

# DETERMINANTS OF CUSTOMER RETENTION IN MOBILE INDUSTRY - EVIDENCE FROM TIGO AND VODACOM CUSTOMERS IN ILALA DISTRICT, DAR ES SALAAM-TANZANIA

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## Abstract

*The study investigates the determinants of customer retention by mobile telecommunication industries in Ilala District. The study specifically examined the influence of convenience of service, pricing/tariff, network coverage, and service quality on retention of Tigo and Vodacom customers. The study employed mixed research, which encompassed descriptive cross study. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. 100 respondents who were Tigo and Vodacom clients participated in the research. Findings depict that respondents were satisfied with the available customer care centres, recharge points, existing recharge vouchers, browsing fees, and price schedules, but were dissatisfied with call rates. Moreover, the study found that signal and drop quality are good and respondents were satisfied with network availability and ultimately confirmed that their expectations were met by service providers. Lastly, the study found that respondents were satisfied with customer complaint reporting mechanisms established by service providers, but had concerns over delays in determining complaints and resolutions reached thereafter.*

## Keywords:

*Human Resources, Information System, Effectiveness*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Customer retention is a process of engaging existing customers to continue buying products or services from a specific company [1]. Customers are retained based on the quality of products or services offered and affordability of prices or tariffs charged on goods and services. Customer retention is vital for the survival of an organization because it ensures and maintains consistency in sales [2]. When goods or services offered by companies do not appeal to customers, other companies offering better goods or services will give customers a reason to leave. Most surveys across industries show that keeping one existing customer is five to seven times more profitable than attracting a new one [3]. Marketers recognize that it is usually less costly and easier to do business or sell to an old satisfied customer, than to keep seeking new ones [4].

Globally, Mobile usage has significantly increased in many advanced and developing countries. In United States of America (USA), the number of subscribers to mobile telephone networks in 2018 was at 404.58 million [5]. According to CIA world fact book (2014), the number of mobile phone users in the world is five billion people which covers 67% of the world population. There are now more than 4 billion people around the world using the internet [6]. Due to increase in demand for mobile users, the number of service providers has heightened to meet the ever increasing demand [32] – [34]. This has encouraged competition among telecommunication industries. When a company retains

just 5% of its customers, profits are most likely to increase from 25% to 95% [7]. According to [8], 82% of companies agree that retention is cheaper than acquisition. It can cost as much as six times more to win a new customer than it does to keep an existing one [9].

In Africa, the challenge of satisfying and retaining customers is equally faced by service providers in Nigeria. The authors in [10] posited similar views on customer loyalty and retention in the Nigerian telecommunication sector. In their study, they found that a business' customer base can only increase when customers are satisfied with the quality, reliability, and delivery of goods and services. In East Africa, Kenya faces a similar experience. The authors in [11] studied the "Effects of Brand Awareness on Customer Retention in Kenya's Mobile Telecommunication Industry" and found distinct elements like advertising, personal selling, promotions, and public relations as determinants of customer retention. This relativism brings uncommon answers and hence a need for further study [35] [37].

Before 1993, the Tanzania Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (TPTC) monopolized communication services and was entirely responsible for regulating the sector. In 1993, the Communications Act was enacted to liberalize the communications sector in Tanzania. The TPTC was thereafter split into 3 different entities: the Tanzania Posts Corporation (TPC), the Tanzania Telecommunications Company Limited (TTCL) and the Tanzania Communication Commission (TCC) [36] [44].

The challenge now is far beyond producing satisfied customers as competitors can do it too; the challenge is to produce delighted and loyal customers [12] [13]. In a study of the overall customer satisfaction in Tanzania's mobile telecommunication networks, it was noted that, irrespective of the big number of mobile telecommunication networks in Tanzania, customer satisfaction is low [27] [31]. Currently, operators of the industry are faced with the challenge of establishing and offering customer-focused services [37]. This requires firms to conduct continuous service improvement to ensure customer satisfaction, brand supremacy, and ultimately customer retention [4] [15].

In today's challenging economy and competitive business world, retaining a customer base is critical to the success of any business firm. When customers are not convinced to stay, competitors will give them a reason to leave [10]. Customer retention and satisfaction result into massive profits. It is far less expensive to cultivate an existing customer base and sell more services to them than it is to seek new, single-transaction customers [38]. Most surveys across industries show that keeping one existing customer is five to seven times more profitable than attracting a new one. If a business successfully creates and keeps customers in a cost-effective way, it will make profits and survive

the threat of closing down [39]. If, for any reason, a business fails to attract or sustain a sufficient number of customers, it will experience losses. Too many losses will lead to the demise of the enterprise [25]. With this note, the current study assessed determinants of customer retention in Mobile Telecommunication Industries by focusing on Tigo and Vodacom customers [40].

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Utility Theory and Service Quality Model. The Utility Theory states that consumers have different levels of satisfaction for the various types of goods and services available on the market [16] [41]. It is no wonder that amidst a variety of things consumers may have a liking for; there are those they are fond of than others and can probably derive preferences of some sort since they only have a limited amount of wealth and have to make decisions on purchases [42]. This actually is a very foundational concept in economics called utility theory [17]. The Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL) views service quality in light of the gap between the expected level of service and perceptions of customers regarding the level of satisfaction with service received which enhance customer retention. The SERVQUAL Model is distinct from others because it determines more than one aspect of service encounter [35] [43]. This view supports this study because the overall perception of service quality which enhances customer satisfaction is based on various dimensions (factors) of service encounters which influence customer retention and this is what the current study sought to establish.

### 2.2 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Aldlaigan and Buttle [1] asserts that time utility and location as components of convenience dimensions have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. In the current study, convenience in telecommunication industry will be determined by four issues which are; availability of customer care center, availability of recharge points, types of recharge vouchers and payment options.

Wang and Lo [41] concluded that convenience in terms of availability of customer care center, recharge points, types of recharge vouchers, payment options and network are the most important factors which enhance customer retention.

Ranaweera and Prabhu [34] studied and researched on the fixed line telephone services and their impact on service quality. This paper presented a holistic model of customer retention incorporating service quality perceptions, price perceptions, customer in difference, and inertia. Their study concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between convenience of service offered by telephone service providers and customer retention.

The authors in [18] examined the level of customer satisfaction associated with various aspects of ICICI bank ATM. The weighted average mean was employed to measure the efficiency of different ATM services. Promptness of ATM card delivery, service quality, behaviour of ATM personnel/ guard, safety- security-privacy, cash availability in ATMs, quality of notes, availability of pay-in-slips and deposit envelope were found to trigger more than a neutral level of satisfaction while

location, availability of backup generators, and availability of complaint books scored less than neutral.

The study which was conducted by the authors in [19] tried to tackle the influence of corporate image, price, and trust on customer retention. Moreover, the study tried to examine how corporate image, price, and trust act as a pull as well as push factor towards customers in the industry.

The sample size was 200 and the study used both primary and secondary source of obtaining data. Secondary data have been collected from journals, newspapers, magazine, books, reports and various websites. Primary data were collected through the survey and questionnaire method. Moreover, the study found that in business, trust and price are the most relevant determinants of stable and collaborative relationship. When trust is established between parties, positive relations and intentions are stimulated. The study equally revealed that brand trust sustains an organization even during the lowest peak of business. In case of corporate image, it was revealed that corporate image is correlated to the physical and behavioral attributes of the organization such as business name, variety of products or service and the impression of quality communicated by each person communicating with the firm's client. Again, price is one of the major determinants of customer retention and loyal customers may buy more and positively advertise a firm.

Moreover, it is hoped that the study will create awareness all over the world on the topic studied. Given the various methods employed including primary data and secondary data, it is expected that the study will become very resourceful for firms that intend to retain their customers. However, since the study used only two instruments to collect data, the information obtained be insufficient and therefore further research may be necessary.

Kollmann [21] found that price plays a vital role in telecommunication markets especially for the mobile telecommunication service providers. The price here is not limited to price of a SIM card, but also covers the price of recharge vouchers, call rates, SMS charges, the Internet charges, price of phones, and so on. A network cheaper services or goods has a high tendency of attracting a large subscriber base leading to an impressive market and financial performance. Kollmann states that income from the number of call minutes determines the basic commercial success of the network providers. He also adds that the success of the telecommunication sector largely depends on continuing usage and pricing policies, which need to be considered at several levels.

The authors in [20] stated that the implication of this is that offering a high quality service is not sufficient to attract and retain customers in the telecom market; offering the service at an attractive and affordable price is equally necessary to achieve a competitive advantage in the market. Specifically, price has been used by all the firms in the GSM market of Tanzania, as a strategic tool both to attract new subscribers and more importantly to retain current ones. In the market, where it is difficult to perceive any significant difference in the service quality of most of the GSM firms, price competition has become widespread and an important competitive tool.

However, price competition is a basis for existence of price wars where subscribers traverse from one network to another to take advantage of the latest price cut, thereby giving no room for any loyalty to be developed.

The study which was conducted by the authors in [21] tackled the influence of network coverage on customer retention. The study examined how network coverage can act as a pull as well as push factor towards customers in the industry. The sample size was 200 subscribers of mobile network of MTN, GLO, Airtel, Vodafone, Tigo and Expresco. Questionnaires were used to collect information from the subscribers. The study found that network coverage plays an important role in building loyalty among customers and ultimately promoting a consistent customer base. The study additionally suggested that stable and better network coverage helps to influence the satisfaction of customers which consequently effects the loyalty of customers. Although this research highlights critical issues within the telecommunication business, it only employed one type of instrument to collect data. This may limit collection of detailed information. Also, the sample was not proportionately selected because 138 samples were from MTN subscribers, 3 from GLO, 15 from Airtel, 32 from Vodacom, 6 from Tigo and 0 from Expresco. Therefore, the study was supposed to equalize the sample to reach a realistic conclusion.

A study conducted by the authors in [22] found that respondents (2,385 aged 18 and over) who had moved to Vodafone mentioned that the main reason (41%) was network coverage. 28% had acted on the recommendation of a family member or friend, and 21% said their move was due to Vodafone's reputation for good customer service. Furthermore, they said, reasons for staying with Vodafone included 'good network coverage' (78%), 'quick customer service' (71%) and 'reasonable pricing' (67%), as respondents could select multiple options. It was also found that over half (55%) of Vodafone customers said they would not look at other networks for their next phone or contract, while 33% said they would shop around, but 'most likely would stay with Vodafone'.

The study which was conducted by Hossain et al. [16] tackled the influence of network quality on customer retention. The study examined how network quality affects retention of customers. The sample size was 245. The structured questionnaire method was used to collect information from the respondents. Moreover, the study found that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and network quality. The study suggested that network quality triggers competitive amongst telecommunication industries as it is a basis for attracting and retaining customers. Finally, the study concluded that low quality of network is the major cause of consumers 'dissatisfaction and ultimately causes customers to switch to other firms. Although the study has contributed tremendous knowledge on the subject under study, only one type of instrument was used to collect data: this may limit collection of detailed information.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed mixed research, which incorporated the descriptive cross study. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. 100 respondents who were Tigo and Vodacom clients participated in the study and data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT MOBILE SERVICES

Overall customer satisfaction covers a broad spectrum and this can be analyzed from different angles. Basing on the current study therefore, overall customer satisfaction was assessed based on readiness to continue using the current mobile services and willingness to recommend other people to use the current mobile services based on the perception that mobile service presents good value.

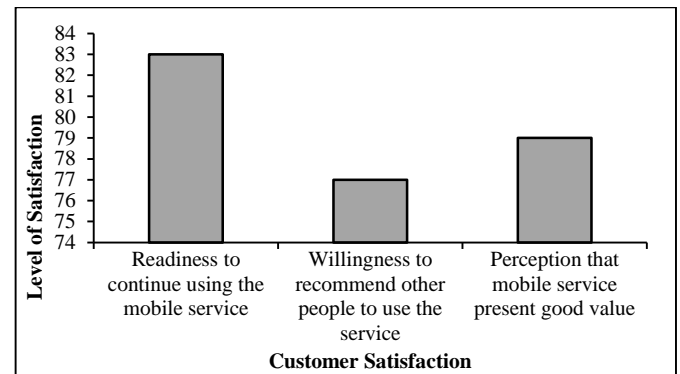


Fig.1. Overall Customer Satisfaction

All these parameters scored 75% indicating that customers are highly satisfied with mobile services as indicated in Fig.1. This result is also in line with the result achieved by Mary (2012) who found that the overall perception on mobile service quality in selected mobile companies was that the companies offer good quality services and most customers had no intention to shift to other service providers.

### 4.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONVENIENCE OF SERVICE AND RETENTION

Results show that 76 (76.0%) and 81(81.0%) of the customers were comfortable with the availability of customer care centres and recharge points. Also, it was revealed that 65.0% were happy with existing types of recharge vouchers but were neutral on payment options. These findings are in line with those established in [3] [22], which suggest that convenience has a significant positive effect on customer retention.

Table.1. Convenience of service

Convenience	Dissatisfied n%	Neutral n%	Satisfied n%
Customer care centre	7 (7.0%)	17 (17.0%)	76 (76.0%)
Availability of recharge points	0 (0.0%)	9 (9.0%)	81 (81.0%)
Types of recharge vouchers	15 (15.0%)	20.0 (20.0%)	65 (65.0%)
Payment options	9 (9.0%)	71(71.0%)	10 (10.0%)

Source: Field Data (2020)

To determine the influence of convenience on customer retention, a correlation coefficient was computed and a high positive value ( $r=0.310$ ,  $p=0.002$ ) was obtained, which indicates a high positive relationship between convenience and customer retention. This finding is consistent with similar findings in [24] who found that convenience has a positive relationship with customer retention. These findings are also consistent with those reflected in studies conducted in [25] [26] who found that responsiveness plays a crucial role in sustaining service quality and facilitation of long term relationships between service providers and customers hence leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty. This requires having adequate customer care centres, recharge points and different categories of vouchers to keep customers satisfied with their service providers.

Table.2. Relationship between Convenience and Customer Retention

Spearman's Rho		Customer Retention	Convenience
Customer retention	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.310**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
	N	100	100
Convenience	Correlation Coefficient	.310**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
	N	100	100

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

### 4.3 EFFECTS OF PRICING/TARIFF ON CUSTOMER RETENTION

The Table.3 indicates that 61% of respondents declared that they were totally satisfied with the prices offered by their service providers. Furthermore, 81% of respondents affirmed that they consider the internet browsing fee is fair. Moreover 67% of respondents agreed that they consider the price schedules are fair and acceptable. Further, 93% of respondents said that they are dissatisfied with the call rates.

Table.3. Pricing/Tariff on Customer Retention

Convenience	Dissatisfied n%	Neutral n%	Satisfied n%
Call rates	20 (20.0%)	19 (19.0%)	61 (61.0%)
Internet browsing fee	0 (0.0%)	9 (9.0%)	81 (81.0%)
Price schedules	13 (13.0%)	20.0 (20.0%)	67 (67.0%)
Accuracy of costs charged	93 (93.0%)	7 (7.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Source: Field Data (2020)

The current study also investigated the relationship between pricing and customer retention. The computed correlation coefficient value ( $r=-.229^*$ ,  $p=0.0361$ ) indicated a negative

relationship between the pricing of mobile services and customer retention. The findings imply that the higher the price, the lower the retention and vice versa.

Table.3. Relationship between Pricing and Customer Retention

Spearman's Rho		Customer Retention	Pricing
Customer retention	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.229
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.361
	N	100	100
Pricing	Correlation Coefficient	-.229	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.361	.
	N	100	100

Source: Field Data (2020)

A key informant asserted that: "One of the key challenges which make most customers to switch to other mobile service providers is the cost of our services. I remember during launching of Halotel services in Tanzania, a number of customers quit, because of the offers and bundles offered by Halotel".

It is true that customers are retained based on the price charged by the entity. If the entity is offering affordable services, customers will be convinced to continuing buying goods and products of the entity. When prices escalate, customers will seek services from cheaper suppliers. The findings of this study are also supported in Kollmann [21], who found that price plays a vital role in telecommunication markets especially for the mobile telecommunication service providers. The price here is not limited to price of a SIM card, but also covers the price of recharge voucher, call rate, SMS charge, the Internet charge, price of phones, and so on. A network with affordable services has a tendency of attracting a large subscriber base leading to an impressive market and financial performance. The study revealed that income from the number of call minutes determines the basic commercial success for network providers.

### 4.4 INFLUENCE OF NETWORK COVERAGE ON CUSTOMER RETENTION

Good network coverage is appealing to customers and in the long run gives an organization a good reputation. This underscores the fact that network coverage is critically important in customer retention. Therefore, the study sought to find out if network coverage influences customer retention of Vodacom and Tigo customers. Results show that 64% of respondents declared that signal quality is good. Furthermore, 81% of the respondents affirmed that the drop quality in their mobile is conducive. Moreover 91% of the respondents were very satisfied with availability of network and confirmed that their mobile network meets their expectations. Also, 68% of the respondents agreed that they are satisfied with the number of available agents dealing with mobile money transfers.

Table.4. Network Coverage and Customer Retention

Network coverage	Dissatisfied n%	Neutral n%	Satisfied n%
Signal quality	26	10	64

	(26.0%)	(10.0%)	(64.0%)
Drop quality	0 (0.0%)	9 (9.0%)	81 (81.0%)
Availability of network	9 (9.0%)	0.0 (0.0%)	91 (92.0%)
Agents for money transfer	18 (18.0%)	14 (14.0%)	68 (68.0%)

Source: Field Data (2020)

This is cemented by the following statement made by a key informant: "In Dar es Salaam, we don't have a problem of signal or drop quality; we used to experience this problem in other remote places like Longido, Tandahimba and the like".

On the influence of network coverage on customer retention, a correlation coefficient test was taken and a high positive relationship correlation value ( $r=0.836$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) was obtained. This implies that reliable network enhances customer retention. Findings are as depicted in Table.5.

Table.5. Relationship between Network Coverage and Customer Retention

Spearman's Rho		Customer retention	Network coverage
Customer retention	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.836**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.000
	N	100	100
Network coverage	Correlation Coefficient	.836**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	-
	N	100	100

Source: Field Data (2020)

The findings of the current study are also supported by the study conducted by Hossain et al. [16] on customer retention and telecommunications services in Bangladesh. The study tackled the influence of network quality on customer retention and concluded that low quality of network dissatisfies customers and forces them to switch to other network operators. The authors in [27] assessed the effect of low cost service, security and privacy, ease of use, and customer financial needs on satisfaction. Multiple linear regressions were used to establish the relationship between the mentioned independent variables and customer financial needs satisfaction. Privacy and security were the only variables discovered to have had a significant relationship with customer financial needs satisfaction. Both correlation and regression analysis show that all independent variables had a significant influence on customer satisfaction, which in turn results to retention.

#### 4.5 EFFECT OF SERVICE QUALITY ON CUSTOMER RETENTION

The researcher also aimed to assess the effects of service quality on customer retention. The study focused on three indicators namely complaint reporting, waiting time, and complaints resolution. Results show that customers were satisfied

with how easy it is to report their complaints, but were dissatisfied with time taken for their concerns to be dealt with and there were mixed sentiments on outcome of complaint resolutions. These findings are consistent with comparable establishments made in [28], found that 68.2% of all respondents were not satisfied with the duration of time taken for complaints to be resolved.

Table.6. Service Quality and Customer Retention

Service quality	Dissatisfied n%	Neutral n%	Satisfied n%
Ease of reporting complaints	13 (13.0%)	23 (23.0%)	64 (64.0%)
Waiting time	0 (0.0%)	81 (81.0%)	9 (9.0%)
Complain resolution	12 (12.0%)	85(85.0%)	3(3.0%)

Source: Field Data (2020)

Regarding the influence of service quality on customer retention, the researcher ran a coefficient correlation test and found a weak positive correlation value ( $r=0.062$ ,  $p=0.543$ ), which indicates a weak relationship between service quality and customer retention. It is true that service quality can influence retention. However, the current study contradicts some studies including that conducted in [29]. The study found a strong positive relationship between service quality and retention. Moreover, the findings of this study are supported by the authors in [30] who conducted a study on *customer loyalty in telecom sector of Pakistan* and assessed the impact of service quality on customer retention. The study found that there is weak significant relationship between prompt problem solving and customer royalty.

Table.7. Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Retention

Spearman's Rho		Customer retention	Service quality
Customer retention	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.543
	N	100	100
Service quality	Correlation Coefficient	.062	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.543	.
	N	100	100

Source: Field Data (2020)

#### 4.6 RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

Reliability analysis was subsequently done using Cronbach's Alpha which measured the internal consistency by establishing that certain items within a scale measures the same construct. The authors in [31] established that the Alpha value threshold at 0.7 and above is regarded as most reliable, thus forming the study's benchmark. This illustrates that all the four variables were reliable as their reliability values exceeded the prescribed threshold of 0.7. Thus the data collection instrument was reliable.

Table.8. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.759	18

Source: Field Data (2020)

#### 4.7 VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

The validity of the study was measured using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of sphericity through the SPSS. Results extracted from SPSS are presented in Table.9.

Table.9. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1230.356
	df	276
	Sig.	.000

Source: Field Data (2020)

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that respondents were satisfied with availability of customer care centres, recharge points and the existing recharge vouchers. On the Effects of pricing/tariff on customer retention, the study concludes that prices offered are affordable and customers are satisfied with browsing fees and price schedules but were dissatisfied with call rates. Also, the study concludes that signal quality and drop quality are good and respondents were satisfied with availability of network and confirmed that mobile network meets their expectation. The study further concludes that customers were additionally satisfied with how easy it is to report their complaints, but were dissatisfied with the time taken for their concerns to be dealt with. Finally, there were mixed sentiments on the outcomes of complaint resolution.

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