Service Quality and Competitive Advantage in Ghana's Telecommunication Industry Evidence of MTN Ghana

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Abstract

This study is conducted in the telecommunication sector in Ghana using MTN as a case study. The purpose of the study was to assess the relationship between service quality and competitive advantage in the telecom industry. The current study used quantitative descriptive research design to help determine the relationship between variables. This research used a selfadministered questionnaire to quantify the impact of service quality constructs and competitive advantage. The study employed convenience sampling techniques with a sample size of 272 MTN users in Ghana. Data was analyzed using SPSS and Smart PLS. The results showed that customers have a positive view about network quality and reliability of service of MTN Ghana. The study also found that there is a statistically significant relationship between the two service quality dimensions namely: network quality and reliability of service and competitive advantage with respective to market share and profitability. This study can serve as guidance for current mobile operators in Ghana and new entrants who intend to enter the industry. This research aspires to contribute to the body of best practices for mobile service providers in Ghana.

Keywords: Market Share; Network Quality; Profitability; Reliability of Service; Telecom Market

1. Introduction

A study carried out by Warraich et al. (2013) in Pakistan telecom sector using 320 companies revealed that service quality can be considered as a source of competitive advantage. Mukherjee, Mukherjee, Rajesh Kumar, Pal, and Saha (2003) noted that superior service delivery assists organizations in differentiating their offering; attracting new subscribers, and gaining more business from current customers. It has become increasingly significant for organizations to select the most suitable measure of service quality because it shows the degree of consumer's satisfaction (Young et al., 1994). Customer aspiration to remain loyal and to use the organization's service in future is reliant on how satisfied the customer is (Shankar, 2012). It has become essential for the survival of the organizations that continue to differentiate their service from competitors (Warraich et al., 2013). Currently, there is intense competition among the six mobile operators in the telecom sector of Ghana with new services being rolled out; price wars going on, constant advertisements through various media, social responsibilities and rising sensitivity of customers. Also, the issue of service quality has gained considerable attention. The objective of this research was to assess service quality as means of achieving competitive advantage in the telecom sector of Ghana. The quantitative research examined the impact of network quality on competitive advantage. Further, the research assessed the impact of reliability of service on competitive advantage.

2. Literature Review

This section will discussed empirical literature review on the concept of service quality, competitive advantage, network quality and reliability of service

2.1Concept of Service Quality

Many studies have revealed that service quality is an important antecedent of customer satisfaction and consumer loyalty (Voss, Rosenzweigh, Blackmon &Chase, 2004; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). Nitin, Deshmukhand Vrat (2005) asserted that consumer perceived quality has been differently conceptualized by many authors and has resulted in the increase of many models of service quality. The literature comes with different definition for service quality. According to Agbor (2011) service is defined as intangible offer by one party to another at a fee for enjoy. Quality on the other hand is refers as the level to which a set of inherent features of an objects fulfils requirement (International Organization for Standardization, 2015).

Also, quality is referred as the thing that meets the consumers' expectation that is useful in achieving and retaining customers Ijaz& Ali, 2013). According to Yadav (2013) service quality is the degree at which services meets up or surpass consumers' expectation or that exist between consumers' perception and anticipation. Service quality reflect particular actions that shows

whether consumer remain royal to service or leave the firm (Akhten& Uddin, 2012). Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined service quality as the difference between the customers'

expectation of service level and their perception of the actual service level. In the study of Edvardsson (2005), the author noted that "customer perception of service quality is beyond cognitive assessment as it is formed during the production, delivery and consumption of services and not just at the consumption stage" (p. 128). This is accomplished as consumers play their responsibilities as co- producers by executing activities as well as being part of interaction that influence both process quality and outcome quality. Lai et al. (2009) stated that customer loyalty can be guarantee through the enhancement of service quality, perceived value and satisfaction. In a study conducted by Siew-Phaik, Ayankunle, Hanisah & Alan, (2010) in Malaysia on service quality and customer satisfaction among telecom operators shows a significant positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction except in the area of tangibility or physical aspects.

The study further revealed that prompt and reliable services are essential to attract, serve and retain customer. Another study conducted by Mohammed (2013) on factors affecting service quality in the mobile industry in Somalia and it was focused on factors such as customer's loyalty price fairness brand image and quality control were studied. Maryam, Marzieh, and Marzieh (2014) in their study on the relationship between service quality and business performance found a positive relationship between the variables. Service quality is an essential tool for a firm effort to differentiate itself from its rivals. The significant of service quality to organization is stresses here mainly the fact that it gives competitive advantage to organizations

that endeavor to improve on it and thus bring customer satisfaction (Ladhari, 2008). In a study carried out by Warraich et al. (2013) in Pakistan telecom sector using 320 companies revealed that service quality to be considered as a source of competitive advantage.

2.2Competitive Advantage

Wheenlen and Hunger (2008) aver that a competition is a foundation of capitalism in that it may arouse innovation, encourage efficiency and lower prices down. Competitors are firms that provide the same, similar or substitute products or service in the same industry.

Wheenlenand Hunger (2008) assert that competitive advantage is the state which permits a firm to operate in a more efficient or otherwise high- quality approach than rival firms compete with, and which outcomes in benefits accruing to that firm. Sigalas and Pekka-Economou (2013) defined competitive advantage as "the above industry averages manifested exploitation of market opportunities and neutralization of competitive threats" (p. 335). Additionally, Hill and Jones (2013) considered that if the high economic profits can be retained for a number of years, it is

could suggest that the firm has a sustainable competitive advantage. Besanko et al. (2007) defined competitive advantage as the state in which a firm achieves a profits rate higher than its

sector average. The capacity to create more economic value then the many rivalry competitors in the market is refers as competitive advantage (Peteraf &Barney, 2003).

. Sigalas and Pekka-Economou (2013) have attempted to recognize competitive advantage conceptual demarcation using two schools of thought. The first school describes competitive advantage in terms of performance, e.g. high relative profitability, benefit cost gap, above average returns, superior financial performance, economic profits positive differential, profit in access of opportunity costs and cross- sectional differential in the spread between marginal cost and product market demand. Also, the second school of thought defines completive advantage in terms of sources, e.g. particular properties of individual product markets location, differentiation, cost leadership, technologies, and products characteristics and a set of idiosyncratic organization resources and capabilities. Li, Ragu,- Nathan and Ragu Nathan (2004) in their study using 196 organizations in US revealed that competitive advantage can have a direct impact on performance. Lewis (2013) argued that, a sustainable competitive advantage can be achieved through the dynamic relationship between a firm and its external environment. If an organization adds competitive advantage is based on its supply association (Nagumey, 2010) then the growth and management of these associations should be seen as an essential source of organizational competitive advantage, which in turn offers the basis for overall organizational competitiveness. (Mracell &Mucha, 2011).

2.3Network Quality

Kumar et al. (2012) defined network as the interconnection between two consumers. Customer perceived network quality is a sign of network performance in terms of network coverage, voice quality, call drop rate and network congestion (Markoulidakis, Dermitzakis, Lyberopoulos and Theologou, 2000; Sharma & Osha, 2004).The network quality represents primarily core service as far as the telecom industry is concerned. Consumers want to experience this quality factor and they expect to get value for money (Nimako et al., 2012). The customers expect to have access in completion calls, network clarity and speed for call completion and other services (Nimako et al., 2012). Where this quality is badly delivered to customers it could result in influencing their loyalty to the service provider (Bansal et al., 2005), encourage intent to

switch and negative word of mouth (Cunningham, 2004).Network quality has appeared as significant dimension that forms customer perception of service quality by mobile operators. Least drop calls and voice quality have been recognized as important in evaluation service quality (Chi et al., 2006).

The network quality has significant influence of consumer satisfaction levels and this help organization increase their competitive advantage over their rivals (Rahhal, 2015). In a study by Lai et al. (2007), the authors concluded that network quality, all–time availability, and no drop

calls are significant aspects that affect customer perception of mobile phone service quality. Further, in a study conducted by Rahhal (2015) to study the effects of service quality dimension on customer satisfaction using Syrian telecom sectors as a case study found network quality as the first significant place in predicting overall customer satisfaction. In addition, the researchers recommend the need for telecom operators to pay much attention on proving

adequate network coverage, voice clarity and focus on reducing the congestion level on their network in order to help them gain competitive advantage.

2.4Reliability of Service

Reliability is referred to three significant factors which include: accessibility, continuity and performance (Singh, 2011). Accessibility is referred as the most significant part which means that service is available whenever it is necessary and desired in the telecom services. The service must be offered when the customer wants touse it. Accessibility of network provider service personnel, signal and calling facility are important to complete the reliability factor of the service (Singh, 2011). The second most significant thing is continuity which means that the service continues to be available up to the required standard. Zeithaml (2009) believe that upholding of standard is very important for adhering to the continuity factor. If the service is not continue reliable, the customer is likely to switch to other operators because the customer will

lose trust in the service (Zeithmal, 2009).The third factor is referred to as performance which involves high quality service delivery and exceeding the customer's satisfaction thus achieving their fidelity for longer time.

Rizan(2010) pointed out that, reliability also assist to improve customer value by offering suitable service needs, customer's participation to fill their requirements and addressing

operational issues when need arise. The mobile service customers anticipate that mobile service providers offer them exact service as promised. Reliability as a dimension of service quality

involves provision of serve precisely and consistently. Service providers are expected to offer customers accurate as promised. Ozer and Hydin (2006) stated that, the customer anticipates that their record of use of services is kept correctly and readily available.

Rahhal (2015) studied the effect of service qualitydimension customer satisfaction in Syrian telecom and found reliability as among the most important factors in predicting general customer satisfaction.

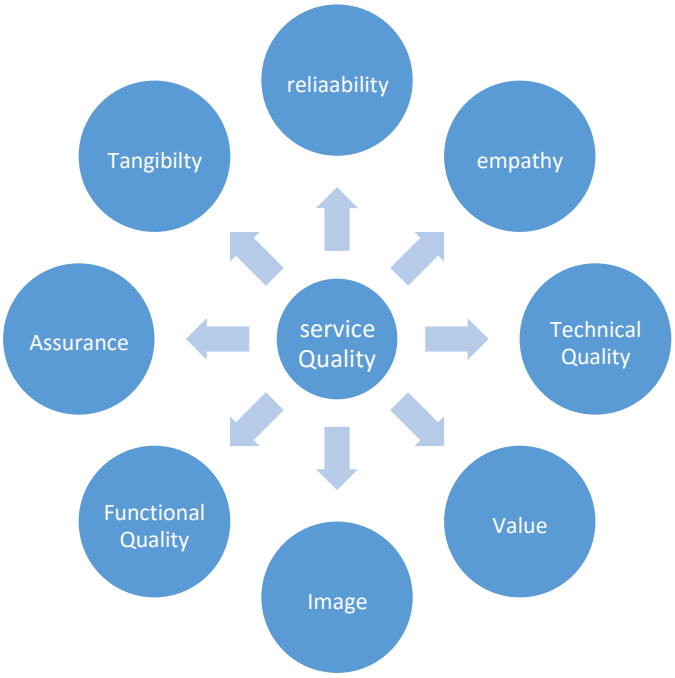

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

3. Research Questions/ Hypothesis

The study attempted to address two research questions:

Research Question 1: Is there statistically significant impact of network quality on competitive advantage at MTN?

($_1H_1$): There is a statically significant impact of network quality on competitive advantage at MTN.

($_1H_0$): There is no statistically significant impact of network quality on competitive advantage at MTN.

Research Question 2: Is there statistically significant impact of reliability of service on competitive advantage at MTN?

($_2H_1$): There is a statically significant impact of reliability of service on competitive advantage at MTN

($_2H_0$): There is no statistically significant impact of reliability of service on competitive advantage at MTN

4. Methodology

The researcher was assisted by four others trained to administer all the 272 questionnaires. The researcher was physically distributing and administering the questionnaire in person using convenience sampling techniques. Prior to the start of the data collection, the researcher sought permission from the management of MTN office in Tamale, the Distributor office in Tamale and Tamale Technical University and approval was obtained from the authorities before the process began. The researcher visited MTN main office premises, Tamale Technical university campus and MTN distributor premises where the target population was available for the researcher to collect the data. The respondents were the current users of MTN mobile network service in Ghana. This quantitative, correlation, descriptive study employed a Likert type scale survey with descriptive statistics to discover and describe the precise independent variables of service quality attributes that significantly relates to the dependent variables of competitive advantage (Network Quality and reliability).

For this particular study, the questionnaire items for this research was based on current literature review on the subject matter and experts' opinion to make sure that its contents and constructs are valid. For the independent and dependent variables, questions items were developed by the researcher and it was based on the two dimensions of service quality constructs selected for this study which include network quality and reliability of service. Questions items related to the dependent variables and demographic data were also developed by the researcher. To ensure effective and dependable survey instrument, a pretest was carried out. To achieve this, a group of five (5) with expert knowledge in the subject matter was formed to pretest the survey instrument. This pretest was carried out in a form of informal deliberation and each member of the group was asked to give supportive ideas for the design of the instrument, the length of survey as well as responding to the draft questionnaire. This pretest further enhanced the validity of the instrument. The Cronbach's alpha for the two constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.7suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency (see table 1). Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using SPSS software and PLS-SEM Techniques using SmartPLS

Table 1: Reliability test showing Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach Alpha		
Construct	Alpha Coefficient	Number of Items
Network Quality	0.886	10

Reliability	0.846	10

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Regression Analysis

A stepwise regression analysis was performed to exact attributes of service quality constructs that impact competitive advantage.

Table 2: Regression Coefficients of Service Quality and Competitive Advantage

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.936	.064		14.647	.000
	Reliability	.111	.023	.298	4.814	.000
	Network quality	.091	.023	.246	3.941	.000

From Table 4 above, the variables as a rule of thumb, we say that a b coefficient is statistically significant if its p-value is smaller than 0.05. All the B coefficients are statistically

significant. Again, this table gives beta coefficients which are used to construct the regression equation. It's clear that the betas change, depending on which predictors are included in the model. These are the weights we are interested in, for an equation that includes just the four best predictors. There is positive regression co-efficient of the variables. This indicates that, for MTN to increase its market share, the company should among other things have the capacity of

improving these independent variables. There is a statically significant impact of Reliability and network quality on competitive advantage at MTN.

5.2 Determining the relationship between Service Quality Constructs and Competitive Advantage

The PLS path modeling estimation technique was adopted in establishing whether there is s relationship between service quality constructs (Network Quality and reliability) and competitive advantage (Market Share and Profitability). The result is shown in figure 2 below;

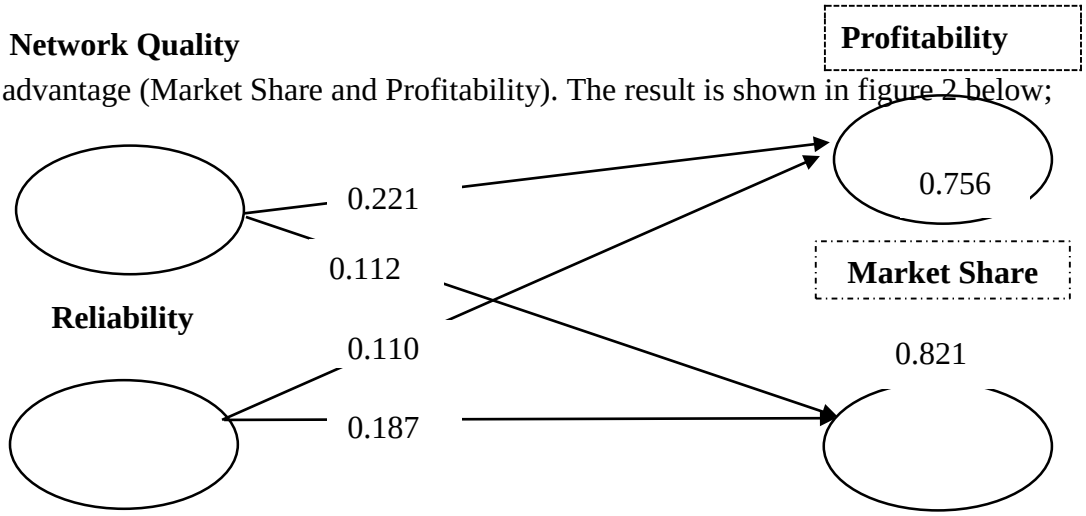

Figure 2: PLS-SEM MODEL and Results

Examining the diagram carefully, the following initial observations are made:

(i Explanation of target endogenous variable variance

i. The coefficient of determination, R^2, is 0.756 for Market Share latent variable. This implies that Network Quality and Reliability explain 75.6% of the variation in Market share.
ii. The coefficient of determination, R^2, is 0.821 for Profitability latent variable. This also implies that, Network Quality and Reliability accounts for about 82.1%of the variance in profitability.

(ii) Inner model path coefficient sizes and significance

In examining the path co-efficient of the Inner Model (same as the Standardized beta coefficients in the regression analysis) between the variables, the following observations are made.

i. The inner model suggests that reliability has a stronger effect on Market share (b1=0.221) whilst Network Quality has the stronger effect on profitability (b2=0.187)

ii. The hypothesized path relationship between reliability and Market Share (b1=0.221)as well as profitability (b1=0.112)are both statistically significant since their standardized path coefficients are both higher than 0.1.

iii. Also, the hypothesized path relationship between Network Quality and market share (b2=0.110) as well as Profitability (b2=0.187) are both statistically significant since their standardized path coefficients are both higher than 0.1

From the above findings, it can be concluded that: Network Quality and Reliability are both strong predictors of Market Share and Profitability. However, the bootstrapping procedure will be used to test the significance of the structural paths using T-Statistic.
Table 3 below presents the summary of all calculated p-values based on each of the hypothesis.

Table 3: P-values of Path Coefficients (Inner Model) using Bootstrapping

Hypothesis	Correlation	P-Values	Conclusion
H_{1}	NETWORK QUALITY □ MARKET SHARE	0.049	Significant
	NETWORK QUALITY □ PROFITABILITY	0.047	Significant
H_{1}	RELIABILITY□MARKET SHARE	0.043	Significant
	RELIABILITY□PROFITABILITY	0.029	Significant

From Table 2, using a two-tailed t-test with a significance level of 5%, the path coefficient is significant if the T-statistics is larger than 1.96 or P-Value less than 0.05 (testing at 95% confidence level). It therefore implies that, all path coefficients in the inner model are statistically significant. This confirms the earlier findings when the results were presented visually examining PLS-SEM results visually (see Figure 2).

6. Discussion of the Results

The objective of the study was to assess service quality dimension as a source of achieving competitive advantage in Ghana's telecom sector. The results revealed that network quality was a key service quality dimension which MTN network used in achieving competitive advantage. The study further disclosed that there is a significant relationship between network quality and competitive advantage. The result of this study supports the finding of Rahhal (2015) who studied the effects of service quality dimension on customer satisfaction in Syrian telecom using seven

quality dimensions including reliability, network quality, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibility, convenience and complaints handling. The results showed that network quality was the first significant place in predicting overall customer satisfaction with a positive

correlation with customer satisfaction. Reliability and complaints handling also had a positive correlation with customer satisfaction.

However, the study results also showed no correlation between empathy, tangibility, assurance and responsiveness and customer satisfaction. Customers in Syria telecom sector just like their counterpart in Ghana telecom sectors want their calls to go through at anytime and with voice clarity in order to reach out to their business partner, .hence their decision to place importance on network quality. According to Rahhal (2015), network operators need to pay much attention in providing adequate network coverage, voice clarity and focus on reducing the congestion level on their network in order to help them gain competitive advantage. Further, the findings of this study are also in harmony with the study done by Nimako et al.

(2012) who studied confirmatory factor analysis of service quality dimension within mobile industry in Ghana using eight service quality dimensions. These include reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy, responsiveness, technical quality, image and economy. The study found network quality was very relevant to Ghana's mobile telecom industry.

Some network quality attributes such as network clarity and successful completion of calls that were identified by Nimako et al. (2012) are similar to the attributes identified by this current study. These similarities of attributes of the two studies might be the reason for the same results. In addition, Nimako et al. (2012) in their study collected data from customers from four different networks with a sample size of 1000 respondents but the current study was limited to subscribers of only one mobile network with a sample size of 272 and this may have impacted the results. Further, the findings of this study are also in harmony with the study done by Wang and Lo (2002) who studied cellular mobile service on service quality and concluded that network quality and after sales services were the most significant factors in enhancing competitive advantage. Gerpottet al. (2000) in their study on structural equation modeling approach found that network quality, assessment of price and personal benefits had positive significant on customer satisfaction and thus could be a source of achieving competitive advantage. Finally, the results of this study are consistent with the findings of Ritho and Jagongo (2015) who established that there was a positive significant relationship between network quality and competitive advantage in the banking sector.

Further, the results also revealed that reliability was a key service quality dimension that MTN leverages on in achieving competitive advantage. The study also pointed out that there was a strong positive significant relationship between reliability and competitive advantage. The

results of this study support the finding of Arslan, Iftikha,andZaman (2014) who studied the effects of service quality dimension on customer satisfaction in Pakistan telecom using reliability and empathy service quality dimensions. The study found significant relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction and thus could be a source of achieving completive advantage. Customers want to use service that will be accessible whenever they want to use it to transact business as well as want service that will be available at anytime to be used to solve important issues and this could be the reason why customers consider reliability as one of the most important aspect of service quality dimension.

According to Singh (2011) reliability refers to three factors and these are accessibility, continuity and performance. According to this study, the attributes that were identified as most

important in the reliability dimension include: consistent and excellent service, network is trustworthy, offers exceptional services to customers at the time it pledges to do so, fulfilling its promises, providing accurate and dependable services, fast data downloads, keep customers informed ahead of new products, maintains good customers records and making service always available for use by customers. Some of these attributes such as providing accurate and dependable services and keep customers informed ahead of new products are similar to the attributes used by Arslan at al. (2014). Although the current study used ten (10) questions items with a total sample size 272 respondents. Arslan et al. (2014) employed twelve (12) questions items with 400 respondents yet both studies had positive correlation. This may further support the fact that reliability is being considered by customers as a very significant service quality dimension in the telecom sector.

However, the findings of the current study differ from the findings of Nimako et al., (2012) who studied confirmatory factor analysis of service quality dimension within mobile industry in Ghana using eight service quality dimensions. These includes: reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy, responsiveness, technical quality, image and economy. They found from emerged dimension with twenty one items being real network quality, customer relations, tangible and image as critical factors in evaluating service quality in mobile telecom industry. In addition, the study also found that assurance, responsiveness, empathy and the five underlying dimension of reliability were eliminated and considered as less important to customers. Although, the two studies were conducted in Ghana, Nimako et al. (2012) used a sample size of 1000 respondents from four different network with only five items questions under reliability unlike the current study, where the sample size was 272 and respondents were from only MTN users with ten (10) item questions under reliability hence, this could be the reason for the vary opinion by customers. Nimako et al. (2012) however, stated that the elimination of the five underlying reliability items does not mean that reliability is not significant to the Ghanaian mobile customers but suggested for modification of the five items used. The current study however used ten (10) items under reliability and this could be the reason for the positive correlation.

Finally, the findings of this study is similar to the study by Warraich et al. (2013) on achieving sustainable competitive advantage through service quality in Pakistan's telecom sector using five service quality dimension. There are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. They found that the entire five dimensions proved to be reliable and can be used as service quality measurement. In addition, the five dimensions were found to be reliable and Vigorous and can be a source of competitive advantage. Also, some of the reliability attributes such as service provider promises something by a certain time it does so and service provider provides service the right time identified by Warraich et al.(2013) are similar to the attributes identified by the current study under reliability dimension. Even though the study findings give some new insights to researchers as well as enhances the body of knowledge in this field, these findings should be viewed in light of some limitations. The sample size used for the study was 272 and this may not be adequate enough to represent precisely the entire population's view towards service quality in the telecom sector of Ghana. Further, data was collected in one region

and this again may not represent the entire views of all MTN users across the ten regions of Ghana. Ideally, a much larger sample of MTN users would give better data.

7. Conclusion

This study has been conducted to ascertain the relationship between service quality dimension of network quality and reliability and competitive advantage in Ghana's telecom sector. Research instrument was developed based on review of current literature and followed by a sequence of satisfactory validation procedures. The primary data was gathered from 272 respondents and they were users of MTN mobile network in Ghana. The study concludes that customers have positive view on the variables being accessed for the two dimensions. This was found from the study results where the average mean of each service quality dimension is less than 3. In addition, the result concludes that there is a significant relationship between the two constructs selected for the study and competitive advantage. Findings of this study also provided a deeper understanding and the important roles each of the dimension played in predicting overall customer satisfaction and thus competitive advantage.

8. Practical Recommendations

The study found that network quality is an essential quality dimension that can help mobile service providers to gain competitive advantage. For this reason, the study recommends the need for operators to continue offering satisfactory network coverage, voice clarity, and focus

on reducing the congestion level in their network. Further, the study results showed that customers were much satisfied with MTN wider geographical network coverage and the fast

downloads of MTN 4G services. For this reason the study recommends the need for current mobile operators and new entrants to invest in network infrastructure as well as acquire 4G services. This will lead to better network reception, congestion free network, and fast internet downloads and thus competitive advantage can be achieved.

Finally, the study also revealed that reliability factor was also very important and was a source of achieving competitive advantage. The results showed that customers rated the variable "MTN network promises to execute something, it does so" with a high score. For this reason, the study recommends the need for current network operators to continue delivering service at the right time as well as at the promised time. In addition, the results of the study reflect the issue of provisioning of promised service, dependable and precisely which would require maximum priority. Previous studies have shown that reliability positively and significantly affects customers perception of service quality(Lai et al.,2007; Negi , 2009).For this reason, the study

recommends the need for mobile operators to focus on building trustworthiness by keeping customers' best interest at heart as well as providing accurate and dependable service. An increase in how organizations carry out and complete their promised service quality with accuracy and timeliness will result in an increase in customer satisfaction (Alabar, Egena & Gbande, 2014).Further, results from the study also showed that customers were uncertain on the variable" MTN internet price is correctly priced and dependable". In this regard, the study recommends the need for current mobile operator and new entrants to set prices for their products and services that will ensure value for money. In addition, service providers should also

continue to improve upon their activities and operations and this will help them win the trust and confidence of their customers. Finally, reliability factor was considered in this study as one of the dimension that predicts general customer satisfaction. In this regard, the study further recommends the need to continue improving quality delivery and timely services.

9. Recommendation for Further Research

The result of this research offers some direction of new research regarding service quality and competitive advantage. First, the study of MTN mobile users in Ghana offers insights into a precise population. Further researchers with different population may provide more insight into

the relationship between service quality and competitive advantage. In addition, population such as MTN users in another country or users of all six operators in Ghana will further enhance the body of knowledge. Also, the study further recommends that future researchers should replicate this with similar objectives in another country to see whether it will yield the same result. Finally, the study used only two dimensions of service quality and recommends the need for future

researchers to include other dimensions such as price, sales promotions, and value added with same population in Ghana's telecom sector.

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