



MAJOR FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF GSM NETWORK AMONG OIL AND GAS WORKERS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

By

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Abstract: Keen competition has magnified the need for GSM service providers in Nigeria to constantly tune and fine-tune their marketing strategies to meet the ever changing needs and service demands of highly knowledgeable and discriminating users of their service. To provide an empirical knowledge base for this emerging challenge, this study identified, based on extant literature, the five factors considered to be important in customers' choice of GSM service providers. The five research questions posed for the study were answered using data generated from ninety users of GSM services selected from the population of oil and gas workers found in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings of the study showed the following to be important influencing factors in the choice of GSM service provider: Network Coverage (97.7%), Network Quality (94.4%), Tariff/Calls cost (76.6%) and Customer Care Service (72.2%). The factor identified as not being a major influence in the choice of GSM service provider is promotion (25.55%). Deriving from the findings and the need for GSM service providers to attract more and retain their extant customers, measures aimed at enhancing the value of the important factors and keeping the not so important one at strategic levels that prevent loss of customers were recommended.

Key words: Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM), GSM Service Provider, Network Quality, Oil and Gas Sector and Tariff.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

With the advent of the Global System of Mobile communication (GSM) in Nigeria over a decade ago, the number of licensed operators in the industry has grown from 3 in 2001 (MTEL, ECONET and MTN) to 5 as at 2013 (MTEL, ECONET/AIRTEL, MTN, GLOBACOM AND ETISALAT). With the increase in the number of network service providers from the starting two to the current four major providers and with the hands-off of government from this industry, competition has become stiffer by the day, as expected of privatization, and subscribers now have a wider choice to justify their spend.

Hence network service providers strive for the larger market share. This pursuit of larger market share must be in harmony with fulfilling the expectations of the teeming users by identifying what major factors influence the choice of a network among the subscribers and direct all the organizational efforts to satisfying the these major factors.

This research seeks to evaluate the influence of coverage, network quality, tariff, customer care, service delivery, and promotion on the choice of GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt. It seeks to understand what oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt consider most in choosing a GSM network. The study will look at mostly staff of the major oil companies and oil servicing companies in Port Harcourt. Oil and gas sector remains the most dominant sector in the Nigerian economy. Nigeria is the 10th largest oil producer in the world, the third largest in Africa and the most prolific oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Nigerian economy is largely dependent on its oil sector which supplies 95% of its foreign exchange earnings (<http://www.mbendi.com/oilg/af/ng/p0005.ht>). The choice of users in this sector of the economy was informed by the desire of the study to tap into the experience of well educated, high income earning and heavy users of GSM services.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

At the inception of the operation of GSM in Nigeria, subscribers had to pay high tariffs to be able to acquire and use the service. Also, consumers of the service had not much choice partly due to limited providers and coverage and partly due to lack of much information both on Information technology and GSM, hence were ready to accept the services as they were. This was also buttressed by the frenzy to show affluence as it was considered to be a sign of 'arrival' among social circles.

But as the years went by and with the entrance of more network providers and consumers' better knowledge of both information technology and GSM, subscribers now seek better services and value for their money, thus some factors have major influence on the subscribers decision making unlike in the past when the crave to just acquire a GSM was the major driving force.

At the inception of the operation of GSM in Nigeria, subscribers had little or no choice and made do with what was available. That was the era of sellers' market in the Nigerian telecommunication industry but with the entry of more operators and the competition for large market shares, network providers exposed subscribers to wider choices both on the services and offerings. With this, subscribers anticipate cutting edge services and would examine some parameters before choosing a network provider.

Based on the above, this research, with respect to oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt, looks at the following:

How much Network quality influences choice of GSM network?

Whether Coverage is a major factor in the choice of GSM network?

Is Lower tariff a major consideration in the choice of a GSM network?

Is Promotion a major consideration in the choice of GSM network?

Does Customer care exert major influence in the choice of GSM network?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this research is to examine some factors with the intent of identifying those that exert major influence on the choice of GSM provider among oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt. The factors could be more but focus is to:

Investigate the level of impact of network quality on the choice of GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Determine the extent to which coverage influences the choice of a GSM network among oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Evaluate the degree of influence of tariff on the choice of GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Evaluate the effect of promotion on the choice of GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Determine the effect exerted by customer care services on the choice of GSM network among oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

1.4 Research Questions

To aid in this research, some questions on some of the factors that influence the choice of a GSM network are posed. The answers to these questions will be sought in the research. Below are the questions.

Do Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt consider network quality significant when choosing a GSM network?

Is Tariff a major consideration in the choice of GSM network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Does Coverage exert a major influence on the choice of GSM network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Does Customer Care Services of a GSM network strongly influence choice of network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Has promotion a strong influence on choice of GSM network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt?

1.5 Definition of Terms

Arrival: a way of showing that one is doing well.

Coverage: areas which network signals can be received by a subscriber

Customer Care Service: after sales support unit of the GSM companies

Network Quality: the ability of the network to sustain calls and data requests by subscribers without disruption.

Promotion: marketing gimmicks including freebies and adverts employed by GSM network providers to ensure subscribers come to and remain on their networks. SMS: short messages.

SIM: subscriber identification module.

Subscribers: users and owners of GSM lines from different network providers.

Tariff: the cost for voice calls, short messages (SMS) and data usage

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Background of Telecommunication and GSM in Nigeria

The introduction of telecommunications in Nigeria dates as far back as the nineteenth century with the analog system and was mainly for the promotion of the activities of the regimes in power in the stead of promoting socio-economic well-being of the country. This era was characterized by government total monopoly with little attention paid to telecommunications and the resultant slow pace of work in infrastructural development. Customers were limited to one network with the attendant poor services.

The monopoly of telecommunications services in Nigeria continued with the emergence of Nigeria Telecommunication (NITEL) in the 80s after merger with the Nigerian external telecommunications ltd (NET) which was responsible for all external communications from Nigeria as the only carrier though with far better services than in the colonial era.

The above situation continued until in 1992 when the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) charged with the responsibility to regulate the activities of telecommunications services in the country. NCC was established due to the continued poor services of NITEL and the need to open up the telecommunications industry to attract both local and foreign investment (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012).

As at 1999, the continued poor performance of NITEL saw Nigeria with a tele density of about 0.04 which was one of the lowest in Africa. With the arrival of NCC came liberalization of the telecommunication sector allowing private participation which led to the licensing of Global System of Mobile Communications (GSM) operations in the year 2001

Through this policy, the nation moved from a monopolistic telecommunications market towards a fully liberalized one which allows completion' (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012).

In 2001, three GSM companies namely MTEL, Econet Wireless International (now Airtel) and MTN were licensed by NCC. With their successful infrastructural roll out and the effective commencement of commercial services in August 2001 (Econet wireless being the first to commence commercial services to the public) the GSM revolution started in Nigeria. In August 2003 Globacom and Etisalat (October 2008) were also licensed bringing the number of operators to five.

Since 2001, mobile telephony has become the most popular means of voice communication in Nigeria overshadowing the older system of mobile communication, the Coded Division Multiple Access (CDMA). With this revolution Nigeria became the fastest growing and largest telecommunications market in Africa with about 92 million subscribers as at February 2012.

Nigeria has maintained its lead as Africa's largest telecommunications market with active subscriber base of 92,006,608 by end of February 2012 (Nigeria Communications Commission, 2012) relegating South Africa to second place with about 60 million subscribers. This represents a tele-density of about 68.85 up from a tele-density of 0.73% in 2001' (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012).

2.3 Factors Considered By Consumers in the Choice of Network

With the explosive growth in the number of subscribers in the market, stiffer competition and rivalry have become the order of the day in the Nigerian GSM telecommunications subsector. In the highly competitive market like the mobile telephone sector, service providers must seek a way to favorably compete on both price and service quality to meet the consumers' requirement and expectations precedent to their choosing a network provider. In the next paragraphs some of the factors considered in extant literature are discussed.

2.3.1 Service Quality

Quality is conformance to requirements (Crosby et al, 2003). Quality is the comparison of perceived performance and expected performance (Kang, 2006). Service quality is the customer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of an organization and its service offerings (Bitner et al., 1990). The firm's ability to create and sustain competitive advantage depends upon the high level of service quality provided by the service provider (Yoo and Park, 2007). Therefore providing a consistently superior service quality can differentiate one GSM provider from others (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012).

According to Leisen and Vance (2001) service quality helps to create the competitive advantage by being an effective differentiating factor.

2.3.2 Tariff or Price

Price is the amount of money charged for a product or service, or the sum of values that customers exchange for the benefits of having or using the product or service (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). In a competitive market, service providers are expected to compete on both price and quality of services and also it is necessary for the service providers to meet the customers' requirement and expectations in price and service quality (Melody, 2001).

Nowadays, due to breathtaking competition, the telecommunication service providers tend to offer innovative services as well as competitive prices just to attract a handful of customers.

Price plays a vital role in telecommunication market especially for the mobile telecommunication service providers (Kollmann, 2000). The price here is not limited to the price of SIM card, but also covers the price of recharge vouchers, call rates, SMS charge, the internet charge, and price of phones and so on. A network with lower prices has a higher tendency to attract a larger subscriber base leading to an impressive market and financial performance. (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012).

When there is thin line of difference in the service quality in a market place, price plays a major role in influencing choice by customers. The Nigeria GSM market place is strongly tilting towards this and price could be a major factor of consideration by users in choosing GSM network. In the market where it is difficult to perceive any significant difference in the service quality of most GSM firms, price competition has become widespread and an important competitive tool. However the reality of price competition in the market is the existence of price war with subscribers traversing from one network to another to take advantage of the latest price cut, thereby giving no room for any loyalty to be developed. (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012.)

2.3.3 Customer Care or Customer Service

Customer service is a process that takes place between a buyer, a seller and third party and can influence demand in the market (Innis and la Londe, 1994). The third party may include companies that have been licensed by a marketing company to provide customer service. When Customer Care is used in a wider sense, it encompasses all the functions leading to the entire service delivery by an organization. Katz et al., (1998) argue that customer care “encompasses all the functions along the entire service delivery value chain”. Customer service is a system of activities that comprises the customer support systems, complaint processing, speed of complaint processing, ease of reporting complaint and friendliness when reporting complaint (Kim et al., 2004).

GSM providers in Nigeria provide customer service through toll free customer care line, helpdesk and websites. Because of its convenience, cost free and availability, majority of the subscribers in Nigeria are most likely to be served by their network providers through toll free customer care lines (Adeleke and Aminu, 2012). Hence, in Nigeria, the ease with which these toll free customer care lines can be accessed creates a more likelihood that customers will choose the network.

Customer care is therefore an important factor of consideration by customers in all sectors of business including the GSM industry. The GSM industry would be much sensitive to customer care because communication both in the official and private lives is vital especially when emergencies are concerned. So, the speed of complaint resolution, friendliness of customer care staff to customers, ease of access to customer care services etc, would have strong influences on the choice of GSM service provider in Nigeria. A GSM network reputed for good customer care is more like to retain existing customers while attracting new ones.

Specifically, the high levels of competition among service providers in Nigeria necessitate the adoption of different customer service techniques to satisfy and retain customers. The effectiveness of the level of customer service will enhance the customer retention and reduce switching between and among service providers (Oyeniyi and Joachim, 2008).

McDougall and Levesque (2000) found that all telecommunication service providers in Malaysia differentiate themselves with a high level of customer service and this has become the most important and significant driver in customer satisfaction.

2.3.4 Promotion

Promotion is when companies educate, inform, persuade or remind customers and the general public of its products (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). This is one of the mediums in which organizations bring to the notice of both prospective and existing customers information about the organization and its products and services. They tend to use this marketing tool to attract new customers and compel them to make buying decision while the existing customers are targeted for top of the mind recall and repeat purchase and loyalty. Companies and organizations also use promotions in overall to penetrate new markets.

More specifically, the objectives of any promotional strategy are: increase sales; maintain or improve market share; create or improve brand recognition; create a favorable climate for future sales; inform and educate the market; create a competitive advantage, relative to competitor's products or market position; improve promotional efficiency (Rowley, 1998).

The above situation is nowise significantly different from what obtains in Nigeria and most African countries. However, it is known that Nigerian consumers will respond more to freebies like free samples, bonus packs, price discounts etc. according to Ndubisi and Moi (2006).

Monetary promotions have been reported to be preferred over non-monetary promotions across all consumer goods in terms of their ability to elicit purchase intentions (Luk and Yip, 2008; Kwok and Uncles, 2005). It is not settled in literature whether sales promotion can enhance or undermine brand preference beyond the time they are offered (Luk and Yip, 2008).

2.3.5 Network Coverage

This is the extent to which a GSM network provider provides its network signals all over the nation. The Nigerian GSM market being quite a young market, providing signals in all the nooks and crannies of the country is still a dream yet to come true as many communities apart from the urban areas are yet to have network coverage up till now.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research method which employed questionnaire as a data collection technique in eliciting the data needed to answer the research questions was adopted. The structured questionnaire used sought the reactions of the respondents to statements made on the consideration of the five factors identified in extant literature as being capable of influencing the choice of GSM services network to use, using likert scale. The factors listed for the respondents were: network quality, network coverage, tariff, customer care and promotion. The respondents were required to agree, strongly agree, be indifferent, disagree or strongly disagree on the consideration of the factors as being major in their choice of GSM network. The draft questionnaire was pretested on five elements of the population

studied. Based on the outcome of the pretest exercise, ambiguous questions were recast, redundant ones were eliminated and new questions were included to fill identified data gaps.

The population of the study comprised users of GSM services in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. For reasons of convenience and accessibility, Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, Nigeria, was chosen as the area of study. Rivers State remains the second largest economy in Nigeria, after Lagos State. The high presence of crude oil in Rivers State necessitated the great number of oil and gas companies in Port Harcourt. This presented a high concentration of local and foreign high skilled labour force. Within Port Harcourt city, the study concentrated on areas like Trans Amadi, Old and New Government Reserved Areas (G.R.A) and the Oil and Gas Free Zone (Federal Ocean Terminal) Onne. This choice was informed by the huge concentration of Oil and Gas organizations in these areas. The major such oil and gas companies included: Mobil, Shell, Agip, Con Oil and Oando. To determine the precise number of questionnaires to be administered, the study established the population of oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt to be approximately 33,000. This was established using a baseline figure of 1,650,000 as the population of rivers state and 2% as the size of the population of Rivers State working in oil and gas companies(2006, Census Figures).

Applying Yamani's formula for sample size determination for a finite population, the study determined the sample size to be approximately 100. With population size (N) of 33000, sampling error of 10%, sample size (n) = $N \sqrt{\frac{1 + 33000(0.1)^2}{33000}}$.

While 100 copies of the questionnaire were administered using convenience sampling, only 90 were fully completed. This gave a response rate of 90%.

Data collected were presented on tables with percentage analysis and research questions answered based on the principle of preponderance of response.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Profile of Respondents

The profile of respondents is given on table 1 below:

The respondents were majorly located in Port Harcourt (88.89%). Only 11.11% were located in Onne (an outskirts of Port Harcourt).

While 70% of the respondents are male, 30% are female.

Majority of respondents were within the age bracket of 25-30 years with 35.56%, followed by 31-35 years with 22.22%, 36-40 years with 21.11%, 41-45 years with 15.56% and 46 years and above with 5.55%.

80% of the respondents work in oil servicing companies while 20% work in oil major companies.

Majority of the respondents are senior officers (44.44%) in their companies. The rest are contract officers (31.12%) and junior officers (24.44%).

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Category	Statistics
Location	
Port Harcourt	80(88.89%)
Onne	10(11.11%)
Gender	
Male	63(70.00%)
Female	27(30.00%)
Age	
25-30 years	32(35.56%)
31-35 years	20(22.22%)
36-40 years	19(21.11%)
41-45 years	14(15.56%)
46 years and above	05(05.55%)
Type of organisation	
Oil servicing	72(80.00%)
Oil major	18(20.00%)
Employment status/level	
Senior	40(44.44%)
Junior	22(24.44%)
Contract	28(31.12%)

Source: Field Survey, 2013.

4.2 Analysis and Answers of Research Questions

In the tables that follow, the study presents analysis of data based on the research questions.

Question 1: Is Tariff or Calls Cost a major consideration in the choice of GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Table 2: Response on Tariff as a major consideration in choosing GSM network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	38	42.22
Agree	31	34.44
Indifferent	04	04.45
Disagree	10	11.11
Strongly Disagree	07	07.78
Total	90	100

Source: field survey, 2013.

Table 2 reveals that on the influence of Tariff or calls cost, on choice of GSM network, a combined 76.66% of the respondents agreed that Tariff or Calls Cost is a major factor in choosing GSM Network while a combined 18.89% disagreed, with 4.45% being undecided.

Based on the principle of preponderance of response, the study concluded that tariff/call cost is a major consideration in the choice of GSM network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Question 2: Is network coverage a major consideration in the choice of GSM network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Table 3: Response on Network Coverage as a major consideration in choosing GSM Network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	58	64.45
Agree	30	33.33
Indifferent	02	02.22
Disagree	00	00.00
Strongly Disagree	00	00.00
Total	90	100

Source: field survey, 2013.

Table 3 reveals that a combined 97.88% of respondents agreed network Coverage exerts an influence on the choice of GSM Network by Oil and Gas workers while 2.22% were indifferent.

Based on the principle of preponderance of response, the study concluded that GSM network coverage is a major consideration in the choice of GSM Network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Question 3: Is Promotion a major consideration in the choice of GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Table 4: Response on Promotion as a major consideration in choosing GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	11.11
Agree	13	14.44
Indifferent	34	37.78
Disagree	23	25.56
Strongly Disagree	10	11.11
Total	90	100

Source: field survey, 2013.

Table 4 reveals that a combined 25.55% of respondents agreed that promotion is a major consideration on the choice of GSM Network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt, while a combined 36.67% disagreed. 37.78% of the respondents were indifferent to this factor.

Based on the principle of preponderance of response, and given that only 25.55% of respondents agreed that promotion is a major consideration, the study concluded that promotion is not a major consideration in the choice of GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Question 4: Is Customer Care Service a major consideration in the choice of a GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Table 5: Response on customer care service as a major consideration in choosing GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	29	32.22
Agree	36	40.00
Indifferent	08	08.89
Disagree	13	14.44
Strongly Disagree	04	04.45
Total	90	100

Source: field survey, 2013.

Table 5 reveals that a combined 72.22% of the respondents agreed that Customer Care Service of GSM Network providers is a major consideration in choosing GSM Network while a combined 18.89% disagreed. 8.89% of the respondents were indifferent to this factor.

Based on the principle of preponderance of response, the study affirmed and concluded that customer care service of GSM service providers is a major consideration in the choice of a GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Question 5: Is Network Quality a major consideration in the choice of a GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt?

Table 6: Response on network quality as a major consideration in choosing GSM Network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	67	74.44
Agree	18	20.00
Indifferent	01	01.11
Disagree	04	04.45
Strongly Disagree	00	00
Total	90	100

Source: field survey, 2013.

Table 6 reveals that a combined 94.44% of the respondents agreed that Network Quality is a major consideration in choosing a GSM network while 4.45% disagreed. Only one respondent (1.11%) was indifferent to this factor.

Based on the principle of preponderance of response, a combined positive response of 94.44%, we answer the question in the affirmative and conclude that network quality is a major consideration in the choice of a GSM network by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study found out from the analyses of the questions employed in the field survey that:

- 1) Oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt consider Network Coverage with 97.7% positive response as a major influencing factor in their choice of a GSM network.
- 2) Oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt consider Network Quality, 94.4% positive response, as a major influencing factor in their choice of GSM network.

- 3) Oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt consider Network Tariff with 76.6% positive response as a major influencing factor in their choice of a GSM network.
- 4) Oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt consider Customer Care Service of a GSM Network with 72.2% positive response as a major influencing factor in their choice of a GSM network.
- 5) Oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt consider Promotion with 36.7% negative responses and 37.8% Indifference response as not being a major influencing factor in their choice of a GSM network.

5.2 Conclusion

The major influencing factors in the choice of GSM service provider among oil and gas workers in port Harcourt are Network Coverage (97.7%), Network Quality (94.4%), Tariff/Calls cost (76.6%) and Customer Care Service (72.2%). The factor identified as not being a major influence by oil and gas workers in Port Harcourt in their choice of GSM service provider is promotion (25.55%).

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has established the factors which influence the choice of a GSM network by Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt and therefore recommends that GSM Service Providers targeting Oil and Gas workers in Port Harcourt and indeed other target markets sharing similar demographics and consumption patterns with them should:

1. Deploy more of their principal resources in delivering extensive Network Coverage, providing stable Network Quality, offering competitive Tariffs, and delivering world class Customer Care Services.
2. Resources being expended on promotions and indeed the strategic message and media used should be rationalized and refocused as the study has determined promotion and influence of peers and contacts not to be critical in customers choice of GSM service providers. This notwithstanding, expenditure on promotion should be maintained at levels that will minimize loss of customers to competitors. Even if promotion may not be directly attracting new customers, it may be helping to retain existing ones.

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