

SERVICE FLEXIBILITY AND MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS OF TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of service flexibility on marketing effectiveness of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. The study was conceptualized using service flexibility as predictor to marketing effectiveness with measures such as customer acquisition, customer retention and customer loyalty. A causal research design was employed in the study. The study population comprised 9 telecommunication companies in Nigeria. In view of the smallness of the population, a census was taken. 5 top level management staff of each company constituted the unit of observation. Thus, 45 management staff provided data for the study. Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Each test was conducted at a 0.01 level of analysis with the help of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. The findings revealed the existence of significant impact of service flexibility on marketing effectiveness of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. Thus, the study concluded that service flexibility has positive significant impact on marketing effectiveness of telecommunication companies in Nigeria; and recommends that managers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria that seek improved marketing effectiveness in terms of customer acquisition, retention and loyalty should change their service deliveries according to consumer needs, tastes and preferences.

Keywords: Customer acquisition, customer loyalty, customer retention marketing effectiveness, service flexibility

Introduction

As consumer expectations change and competition intensifies, telecommunication companies are increasingly tasked with not only providing robust connectivity but also offering adaptable services that cater to diverse customer needs (Shalender, 2015). In Nigeria, the telecommunication industry is rapidly evolving, with heavy surge on mobile phone penetration and internet usage. The demand for tailored telecommunication solutions is at an all-time high. Customers seek plans that resonate with their unique lifestyles, whether for personal use, business needs or casual browsing (Gopakumar & Suresh, 2020). In line with this trend, service flexibility has emerged as a vital component influencing marketing effectiveness. Organizations that embrace service flexibility can position themselves as customer-centric, enhancing their appeal and loyalty among users (Brozovi et al., 2023).

Service flexibility refers to the ability of a company to modify its offerings such as data plans, pricing structures, and customer service options to better align with the preferences and behaviors

of its users (Shalender, 2015). Service flexibility fosters market share growth by enabling telecommunication companies to differentiate themselves from competitors (Lindgreen et al., 2005). By offering unique value propositions that address specific customer needs and pain points, companies can attract and retain a larger customer base, thereby increasing their market share (Srinivasan et al., 2005).

The assessment of marketing effectiveness has become a major issue and marketing professionals are under ever-increasing pressure to justify their marketing expenses. Researchers in marketing have cautioned that inability of marketing to demonstrate its contribution to organizational performance has weakened its standing within firms (Ambler & Roberts 2008). The consensus that has been reached in both strategic and marketing literature is that marketing effectiveness is multidimensional (Gao, 2010). Nevertheless, what constitutes superior marketing effectiveness differ between firms.

Although, studies have shown how service flexibility positively influence the performance of companies (Vilaginés, 1994; Cross et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2005; Jaramillo & Grisaffe, 2009; Kumar et al., 2008) in different industries (Harry, 2019; Nasreen et al., 2013). The results of these studies are not consistent. Also, there is relative scarcity of studies that specifically focused on examining the relationship between service flexibility and marketing effectiveness in the Nigerian telecommunication industry is scarce. In order to vacate this gap, this study examined the impact of service flexibility on marketing effectiveness of telecommunication companies in Nigeria.

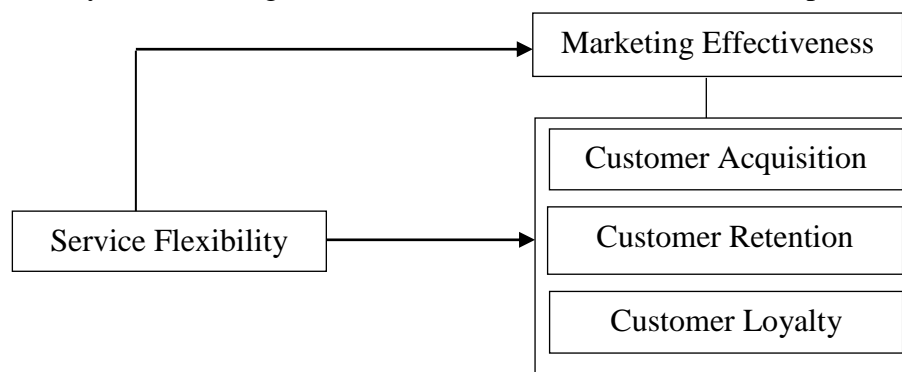


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of impact of service flexibility on marketing effectiveness of telecommunication companies in Nigeria.

Source: Gopakumar and Suresh (2020).

Literature Review

Consumption value theory

This study is rooted in consumption value theory (Sheth et al., 1991) which examines the underlying reasons behind the purchase of goods and services; and what motivates consumers to remain committed to an exchange relationship. In other words, the theory explains why consumers buy a product or not; why they prefer one product to another; and why they prefer a specific brand in a wide range of product categories such as physical and non-physical consumption goods, industrial goods and services (Sheth et al., 1991). Septa et al. (2016) posit that consumers have access to a lot of products due to globalization and advances in communication technologies. As a result, businesses need to differentiate themselves from competitors through better quality products and positioning.

By leveraging insights from consumption value theory, telecommunication companies can develop strategies that resonate with customers across emotional, social and epistemic dimensions, and ultimately drive enhanced marketing performance in terms of satisfaction, loyalty and profitability. Considering the foregoing, consumption value theory was adopted to underpin this study.

Concept of service flexibility

Services are intangible and are result of human intervention. So, customer satisfaction in service contexts is far more sophisticated and difficult to achieve. That said, the service sector is one of the most important sectors in both developed and developing economies, as services rise progressively, in their overall share in gross national product. Flexibility on the other hand, is the degree to which an organization has a variety of managerial capabilities and the speed at which they can be activated, to increase the control capacity of management and improve the controllability of the organization” (Sharma & Jain, 2010).

In the telecommunication industry, Gopakumar and Suresh (2020) observed that organizations could use such flexible activities as branding, point of purchase, product creation, product differentiation, product planning and development, pricing strategies and loyalty programs to manage and retain customers. The essence of service flexibility is to focus a firm's intent and capabilities to generate firm specific real options for the configuration and reconfiguration of appreciably superior customer value propositions (Singh & Shalender, 2014).

Marketing effectiveness

Effectiveness is considered by Drucker (1974) as doing the right thing. In organisational studies, effectiveness is considered from the perspective of the extent to which a certain performance achieves the goals of the organisation (Clark 2000). In marketing literature, effectiveness is described as the extent to which marketing actions have helped the company to achieve its business goals (Ambler et al., 2001).

Marketing effectiveness is the extent to which marketing objectives, such as customer loyalty, customer acquisition, customer retention, and positive referral are achieved by an organization. Effectiveness measures the extent to which organizational goals and objectives are achieved (Anyanwu, 2012). The effectiveness of particular marketing strategies needs to be measured. In this study, we adopt three nonfinancial measures of marketing effectiveness: acquisition, customer retention and customer loyalty.

Customer acquisition

Customer acquisition encompasses a series of interconnected activities involving customer touchpoints, customer engagement and customer conversion (Ateke & Amangala, 2020). It is concerned with identifying, converting and providing services for new buyers and ensuring that they maintain exchange relationship with the organization. Customer acquisition refers to gaining new consumers; persuading consumers to purchase a company's products (Molly, 2019). Organizations consider the cost of customer acquisition as an important measure in evaluating how much value customers bring to their businesses. A firm can acquire customers through customer referrals and customer loyalty programs.

Customer retention

Customer retention means having exchange relationship with a customer on a continuous basis. Customer retention is defined by Kihoro and Kepha (2014) as an attempt to prevent an organization's customers from going to buy products from competing firms. Organizations perform many activities to ensure that their customers do not try the products of competitors. It means to maintain business transaction or exchange with a particular firm in an ongoing basis (Didia & Harry, 2018).

Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is a deeply held commitment to re-patronize a preferred service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behaviour. Dick and Basu (1994) define customer loyalty as the strength of the relationship between an individual's relative attitude towards an entity (brand, service, store, or vendor) and repeat patronage. Customer loyalty could also be defined as the feeling of attachment or affection for a company's product or service that will directly influence customer's behaviour, with the aim of keeping and satisfying them and making them buy more of the firm's products (Wali & Opara, 2012).

Service Flexibility on Marketing Effectiveness

Marketing flexibility helps to ensure customer satisfaction and provides a basis of differentiation and superior performance (Gopakumar & Suresh, 2020). However, studies on marketing flexibility in general, and service flexibility in particular, are in short supply. However, the concept of marketing flexibility is important to firms that aspire to improving their performance and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Brozovi et al. (2023) examined strategic flexibility and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Sweden. The study conducted and analyzed 91 interviews with owners and chief executive officers (CEOs) of SMEs exhibiting high growth. The results showed a connection between strategic flexibility and firm growth and confirm the importance of strategic flexibility in SMEs.

Ogunmokun and Ling-yee (2012) investigated the effect of manufacturing flexibility on export performance in China and found that flexibility is positively related to export performance of the companies in mainland China. Also, Asikhia (2011) investigated the relationship between strategic flexibility and market performance of SMEs in Nigeria and revealed that strategic flexibility relates positively and significantly with market performance.

Similarly, Hind (2015) carried out a research on the effect of customer orientation on customer satisfaction in the Indian automobile industry. The showed that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between customer orientation and satisfaction of Indian automobile customers. Hennig-Thurau (2004) investigated the relationship between customer orientation of service employees and customer satisfaction, commitment, and retention in the context of Germany book retail and travel agency service sectors. Result of the analysis showed that customer orientation of service employees has a positive direct influence on customer retention.

In view of the foregoing, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

H₀₁: Service flexibility does not significantly impact customer acquisition of telecommunication companies in Nigeria.

H02: Service flexibility does not significantly impact customer retention of telecommunication companies in Nigeria.

H03: Service flexibility does not significantly impact customer loyalty of telecommunication companies in Nigeria.

Methodology

A causal research design was employed in this study. The population of the study comprised nine telecommunication companies in Nigeria as listed in National Bureau of Statistics (2022) website. In view of the smallness of the population, a census was taken. 5 top level management staff of these companies constituted the unit of observation. In other words, 45 management staff provided data for the study. These employees were (i) Business Development Managers, (ii) Relationship Managers, (iii) Customer Service Managers, (iv) Operations Managers, and (v) Marketing Managers. The final data analyses was however, based on responses gathered from 39 respondents.

A structured questionnaire served as primary data collection instrument. The instrument was tested for reliability using the Cronbach's alpha test. A summary of the results of test of reliability is presented in Table 1. Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The probability criterion of 0.05 significance level was adopted for accepting the null hypotheses at ($P > 0.05$) or rejecting it at ($P < 0.05$). Each test was conducted at a 0.01 level of analysis with the help of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

Table 1: Reliability Test - Cronbach's Alpha Analysis

S/N	ables	umber of I	tenbach's Alpha Coeffic
1	ce Flexibility	5	0.839
2	omer Loyalty	5	0.885
3	omer Acquisition	5	0.755
4	omer Retention	5	0.712

Source: SPSS Output from Field Data

The results of the Cronbach's alpha test revealed that all the variables in the study produced high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients indicating that, there is inter-item consistency among the variables in the study. This means that, if this study is conducted again in a similar condition the results will be similar to the results of our study.

Data Analyses and Results

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Service Flexibility

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
What is the extent to which your company is willing to make changes in order to accommodate customer's changing needs?	39	151	3.87	1.418	2.009
To what extent is your company able to activate various managerial capabilities?	39	176	4.51	1.097	1.204
To what extent does your organization apply flexibility in various marketing activities such as branding and product creation?	39	173	4.44	.852	.726
To what extent is your company able to change its operations to deliver superior customer value propositions?	39	175	4.49	.997	.993
To what extent does your company improve performance without sacrificing quality?	39	147	3.77	1.012	1.024

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 2 shows results of descriptive analysis using sum, mean, standard deviation and variance. As shown in the Table, the entire responses generated high mean scores greater than 3.00. Specifically, in the result, question 2 which sought to ascertain the extent to which the companies are '*able to activate various managerial capabilities*' has the highest sum - which is 176, and hence the highest mean score of 4.51. However, question 1 has the highest standard deviation and variance of 1.418 and 2.009, which means question 1 has the most data variations.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Customer Acquisition

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
To what extent does your company identify new customers?	39	157	4.03	1.181	1.394
To what extent does your company convert and provide services for new customers?	39	180	4.62	.747	.559
To what extent does your company maintain exchange relationship with new customers?	39	169	4.33	.927	.860
To what extent does your company acquire customers through referrals and customer loyalty programs?	39	167	4.28	1.099	1.208
To what extent does your company persuade consumers to purchase a company's products and/or services?	39	153	3.92	.900	.810

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3 shows results of descriptive analysis using sum, mean, standard deviation and variance. As shown in the Table, the entire responses generated high mean scores greater than 3.00. Specifically, in the result, question 2 which sought to ascertain the extent to which the companies '*convert and provide services for new customers*' has the highest sum - which is 180, and hence the highest mean score of 4.62. However, question 1 has the highest standard deviation and variance of 1.181 and 1.394, which means question 1 has the most data variations.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Customer Retention

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
To what extent do your customers maintain exchange relationship with your company for a long time?	39	167	4.28	1.234	1.524
To what extent is your company able to prevent customers from going to buy products from other firms competing with you in the market?	39	193	4.95	.223	.050
To what extent do customers maintain business transaction or exchange with a particular firm in an ongoing basis?	39	185	4.74	.442	.196
To what extent are you committed for a long-term to maintain the relationship with customers?	39	189	4.85	.670	.449
To what extent does your company maintain a large number of customers who engage in exchange transaction with the firm for a specific period of time, such as a year?	39	155	3.97	.903	.815

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 4 shows results of descriptive analysis using sum, mean, standard deviation and variance. As shown in the Table, the entire responses generated high mean scores greater than 3.00. Specifically, in the result, question 2 which sought to ascertain the extent to which the companies *'convert and provide services for new customers'* has the highest sum - which is 180, and hence the highest mean score of 4.62. However, question 1 has the highest standard deviation and variance of 1.181 and 1.394, which means question 1 has the most data variations.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Customer Loyalty

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
To what extent are your customers willing and ready to continue to patronize your company?	39	162	4.15	1.204	1.449
To what extent are your customers favourably disposed to your company?	39	190	4.87	.570	.325
To what extent are your customers willing to pay for your services despite slight increase in prices?	39	181	4.64	.628	.394
To what extent are your customers despite promotional activities of competitors?	39	194	4.97	.160	.026
To what extent are your customers open to various services provided by your company?	39	160	4.10	.788	.621

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 5 shows results of descriptive analysis using sum, mean, standard deviation and variance. As shown in the Table, the entire responses generated high mean scores greater than 3.00. Specifically, in the result, question 4 which sought to ascertain the extent to which *'employees react to the wants of the customers'* has the highest sum - which is 196, and hence the highest mean score of 4.97. However, question 1 has the highest standard deviation and variance of 1.204 and 1.449, which means question 1 has the most data variations.

Table 6: Model Summary of impact of Service flexibility customer acquisition

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.707 ^a	.500	.486	2.283

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Flexibility

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

A simple regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of service flexibility on customer acquisition of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. As shown in Table 6, service flexibility has a strong and positive impact on customer acquisition. This is evident in the regression coefficient (R) of 0.707. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.500. This means that 50% of the changes in customer acquisition are attributable to service flexibility, while the remaining 50% changes are due to the impact of external variables not included in the model.

Table 7: ANOVA^a of impact of Service flexibility on customer acquisition

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	192.854	1	192.854	36.993	.000 ^b
	Residual	192.889	37	5.213		
	Total	385.744	38			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Acquisition
b. Predictors: (Constant), Service Flexibility

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

As shown in Table 7, Service flexibility significantly predicts customer acquisition of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. This is indicated by the probability value of 0.000, which is less than the critical value of 0.05. Statistically, service flexibility significantly predicts customer acquisition at $F(1, 37) = 36.993$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.500$. The results also showed that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 8: Coefficients^a of impact of Service flexibility on customer acquisition

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.027	1.870		5.362	.000
	Service Flexibility	.529	.087	.707	6.082	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Acquisition

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

As shown in the regression model in Table 8, the unstandardized coefficients indicate how much the dependent variable – customer acquisition varies with the independent variable – service flexibility. As shown in the table, before the introduction of the predictor variable - service flexibility, customer acquisition stood at 10.027, but at the introduction of the predictor variable, there is an additional unit. Specifically, as shown in the table, the intercept B_0 is 10.027, which is the predicted value of customer acquisition without the contributions of the predictor variable. That is, when service flexibility is equal to zero, customer acquisition is 10.027. However, the slope B_1 is 0.529, indicating that 1% increase in service flexibility will bring about approximately 0.53% increase in acquisition of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that *service flexibility does not significantly impact on acquisition of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria* was rejected.

Table 9: Model Summary of impact of flexibility on customer retention

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.398 ^a	.167	.144	1.619

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Flexibility

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

A simple regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of service flexibility on retention of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. As shown in Table 9, service flexibility has a weak and positive impact on customer retention. This is evident in the regression coefficient (R) of 0.398. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.167. This means that approximately 17% of the changes in customer retention are attributable to service flexibility, while the remaining 83% changes are due to the impact of external variables not included in the model.

Table 10: ANOVA^a of the impact of flexibility on customer retention

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.407	1	19.407	7.406	.010 ^b
	Residual	96.952	37	2.620		
	Total	116.359	38			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Retention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Service Flexibility

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

As shown in Table 10, service flexibility significantly predicts retention of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. This is indicated by the probability value of 0.010, which is less than the critical value of 0.05. Statistically, service flexibility significantly predicts customer retention at $F(1, 37) = 7.406$, $p = 0.010 < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.167$. The results also showed that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 11: Coefficients^a of impact of flexibility on customer retention

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	19.257	1.326		14.527	.000
	Service Flexibility	.168	.062	.398	2.721	.010

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Retention

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

As shown in the regression model in Table 11, the unstandardized coefficients indicate how much the dependent variable – customer retention varies with the independent variable – service flexibility. As shown in Table 11, before the introduction of the predictor variable - service flexibility, customer retention stood at 19.257, but at the introduction of the predictor variable, there is an additional unit. Specifically, as shown in the table, the intercept B_0 is 19.257, which is the predicted value of customer retention without the contributions of the predictor variable. That is, when service flexibility is equal to zero, customer retention is 19.257. However, the slope B_1 is 0.168, indicating that 1% increase in service flexibility will bring about approximately 0.17% increase in retention of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. Therefore, the null

hypothesis which states that *service flexibility does not significantly impact on retention of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria* was rejected.

Table 12: Model Summary of impact of service flexibility on customer loyalty

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.620 ^a	.384	.367	1.191

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Flexibility

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

A simple regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of service flexibility on customer loyalty of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. As shown in Table 12, service flexibility has a strong and positive impact on customer loyalty. This is evident in the regression coefficient (R) of 0.620. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.384. This means that approximately 38% of the changes in the criterion variable (customer loyalty) are attributable to the impact of the predictor variable (service flexibility), while the remaining 62% changes are due to the impact of external variables not included in the model.

Table 13: ANOVA^a of impact of Service flexibility on customer loyalty

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	32.734	1	32.734	23.071	.000 ^b
	Residual	52.497	37	1.419		
	Total	85.231	38			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), Service Flexibility

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

As shown in Table 13, Service flexibility significantly predicts customer loyalty of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. This is indicated by the probability value of 0.000, which is less than the critical value of 0.05. Statistically, service flexibility significantly predicts customer loyalty at $F(1, 37) = 23.071$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.384$. The results also showed that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 14: Coefficients^a of impact of Service flexibility on customer loyalty

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	18.021	.975		18.474	.000
	Service Flexibility	.218	.045	.620	4.803	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

As shown in the regression model in Table 14, the unstandardized coefficients indicate how much the dependent variable – customer loyalty varies with the independent variable – service flexibility. As shown in Table 14, before the introduction of the predictor variable - service flexibility, customer loyalty stood at 18.021, but at the introduction of the predictor variable, there is an additional unit. Specifically, as shown in the table, the intercept B_0 is 18.021, which is the predicted value of customer loyalty without the contributions of the predictor variable. That is, when service flexibility is equal to zero, customer loyalty is 18.021. However, the slope B_1 is

0.218, indicating that 1% increase in service flexibility will bring about approximately 0.22% increase in loyalty of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that '*service flexibility does not significantly impact on loyalty of customers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria*' was rejected.

Discussion of the Findings

The Simple Regression Analysis conducted to determine the impact of service flexibility on marketing effectiveness of telecommunication companies in Nigeria revealed that service flexibility has a positive significant impact on customer acquisition, retention and loyalty. These findings align with findings of similar studies examined.

The findings are in line with the findings of Brozovi et al. (2023) who investigated strategic flexibility and growth and found a connection between strategic flexibility and firm growth and confirm the importance of strategic orientation for strategic flexibility in SMEs. The current findings also align with that of Ogunmokun and Ling-yee (2012) that flexibility positively relate to export performance of companies in mainland China.

Similarly, the findings of this study align with findings of Asikhia (2011) that strategic flexibility relates positively and significantly with market performance of SMEs in Nigeria; and that of Hind (2015) that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between customer orientation and satisfaction of Indian automobile customers. Further, the findings of this study confirmed findings of Hennig-Thurau (2004) that customer orientation of service employees has a positive direct influence on customer retention.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the large extent to which the findings support findings of previous studies, the study concludes that service flexibility has significant impact on marketing effectiveness of telecommunication companies in Nigeria. Thus, the study recommends that managers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria should adapt their service deliveries to consumer needs, tastes and preferences in order enhance customer acquisition, retention, and loyalty; and also that managers of telecommunication companies in Nigeria should improve performance without sacrificing quality so as to enhance customer acquisition, retention, and loyalty.

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