

An Assessment Of Factors Affecting Quality Customer Care Services In Telkom Kenya.

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ABSTRACT: Quality customer care services is a significant basis which customers use for differentiating between competing services of different company offering same product and services, second only to market share hence the purpose of the study was to examine factors affecting quality customer care service in Telkom industry in Kenya: a case study of Telkom Kenya, specific objectives were to determine how staff training, accessible customer care centres, organisation customer care policies and guideline, agility supply chain of products and service affect quality customer care services in Telkom Kenya. The problem statement were Telkom Kenya has lost most of its customers to its competitors mainly due to poor customer service skills, policies and provision by the organisation, poor agility supply chain management of its core products and services and lack of strategic business customer care location on a decentralized business system for easy accessibility by its customers.

Key words: Quality customer care, Services, Customer, Service Quality, Telkom industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

A company creates its own image to the public according to the way it receives handles and discharges its customer. In developing customer care, proper customer complaint should be established. This is an important tool and challenging task which requires participation and commitment of all staff. Telkom Kenya, being Kenya's leading telephone provider was created in 1997 as a fully owned subsidiary of Telkom Kenya. In May 2007, Vodafone Group acquired a 40 % stake and management responsibility for the company leaving Telkom Kenya with 60% shareholding. Telkom Wireless Kenya entered the telecommunication service industry in the year 2007 and was officially launched in the month of January. Its prefix code starts with 020 giving Kenya an opportunity to fully appreciate the time potential of mobile telephone and creating an environment that stimulates simplicity, assurance, understanding and clarity. However, Telkom Wireless has faced stiff competition from three other operators who offer telephone services in Kenya; Safaricom Kenya, Bharti Airtel and Essar Yu Mobile who have all become more focused CCK (2005). This has consequently made Telkom to lose many of its customers. As a result, the number of customer complaints has increased with many records per month CCK (2009). The company as a whole is divided into several departments and has over 500 employees with several retail shops countrywide. The customer care department provides services to the subscribers. Marketing department anticipates, identifies and satisfies customers' needs. It also defines and implements the firm's communications strategy. Sales department develops sales through all distribution channels. Technical department builds, operates and maintains the firm's network.

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2. Statement of the Problem

Specialized Telecommunication institution are facing increasing challenges brought about by the effect of globalization, communication market liberalization and the vast opportunities being created by emerging new information technologies. This challenge requires Telkom Kenya to keep pace with the rapidly changing technological and business environment, one that is heavily influenced by events outside the control of these institutions. Telkom Kenya has kept pace by continuously improving product taste and preference and marketing its products. But its main failures are lack of well structured customer care policies and guidelines, lack of strategic business location on a decentralized business system for easy accessibility by its clients and HR department employment of untrained staff hence not looking at the end customer satisfaction and needs. Due to stiff competition and the poor handling of customers by Telkom Kenya, its market share has dropped by 49% while the customer volume has dropped by 45% since its inception to become the fourth ranked telecommunication company by market share and customer volume CCK (2011).

3. Objectives of the Study

- i. To assess the factors affecting quality of customer care services in Telkom Kenya.
- ii. Determine how staff training affects quality customer care services in Telkom Kenya.
- iii. Establish how accessible centres affect quality customer care services in Telkom Kenya.
- iv. Find out how policies and guidelines affect quality customer care services in Telkom Kenya.
- v. Examine how agility supply chain affects quality customer care services.

4. Justification of the Study

Despite the fact that Telkom Kenya was the first telecommunications company to be established in Kenya, it has seen a significant fall in market share while its two major competitors, Safaricom Kenya and Bharti Airtel have gained market share by 60% and 34% respectively CCK

(2009). This provoked a study in order to look into factors affecting quality customer care services in Telkom Kenya. Other studies done by scholars left some gaps by not bring out clearly the main causes and relation between quality service and customer satisfaction. Also, the scholars have concentrated their studies in fast developed countries like India, Singapore and this leaves a gap which necessitates a study to be carried in a developing country like Kenya. With such gaps identified, this study assess the factors that have affected service quality delivery to customer service at Telkom Kenya leading the parastatal not to be fully successful or barely less competitive and its profit margin shrinking.

5. Significance of the Study

To Telkom Kenya the study will help top management come up with customer care policies, procedures and guidelines to understand factors affecting service quality delivery in the industry. To the junior staff customer care training knowledge will be added to their experience hence understand the customer care operations well. The study can also be of significant help to the policy makers in the country in understanding how quality services should be provided to the customer as well as keeping in pace with the competition. Finally, the study can be expected to add to the body of knowledge and scholarly fields of both quality and marketing in terms of findings and theoretical review.

6. Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study was employees and customer's unwillingness to provide relevant information for fear of it being leaked to the company's competitors.

7. Literature Review

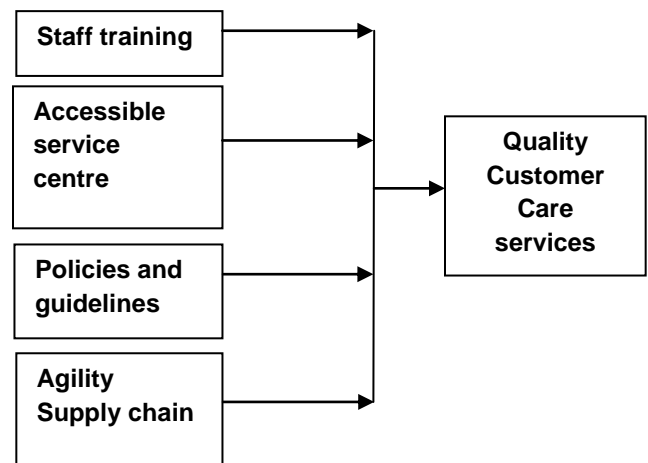
First the theoretical review of the study will be provided. Then, empirical review on how factors affecting service quality delivery to consumers in the service industry. Lastly, the link between employee customer care training, customer centres accessibility, agility of product access, employee performance and organisation performance will be reviewed.

8. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on the examining factors as Customer care training, accessible customer care centers, customer care policies, agility access to product and services which are independent variables. Customer care training; the company needs to train its employees on effective management of customer service quality to enable all staff to be at a position to offer effective and efficient services to customers Beardwell et al, (2004).

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable (input) Dependent Variable (output)



Source; Researcher Conceptualisation 2012

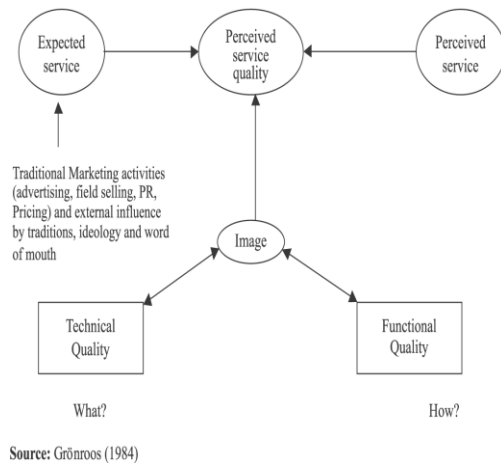
9. Theoretical Review Framework

Customer Care Strategy Development

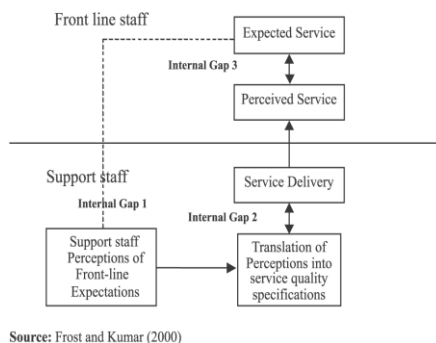
According to this perspective, customers buy products and or services for basically the same reason, i.e receive a service that creates value for them. The consequence of such logic is that companies should rethink their business logics to make them more service-oriented. The adoption of a service-logic implies focusing on how to provide benefits to customers, rather than focusing on adding services to the current market offerings. However, being a strategic decision, the adoption of a service-logic should be based on a careful assessment of the customers' purchase logic Grönroos (2008). Drucker (2007) observed that customer guiding principle will be concerned with such specific matters as; developing customer care policies, practices and guidelines that support the achievement of business goals: of providing customer expected needs, training staffs on customer care services hence high staff customer service performance; maintain competitive edge in quality service provision.

Customer Service Quality

Service quality is a significant basis which customers use for differentiating between competing services, second only to market share in the PIMS research Gale (2007). Relative quality is a key contributor to bottom line profit performance. Quality can only be defined by customers. It occurs where a firm supplies of products to a specification that satisfies their needs Payne, (2008). Customer expectations serve as standards against which subsequent service experiences are compared; when service performance falls short of customer expectations, dissatisfaction occurs. There are three ways firms can gain from improving their quality of service; customer retention, positive word of mouth recommendations and the ability to increase profit margin due to increased market share.

Figure 2 A model of quality customer service training on technical and functional

The model suggests that the quality of a given service is the outcome of an evaluation process where consumers compare what they expected to receive with what they perceive that they actually received. Consumer expectations are influenced by marketing mix activities, external traditions, ideology and word of mouth communications. Gronroos (2004) also suggests previous experience with the service will influence expectations. Gronroos (2002) suggested there are two principal components of quality, technical and functional, with a third, image, acting as a mediating influence. One is the technical quality training is what the customer is left with, when the production process is finished.

Figure 3 Internal service quality models (Frost and Kumar, 2000)

This model evaluates the dimensions and their relationships that determine service quality among internal customers (front-line staff) and internal suppliers (support staff) within a large service organization. The internal gap 1 shows the difference in support staff's perception (internal supplier) of front-line staff's expectation (internal customers). Internal gap 2 is the significant difference between service quality specifications and the service actually; customer value and customer satisfaction delivered resulting in an internal service performance gap.

Pillars of the 5P's Service Quality Model

As with all organisational operations, policies, the Service Quality Model will only deliver its full potential and value if

organizational policies and operations are embedded into the organisational infrastructure and maintained while supported by the key pillars of education and training. The Model distinguishes the 5 main factors of customer service excellence, which directly impact and determine customer satisfaction, Policies - the guide of action. It is the overall enabler and conditioner of the other 4 P's and parameter for the allocation of resources (time, money and effort etc.) to the achievement of the organization's service excellence goals. Processes one of the most crucial elements in the delivery of service excellence and customer satisfaction. Customers expect a satisfactory outcome after completing a transaction with the organisation and it is the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes that contribute greatly to the expected outcome. People the main resource of an organisation. Their knowledge, competence and skills can positively influence the service quality performance and the success of the organisation, Products/Services - the key reason why customers are engaging with the organisation, build loyalty or leave to the competitors, Premises major contributory factors to the customers overall impression of the business and can act as major attractors to new customers.

10. Empirical Review Framework

This area covers other related theories and previous studies. The SERVQUAL model (Service Quality) by Grönroos (1982) holds that the quality of a service, as it is perceived by the customer, can be divided into technical quality and functional quality dimensions. The former denotes what the customer receives as the output of a service production process and the latter how the technical quality is produced and transferred to the customer during buyer-seller interactions. The Total Perceived Quality Grönroos (1988) The expected quality is heavily influenced by market communication, word-of-mouth, company image, and customers' needs. While a company directly controls market communication, the word-of-mouth and company image are outside its immediate reach. Grönroos concludes that the total perceived quality is not only defined by the level of technical and functional dimensions, but also by the gap between the expected and the experienced quality. Kano Model of Customer Satisfaction classifies product attributes based on how they are perceived by customers and their effect on customer satisfaction. According to the model, there are three types of product attributes that fulfill customer satisfaction to a different degree: basic or expected attributes, performance or spoken attributes, and surprise and delight attributes.

11. Knowledge Gaps

The above mentioned scholars have concentrated their studies in the developed countries and this leaves a gap for the author to carry out the same in a developing country like Kenya. In particular, Munyiri (2002), Okeri (2006) and Ummer (2008) have carried out studies on parastatals but did not focus on quality customer service delivery but rather focus in marketing of product and services, customer responsiveness to product, products pricing, products differentiation, demand and supply of various products and services hence a study gap lift on service quality delivery in the service industry and organizational performance. Telkom Kenya is under pressure to revise its customer care

policies and staff training policies. Therefore there is an evaluation whether factors influencing quality service affect consumers satisfactory, leading to the parastatal not to be fully successful or barely competitive. Mainly, this is the gap that was covered by the study.

12. Research Methodology

Research methodology details involved research design and data collection and define the research design, target population, sampling design which includes the sampling technique and sample size, data collection methods and finally the data analysis methods. For the primary data, collection tool was a structured questionnaire and for secondary data, collection tool was documents, journals and research books.

12.1 Research Design

The most suitable design used was descriptive research design and multiple linear regression equation $Y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + \dots + b_px_p$ on the independent and dependent. A field study of respondents was done in which they were to describe problem related to service quality on customer services.

12.2 Target Population

The target population in research study included the employees of the Telkom Kenya and their customers. The population consisted of three categories of respondents namely, permanent employees (P.E), contracted employees (C.E) and customers of Telkom Kenya.

13 Sampling Design

Table 1 Sampling Design

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
P. Employees	3500	83
C. Employees	600	10
Customers	5000	7
Totals	9100	100

The sample was a representative of the population. It included members who were participating in the study outlining their various characteristics.

12.3 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Stratified random sampling technique was used since it works more effectively where the sampling frame is heterogeneous i.e. different kinds of characteristics; consisting of permanent, contractual employees and casuals. The population was divided into small groups called strata then a systematic technique was used to select members who would participate in the study from each stratum. Due to the large population, a minimum of 10% sample size was a good representation of the population therefore, a choice of 9100 respondents was considered since it was more than 10% of the total population.

12.4 Data Collection and Survey Instrument

Data for this study was collected through the use of questionnaires which were semi-structured and based on pre-determined or standardized set of questions. Open-ended questions were used where there were no pre-determined answers while close ended were used where pre-determined answers were needed.

12.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis was done using the statistical package for social scientists (SPSS ver.17). Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data. Here, mean score, standard deviation, frequency and percentage of occurrences will be used and the results are presented on frequency distribution tables, pie charts and bar charts.

13 Pilot Study

A pilot study was to do away with questionnaire ambiguity hence study was carried out using respondents from the Telkom Kenya with 1,500 Telkom Customers, 1,000 Permanent employees and 2,000 Contractual Telkom employees.

12.5 Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

The study investigated on a number of factors affecting quality customer care services in Telkom Kenya Ltd. The specific objectives included the following questions importance of staff customer care training in Telkom Kenya, how customer service policy affects services, how location of the company affected its services and the effect of the organizational agility to products affects the company.

14 Staff Training

Customer care quality service is vital in every organization and if not observed can lead to loss of customers. It is therefore necessary to train staff very well on the same as customer care department represents the face of the organisation. Below is a representation of response on staff training for Telkom Kenya.

Table 2 Effect of Staff Training on customer care services quality.

CATEGORY	Frequencies			
	GOOD	BETTER	BEST	TOTAL
P. Employees	10	10	15	35
C. Employees	2	1	7	10
Customers	1	1	3	5
TOTAL	13	12	25	50

The findings reveal that a total of 13 respondents (26%) were of the view that Telkom Kenya trained its staff well. These respondents include 10 permanent employees, 2 on contract and 1 customer. 12 respondents (24%) felt that Telkom trained its staff better than its competitors and majority of the respondents felt that the organisation offered the best staff training. This is represented by 50% respondents with 22 being Telkom Kenya employees and 3 customers.

15 Strategic customer care center location

Strategic customer care location enable easy access to products, after-sales services hence skills and knowledge to improve customer care quality which leads to improved organizational performance and service delivery.

Table 3 Effect of Strategic business customer care centres on customer care services quality.

CATEGORY	Affected	Not Affected	Total
P. EMPLOYEES	25	10	35
C. EMPLOYEES	6	4	10
CUSTOMERS	4	1	5
TOTAL	35	15	50

These findings imply that majority of the respondents feel that Telkom Kenya customer care units are not well located therefore this has affected business negatively. 35 respondents (70%) who comprise of 25 permanent employees, 6 contractual employees and 4 customers stated that the customer care locations were not strategic while only 30% respondents stated that the locations were ok and so not affected business.

16 Customer Care Policies and Guidelines

Customer care policies and guidelines define the best way for the organisation's staff to deal with it customers. Therefore, these guidelines are crucial to any organisation and they ought to be drafted with utmost care. Below is a table which represents the response on whether Telkom Kenya policies and guidelines are well conveyed.

Table 4 Effect of Customer Care Policy and Guidelines on customer care service quality.

CATEGORY	Change	Average	OK	Total
P.EMPLOYEES	25	5	5	35
C.EMPLOYEES	6	2	2	10
CUSTOMERS	3	1	1	5
TOTAL	34	8	8	50

From the above analysis on customer care policies and guidelines 34 respondents (68%) stated that there is need for a well defined organizational structure to improve customer care services, 8 respondents (16%) showed that the customer care policy was average, while a similar figure of 16% showed that there was no need for change on the policies. This implies that well structured customer care policies framework on how to deal with customer will attract more customers in the organization hence need to improve performance on quality of services given by Telkom Kenya to its customers.

17 . Agility Chain Supply

Agility chain supply of products and services is necessary for an organisation in order to be ahead of its competitors hence maintaining customer satisfaction and to better sales of its products. Table below shows the response about agility chain supply of Telkom's products.

Table 5 Effect of Agility Supply Chain on customer care service quality.

CATEGORY	Change	Average	Ok	Total
P.EMPLOYEES	21	4	5	30
C.EMPLOYEES	10	2	2	14
CUSTOMERS	4	1	1	5
TOTAL	35	7	8	50

70% of the respondents stated that there is need for a well defined organizational agility to access products and these included 31 employees and 4 customers. 14% respondents who included 6 employees and 1 customer showed that the agility strategy was average while 16% showed weakness in the agility strategy. These included 7 employees and 1 customer.

18 . Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis helped to analyze information from the study in a systematic way. This finally enabled study come up with useful conclusions and recommendations of the problem in question. Strategic customer care location was the most important variable in the study and the analysis stated the need for acquisition of more strategic locations. This would enable the company to expand its business centres and open several other branches countrywide. It was also recommended that the company interacts with major donors who can provide aid for training when necessary. Further analysis proposed the need to conduct enough research on certain locations before deciding to put up an outlet in that strategic business location. Also the need to conduct a research, on the kind of people, their status and living standards. The agility to access products was severely missing from the records studied indicating that quality access that quickly lead customers to the new products are not prevalent.

19 Summary of Findings

The study focused on four specific variables which were customer care policies and guidelines, agility supply of products and services, staff training and customer care strategic business location. The study revealed that customer care training is very important in every organization as it provides staffs with customer knowledge and skills to manage customers. The respondents also seemed dissatisfied with the employee's services. They claimed that the firm lacks continuous supply chain hence there was no agility supply of products and services. Customer care training was recommended that employees were to be well trained and be given customer care knowledge, skills in order to boost their customer handling ability and get to attract more customer hence increases

organizational performance. It should not go without notice that out of the total respondents, the customers respondents were quite few. This can rightly be presumed to be due to the low customer base that Telkom Kenya has.

20 Conclusion

The objective for this study was to clarify the factors that affect quality customer care provision in Telkom Kenya Ltd. Efficient and effective training and development of employees is an essential element for Telkom Kenya continuing growth in an increasingly telecommunication world. Telkom Kenya requires employees who are committed and flexible in order to aid its expansion of the business. The expansion of Telkom Kenya relies on retaining existing customers and acquiring new ones. All customers need to be confident and happy in Telkom Kenya. This relies on committed and flexible employees delivering the highest standards of service to meet Telkom Kenya objectives. Telkom Kenya structured approach to training and developing its existing and new employees provides a strong foundation for its continuing growth. The study also suggests that the consumer decision-making process for service products is best modeled as a complex system that incorporates both direct and indirect effects on quality of the service.

21 Recommendations

The study recommends that if Telkom Kenya is to compete competitively in the world market and Kenya, it should specifically concentrate on service quality delivering to customer hence customer satisfaction. The customer care department should be taken seriously and those employees trained on customer care values in order to improve their services to its customers hence customer satisfaction and improve organisational performance. It further recommends that employees should be provided with proper facilities and equipment like motor vehicles, motorcycles in order to timelessly and agile deliver product and services to the customers hence remain competitive in the market. Telkom Kenya should institute appropriate motivating factors like salary improvement, incentives to boost staffs working morale. Training was also recommended for the employees to acquire relevant skills, knowledge and attitude towards the job and enable quicker and easier handling of customers and development of good public relations.

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