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CUSTOMER CARE AS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN THE TELECOMMUNICA-TION INDUSTRY

Case Airtel Ghana

Business Economics
2016

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Koulutusohjelman nimi

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Ramatu Bashiru Gambo
Opinnäytetyön nimi	Oppimisen tehostaminen ammattikorkeakoulussa
Vuosi	2015
Kieli	suomi
Sivumäärä	61 + 1 liitettä
Ohjaaja	Heidi Hellström

Nykyään, mobiili-internetin evoluutio on johtanut mobiiliverkkopalvelujen räjäh-dysmäiseen kysyntään televiestinnän alalla. Tämä ei ole vain pakottanut televies-tintäyritysten harkitsemaan hintaa tärkeänä kilpailullisena tekijänä, vaan myös keskittymään asiakassuhteisiin keinona menestyä kyseisillä markkinoilla.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia Airtel Ghanan, tutkimuksen keskipis-teessä olevan yrityksen, asiakassuhdetoimintoja ja niiden vaikutusta yrityksen palvelun välittämiselle. Tutkimustyö myös vahvisti asiakassuhteen roolia palvelun välittämisen kehittämisessä televiestintäalalla. Teoreettinen runko kattaa kirjalli-suutta liittyen asiakassuhteisiin, asiakaspalveluun, palvelun välittämiseen ja laa-tuun. Tutkimustyö suoritettiin käyttämällä sekä kvantitatiivista että kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää. Kvantitatiivinen menetelmä toteutettiin muodostamalla tut-kimus kooten asiakkaiden näkemyksiä ja kokemuksia asiakassuhteisiin käyttäen kyselylomakkeita, kun taas kvalitatiivista menetelmää käytettiin toimeenpanemal-la lyhyt haastattelu yrityksen työntekijöiden kanssa. Myös toissijaiset tiedot koot-tiin kirjoista, artikkeleista ja nettisivuista.

Tutkimustulokset paljastavat, että tehokkaasti toteutettu asiakassuhde vaikuttaa positiivisesti palvelun välittämiseen, sillä se suo yritysten tarkastella asiakkaita ostajien sijasta partnereina ja välittää nopeita ja oikeanlaisia palveluita. Asiakas-tyytyväisyys, asiakaslojaalisuus ja hyvä brändi imago olivat muita hyötyjä, mikä saatiin selville tutkimuksen tuloksena. Lopuksi, vaikka Airtel Ghana toteuttaa useita asiakassuhdeohjelmia, tulee yrityksen vielä kehittää palvelujaan paremmik-si.

Avainsanat	Asiakaspalvelu, Asiakaspalvelu, Palvelutarjonta, Palvelun laatu, Airtel Ghana

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ABSTRACT

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Title	Customer care as an essential element in the telecommunication industry. Case study Airtel Ghana Limited
Year	2015
Language	Finnish
Pages	61 + 1 Appendix
Name of Supervisor	Heidi Hellström

Today, an evolution of mobile internet has led to a dramatic demand of mobile network services within the telecommunication industry. This has compelled telecommunication companies not to only consider price as a major competing tool in intense competing markets but also, focus on customer care as a means of excelling in those markets.

The purpose of this study is to investigate customer care activities practiced by Airtel Ghana, the case company and their impact on the company's service delivery. The paper further established the role of customer care in enhancing service delivery in the telecommunication industry. The theoretical framework covers literatures on customer care, customer service, service delivery and quality. The research was accomplished using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative method was applied in a form of survey to gather customers' views and experiences on customer care using a set of questionnaire whilst a qualitative method was used to conduct a short interview with company's staff. Secondary data were also collected from books, articles and websites.

The research findings reveal that, an effective customer care has a positive impact on service delivery as it allows companies to view customers as partners instead of buyers and to deliver fast and accurate services. Customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and good brand image were another benefits discovered from the study. In conclusion, even though Airtel Ghana undertakes several customer care programs to enhance delivery to customers, the company must work hard to improve its services.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Customer questionnaire

1 INTRODUCTION

The telecommunication industry is a collection of firms that undertake the similar kind of business of exchanging information through the use of technology. This industry has continued to evolve at an increasing rate in the 21st century with consistent technological advancements to meet changes in the market. Global and intense competition has compelled organizations not to only view price as a major competing tool, but also focus on customer care as the means of gaining competitive advantage in the telecommunication industry. Over the past years, there has been a dramatic growth in the demand for mobile network services by mobile subscribers due to the evolution of mobile internet. Mobile phone users are eager to try mobile applications and other software that would foster interactions with other users. However, there have been issues regarding customer care and services delivered by these telecommunication companies to customers. It is important to realize that the one thing that is very imperative in the delivery of goods or services is the customer, since the customers are the reason for the company's existence.

Not only does customer care play a major role in the delivery of services, but also it is very important in the sale of products to consumers. That is, since the final destination of a product or service rest with the customer, care must be taken in handling the customers. This is why in recent years, telecommunication companies are taking initiatives and channeling resources into developing customer care practices that will have positive effects in delivering services to mobile network subscribers thereby, meeting the goals of the companies.

Mobile network subscribers now seek more than just delivering services. They tend to seek value and satisfaction as well. Essentially, this means that the service provider must focus its efforts on developing an offer that will surpass customers' expectations and satisfaction through managing their needs and complaints.

In short, the kind of care given to customers and how it is done to a large extent has the potential of affecting service delivery in both the long run and short run.

1.1 Background of the study

Customer care is a vital tool in both the sale of goods and delivery of services. As the name implies, customer care is basically about caring and showing concern to customers. That is, it is the ability to understand and share the feelings of one's customers and incorporating them in the production of goods and services. It can also be considered as the summation of all those activities that enable companies to deliver customer value and satisfaction by providing services before, during and after a purchase. Customer care is however, a concept that is understood by all but yet, difficult to articulate.

According to Grönroos (2007), customers do not buy goods or services, they buy the benefits goods and services provide them with. This implies that they buy what these goods or services offer to them in terms of solutions, information personal attention and other relevant components which tend to create value for them. It is often not difficult for competitors to imitate the use of advanced technologies, product features and conventional marketing strategies in order to strategically compete in a heavy competitive market. However, a company's inherent corporate culture and shared values that distinguish its business from other customer service-oriented business are what make the company distinct and unique.

Customers seek more than just the delivering of services; in most cases they also seek value and satisfaction. In the new paradigm of marketing, the emphasis changes from the mere fact of delivering value to meet customer satisfaction through effective customer care. Grönroos (2007) further emphasized that, the value of goods and services to customers is not manufactured in factories or the back offices of service firms, but instead value is created in customers' value generating processes when individual consumers or industrial users make use of a solution they have purchased. Consequently, it is equally important for service companies to provide customers with solutions consisting of all the necessary components such as before and after sales support which may be required to function in a value-creating way in customers' everyday lives or activities.

The market place has significantly changed towards the "customer as a king" perspective. Customers have become more sophisticated and confident due to increasing awareness and knowledge of goods and services in a rapid changing competitive market. Moreover, constant technological advancement and new emerging markets have intensified the needs and wants of customers for more convenient and quality services.

The telecommunication industry of Ghana epitomizes the very nature of the concept of customer care since the industry thrives solely on the subscribers of their networks to survive. Thus, for the purpose of this study, Airtel Ghana is the chosen case company and area of focus. Airtel Ghana is chosen due to its high level of customer involvement and competitive nature in the telecommunication market of Ghana. The level of customer participation in the industry also indicates the degree of efforts and commitment that telecommunication companies should offer towards customer oriented activities. Hence, the reason for the study is to establish the fact that effective customer care can be an essential element in enhancing service delivery in the telecommunication industry of Ghana.

1.2   Problem statement

In Ghana, customers who patronize products and services offered by telecommunication operators usually have poor ratings for their experiences, especially with the way these services are delivered. This ever increasing number of unsatisfied customers within the telecommunication industry is often attributed to the network providers' inability to fully appreciate the value of customer care as well as the benefits it offers to the companies at large. Therefore, disloyalty and dissatisfaction on the part of customers have become a prominent problem within the industry.

However, due to globalization and growing technological advancement, consumers have become more aware of how exactly they want to be satisfied. Most customers in recent years travel around the world and read information available on the internet, published articles and journals. This as a result has allowed Mobile

network subscribers in developing countries such as Ghana to have better knowledge of the customer care practices and services provided by network operators in developed countries. Thus, it compels these Ghanaian customers to demand a higher level of quality on services from the companies.

Despite the fact that most network service providers undertake adequate customer care activities, it is evident that they have little or no knowledge about the concept of customer care and its ability to improve the level of services delivered. This reason thereby forms the basis of this research.

Hence, by the statement above, the purpose of this study is to investigate customer care activities practiced by Airtel Ghana and their impact on the company's' services delivery.

1.3   Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study include the following;

- ❖ Establishing the role of customers care in enhancing service delivery in the telecommunication industry.
- ❖ Providing recommendations derived from the research results that may help improve customer care practices and services within the telecommunication industry.

1.4   Benefits of the study

The research will be useful in the following ways;

- ❖ Network service providers in the telecommunication industry will have more insight on how to effectively and efficiently care for their customers.
- ❖ Service trainers will be able to incorporate the recommendation from the study into training and educating potential and existing service providers on service quality within their companies.

❖ The adoption and practice of the policy recommendation from the study can help eradicate the problem facing the telecommunication industry in Ghana as well as boosting positive results.

1.5   Outline of the study

The study has been divided into five (5) different chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the elements of the research proposal and it includes the introduction which comprises of the study background, problem statement, objectives of the study, benefits of the study, the study organization and case company (Airtel Ghana) profile. The Chapter 2 covers the literature review for the research work and involves the evaluation of theories by different writers and authors concerning customer care and services as a whole. Published materials as well as web-information are also evaluated in this section. Chapter 3 of the study is made up of the research methodology and includes the choice of industry, selection of the study area, research design, sample plan, size and techniques, the research instruments, data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 covers the empirical aspect of the research including the analysis and interpretation of data collected and responses and finally, Chapter 5 presents the summary of the research findings, recommendations derived from the study results and the study limitations and further study.

1.6   Company profile

Airtel Ghana limited is a mobile network launched in Ghana on November 22, 2010 by the management of Bharti Airtel, (the parent company). On the 8th of June 2010, Bharti Airtel, an Indian telecommunication company completed a purchase of mobile operation in 15 African countries from a telecommunication company called Zain. With Ghana being one of these countries, Zain Ghana limited was eventually changed to Airtel Ghana limited. (Ghana web 2010).

Currently as one of Ghana's most affordable telecom operator, Airtel Ghana is driven by the vision of providing affordable and innovative mobile services to all its customers. They offer services such as Airtel credit, data credit, magic voice,

caller tunes, Airtel information services, SMS infotainment services, internet, business and personal solution all in 3.75 G Network. Right after its inception, the company had about 1.76 million customers and this number has continued to grow over the years. (Airtel Ghana 2015)

By October 2015, the National Communication Authority (NCA 2015) released a report on daily guide online stating that, Airtel Ghana has chalked a phenomenon achievement by recording over 4 million subscribers in the latest telecom voice and data subscription services. Being the second largest operator in Ghana in terms of network coverage, Airtel Ghana has recently announced an increase its data network speeds from 21.6mbps to 42 mbps, making it the fastest and the first network operator to undertake this upgrade: (NCA: Quist 2015)

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the years, various studies have been undertaken in the areas of customer care and service delivery. Thus, the literature of the study is aimed to review and evaluate the main theoretical approaches of the research based on published writings that depict actual practices on customer care and its relationship with delivery of services. Theories presented by authors concerning customer management would also be evaluated. The evaluation of these works will help ascertain the principles and ideas of customer services as well as identify any uncertainties or controversies projected by the various writers. These will therefore offer an insight into what part of the vast areas of customer care is currently being investigated.

2.1 Customer care definition

Clutterback (2001), defined customer care as a fundamental approach to the standards of service quality which covers every aspect of the company's operation, from the design of services to how it is packaged, delivered and serviced. Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (2001) explained that the concept of customer care to include all those activities provided by the organization which have value to the buyer, and thus increasing customer satisfaction as well as encouraging patronage and loyalty between both parties. According to them, the new paradigm of marketing emphasizes on the change from merely delivering value to customers' satisfaction through effective customer care.

2.1.1 Scope of customer care

According to Clarke (2000), a customer's opinion on the level of service an organization delivers will be directly influenced by how he/she is dealt with as an individual. For this reason, he argued that all contact with customers comes under the scope of customer care and that customers can change their opinion about a firm very quickly for good or ill.

Zeithaml, Bitner, Gremler and Pandit (2006), further explained Clarke's assertion by referring it to the term "Interactive Marketing" which is explained using the Services Marketing Triangle (SMT) below:

MANAGEMENT

EMPLOYEES   CUSTOMER

INTERACTIVE MARKETING
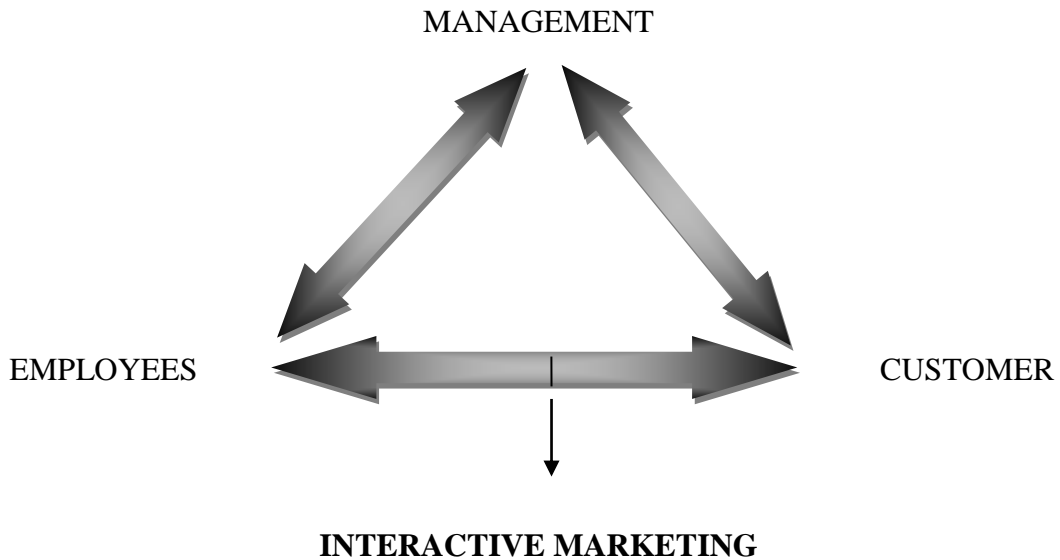
Figure 1. Interactive Marketing (Zeithaml et al. 2006)

From the diagram, one can deduce interactive marketing as an interaction involving employees of a service organization and its customers to produce a meaningful or desired product. Interactive marketing is an evolving trend in marketing where marketing has moved from a transaction-based effort to a conversation. According to Zeithaml et al. (2006), interactive marketing refers to where promises made by organizations are either kept or broken by the firms' employees and that, people are very critical at this juncture. This means that a firm that practices an interactive marketing allows its customers to express or specify their preferences with regards to the kind and nature of products/services they wish to buy. Thus, this makes the customers play a critical role in the firm's production decision. Zeithaml et al. (2006) further stated that, interactive marketing allows organizations to become more customized and responsive to their individual customers.

Gilmore (2003) in her view mentioned that because the kind of services available in service companies such as hotels are highly dependent on people, the quality of

face to face interactions between customers and frontline staff can have a major influence on customer care and perceived service quality. However, Grönroos (2000) argued that reputation and credibility or an organization can affect customers' experiences. He emphasized that the reputation and credibility of the organization will make customers believe and trust in the services offered by the organization and that it will be up to the organization's services to deliver up to that reputation.

2.1.2 Systems for effective customer care

An effective customer care is having a corporate culture of customer service. According Jones (2006), for a successful implementation of the customer care concept, an organization must have several systems in place. These systems are mentioned and explained below:

❖ **Identify customers' needs and perception**

According to Jones (2006), organizations must undertake research to ensure that they are abreast with current customer needs and wants, which may include "benchmarking" against organizations that are considered best in their provision of customer services. Also, she explained that not only should organizations focus on the services they provide but however, the system used and the skills of staff available.

❖ **Establishing mission statement.**

An organization's approach to customer services must be echoed within its mission statement since it is the means of communicating to both the customer and employees of the organization (Jones 2006).

❖ **Set service standard level**

Jones (2006) stressed that standards governing all aspect of the service in terms of staff behavior, appearance, courtesy and responsiveness are required. She further

explains that these standards should be prescriptive where necessary but also, be sufficiently flexible for employees to feel empowered to deal with situations.

❖ **Establish management processes and communication to staff**

According to Jones (2006), the system should define who does what, by what, when and also responsibility needs to be allocated as well as timescales set. Again, there should be internal communication and encouragement of a feedback system.

❖ **Establish a complaint system**

Clear systems for encouraging, recording and following up are required (Jones 2006). She stated that staff must be well trained in listening and verbal skills to ensure a better handling of complaints from customers.

❖ **Have mangement commitment**

Jones (2006) explains that it is very necessary to gain access to the resources in terms of recruitment, skills and systems that may need to be put in place for a system to work. This is why the commitment of management of the organization is vital.

❖ **Control system**

Finally, Jones (2006) emphasized that the customer care program must be developed in such a way that measurable objectives can be developed and performance can be measured against those objectives. She was of the view that a system of continuous improvement needs to be maintained in order for service received by customers can continue to evolve and can change to meet their needs.

2.1.3 Importance of customer care

In modern business philosophy, businesses should be customer oriented and to implement the main principles of a continuous improvement, there must be a con-

stant evaluation and analysis of customer services in response to customer satisfaction. Evangelos and Yannis (2010) stated that customer satisfaction is considered as baseline of standardize and excellence of performance for many businesses and it helps identifies potential market opportunities.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM 2005) outlined some benefits of implementing customer care activities and they are explained below:

First of all, differentiation is one benefit accompanying effective implementation of customer care. A service organization may use an effective customer care program in gaining competitive advantage over its competitors in the telecommunication industry, since service features can be duplicated due to technology and globalization.

Secondly, effective customer care breeds customer loyalty. The organization is able to engage customers' emotional involvement with the brand and make them feel more valued thus, leading to the retention of customers which is far more profitable that acquiring new ones (CIM 2005).

Attracting new customers is another benefit of executing an effective customer care. According to CIM (2005), an organization by virtue of the fact that services are produced and consumed simultaneously may add customers care activities as part of the overall package of the purchase benefit that the service offers. This therefore acts as an important part of the marketing mix in attracting customers.

Finally, employee satisfaction is achieved through carrying out effective customer care. The key source of employee morale and motivation is quality and customer focused. Hence, involving employees in the development and implementation of customer care initiatives help enhance their satisfaction in the work place (CIM 2005).

2.2   Management and organization of customer care

It is evident that for service organizations to effectively manage their customer care activities, it is necessary for them to focus on their internal and external customers. Both customer types can be managed and organized based on the practice of internal and external marketing concepts respectively.

2.2.1   Internal customers

It is very important for every service organization to effectively undertake internal marketing activities since there is a frequent interaction between the employees of the organization and its customers.

Internal marketing encourages employees to view co-workers as internal customers and this motivates them to deliver high quality service to their co-workers (Boone and Kurts 1999). In an attempt to explain the internal marketing concept, Zeithaml et al. (2006) used the service marketing triangle diagram.
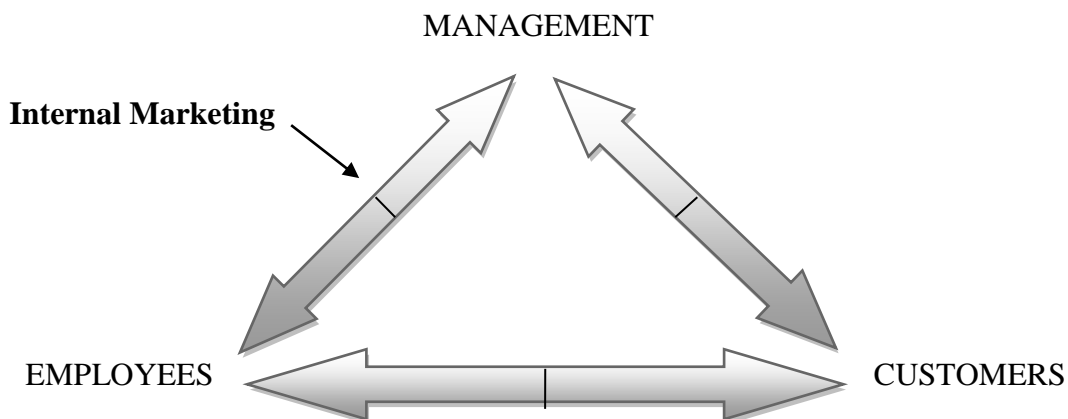

Figure 2. Internal Marketing (Zeithaml et al. 2006)

According to them, management must engage in all activities that aid employees in their ability to deliver services of recruitment, training, motivation, rewarding and provision of equipment and technology. Boone and Kurtz (1999) noted that two important goals of internal marketing are employee knowledge and involve-

ment, and employee satisfaction. They asserted that employees that were well informed about organizational goals and strategies and were also happy at the work place had the tendency of being translated to highly satisfied customers. Zeithaml et al. (2006) proposed that in order for a service industry to be customer oriented, it must take into account the following measures in its internal marketing approach.

Hire the right people – they were of the view that the service industry should focus on recruiting and hiring the competent persons. These include competing for the best people, hiring for service competencies, service inclination and being the preferred employer. Cook (2002) supported this statement by adding that a successful personnel policy involves recruitment and selection of right people. Also, key characteristics for employees to perform effectively may relate to process and technical skills, interpersonal and communication skills, teamwork skills, flexibility and adaptability as well as empathy with external customers (Cook 2002).

Developing people to deliver service quality – Zeithaml et al. (2006) argued that to grow and maintain a workforce that is customer-oriented and focused on delivering quality, an organization must train and work with these individuals to ensure excellent service performance. Cook (2002) again added that customer service training should include all members of staff ranging from managers, frontline employees as well as support staff. According to her, training should include a mixture of skills, knowledge, teamwork, process improvement and empowerment.

Providing needed support systems – for service workers to be efficient and effective on their jobs, internal support systems must be aligned with their needs. This could be done through developing service oriented internal process by providing technological and equipment support as well measuring internal service quality (Zeithaml et al. 2006). Grönroos (2006) suggested that a service industry's internal marketing activities should also involve the use of systems that facilitates the free flow of information. He further stated that these systems should include the use of intranets, databases, e-mails, internal memos, reports and other means

to help people communicate easier within the organization. The development of communication media to convey a service philosophy is a vital means of creating an awareness of the investment that an organization is making in a service.

Retaining the best people – according to Zeithaml et al. (2006), there is the need to retain the best people in an organization in order to be customer-oriented. That is including employees in company's vision, treating employees as customers as well as measuring and rewarding good service performers.

Mission and vision statement – they also claimed that in the process of conducting the internal marketing activities, it is necessary for the service organization to introduce or educate its employees on the company's mission statement. A mission statement embodies the core values of the business and should be understood by all staff, financial investors, suppliers and customers (Clarke 2000).

2.2.2   External customers

Zeithaml et al. (2006) defined external marketing as all those efforts a firm engages in to set up its customers' expectations and make promises to customers regarding what is to be delivered. According to Cook (2006), service quality improvement come about as a direct result of proactively going to generate feedback from customers rather than just relying upon complaint analysis which can be done through market research.

Zeithaml et al. (2006) again used the Service Marketing Triangle (SMT) to illustrate the external marketing concept and mentioned that anything or anyone that communicates to the customer before service delivery can be viewed as part of external marketing. This can be viewed below;
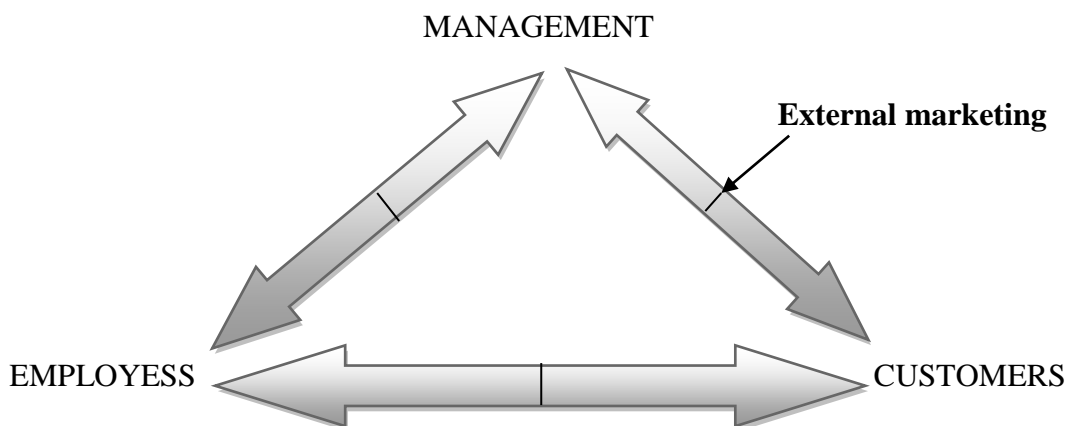
MANAGEMENT

External marketing

EMPLOYESS

CUSTOMERS

Figure 3. External Marketing (Zeithaml et al. 2006)

The chartered institute of marketing (CIM) study text (2005) described how an organization can undertake an effective customer care program with regards to external customer relations and these are as follows;

In order to remain customer focused, organizations must gather, analyze, communicate and act upon customers' feedback. This will enable the organization to effect the necessary changes or improvement to suit customers. Partnership plays a major role especially when an organization in its dealings recognizes customers as partners in business rather than just mere money making avenues, it is able to identify and meet needs more effectively at all links in the value-delivery chain. Also, the use of incentives and rewards by organizations as means for reinforcing customer loyalty. Rewarding customers in a form of providing sales incentives will make them aware of how much they are valued by the service organization. Customer friendly systems such as information flow, procedures and other necessary technology that enable front line employees to render good services to customers. (CIM Study Text 2005).

2.3   Service Marketing

According to Grönroos (2007), a service is a complicated phenomenon that has different meanings ranging from personal service to service as a product or offer-

ing. He cited an example of a machine being a physical product but can however, be turned into a service to a customer if the seller makes an effort to tailor the solution to meet the most detailed and specified demands of that customer.

2.3.1 Service definition

Grönroos (2007) defined service as a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always take place in interactions between the customer and service employees and physical resources/goods or systems of the service provider which are provided as solution to customer problems. Zeithaml et al. (2006) on the other hand also referred to service as consisting of deeds, processes, performances and all economic activities whose output is not a physical product. They stressed that services are generally consumed at the time they are produced and they provide added value in forms such as convenience, timeless or health that are essentially intangible to the buyer or purchaser concerned. For this reason, it is safe to understand that, service marketing basically requires a higher customer focus orientation than goods marketing.

2.3.2 Characteristics of Services

Grönroos (2007) asserted that services in general have some common three (3) basic generic characteristics and can be identified as follows;

1. Services are processes consisting of series of activities.
2. Services are at least to some extent produced and consumed simultaneously.
3. The customer participates as a co-producer in the service production process at least to some extent.

This in addition was elaborated by Zeithaml et al. (2006), who suggested five (5) unique characteristics of services for which an effective customer care is required. These include intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability and simultaneous production and consumption.

Intangibility means that services are performances or actions and not objects that customers can feel, touch or taste as compared to physical goods. Due to this, customers may find it difficult to assess the quality of a service unless they experience it. A quality of a particular product or service is whatever the customer perceives it to be and a good perceived quality is obtained when the experienced quality meets the expectations of the customer (Grönroos 2007). This means that quality is only be determined by customers and it is therefore the responsibility of service providers to understand customers' expectations and deliver services that will meet or surpass those expectations.

The view of Zeithaml et al. (2006) on heterogeneity stipulates that services are performances that are frequently produced by humans and no two (2) services will be equally delivered or received. This simply means that services are different in nature. For example, two different restaurants with similar aesthetics and services program will end up serving their customers differently due to differences in the skills of cooks, differing personal characteristics of waiters and most importantly, differences in customers' perceived values. Thus, since people are the dominant factor in services marketing mix, there is the need for an effective interaction between employees and customers in order to main the service levels.

According to Zeithaml et al. (2006), perishability of services refers to the fact that services cannot be stored, saved, resold, reused or returned. They further stated that since services cannot be typically resold or returned, it brings forward the need for strong recovery strategies when things go wrong. An example will be the case of addressing a hotel guest's complaint and then compensating him or her where necessary.

With regards to the final service characteristics, Zeithaml et al. (2006) described services as produced and consumed simultaneously. This according to them means that while most goods are produced first, sold and consumed later, most services are sold first and then produced and consumed at the same time. This implies that customers participate in and observe the production process as in the

case of booking an appointment for a hair service. In such a situation, the quality of service will be judged from what happens during the booking including the actions and attitude of the hairdresser.

The above characteristics seem to explain the necessity for service organizations to focus more on customer orientation as compared to manufacturing organizations. In short, Gilmore (2003) established that all organizations that portray themselves to be marketing oriented are always positioned at the core of the organizations' activities and purposes. She also stressed that a more rational and business oriented approach to service marketing should involve the philosophy of marketing orientation. This according to her could be done by concentrating on monitoring customers and maximizing their satisfaction by offering them better services while remaining a profitable organization as well.

2.3.3   Phases for service delivery

The design and configuration of service delivery system through which the service concept and the value proposition inherent within it provided to target customers are contigent due to the competitiveness of service businesses (Johnston and Clark, 2005; Verma, Fitzsimmons, Heineke and Davis, 2002). Congruency between target market, service concept and service delivery system design is often emphasized as a means to successfully deploy business staretegy and attain levels of performance in customer satisfaction, retention and overall profitability.

The Chartered institute of marketing (study text 2005) outlined the various phases for service delivery which when effectively implement will lead to an enhance service delivery. According to the text, there must be an integration of corporate vision and values, internal human resource system and external customer communication system with a view to commercial success. This is illustrated in the diagram below:
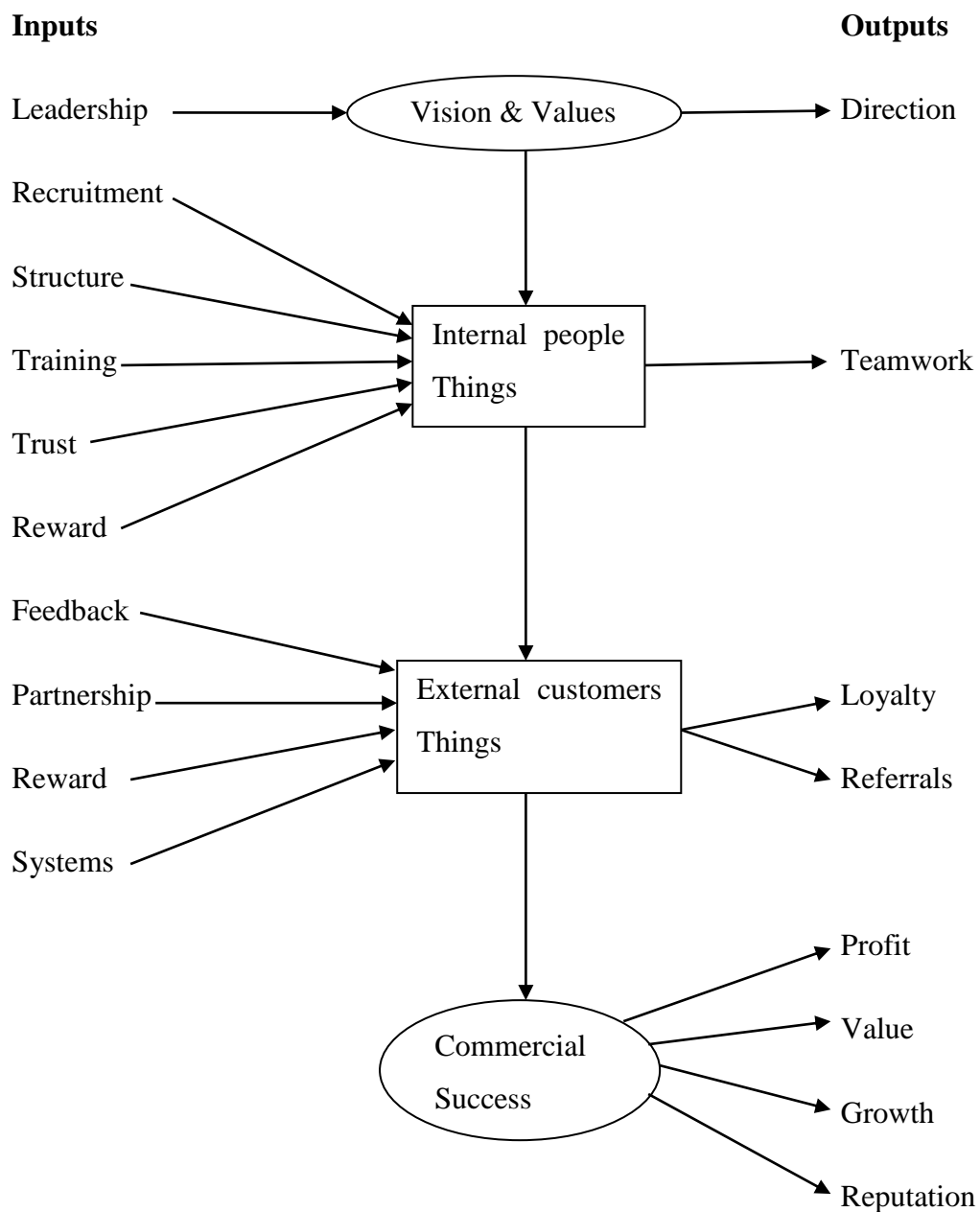
Inputs   **Outputs**

Leadership ────────▶ (Vision & Values) ────▶ Direction

Recruitment

Structure

Training ──────▶ Internal people   ────▶ Teamwork
                        Things

Trust

Reward

Feedback

Partnership ──────▶ External customers   ────▶ Loyalty
                          Things   ────▶ Referrals

Reward

Systems

                                                      ────▶ Profit

                        (Commercial   ────▶ Value
                           Success)   ────▶ Growth

                                                      ────▶ Reputation

Figure 4. Phases for Service Delivery, (CIM Study Text 2005)

2.4   Service quality

Several attempts have been made by marketing researchers to define service quali-
ty over the past years. According to Kortler and Keller (2009), service quality is
the totality of feature and characteristics of service that bear on its ability to satis-
fy stated or implied needs. It was also defined by Kasper, Helsdingen and Gabbott

(2006) as a complex and ephemeral concept which refers to some attribute of what is offered, provided whereas satisfaction or dissatisfaction refers to a customer's reaction to that offer. Zeithaml et al. (2006) on the other hand viewed service quality as something that focuses specifically on dimensions of service.

2.5 The gaps in service quality

The gap model was first proposed by A Parasuraman, Valerie Zeithaml and LL Berry in 1985 in the journal of marketing to measure quality in the service sector. The **Figure 5** shows the frame for the gaps model of service quality by Zeithaml et al. (2006).
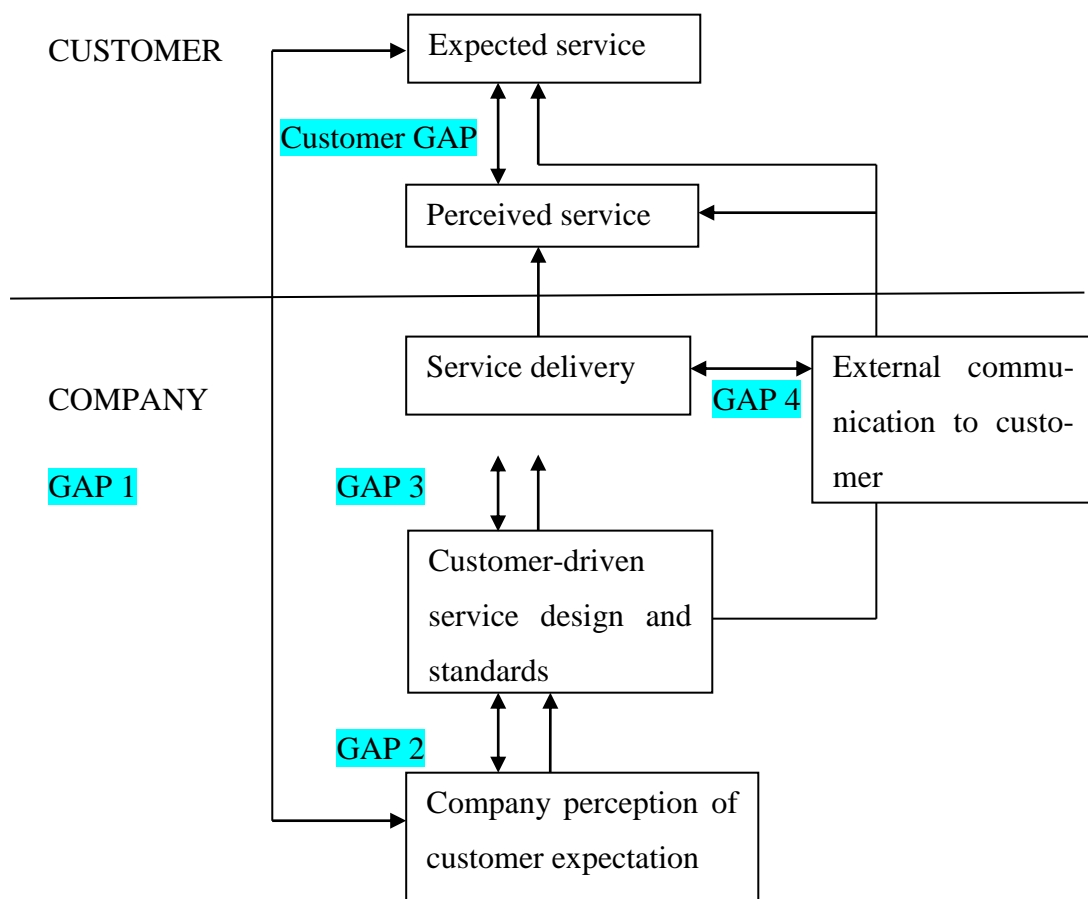

Figure 5. Gaps Model of Service Quality. (Zeithaml et al. 2006)

The Customer Gap is the difference between customers' expectation and perception of service. According to Zeithaml et al. (2006), Customers expectations are what customers hold on their mind about what should happen and thus, if any gap arise at this point, it is critical to remove the negative impact from the mind of customers.

COMPANY GAP 1 stands for 'not knowing what customers' expectations are'. This is as a result of inadequate or lack of marketing research, insufficient relationship focus, inadequate service recovery and less interaction between management and customers. In order for service providers to minimize or prevent this gap, it is important to acquire accurate information about the expectations of customers. (Zeithaml et al. 2006: 35).

Provider GAP 2 represents 'not selecting the right service quality designs and standards. Zeithaml et al. (2006) mentioned that, this gap arises due to poor service design, absence of customer driven service standards, inappropriate physical evidence and service cape and also, lack of management commitment to service quality of meeting customer expectations.

GAP 3 represents 'not delivering to service design and standards'. Zeithaml mentioned that, gap 3 is actually the difference between development of customer-driven service standards and actual service performance by company personnel. This arises from management's poor selection of employees, lack of teamwork, inadequate training and inappropriate job design. Henceforth, management must develop ways to train and control employees or motivate them to meet the company's goals. (Zeithaml et al 2006: 40-42).

Provider GAP 4 stands for 'not matching performance to promises and it is the difference between service delivery and external communication that company exaggerated as promised but not provided in real. It is important to note that, customer expectation is actually formed by media advertising and other communication agencies. Another issue in this gap is the pricing of services. This is because, customers are well known and aware about the price of a product bundle when

purchasing but it is different in the case of a service as they sometimes find the price of services as overpriced according to quality.(Zeithaml et al. 2006: 42-43).

2.6   The power of the customer

For a long period of time, customers have continued to have great influence on the success or failure of businesses across the globe. They are considered the most important aspect of any business as they can single-handedly determine the longevity and vitality of any business. Zairi (2000) mentioned in a magazine that 'customers are the purpose of what we do and rather than them depending on us, we very much depend on them. The customer is not a source of problem; we should not perhaps make a wish that customers should go away because our future and security will be put in jeopardy'. According to Carrol (2011), businesses have forgotten about, or perhaps never fully realized the power that existing customers and clients can wield. She then outlined (3) three customer powers that organizations must pay attention to and termed them as the hidden powers. These include the following;

❖ Current customers have the power to decide whether to continue doing business with you.

❖ If they do continue. They have the power to determine how much money to spend with you.

❖ They also have the power of word of mouth to share with others what they think about you.

Among these powers, Carrol (2011) emphasized that the power of word of mouth has lately been much focused on by business organizations due to the realm of social media. She however advised businesses who want to win their customers to treat the (3) three listed powers equally important.

2.7   Barriers to effective customer care

Even though Jones (2006) mentioned and explained several systems that can help in a successful implementation of the customer care concept, she was however of

the view that the implementation of such systems may be faced with some potential problems. These include;

Jones (2006) first of all explained that the idea of customer care and service being the sole responsibility of a specific department of an organization has the result of other departments not being acquainted with the system in place. According to her, the overall effect of such a situation will be something that not all staff will be clear about the program and hence, leading to non-commitment.

Secondly, another potential problem with customer care systems identified by Jones (2006) was the use of less skilled, not well informed and lowest paid staff in implementing the system. She was of the view that allowing frontline employees whom are not empowered enough or have little customer care-knowledge to handle customers' problems poses a threat to the organization.

She finally mentioned that lack of management commitment also leads to a barrier to effective customer care. Without management's commitment, there would not be effective and efficient release of resources for paying, training and rewarding good performance and this would demotivate the employees (Jones 2006).

2.8 Reasons for ineffective practice of customer care and services

Customer service viewed as a platform for interaction between service organizations and their customers is an integral part of the purchasing process and user experience, and as such, it is the key to continued success in business. Despite organizations' increased use of technologies to purposely improve customer service programs, customers' expectations and satisfaction are still not met and as a result, leads to consumers switching from one service provider to the other. This problem is primarily attributed to poor planning and implementation of the service programs.

According to Goodman (2009), misleading marketing messages, ineffective policies and broken internal process are the major causes and accounts for 50% to 60% of service organizations problems. Mismatching of company's policies with

customer service goals usually guides the whole company in the wrong direction. He added that it is somewhat good news to service providers because these problems can quickly be discovered and eliminated and also, the effects on customers can be mitigated as well.

Lack of proper training of service personnel is another major problem for poor practice of customer care. Most organizations do not dedicate time and money resources for training and reinforcement of their employees and that, employees must be fully informed about company's goals, products and services. He advised that people can only do their job if they are given the right tools and objectives and thus, emphasis and training should be focused on the importance of listening and responding to customers' requests at all times: (Iwan 2007).

Employees' negative attitude towards customers was another factor Iwan (2007) mentioned as a reason for ineffective customer care. It is important for service providers to recruit the right persons needed to fit the required profile within the organization since the selection of correct personalities is crucial to the success of the business. Angry and impatient employees may find it difficult to attentively listen to customers repetitive complaints and provide accurate solutions to the reported problems. Such employees can actively work to sabotage the company: (Iwan 2007).

Goodman (2009) stated that, inadequate customer knowledge and information can affect the company's implementation of customer care. Service providers may tend to focus on a certain perspective regarding their customers but this perspective may not match their customer's. That is why it is advantageous to first conduct an extensive market research to unveil what customers expect and what rewards they find most valuable before designing a customer care program. This enables the service provider to match customers' needs with the company's offers and to deliver the right services.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the various research and collection methods used in undertaking the study. A description of the target population, data analysis and sampling methods will also be revealed.

3.1 Selection of study area

The telecommunication industry, Airtel Ghana to be precise was chosen because most activities performed by the service practitioners within this industry are covered under the customer care concept. This is emphasized by the fact that the telecommunication industry may not be able survive without the people who patronize its services. Thus, customer management is pivotal to the industry's success.

3.2 Research methods

There are two (2) main methods or types of market research and they are qualitative and quantitative methods of research. According to Creswell (2003), the selection of the research method is the most concrete part of a research process and therefore, it is important to understand the main features of both methods to be able to select the most suitable type.

A qualitative research is a scientific research used to determine the essential nature of an event or phenomenon. Its objective is to study the features or behaviors of the target in-depth and explore its causes. Qualitative research method emphasizes more on the significance, experience and description and researchers usually use history, literature analysis, interviews, observations and other non-quantifiable means to acquire the information and the method of obtaining conclusion. The research is conducted in a small-scale sample, which does not need a statistical importance. Therefore the experience of the researchers and the relevant technology used in the research has an influence on the effectiveness of the study. (Blythe 2012)

Although the sample of a qualitative research is small, the results give a deeper understanding on the topic and the researcher is more likely to get new insights. (Creswell 2003: 181-183)

On the other hand, a quantitative research is the method of collecting numerical data to measure the issue or phenomenon. The process of analysis, test, explaining are all based on digitized symbol to quantify results. Qualitative research is closely related to the experimental science research, so the main methods of designing a quantitative research are the survey method, correlation method and experimental method. Survey is a commonly used method and it means to develop a comprehensive plan or collect materials from some aspects of the object in order to analyze, to synthesize and to obtain conclusion while the correlation method is used to explore relationship between variables through the use of correlation coefficient. (Blythe 2012)

Unlike the qualitative method, the sample size of a quantitative research is bigger and questions are designed in such a way that they can be handled and analyzed statistically. A quantitative method of research is also much logical and critical (Mäntyneva, Heinonen &Wrange 2008).

However, for the purpose of this research, a quantitative method of research was deployed in a form of questionnaires to collect primary data from customers and a qualitative method in a form of interview was conducted to gather staff knowledge on Airtel's customer care practices. Questionnaires were designed primarily for the case company's customers and it was in two parts. The first part sought to know the demographical information of the respondents whiles the second part focused on the core research questions which investigated customer care activities, staff responsibilities, time and challenges faced by the network users. Meanwhile, staff interview focused on their training background, Airtel's customers care activities and the effect they have on the company as a whole.

3.3 Sample size and technique

Despite a total number of seventy (70) customers that were randomly sampled and given a questionnaire each, fifty (50) set of answered questionnaires were retrieved and thus, making the final sampled customers for this research 50. On the other hand, only two (2) company staff were selected for the interview.

To achieve an accurate result, a simple random probability sampling method was used to select the customers but staff selection was based on purposive sampling. A simple random sampling technique helps provide an equal and fair representation of the entire customers' views and experiences concerning the services received from the Airtel. According to Malhotra (2010), a random probability sample gives each customer an equal chance of being selected from the huge number of company's customers and also, the technique helps avoid arbitrary or biased selection of sample elements.

3.4 Data collection and analysis method

Data collection is a systematic approach of gathering information from variety of sources to get a complete and accurate picture of an interest. Creswell (2003) stated that, data collection methods, being it primary or secondary data depends on the method of research as there are different approaches to both qualitative and quantitative methods.

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of information used in this study, both primary and secondary data were collected. According to Kumar, Aaker and Day (2002), secondary data are data collected for some purpose other than solving the present problem. Typical sources of these data are books, internet publication, online sources and articles. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) added that secondary data are information collected by others for a different purpose and thus, the reliability of such information must be questioned. However, secondary data helps assist a researcher to understand, solve and explain a research problem.

Primary data on the other hand is a data collected by a researcher him/herself for a specific purpose and thus, making it a unique and more reliable data compared to secondary data. Primary data is also consistent with the research objectives and can be collected through surveys and interview, observations and experiments (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2005).

For this research, secondary data were gathered from books, websites and articles for the theoretical framework. Meanwhile, a survey and interview was conducted to collect primary data from customers and staff, respectively. The survey was carried out by dispatching 70 designed questionnaires to be answered by 70 sampled customers of Airtel in Ghana. As mentioned earlier, the questions were structured in two parts; part 1 which was about the demographic profile of the respondents consisted of (3) three questions and part 2 which was made up of the core questions consisted of (15) fifteen questions. All of the questions were multiple-choice questions. In October, 2015, the questionnaires were distributed in Ghana to customers on the Accra polytechnic campus, university of Ghana and in 3 different branches of Airtel to customers who visited the company. Customers on both campuses were willing to answer the questionnaires given to them but the customers who visited the company were a bit reluctant as some of them made excuses of not having the time. By November 2015, a total of 50 answered questionnaires out of 70 were received hence, making the sample for this study 50. A telephone interview with staff also took place at the end of November 2015.

To ensure easy analysis of data and clear photographic of results, Microsoft excel was implemented to analyze the responses of customers and results were also presented in column, bar and pie chat. Staff responses were however presented in a written form.

3.5   Reliability and validity

Reliability refers to the extent to which a scale produces consistent results if repeated measurements are made. 'Systematic sources of error do not have an adverse impact on reliability because they affect the measurement in a consistent

way and do not lead to inconsistency' says Malhotra (2010, 318). Kumar et al. (2002) also explained reliability as the random error component of a measurement instrument that can be discovered by repeating the study and observing the consistency of the results. It is important to note that the lesser the error, the more reliable the observation is.

The validity of a scale can be defined as the extent to which differences in observed scale scores reflect true differences among the characteristics being measure, rather than systematic or random error. Thus a measuring device is valid only if differences in scores reflect true differences on the characteristics being measured rather than systematic or random error (Malhotra 2010, 320). In short, Kumar et al. (2002) defined validity as the ability of a measurement instrument to measure what it is suppose to measure. They added that high validity can be reached when the research process and decisions made are defined as precisely as possible and when the empirical findings support the theoretical framework.

Since the quantitative method of research was used to study customers and survey was conducted using questionnaires, it is safe to say there was a medium influence of the researcher on the customers' responses as there are instances where the researcher assisted the customers in answering the questions. Unlike the staff interview whereby there was no physical contact. Also, the distribution of standardized questionnaires with similar structure helped reduce the amount of error components. However, the reliability of the research can be questioned to some extent due to the small sample size used.

As mentioned at the early stage of this work, the purpose of this research is to investigate the customer care practices of Airtel and the impact they have on the company's service delivery. That is, in order to ensure the validity of this study, information from different sources was gathered for the theoretical framework to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research purpose. This in addition aided in the drafting of the research questions which again, ensured consistency

between the research findings and theoretical framework. Also, the findings or results were able to solve the problem of the research as well objectives.

4 EMPIRICAL STUDY

In this chapter, data findings from the survey will be analyzed and discussed.

4.1 Analysis of results

Customers responses are anylyzed in five (5) different groups or areas. They include demographical information, customer care, staff, time and challenges.

4.1.1 Demographic profile

The first part of the questionnaire consisting of (3) three questions sought to find the demographical information of the respondents. This involve the gender, age group and level of education of the customers.
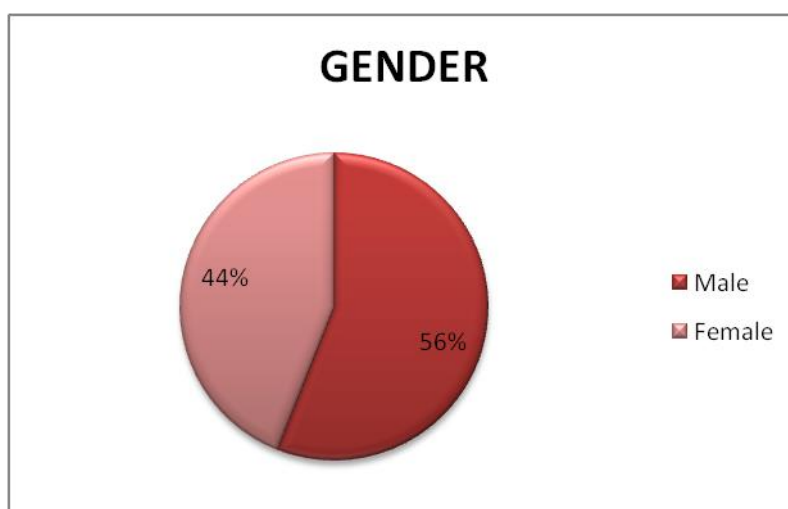

Figure 6. Gender of customers.

The first question respondents were asked was about their gender. Results of the survey indicated that out of the 50 customers that were sampled, the number of males that responded to the questionnaires where greater than that of the females. As this can be noted from figure 6 above, the male respondents represent 56% whiles the females represent 44%. From this outcome, it can be deduced that the male customers of Airtel Ghana counts more than half times of the comapny's

female customers and this may be an indication of the males preferring the services of Airtel much more than the females do.
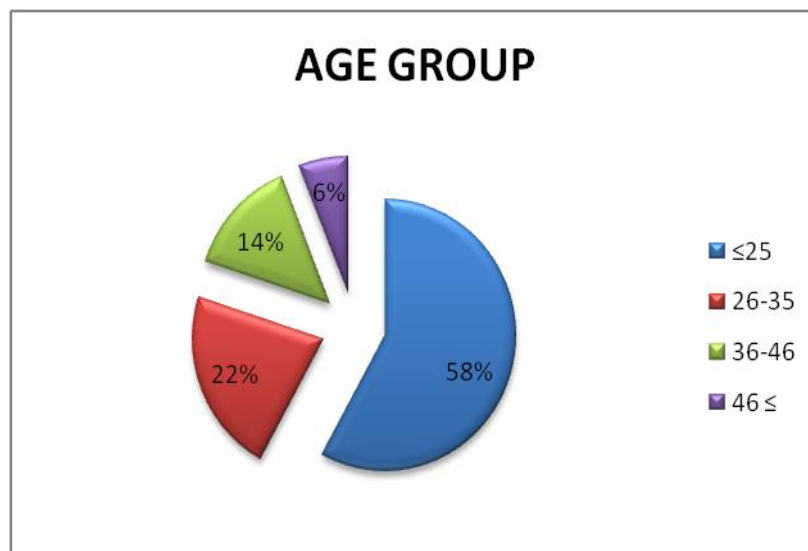

Figure 7. Age group.

In an attempt to determine the age group of the customers, respondents' ages were grouped in 4 different age categories that is, 25yrs and below, 26-35, 36-45 and 46ys and above. After the data were collected and analyzed, it was interesting to realize that all the respondents fell at least in one of the age group. Figure 7 shows that, 58% of the customers were between 25yrs and below with 22% being within the ages of 26-35. 14% and 6% also represent customers between the ages of 36-45 and 46years and above respectively. This signifies that a greater percentage of Airtel's target market represents young customers and this may be due to the current generations' passion for advanced mobile technology.

In the survey, customers were also asked about their level of education. It turned out that more than half of the customers were first degree and highest national diploma holders as indicated in figure 8. 9 out of 50 customers were students in junior and senior high school and only 3 customers happened not to be in any of the categories. This result is a true representation of figure 7 because it also clearly

shows that the Ghanaian youth are dominant within the company's target customers since they show much interest in telecommunication activities.
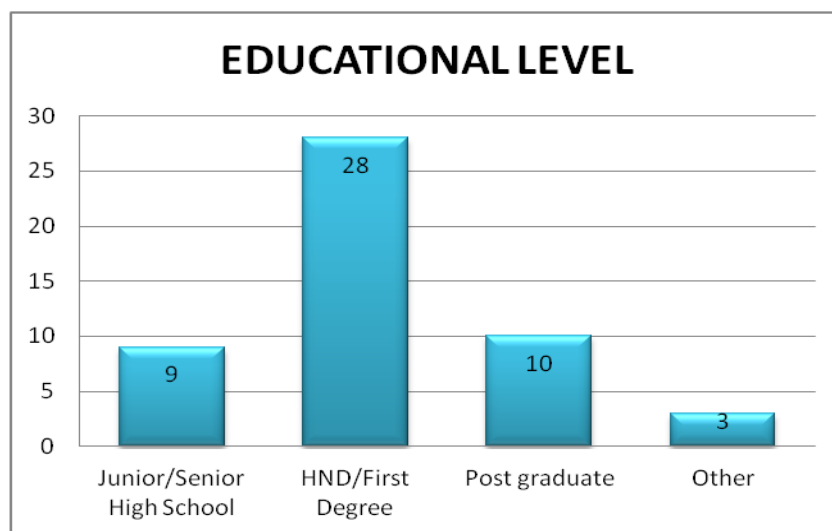

Figure 8. Level of education.

4.1.2 Customer care

This section comprised of (4) questions seeking to investigate customers' views on the company's services, the nature of their network experiences, status of relationship between them and Airtel as well as measures put in place to get their suggestions known to the company.
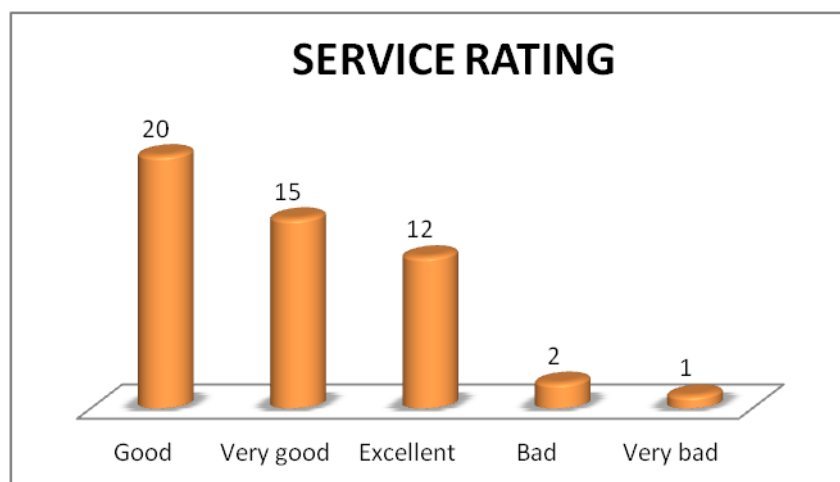

Figure 9. Overall Service impression.

The first question asked by customers regarding the customer services offered by Airtel was how they will rate it. It was pleasant to discover that, as low as 3 respondents rated the company's services as bad. The remaining respondents gave positive remarks about the services. As it can be seen from figure 9, 12 customers rated Airtel's services as excellent while 20 and 15 respondents rated it as good and very good respectively. This serves as a positive feedback to the company as it is a proof of their enormous effort and hard work towards servicing their customers.
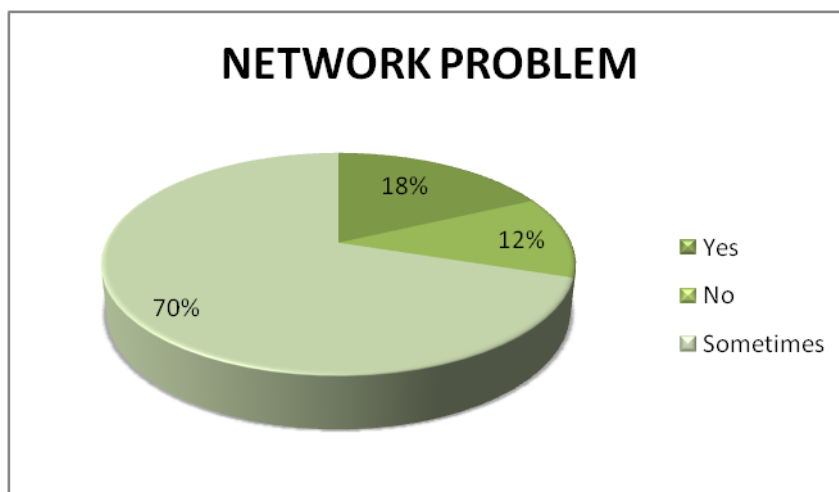

Figure 10. Encountering network problem**.**

It is of no doubt that telecommunication companies sometimes encounter networking problems during their operations. Due to this, customers were required to answer whether such problems are prevalent when using Airtel network. It was not surprising that majority of the customers representing 70% claim to sometimes face networking error or slow internet connection when surfing the net which are common problems of internet. Meanwhile, only 12% as seen in figure 10 do not experience such problems. This result can be attributed to the fact that the less percentage of customers only patronizes Airtel's basic services which are texting and calling, and since such services do not require any internet access, they are likely not to face any problem unlike the majority of customers who make use of the company's internet services.
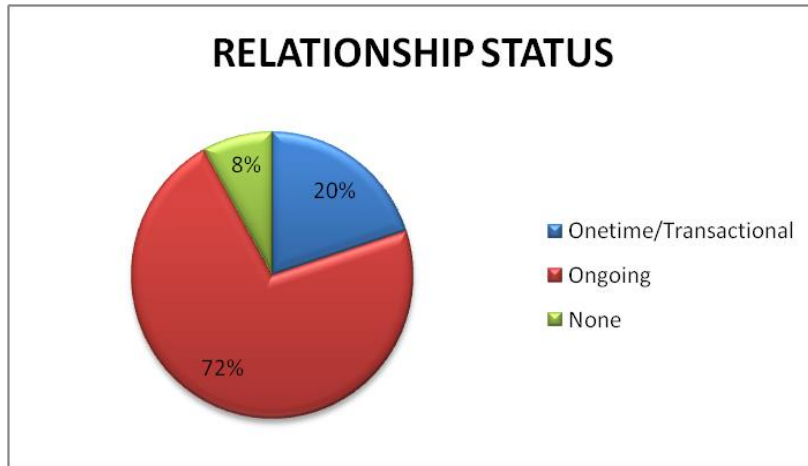
RELATIONSHIP STATUS

- Onetime/Transactional
- Ongoing
- None

20%
8%
72%

Figure 11. Type of customer-company relationship.

Building and maintaining good relationship with customers can be a key to gaining loyal customers. Figure 11 shows that, after customers were asked about the kind of relationship they have with Airtel, only 20% and 8% of customers have a onetime relationship and no relationship at all with the company, respectively. The remaining customers who represent 72% have an ongoing relationship with Airtel which is a good step. This can be due to the fact that since it is the wish of every company to monitor and satisfy the needs of their customers, Airtel Ghana ensures that its staff maintains a good relationship with customers so as to help the company keep track and meet the needs of the customers proportionally.

MEDIUM FOR SUGGESTION

25	
20	23
15	14
10	11
5	2
0	

Customer complaint line | Direct interaction with front line staff | Suggestion box | E-mail
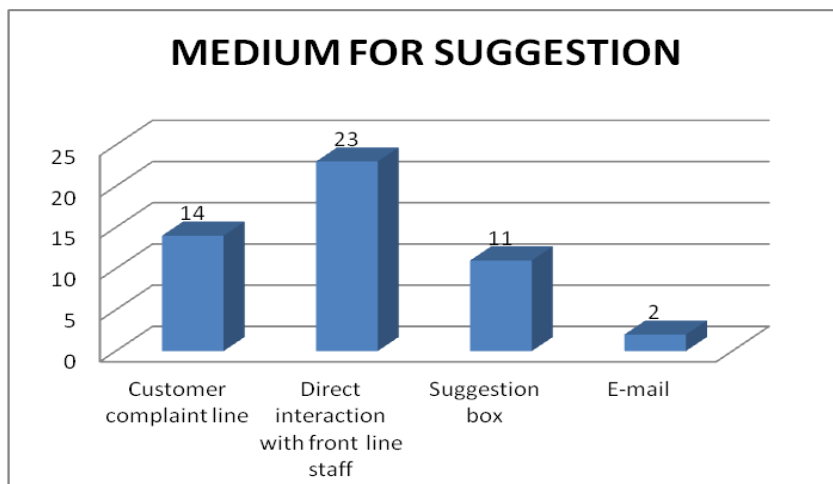
Figure 12. Medium for channeling customer suggestion.

With the question regarding the medium through which the respondents get their suggestions known to the company, figure 12 indicates that out of 50 respondents, 23 customers prefer to directly interact with frontline staff in order to air out their views whiles 11 of them instead prefer using the suggestion box. This is a common practice in Ghana due to the absence of effective mechanisms to channel customer opinions and also, Ghanaian customers' recognition and familiarity of face to face interaction as the most effective tool for communication.

4.1.3 Staff

The aim of this section was to discover the attitude of the company's staff towards Airtel customers in respect to how welcoming or friendly they are and their attempt to build any relationship with the customers.

In an attempt to investigate the behavior of Airtel's staff, customers were asked whether the staff are friendly to them during a call or visit to the company. Figure 13 demonstrates a positive attitude of the company's staff as it can be viewed that, apart from 9 respondents who didn't completely agree to the fact that the staff are customer friendly, 41 customers agreed. This result indicates that Airtel Ghana as a customer-oriented company views their customers as an important part of their job and for that reason, the company encourages its staff to always show appreciation to customers by making them feel at home during any business transaction.
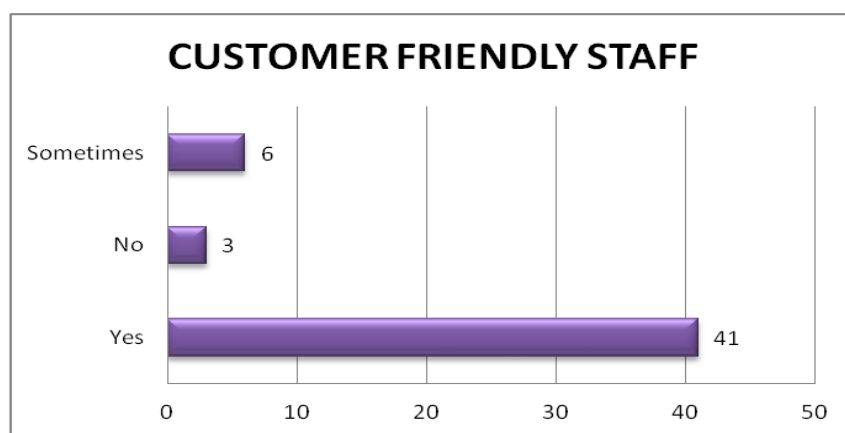

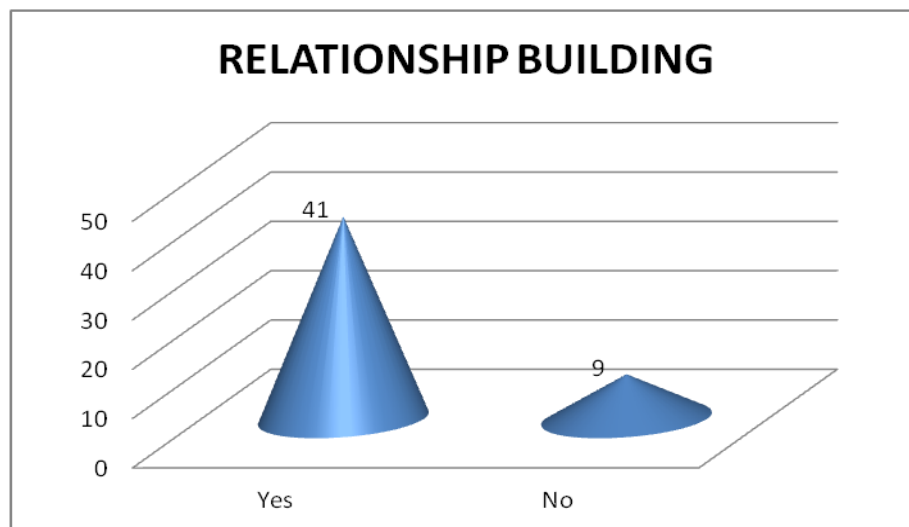**Figure 13.** Customer friendly staff.

Figure 14. Staff attempt to build customer relationship.

In addition, respondents were also asked if any attempts are made by staff to build relationship with customers. As shown in figure 14, a greater number of 41 customers out of 50 respondents responded Yes whiles the remaining 9 customers responded No. This result complements both results presented in figure 11 and figure 13 as all results testifies that more than half of the customers have a good relationship and experience dealing with the staff of the company.

4.1.4 Time

The 4th part of the questionnaire focuses on time. Not only were customers asked how long Airtel Ghana has been their network provider but also, how quick and eager the company manages its time to deliver customers services and what customers also think of the length of time.

With regards to time, customers were first asked about how long they have been using Airtel. Figure 15 interestingly shows that, Airtel Ghana has had majority of its customers to continually patronize its products and services over the years. A very few number of customers were new users of the network. This is an implication to a higher level of service satisfaction received by customers from the company. As noted from figure 15, 38 customers out of 50 have stayed with the com-

pany for more than a year and despite this large number of loyal customers, the company continues to attract new customers.
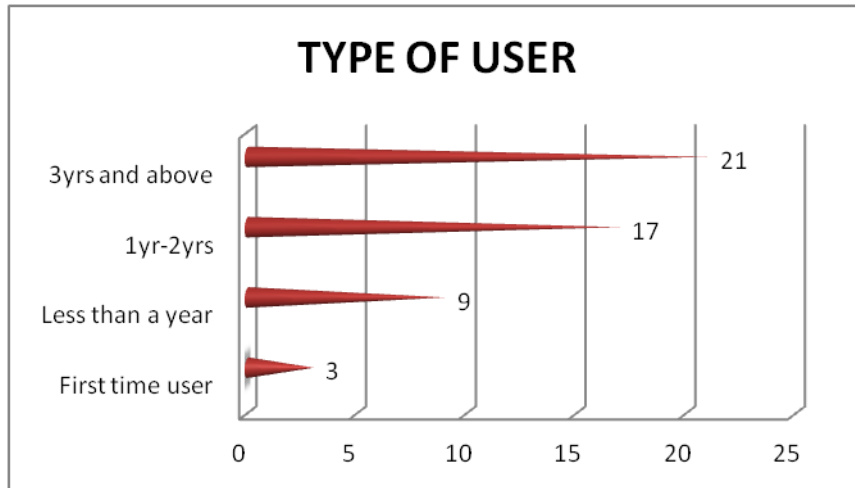

Figure 15. Type of user
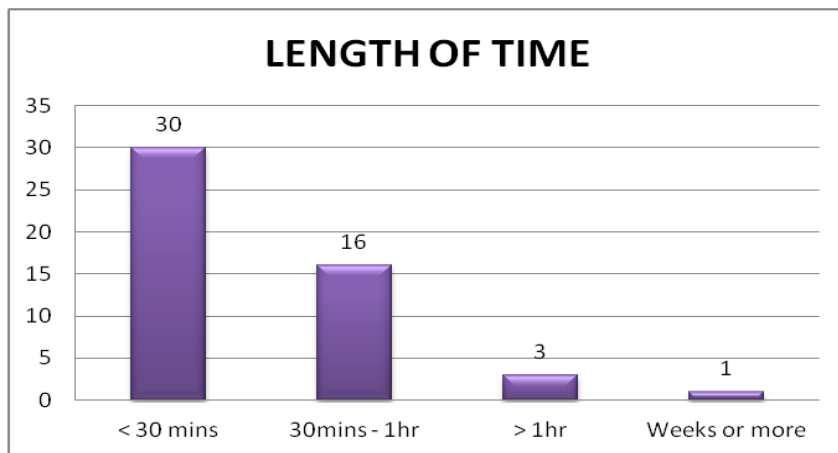
Figure 16. Length of time for solving problem.

Timing is important in the delivery of customer service and it is the desire of every customer to be attended to and served on time without having to wait for a long period. Due to this, customers were also questioned about the length of time it takes for Airtel to complete a transaction or solve a problem when reported. Figure 16 stipulates that, 30 customers agreed that it takes less than half an hour to solve a given problem whiles only 1 customer said it takes a week or more. Cus-

tomers pointed out that the period of time for solving a problem depends on the nature of problem. Thus, the easier the problem the lesser the time it takes for rectification and vice-versa.
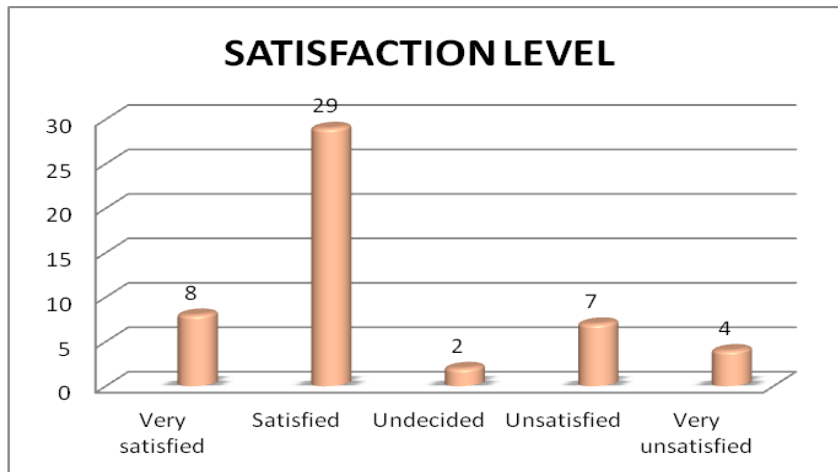
Figure 17. Level of satisfaction with the length of time.

It was interesting to note that after collecting and analyzing data received from the respondents, 11 of the customers were unsatisfied with the time spent by the company to resolve their issues as shown above in figure 17. This could be attribute to the complex nature of the problem and staff or management approach to solving it as mentioned under figure 16. On the other hand, 2 customers were undecided whiles the remaining customers claimed to be satisfied.

Figure 18. Promptness of service delivery.

To evaluate the promptness of the front line staff, a provision for a question was made in the questionnaire asking customers how they regard the promptness of the services they receive. Surprisingly, as specified by figure 18, 47 customers out of 50 gave positive remarks with only 3 rating it as bad. Even though majority of the customers claimed to receive a swift service delivery, customers with negative remarks may have been faced with technical difficulties which is common in the telecommunication industry and that might have impeded or slowed the pace of the delivery of their services.

4.1.5 Challenges

The purpose of the challenge part of the questionnaire was to determine the nature of problem faced by customers in times of need and measures put in place by the company to ease those problems.
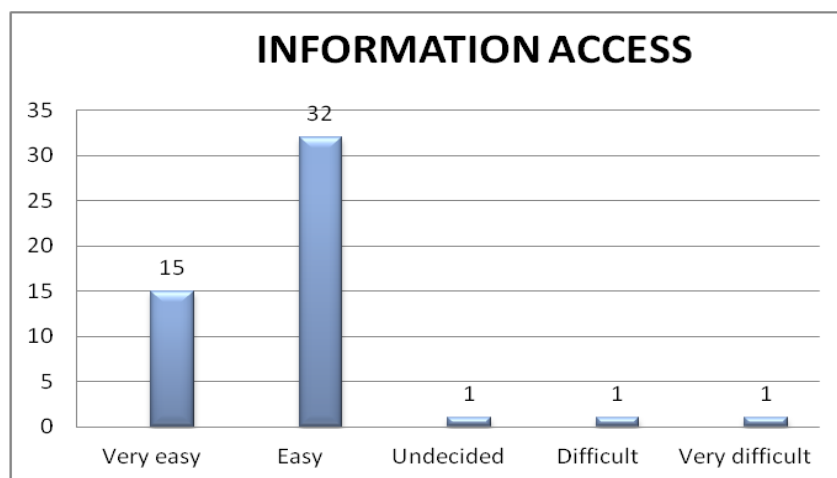
Figure 19. Accessibility to Information.

In an attempt to reveal the extent to which customers go to get information from Airtel, respondents were asked to rate how difficult it was. It can be clearly viewed from figure 18 that, access to information at Airtel Ghana is quite easy as 47 customers attested to that fact leaving only 3 customers to respond otherwise. This could only mean that the 3 respondents are either unaware of the available sources of Airtel's information which include online, company branches, retail

shops, customer care line as well as phone directories or they lack knowledge on how to utilize them.

Figure 20. Means of contact.

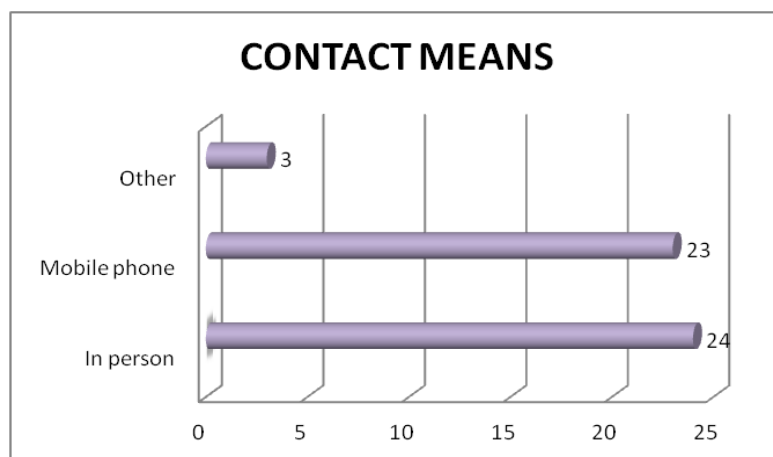As most developed countries are familiar with reaching a service organization especially a telecommunication company through e-mailing or a phone call when a problem occur, customers from developing countries such as Ghana prefer personally visiting a company to report a problem. This is due to the average or minimum use of internet by Ghanaians to transact business. Meanwhile, there are also customers who prefer phone calling the customer care line for easier and faster delivery of service as shown in figure 20. The 24 respondents who instead prefer contacting the company in person consider it as the best method of communication as that can yield a positive feedback.

Also, customers were asked about how often front line staff refer difficult issues to company superiors. During the data analysis, results proved that even though some difficult issues are mostly sometimes channeled to top management for solutions, the front line staff also often or rarely do so as viewed from figure 21 below. This result either depends on whether Airtel's top managements delegate part of their function to staff or whether the staff are completely empowered to undertake certain responsibilities rather than just allowed to carry out their assigned

tasks. In addition, how complex or easy a problem is can also determine the rate at which difficult customer issues are sent to top management.
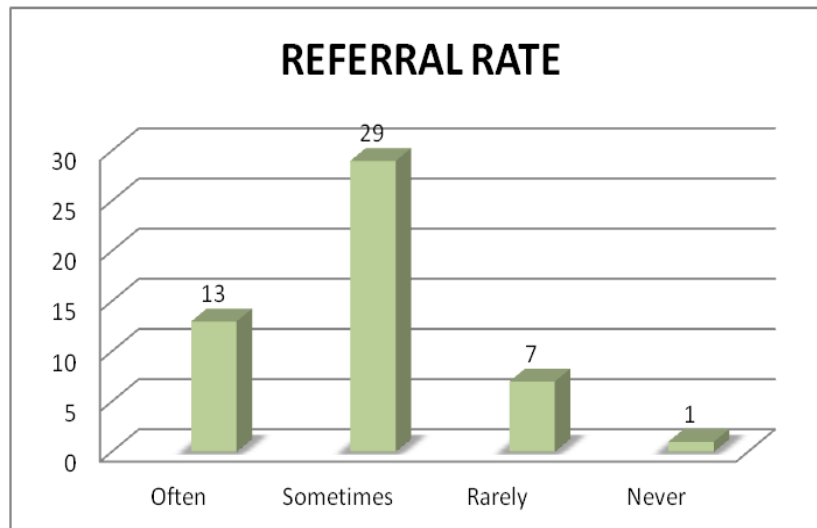
Figure 21. Referral rates of difficult issues to management.
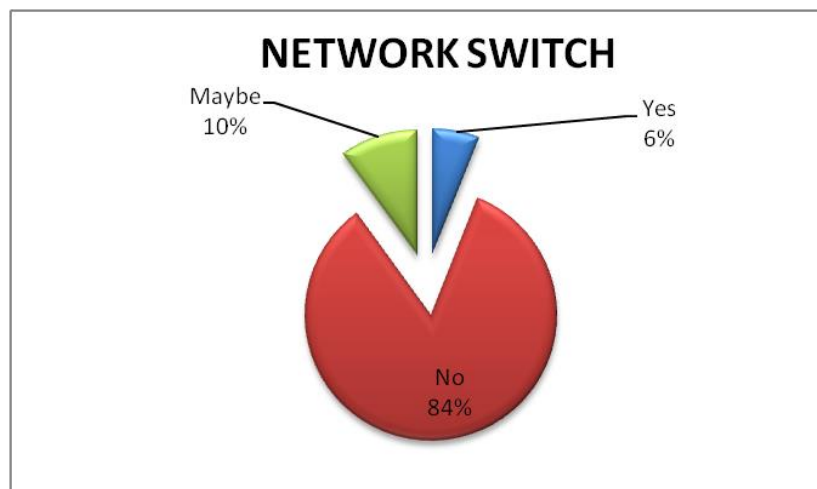
Figure 22. Switching to a different network.

It was remarkably amazing that, when respondents were questioned if they would change to a different network provider, more than 80% of the sampled customers proved to be loyal customers of Airtel and seem to appreciate the nature and quality of services they receive from the network company and thus, they didn't see it as a need to patronize a different network package. As this can be noted

from figure 21, aside 6% of customers who responded yes to switching to a different network and 10% who were not sure if they will, the rest agreed to remain with Airtel.
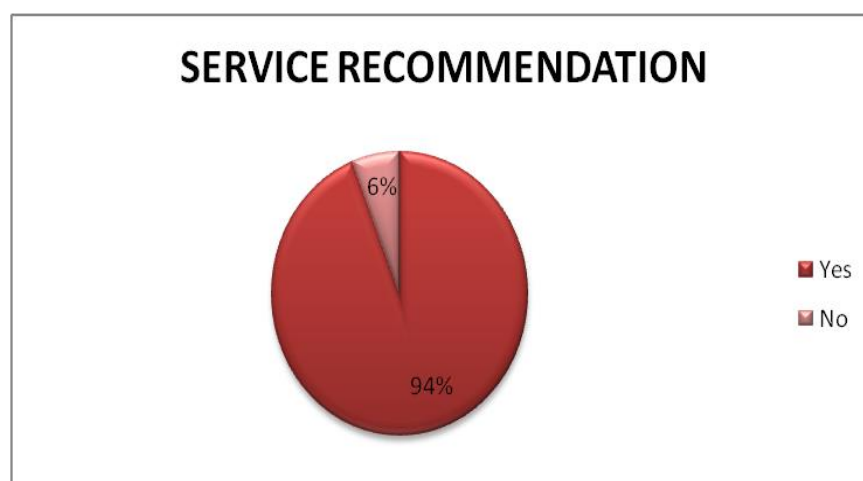
Figure 23. Service recommendation.

It is the wish of every organization for its products or services to communicate positively to the market and have a good position in the minds of customers. This type of wish was granted to Airtel Ghana as figure 23 indicates that, 94% out of the total sampled customers agreed to recommend Airtel network services to friends and families whiles only 6% of customers responded No. This is a positive indication of a good and quality care and services provided to Airtel customers.

4.1.6 Staff interview

During a short group interview with two (2) staff members of Airtel which lasted for 5-10 minutes, the questions asked were, how long have they been working for the company? Did they undergo any training after being hired? Does the company has or undertake any special customer care program? Are they allowed to handle all customers related issues and if not through what means are those issues channeled to top management for solution? Finally, how have the customer care activities impacted the company as a whole?

When the 2 staff were asked about how long they have been working for Airtel and whether they received some form of training after being employed, they mentioned they have been working for the company for more than 4 years now and they were absolutely trained for a long period of seven months on excelling in customer care and service delivery programme. According to them, the training program is part of Airtel's recruiting process which helps newly employed individuals to further develop their skills and acquire meaningful knowledge required by the company and that, all persons employed by the company are assigned to senior staff members who coach, direct and supervise them in carrying out specific duties.

They were also of the view that all new hired employees are offered a fair knowledge and information about caring for customers and efficient and effective service delivery irrespective of the field or department one finds him/herself. This according to them is because Airtel Ghana is a customer focused and oriented company and its goal is to incorporate all sections of the company into serving the needs of customers profitably.

Secondly, the staff were asked if Airtel Ghana has and practices any exceptional customer care program. They emphasized that despite Airtel having a 24hour-operating customer care lines through which all customers can reach the company in case of any problem, the service has been long upgraded to allow customer care respondents meet the needs of customers in all the different local languages spoken in Ghana as well as some international languages for foreign customers other than just English. For instance, a Ghanaian native who cannot speak English is able to communicate with Airtel's customer representative in any language he/she is familiar with in case of any problem without any hindrance. This according to them has helped bridge the gap between the company and local customers and most importantly, meeting customer demands has been achieved more efficiently.

They added that the company undertakes health talk and sponsorship programs, sends seasonal wishes to customers, provides recharge discounts, credit borrowing

and pay-for-me services, as well as proactive-care measures such as follow-up calls to customers in case of any transaction error to ensure everything is resolved completely. All these services are carried out by the company and made available to all customers with the aim of helping to make life and communication easy.

In addition, when questioned if they were allowed to solve all customer problems, the staff stated that, though there are customer complaints where they are in full capacity to handle; difficult problems and issues relating to a different field other than theirs are referred to the superiors and respective fields or departments, respectively. However, they mentioned that such problems are usually channeled through company's call service directory or personally to the superiors. Also, they claimed to perform certain functions and tasks delegated to them by the top managers.

Finally, to determine the effect the company's customer care activities have on the company, the staff responded positively stating that the market share of Airtel Ghana has immensely grow over the years and continues to grow at an increasing rate currently. Also, the Airtel has gained loyal customers who have been with the company for so many years but most importantly, the customer care activities have helped deliver timely and accurate services to their customers.

5   CONCLUSION

As the title of the thesis states 'customer care as an essential element in the telecommunication industry', the main purpose of the research was to investigate customer care practices at Airtel Ghana and its impact on service delivery. Also, the underlining objective of the study was to establish the role of customer care in enhancing service delivery within the telecommunication industry.

After completing the study with a 50 sampled customers, the research proved that, majority of Airtel's customers were males and more than half of the total customers were 25years and below. It further indicated most of the customers were first Degree and Higher National Diploma holders which explain that, the young generation are dominant within the target market of Airtel Ghana as well as the telecommunication world as a whole due to their passion and interest in advance mobile technologies. This information will help Airtel Ghana to focus more on specific target group and improve their services.

According to the research results, the nature of services provided by Airtel to customers is very good and the level of satisfaction received matches positively with the overall services. However, though customers are impressed and satisfied with the level of services, Airtel Ghana must make improvement to areas such as putting in place different mechanisms and systems for customer communication and dealing with customer complaints effectively and efficiently. These will help sustain and maintain the standard of the company's services.

During the research, it was discovered that face to face communication was the common tool used for customer and company interactions as greater percentage of Airtel customers prefers directly and personally meeting with company staff to report a problem despite other available means. As mentioned earlier, this is as a result of absence of the use of communication systems like e-mailing and unreliable internet access. That is, due to the minimum use of internet and the company's inability to incorporate other mechanisms for communication, Airtel customers are more abreast and familiar with face to face interaction and thus, they recog-

nize it as the best tool for yielding positive and accurate feedback or solutions from the company. This therefore means that Airtel can capitalize on that by improving direct communication but also, introduce different systems that can help foster quick response.

The research also demonstrated the degree to which Airtel care for their customers by attempting to build and maintain an on-going relationship with them as well as being friendly. These practices allow customers to view themselves as important part of the company's business and also enable them to freely air out any they problem face using the company's services.

To achieve the purpose of the research, Airtel's customer care practices were investigated. It was evident based on the responses gathered from the staff during the interview that, Airtel Ghana has a wide package of customer oriented activities. While some of them are undertaken seasonally, most of them are offered to customers on a daily basis. These daily services include credit discounts and borrowing, call-me-back and pay for me service where the receiver pays for the call instead of the caller, as well as subscribing to a health talk service where customers receive daily health care messages and many more.

Moreover, aside from the fact that telecommunication companies depend on their customers to achieve their profit and sales goals, it could be clearly seen that Airtel continues to widen their spectrum of caring for customers as results gathered from the respondents indicated mechanisms put in place by the company for forwarding customer suggestions and contacting the company. These mechanisms include customer care and complaint lines, suggestion box, physical interaction with front line staff and e-mailing. However, the outcome of the study prove that majority of the customers utilized more of face to face interaction and less customer care phone line as well as the suggestion box because of its popular use in Ghana.

In determining the impact of Airtel's customer care on service delivery, it was discovered that the company trains their staff to be customer friendly and make

effort to establish an ongoing rather than transactional based relationship with the customers. Also, aside some customers who prefer personally visiting the company in case of any problem, Airtel has in place a 24hour-operating customer care lines that attend to the needs of most customers across the country. These have allowed customers to freely interact with the company staff to voice out and describe the true nature of their problems thus, facilitating easy delivery of fast and accurate services leading to increase in customer satisfaction.

In addition, results from the survey indicated that there is a high level of service satisfaction received from Airtel by customers as majority agreed to remain loyal customers to the network and promote a good image of the brand through recommendation. This is another huge positive impact on the company as a whole as customer retention can be very expensive than customer acquisition.

It is also of no doubt that most telecommunication companies in Ghana apart from Airtel are often faced with network problems, which is why their customers rated the services as good since they may be facing the same problem at minimum.

The research objective of establishing the role of customer care in enhancing service delivery within the telecommunication industry was achieved as results from the survey and interview proved that, an effective implementation of customer care helps bring employees closer to customers and increase customers satisfaction by meeting their needs and wants timely and accurately. Other rewarding benefits of effective customer care that were identified from the research are customer loyalty, customer attraction, positive brand image and good service positioning.

5.1   Recommendation

Even though Airtel has numerous customer care practices which impact their service delivery and company as a whole positively, there is still room for improvement. Research results showed that, it is quiet important for Airtel to include in its customer care package well established communication systems through which

customers can effectively communicate with staff and air their views and opinions without necessarily having to visit the company. Great emphasis on e-mailing to contact the company and heavy promotions on the use of internet to transact businesses online must also be considered.

Secondly, it was noted from the result that most customers' difficult issues were channeled to superiors for solutions. This is why it is recommended for Airtel to empower and delegate some management functions to their front line staff by intensely and effectively training them to handle both simple and complex problems. Not only will this improve service delivery, but also motivates and encourage them to play a more active role in their work as well as bringing them closer to the customers. Moreover, the company can focus on recruiting competent personnel with specialty in area of customer complaints in order to provide quick and timely response to customers.

Furthermore, Airtel Ghana must overall improve its network services across the country as most customer complaints were directed to this problem. The company's customer complaints systems must as well be re-designed to as much as possible reduce the time frame for resolving customer problems or issues.

Finally, Airtel can incorporate customer care philosophy into their mission statement to guide in the execution an effective customer services. Also, front line staff or customer representative should not be the only body responsible for being customer orientated however; managements and all the company's departments must be customer focused and committed to serving every customer diligently.

5.2 Limitation

The study was succesfully conducted except for a few problems that were encountered.

First of all, the small sample size used was a limitation to the study. Due to a short period of time for dispatching and retrieving the questionnaires as well as reluctancy on the part of some customers, it was difficult to contact an adequate num-

ber of customers. This did not therefore allow the reaserch to have a full representation of customers views and experiences regarding Airtel services and thus, making the survey results shallow to some extent.

In addition, another limitation was that, the study did not further look into the impact of customer care on service delivery from the perspective of managers as it concerntrated more on customers and also, though two staff members were interviewed, it some how limited the overall picture of the company's views.

5.3   Further study

A similar kind of research can be undertaken in the future in a different field or different industry. This will help provide an insight as to whether there is a positive connection between customer care and service delivery. Also, intead of focusing much more on customer views and opinions on such a topic, management and staff views can contrubute immensely to the final results of the research.

Most importantly, for further reaserch on this topic and an accurate and reliable result, the size of sample used must be bigger in order to provide a true representation of customer views with regards to customer care.

Finally, further research can be conducted in the areas of customer care and customer service since most service practioners seem to use the concepts interchangeably. Despite the fact that both concept have common characteristics of satisfying customers and meeting expectations, it is evident from this research that they both have different level of intensity and the way they impact service delivery.

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CUSTOMER QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire seeks your response concerning the customer care service and satisfaction received from Airtel Ghana. You will contribute immensely to this if you please respond to the questions below. Any information given will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Part 1: Demographic Profile

1. Gender?
   { } male
   { } female
2. What is your age group?
   { } 25 and below
   { } 26-35
   { } 36-45
   { } 46 and above
3. What is your highest educational level?
   { } Junior High School/Senior High School
   { } Highest National Diploma/First Degree
   { } Postgraduate
   { } Other specify……………………

Core Questions

Customer care:

1. How would you rate Airtel services?
   { } Good
   { } Very good
   { } Excellent
   { } Bad
   { } Very bad
2. Do you often encounter networking problems using Airtel?
   { } Yes
   { } No
   { } Sometimes
3. How would you classify your relationship with the company?
   { } one time /transactional based
   { } ongoing relationship
   { } no relationship
4. Through what means do you get your suggestions known?
   { } via customer complaint line
   { } via interaction with frontline staff
   { } via suggestion box
   { } via email

Staff:

5. Are the company's staff customer friendly?
   { } Yes
   { } No
   { } Sometimes
6. In your opinion, do they attempt to build any relationship with customers?
   { } yes
   { } no

Timing:
7. How long have you been using Airtel network services?
   { } First time user
   { } less than a year
   { } 1yr-2yrs
   { } 3yrs and above
8. Averagely, how long does it take to get a problem solved?
   { } Less than 30mins
   { } Between 30mins and 1 hour
   { } More than an hour
   { } Takes a week or more
9. How satisfied are you with the length of time taken to solve problem or complete a transaction?
   { } Very satisfied
   { } Satisfied
   { } Undecided
   { } Unsatisfied
   { } Very unsatisfied
10. Evaluate the promptness of the company's service delivery.
    { } Good
    { } Very good
    { } Excellent
    { } Bad
    { } Very bad

Challenge:
11. When making enquiries, how easy is it getting information from Airtel?
    { } Very easy
    { } Easy
    { } Undecided
    { } Difficult
    { } Very difficult
12. In case of any problem, how do you contact Airtel Ghana?
    { } In person
    { } Mobile phone
    { } Other
13. How often do frontline staffs refer difficult issues to the superiors or management?
    { } Often
    { } Sometimes

{   } Rarely
{   } Never
14. Would you ever consider switching to a different network provider?
{   } yes
{   } no
15. Would you recommend Airtel Ghana to any one?
{   } yes
{   } no

Thank you for your co-operation!