

"UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER PREFERENCES IN MANGALURU CITY'S MOBILE NETWORK SERVICES: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY"

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive study focuses on unravelling the intricate nuances of consumer preferences within Mangaluru city's mobile network services landscape. With the advent of mobile services in the late 1990s, India's expansive population became a significant advantage for market players. Mobile network service providers have continuously strived to cater to the diverse needs of subscribers, emphasizing accessibility, retention, and the acquisition of new users. The evolving market dynamics have seen a surge in competition among service providers, leading to innovative offerings such as mobile number portability, value-added services, multimedia messaging, robust signal transmission, flexible subscription schemes, and seamless recharge options. Notably, the accessibility of mobile networks has widened among lower and middle-class demographics owing to substantial reductions in subscription tariffs and government-led initiatives supporting spectrum operators to enhance signal clarity. In today's fiercely competitive environment, where customer satisfaction is paramount for business success, understanding consumer preferences beyond the mere provision of services has become indispensable. Therefore, this study endeavours to explore and dissect the preferences of mobile network users concerning specific service providers in Mangaluru city. By delving into these preferences comprehensively, this research aims to shed light on the influential factors driving consumer choices in the domain of mobile network services.

KEYWORDS: Network, Brand preference. Mobile services.

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1990s, India witnessed the inception of mobile services, capitalizing on its vast population as a significant advantage for market players. Mobile network service providers have consistently endeavoured to cater to subscribers' needs, ensuring accessibility and retention while also enticing new users. Understanding consumer preferences and behaviours has become pivotal for these providers in devising promotional strategies to thrive in a fiercely competitive market.

The landscape of mobile network services in India has evolved with healthy competition among providers, fostering innovations such as mobile number portability, value-added services, voice and multimedia messaging, robust signals, flexible schemes, seamless recharging, and other customer-centric offerings. The accessibility of mobile networks expanded among the lower and middle-class demographics due to a drastic reduction in subscription tariffs, plummeting from ₹14 to ₹1. Government initiatives supporting spectrum operators have further enhanced signal clarity, benefiting subscribers.

In today's competitive environment, customer satisfaction has emerged as the cornerstone of business success, compelling organizations to surpass customer expectations. This intense competition remains a primary challenge for businesses, prompting an urgent need to comprehend consumer preferences beyond mere services offered.

Hence, this study aims to delve into the preferences of mobile network users towards specific service providers in Mangaluru city. By examining these preferences comprehensively, the study seeks to illuminate the factors influencing consumer choices in the mobile network service domain.

BRAND PREFERENCE

Brand preference is strongly linked to brand choice what attracts consumer towards that can influence the consumer decision making or their taste too and activate brand purchase. "Brand Preferences can be defined as the subjective, conscious and behavioural tendencies which influence consumer's predisposition toward a brand". Understanding the brand preferences of consumers will dictate the most suitable and successful Marketing Strategies. One of the indicators of the strength of a brand in the hearts and minds of customers, brand preference represents which brands are preferred under assumptions of equality in price and availability.

Measures of brand preference approach to quantify the impact of marketing activities in the hearts and minds of consumers and potential consumers. Higher brand preference usually indicates more revenues (sales) and profit, also making it an indicator of company financial performance.

There has been a long-standing process from marketers and their lot of analysis to understand how customers form their preferences and according to their interest toward a specific brand. Brand preference is closely related to brand choice that can facilitate consumer decision making and activate brand purchase. Knowing the pattern of consumer preferences and their taste over the years across the population is a severe input for designing and

developing innovative marketing strategies. It also uncovers the heterogeneity of consumer choices leading to efficient market segmentation strategies. However, foreseeing consumer's preferences & choices between brands is not an easy task as we all know that their preferences changes with the time. Most of the early models focused on brand attributes in preference construction (e.g. Fishbein, 1965). Thus the evolving marketing strategies concentrate on analysing and communicating information or exchanging their views about product attributes. Although these cognitive responses derived from beliefs about brand attributes are important in building preferences, there are other emotional responses (e.g. elaboration likelihood model-1982), social influences (e.g. extended Fishbein model) that can influence brand preferences. It is observed that consumers can have an already established preference or taste and refer to the brand attributes that confirm their preferences and choices. In addition, this traditional cognitive view that deemed consumer as rational decision making had been shifted to the experiential view focuses on the emotional, cognitive, symbolic responses of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). This shift echoed the changes that organisations have moved from concentrating on attributes and features toward creating & innovative experiences to their customers. Brands are no longer bundles of functional characteristic but are means of providing experiences (Schmitt, 1999). Moreover, these experiences were hyped to be an important driver in building brand preferences & choices. This study adopts the experiential view in studying the relationship between brand experience and brand preference. It will identify how brand experiences can build consumer's preferences toward certain brands directly or indirectly by affecting the brand associations and brand personality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nandhini (2001) found out that attitude of the respondents using cell phones was not influenced by either education or occupation and income.

Samuel (2002) in his study, observed that most of the respondents consider size, quality, price, instrument serving as an important factor for selecting the handset while majority of the respondents are satisfied over the payment system, quality of services, coverage area and the process of attending the complaints regarding their mobile service provider.

K.E Lommeruda and L. Sorgard¹⁰ (2003) in their study on "Entry in Telecommunication: customers are not price sensitive all the times and sometimes brand loyalty takes a dominant part in brand preferences. This is because some consumers are retained with old monopolists. They have pointed out that substantive role of price fairness and quality service with customer satisfaction existing in the communication sector.

K. Maran, C. Madhavi and K. Thilagavathi¹⁵ (2004) in their article titled, "Customer's Perception on Telephone: The objectives of the study was (1) to find the most influencing factor in selection of service provider, and (2) to measure customer perception and satisfaction as regards the service provided. The study on a sample of 550 telephone users indicate that some problems exist that deserve the attention of the company. The company needs to bridge the gap between the services promised and services offered.

S. Revathi and S. Padmavathy²⁵ (2005) in their article entitled, “Preference in Cellular Service Providers in the Post-liberalization Era” have found the various factors like poor service from Department of Telecommunications (DOT), lower service charges offered by DOT than by other private players, convenience of contact, accessibility, improvement of own business/profession, prestige and status symbol are the influencing factors for the possession of cell phone connections.

Zafar (2013) examines the impact of the mobile service attributes like call rates, service quality, service availability, promotion and brand image of both the gender’s purchasing decision. The result reveals that the male and female consumers have different preference in making the purchase decision to the avail mobile service. The study also discovers that the female consumers are tough to satisfy than the male consumers.

Zohaib Ahmad and Junaid Ahmad (2014) in their study titled “Consumer Purchase Behavior in Cellular Service Sector” says that the dominant factors quality, price, promotions, and social factors reflects the latest buying behavior of people or not. The study reveals that the social factor is the most dominating factors which determines the purchase behaviour and basically reflects the societal image of the customers.

RESEARCH GAP

There are numerous studies that are conducted to assess the service quality, customer satisfaction and customer references to the mobile networks and its various aspects. But the present study is unique in nature because it is conducted especially in Mangaluru city with the aim to identify the customer preferences of the selected mobile network service providers and also to analyse the factors affecting while selecting a particular mobile network by the customers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The fundamental problem in predicting the customer choices exist in the fact that brand preferred decisions of the customers are solely made on the bases of several different criteria simultaneously which includes factors like brand image, features, network quality, price, etc. Thus, the frequent preferred behaviour of customer has compelled to review such factors that affect the telecom industry. Thus, the problem has been more confounded in telecom industry where customers get attracted towards the competitor’s offers and features and analyses the expectations of the customers regarding the telecom industry services.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The study analyses how the consumer have preferred their brand in telecom industry and the factors that they have considered while preferring the brands, also how it has affected the telecom industry. The study includes the service provided by telecom industry in order to keep a hold on the customer of their brand.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine factors that influence brand preference in telecom industry.
- To propose recommendations to the mobile service providers to retain brand loyalty.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study is to establish a platform to examine the customer preferences for the selected mobile networks. The study also extends to understand the factors influencing to use the particular mobile network service.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Sample Size-** 100 respondents
- **Sample unit-** youths, adults and middle-aged groups
- **Sampling Area-** Mangaluru city
- **Sampling Technique:** A stratified sampling technique was used. A different stratum for different type of respondent within every stratum the respondents was selected as per convenience basis

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data collected for the study has been divided into two parts:

Primary date: The data was collected through questionnaire method. Again, the research is descriptive type. The analysis is done through the tabular and graphical representation.

Secondary day: The data collected from the readily available sources. The sources like previous projects, different journals and various internet sites have been used.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table showing gender of the respondents

| Gender | No. Of respondents |
|--------|--------------------|
| Male | 26 |
| Female | 74 |
| Total | 100 |

Table showing profession of the respondents

| Profession | No. of respondents |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Student | 78 |
| Job | 15 |
| Housewife | 4 |
| Daily wage worker | 1 |
| Unemployed | 2 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing current network of the respondents

| Current network | No. of respondents |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Airtel | 55 |
| Jio | 27 |
| Vodafone | 7 |
| Idea | 8 |
| Other | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing the kind of mobile network respondents use

| Mobile network | No. of respondents |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 2G | 0 |
| 3G | 2 |
| 4G | 98 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing whether the respondents use pre-paid or post-paid connection

| Pre-paid or post-paid connection | No. of respondents |
|---|---------------------------|
| Pre-paid | 86 |
| Post-paid | 14 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing how many times the respondents have changed their mobile network

| Change in mobile network | No. of respondents |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1-2 times | 37 |
| 2-3 times | 14 |
| More than 3 times | 3 |
| Never | 40 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing how long the respondents have been a customer of the company

| Customer of the company | No. of respondents |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Less than one year | 17 |
| 1-3 years | 44 |
| 3-5 years | 19 |
| More than 5 years | 20 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing the quality of video call provided by the network of the respondents

| Quality of video call | No. of respondents |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | 4 |
| 2 | 6 |
| 3 | 38 |
| 4 | 45 |
| 5 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing whether the network provider of the respondents provide the network for data roaming all over India

| Data roaming all over India | No. of respondents |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 15 |
| 3 | 36 |
| 4 | 36 |
| 5 | 10 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing whether the network provide respondents continuous\uninterrupted connection for games

| Continuous/uninterrupted connection for games | No. of respondents |
|---|--------------------|
| Yes | 59 |
| No | 41 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing how the respondents got to know about their sim:

| About sim | No. of respondents |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Advertisements | 16 |
| Family | 45 |
| Friends | 18 |
| Mobile retailers | 5 |
| Own decision | 16 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing whether the respondents think their customer care service of their sim card network is poor

| Poor customer care service | No. of respondents |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Yes | 44 |
| No | 56 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing if other sim card operator provides the respondents better offer would they like to switch to other sim network

| New network with better offer | No. of respondents |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Yes | 62 |
| No | 38 |
| Total | 100 |

Table showing how the changes affected the respondents personally

| How has it affected you personally | No. of respondents |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| By paying more for recharge | 41 |
| By not getting good network | 20 |
| Bad customer care service | 5 |
| TOTAL | 66 |

Table showing what services are helpful to the respondents while using the communication services

| Communication services | No. of respondents |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Call rates | 27 |
| SMS services | 8 |
| Quality network | 61 |
| Value added services | 4 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing whether the respondents are satisfied with the after-sale services of the company

| After sales services | No. of respondents |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Strongly agree | 8 |
| Agree | 30 |
| Neutral | 57 |
| Disagree | 3 |
| Strongly disagree | 2 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing whether the respondents would pay more if the quality of the product and services are worth it

| Worthiness of paying more for the product and services | No. of respondents |
|--|--------------------|
| Strongly agree | 13 |
| Agree | 35 |
| Neutral | 38 |
| Disagree | 10 |
| Strongly disagree | 4 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing what the respondents use to identify the network to subscribe:

| Identification tool | No. of respondents |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Brand name | 73 |
| Colour | 7 |
| Logo of the company | 13 |
| Slogan of the company | 6 |
| Speed network | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table showing what the respondents would recommend their service provider for the betterment of overall service quality to retain the customer

| Recommendation to retain the customer | No. of respondents |
|--|---------------------------|
| Improve the promotional tools | 8 |
| Take customer feedback seriously | 35 |
| Reduce tariff rates to suit the customer | 20 |
| Provide personalised offers for the loyal customers | 16 |
| Incorporate latest technological advancements to make the service quality better | 21 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

FINDINGS

From the study on topic “A study on factors affecting brand preferences with references to telecommunication in Mangaluru city” there are several facts and such facts are known as findings of the study. The findings of the study are as follows:

- Based on the research it can be interpreted that respondents give first preference to airtel with 55 % and second preference to Jio with 27% because of the network.
- The study reveals that that 98 % of the respondents use 4G mobile network.
- According to the research 49 % of respondents spend 300-500 on recharge.
- The study reveals that 67% of respondents are not using more than one sim card at a time.
- According to the study 40 % the respondents have not changed their mobile network.
- 45% of respondents are satisfied with the video call service provided by the network provider and 36% of respondents are satisfied with the data roaming available by the network provider.
- According to the study 59% of the respondents suggest that the network does provide uninterrupted connection for games.
- The study reveals that 71 % of the respondents agree that the company provides a proper denomination on the new product or service.
- The study reveals that 45% of the respondents got to know about their SIM through family.
- The study reveals that 56% of respondents do not agree that the customer care service of their sim card is poor.

- According to the study 62 % of respondents would switch to other sim network if they provide better network and offers.
- The study reveals that majority of respondents i.e 68% of the total respondents agree that they are satisfied with the service provided by the network.
- According to the study 66% are affected personally to the changes in the telecom industry and 49% say that they are affected by paying more for recharge.
- According to the study 61% of respondents believed that quality network is more helpful to them while using communication service.
- The study reveals that 57 % of total respondents are neutral with the after sales services of the company.
- According to the study majority of respondents i.e. 38 % of them pay more if the quality of the product and services are worth it.
- The study reveals that 73 % of respondents use brand name as their tool to identify the network to subscribe.
- The study reveals that 82% of respondents usually spend on internet services.
- According to the study 51 % of the respondents take into consideration service quality as the most influential factors while making purchase decision in telecom service.
- The study reveals that 35 % of respondents would recommend that the service providers should take customer feedback seriously in order to get the betterment of overall service quality.

SUGGESTIONS

- In this research it is found that the majority of the respondents have given top preference to airtel. Hence it is suggested that the other service providers (Jio, Idea, Vodafone and BSNL) have to focus on improving their service quality, responsiveness, attractive offers, customer care service and impactful advertisement in order to widen their subscriber's base and capture more customers.
- Customers need to feel that they are getting excellent service at appropriate charge that is they are getting the value of money.
- The telecom industry must conduct a study on price factor, network preferred by customer.
- The telecom industry needs to build proper relation with customer by providing a good customer care service.
- It is found from the study that the majority of the respondents have given top preference to service quality. Service quality of the network plays a vital role. Hence it is suggested that the operators have to maintain proper service quality.
- It is found from the study that the service providers should take customer feedback's seriously in order to retain their customers.

CONCLUSION

The Indian telecom industry has grown a rapid speed in the last decade. Declining the call tariffs and favourable regulatory policies have led to a tremendous increase in the subscribers' base. Proper identification of the customer preferences will facilitate the favorableness towards the various mobile service providers. Continuous research on consumers will enhance the customer satisfaction. The present research focuses on the study of customer preferences with special reference to the mobile network users in Mangaluru city. The study has been carried out to find out the most preferred mobile network service provider and the factors influencing to use the particular mobile network service. The result revealed that, Airtel, Jio, Idea, Vodafone and BSNL are the most preferred mobile network service providers. Service quality, value added services, customer care services are the most influencing factors in the selection of a particular mobile network service provider. To retain the customers the service providers should take customer feedback's seriously. If these suggestions are considered by the respective mobile network service providers and it would certainly help to improve the service quality of the mobile network service providers and also it improves the level of satisfaction of the mobile network users.

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