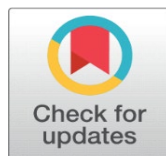


"ANALYZING THE GAP BETWEEN PRE-PURCHASE AND POST-PURCHASE CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF BRAND POSITIONING IN THE MOBILE TELECOM SECTOR"

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4858](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4858)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the intriguing gap between pre-purchase and post-purchase consumer perceptions, specifically within the context of brand positioning in the mobile telecommunications industry. In today's highly competitive market, where consumer choices are abundant, understanding how consumers perceive a brand before and after purchase is crucial for brand managers to position their offerings effectively. Through a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, this study examines the factors contributing to variance in consumer perception and their implications for brand positioning strategies. Findings reveal significant disparities between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase experiences, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities for mobile telecom network providers in managing consumer perceptions throughout the customer journey.

Keywords: Pre-Purchase Perception, Post-Purchase Perception, Brand Positioning, Mobile Telecom Network, Consumer Behaviour, Customer Experience

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The mobile telecom network industry is marked by fierce competition and rapid technological changes, resulting in a dynamic landscape of consumer preferences and behaviours. As smartphones proliferate and mobile connectivity becomes essential for both personal and professional activities, consumers are increasingly selective about their telecom service providers. Effective brand positioning is crucial for shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions in this context.

While considerable research has focused on the determinants of consumer behaviour and brand positioning strategies, a notable gap remains in understanding the disparity between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase

experiences in the mobile telecom sector. Despite companies' efforts to create compelling brand messages, consumers often face a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of the services they receive, which can lead to dissatisfaction and churn.

This study aims to address this gap by highlighting the importance of aligning consumer perceptions throughout the entire customer journey. By examining the factors that contribute to the differences between pre-purchase perceptions and post-purchase experiences, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for brand managers. These insights can help refine positioning strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In an era where customer experience is increasingly recognized as a key competitive advantage, understanding the intricacies of consumer perception is vital for telecom providers looking to stand out in a crowded market. By uncovering the drivers behind the perception gap, companies can better tailor their marketing communications, product offerings, and service delivery to meet customer expectations and build stronger brand-consumer relationships.

In summary, this study aims to fill a significant knowledge gap in the mobile telecom industry by investigating the discrepancy between pre-purchase and post-purchase consumer perceptions. By elucidating the underlying factors and their implications for brand positioning, the research seeks to contribute both to theoretical understanding and to practical strategies for enhancing consumer satisfaction and loyalty in this competitive landscape.

1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the variance between pre-purchase consumer perceptions (expectations) and post-purchase experiences in the context of mobile telecom network services.
- To identify the key factors influencing pre-purchase perceptions of consumers towards mobile telecom network brands.
- To analyze the factors contributing to the variation between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase experiences among consumers of mobile telecom network services.
- To explore the impact of the perception gap on customer satisfaction and loyalty towards mobile telecom network brands.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer perception and behaviour play crucial roles in shaping brand positioning and overall success in the telecom industry. Understanding the dynamics between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase experiences is essential for telecom companies to effectively manage their brand image and reputation. This literature review examines key factors influencing consumer perception in the telecom sector and explores the gap between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase experiences.

- **Brand Positioning in the Telecom Industry**

Brand positioning is the strategic process of defining how a brand differentiates itself in the market and occupies a distinct place in consumers' minds. In the highly competitive telecom industry, effective brand positioning is vital for attracting and retaining customers. Research by Keller (1993) emphasizes the importance of brand salience, performance, imagery, judgments, and feelings in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards telecom brands.

- **Consumer Expectations and Perceptions**

Consumer expectations are formed through various sources, including advertising, word-of-mouth, and prior experiences. Research by Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993) highlights the significance of understanding and managing consumer expectations, as they significantly influence post-purchase satisfaction and loyalty. In the context of the telecom industry, consumers often have specific expectations regarding network coverage, data speed, pricing, and customer service quality.

- **Consumer Behaviour in the Telecom Industry**

Expectation Formation: Research highlights how consumer expectations are shaped by prior experiences, marketing communications, and peer influence (Oliver, 1980; Zeithaml, 1988). Understanding these factors is crucial in the telecom context, where brand promises are often heavily marketed.

Decision-Making Processes: Various models (e.g., Engel-Kollat-Blackwell model) explain how consumers navigate the decision-making process in choosing telecom services, underscoring the importance of information search and evaluation criteria.

- **Brand Positioning and Consumer Perception**

Brand Equity: Aaker (1991) posits that brand equity is built on consumer perceptions, which are influenced by brand positioning strategies. This has implications for telecom providers aiming to differentiate themselves in a crowded market.

Positioning Strategies: Research by Ries and Trout (2001) outlines various positioning strategies that can be employed to shape consumer perceptions, including functional benefits and emotional connections.

- **Customer Experience and Loyalty**

Customer Experience Frameworks: The customer experience journey is multi-faceted, involving pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase phases (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Understanding this journey is critical for telecom providers to create seamless experiences.

Loyalty Drivers: Research by Dick and Basu (1994) highlights that satisfaction, trust, and commitment are key drivers of customer loyalty, suggesting that aligning brand positioning with consumer expectations can foster long-term loyalty.

- **Technological Influence on Consumer Perception**

Digital Transformation: The rapid evolution of technology has altered consumer expectations and experiences (Bharadwaj et al., 2013). Telecom providers must adapt their offerings to meet these new standards of connectivity and service.

Role of Social Media: Studies have shown that social media plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and expectations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Negative reviews or positive endorsements can significantly impact pre-purchase expectations.

Pre-Purchase Decision Making

Consumers engage in extensive information search and evaluation before making a purchase decision in the telecom sector. Factors such as price, network coverage, data plans, and promotional offers influence consumers' consideration sets (Dholakia, 2001). Moreover, advertising and promotional messages play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences for telecom brands (Okazaki, 2004).

Post-Purchase Experience and Satisfaction

The post-purchase experience plays a significant role in determining consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Research by Oliver (1980) suggests that the perceived performance of a product or service relative to expectations influences satisfaction. In the telecom industry, factors such as network reliability, data speed, customer service responsiveness, and billing accuracy contribute to post-purchase satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

Perception Gap Analysis

Discrepancies between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase experiences can lead to dissatisfaction and negative word-of-mouth. Studies have shown that consumers' perceptions of a brand are shaped by its marketing communications and their actual interactions with the brand (Luo & Donthu, 2006). Identifying and addressing the perception gap is essential for maintaining brand credibility and trustworthiness in the telecom market (Kapferer, 2012).

- **Gap Analysis in Consumer Experience**

Expectation vs. Reality: The discrepancy between expected and experienced service quality is often termed the "perception gap." Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed the SERVQUAL model to measure service quality and identify these gaps, emphasizing dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, and assurance.

Impact on Satisfaction: Studies have shown that larger perception gaps can lead to decreased customer satisfaction and increased churn rates (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). This is particularly relevant for the mobile telecom industry, where service consistency is paramount.

- **Brand Communication and Its Effects**

Consistency in Messaging: Effective brand communication is essential for aligning consumer perceptions. Research indicates that inconsistencies between marketing messages and actual service experiences can exacerbate perception gaps (Keller, 2001).

Influence of Advertising: The role of advertising in shaping expectations and perceptions has been well-documented (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This is particularly pertinent in the telecom sector, where promotional campaigns often promise superior service and connectivity.

- **Comparative Studies in Telecom**

Cross-Brand Analysis: Existing studies have explored how different telecom brands perform in consumer perception and experience, providing insights into best practices and areas for improvement (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2005).

Research Hypothesis

H1: A statistically significant variance exists between pre-purchase consumer perceptions (expectations) and post-purchase experiences in the mobile telecom network sector.

H0: No significant variance exists between pre-purchase consumer perceptions and post-purchase experiences in the mobile telecom network sector.

Sampling Framework: The sample size refers to the group of respondents selected from the overall target population. This study draws on the responses of 150 participants, reflecting a broad spectrum of demographic variables, collected via a comprehensive questionnaire.

Sampling Period

The data collection for this study was conducted throughout [Jan to August 2023]. This period was chosen to ensure an adequate and diverse set of responses, accounting for any seasonal or temporary fluctuations in service usage or satisfaction levels that may affect the results.

Data collection method:

Primary Data: Questionnaires were administered online or through in-person interviews at popular public spots like telecom service centers, malls, or markets.

Secondary Data: Data can be gathered from telecom company reports, previous studies on consumer satisfaction, and governmental or regulatory authority reports on telecom services.

This study adopts a descriptive approach, utilizing primary data collected through direct personal interviews and structured questionnaires. A well-designed questionnaire was developed specifically for the study, featuring targeted questions aligned with the research objectives. Responses were captured using a five-point Likert scale to facilitate analysis of the study's objectives.

In addition to primary data, secondary data was also utilized, which consists of previously gathered and analyzed information from earlier research. For this study, references from various academic journals and telecom company websites were reviewed.

3. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The below analysis reveals the primary factors customers consider when selecting a mobile telecom service provider. The distribution of preferences is as follows:

- Price – 22.6%
- Network Coverage – 21%
- Customer Service – 22.6%
- Brand Reputation – 26%

These results highlight that brand reputation is the most influential factor, closely followed by price and customer service, which are equally valued. Network coverage, while still significant, ranks slightly lower compared to the other criteria.

This data indicates that while practical concerns like cost and service quality remain important, brand perception plays a pivotal role in consumer decision-making in the telecom sector.

Customer Expectations Prior to Purchase – Linear Scale Analysis

Based on the linear scale analysis of customer expectations before purchasing a mobile telecom service, the majority of respondents—46.8%—rated their expectations as neutral. This suggests that nearly half of the customers had moderate or average expectations regarding the service prior to making their purchase decision.

Pre-Purchase Expectations:

According to the linear scale analysis, 46.8% of customers had neutral expectations prior to purchasing mobile telecom services.

This indicates a cautious or reserved attitude, where nearly half of the consumers neither expected excellent nor poor service.

Post-Purchase Considerations:

Once customers experienced the service, their considerations in choosing the provider were distributed as follows:

Brand Reputation – 26%

Price – 22.6%

Customer Service – 22.6%

Network Coverage – 21%

Variance Observed:

The high percentage of neutral expectations (46.8%) suggests that consumers approached the purchase with moderate hopes.

However, post-purchase considerations reflect that brand reputation became the most influential factor (26%), indicating that actual brand performance and perception played a stronger role after the experience.

The relatively balanced importance of price, customer service, and coverage shows that once consumers used the service, practical performance factors became equally critical, possibly adjusting their initial expectations.

4. DISCUSSION

There is a clear shift from neutral expectations to more defined post-purchase evaluations. While consumers may initially have limited expectations, their experiences tend to highlight specific factors—especially brand reputation and service quality—that significantly influence their overall satisfaction and future choices. The data suggests a clear connection between pre-purchase brand perception and post-purchase importance. Consumers who entered the buying process with neutral or positive brand impressions were likely influenced by that perception during decision-making. After experiencing the service, brand reputation not only validated their choice but became the leading factor in overall satisfaction, demonstrating its strong impact on both initial expectations and final evaluations.

Post-Purchase Customer Behavior & Satisfaction Analysis

After experiencing the mobile telecom service, 60.3% of respondents rated their satisfaction positively on a linear scale, indicating that a significant portion of users were pleased with their post-purchase experience.

Furthermore, customer expectations were met to a substantial extent—approximately 84.2%, suggesting that the service delivery closely aligned with what consumers anticipated.

When asked which specific aspects of the service contributed most to their satisfaction and influenced their post-purchase behavior, respondents indicated the following:

Customer Service – 60.6%

Price & Value – 59.5%

Network Coverage – 20.1%

Accuracy of Service/Agreement with Expectations – 51%

This indicates that service-related aspects (customer service and pricing) were the strongest drivers of satisfaction, with network coverage and accuracy playing supportive roles.

Discussion

The post-purchase evaluation of mobile telecom services reveals a largely positive customer experience. With 60% of respondents expressing satisfaction and 84.2% stating that their expectations were met, it is evident that the service delivery aligns well with consumer anticipation.

Among the key drivers of satisfaction, Customer Service (60.6%) and Price & Value (59.5%) stood out as the most influential factors. This indicates that responsive support and cost-effectiveness significantly shape customer perceptions post-purchase. Accuracy of service (51%) also played a meaningful role, reflecting the importance of reliability and transparency. Meanwhile, Network Coverage (20.5%), though less dominant, remains a necessary baseline expectation.

These findings underscore the critical need for telecom providers to focus not only on infrastructure but also on customer-centric services and transparent pricing to maintain and enhance consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Analysis of Expectation-Experience Gap and Consumer Perception

The data shows that:

60% of respondents reported positive satisfaction with the mobile telecom service after purchase.

84.2% of customers felt that their expectations were met to a substantial extent.

Prior to the purchase, a significant proportion of consumers held a neutral perception, as indicated by earlier data showing 46.8% of respondents had neutral expectations.

Interpretation:

The gap between expectation and experience is moderate, not drastic. This suggests that while services may not have dramatically exceeded expectations, they largely met what customers anticipated, resulting in a stable and mostly satisfying experience.

The neutral pre-purchase perception played a key role here—it likely set a balanced baseline, where customers were neither overly optimistic nor overly skeptical. As a result, when their experience aligned reasonably well with their expectations, it led to a positive overall satisfaction rating (60%), rather than disappointment or surprise.

5. CONCLUSION

The moderate gap between expectations and actual experiences suggests that telecom providers are doing a decent job of delivering what customers anticipate. The neutral perception before purchase helped in setting realistic expectations, thereby minimizing dissatisfaction and contributing to a strong post-purchase satisfaction rate. This highlights the importance of managing consumer perceptions early in the decision-making process to ensure favorable post-purchase outcomes.

6. LIMITATIONS

Geographical Scope: The study is confined to the Nagpur district, which may not accurately reflect consumer satisfaction trends in other regions or on a global scale. Thus, the findings may not be applicable beyond this specific geographical area.

Sample Size: The study used a small sample size of 111 respondents, owing to schedule restrictions. This limited sample may not fully represent the broader population, and as a result, the conclusions drawn from this study may not be generalized to the entire universe of telecom consumers.

Regional Focus: Since all data were collected exclusively from respondents within the Nagpur district, the results may not account for variations in consumer satisfaction that might exist in different regions, both within India and globally. Therefore, the study's findings should be interpreted with caution when considering broader applications.

These limitations underscore the parameters and constraints under which the study was carried out, indicating that future research involving a larger and more diverse sample could improve the generalizability of the findings.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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