# INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN MTN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The study examined the influence of customer complaints management strategies on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria. The specific objectives include to; examine the influence of complaint-handling staff attitude on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis. Examine the influence of customer service waiting time on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis and examine the influence of service failure compensations on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 97,700 MTN customers. The sample size of the study was 398 using Taro Yamani Formula. Questionnaire instrument was validated. Reliability of the instrument was checked using Cronbatch alpha test. The study used convenience sampling techniques for selecting respondents. The findings revealed that complaint-handling staff attitude had a significant positive influence on consumer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis. customer service waiting time had a significant positive influence on consumer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis and service failure compensations had a significant positive influence on consumer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis. We concluded that customer complaints management strategies of MTN, specifically complaint-handling staff attitude, customer service waiting time and service failure compensations are major drivers of customer loyalty in MTN. based on findings, the study recommended that complaint-handling staff attitude should be improved, customer service waiting time should be highly reduced and MTN compensations should be fair when customers suffer losses or injury of any kind.

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## INTRODUCTION

The intensity and fierceness of competition in contemporary markets have heightened customers' awareness with respect to acceptable or tolerable levels of service delivery. Service providers have therefore been mindful of the quality of service they deliver to their customers. However, due to human and non-human errors (Ateke *et al* 2021; Kau & Loh, 2020), instances of service delivery that fall short of customers' expectation still do occur. This is not necessarily a result of nonchalance on the part of service providers; but a consequence of the unique nature of services and the individuality of consumers. Thus, service providers are encouraged to continually gauge the quality of service they deliver, and also seek feedback from their customers. They are also encouraged to provide access to customers to lodge complaints when they are dissatisfied with the quality of service delivered to them.

However, Stephens and Gwinner (2018) notes that some dissatisfied customers do not lodge formal complaint because they regard it as an action that does not worth the efforts, they do not believe that they will get restitution, they consider it unpleasant, they do not know how and to whom to lodge their complaints, they want to avoid conflict, especially if it involves people who they know and will have to cooperate with again. Goodwin and Verhage (2020) suggests that other reasons that discourage customers from complaining are the feeling that they do not have the power to question the service providers' expertise due to social norms and lack of requisite knowledge. This implies that complaint behaviour depends on customers' perception and social norms (Wasfi & Kostenko, 2022).

Moreover, effective customer complaint involves instituting policies and procedures that helps the firm to assuage disgruntled customers and return them from the verge of dejection and defection to the altitude of satisfaction and loyalty (Ateke *et al*, 2021). It suggests that effective service recovery provides customers with higher satisfaction than if no failure has occurred in the first place (Maxham, 2021). it is observed that complaint customer is one avenue open to service providers to correct mistakes and cement relationships; even as the different socio-cultural background of individual customers condition them to expect different results from service providers in their service encounters (Wasfi & Kostenko, 2022).

Also, satisfactory or unsatisfactory handling of complaints determines whether a customer will patronize the seller again or shift his loyalty; and whether that customer will engage in negative or positive evangelism for the service provider. With a view to entering the discourse on the association between customer complaints strategies and customer satisfaction therefore, the current study seeks to examine the nexus between the variables, using MTN telecommunication Nigeria with reference in Enugu metropolis as the data base.

## Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian telecommunication sector has witnessed significant rise in competition in recent years due to largely deregulation policy of government and the advent of more mobile telecommunication companies. Another complex dimension to the competitive trend in the Nigerian telecommunication sector is the ease and rate at which products and services are duplicated in the sector and the multi dimension nature of communication.

The test for any organization with an aim of succeeding in the market place must begin with recognising that the "customer is king" and that the entire purpose of any business is to serve both consumers and stakeholders. Customers express their dissatisfaction with products or services through complaints. Thus, a review of customers' complaints is requisite to improved customer satisfaction. However, this is not always the case. Research has shown that many bad customer experiences were poorly handled in service organizations when

customers complained. In fact some service organizations had no budget at all for complaint handling expenses. Others pay lip service to complaint handling management strategies.

The influence of customer complaint management strategies on organizational performance have been validated in other organizations. For instance, Chikosha and Vutete (2023) investigated the effectiveness of customer handling system in banking sector and discovered it has effect on customer retention. Similar Edem and Simeon (2022) studied customer complaint handling strategies among indigenous food vending firms' results show it increased the sales, volumes and profitability of the companies used for study. However, research on customer complaint management strategies in telecommunication industry, particular MTN are quite few. Again, many of the previous studies on customer complaint strategies were foreign and investigated variables other then complaint-handling staff attitude, customer service waiting time and customer service failure compensation. As a result of this apparent gap in the literature, this study tries to investigate the influence of customer complaint management strategies on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria, Enugu metropolis.

## Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to examine the influence of customer complaints management strategies on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria. Other specific objectives include:

❖ To examine the influence of complaint-handling staff attitude on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

❖ To ascertain the influence of customer service waiting time on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

❖ To determine the influence of customer service failure compensations on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

## Review of Related Literature

### Customer Complaint Management Strategies

A complaint is an expression of discontent by a customer/consumer, addressed to a service provider, third parties or consumer protection agencies in the event of service failure (Ateke *et al,* 2021). It is a set of behavioral and non-behavioral responses, some or all of which are triggered by perceived dissatisfaction with a purchase episode (Singh, 2018). Complaints can also be looked at as those actions that directly convey expressions of dissatisfaction following service deliveries that fall short of acceptable or tolerable standards (Halstead & Droge, 2021). Customers complain when they experience a service performance that falls below their expectation, and the consequent dissatisfaction they feel. Thus, dissatisfied customers are more likely to complain than satisfied ones (Keiningham *et al,* 2019).

### Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is primary components in the external relations system of any organization, as they currently play a key role in determining the company's competitiveness. The wish to manage customer relationships arises from the fact that firms are beginning to pay attention to service standards development and implementation. Reviewing customer service standards as part of the organization's corporate culture allows for the identification of more effective approaches to its development and implementation (Archakova, 2023).

There has been an increasing use of customer satisfaction as a standard for customer related activities and for any business organization superiority standard (Jamali, 2022). On the other hand, service failures occurrences are recurrent leading to diminishing customer satisfaction due to the number of customer complaints. Service failures may cause customers to move to other service providers as they are increasingly becoming intolerant to mediocrity hence it important for the organization to understand the service recovery process. Even though service failure can break customer loyalty, the defection of dissatisfied customers may be prevented when service recovery strategies are in place (Moliner *et. al,* 2020).

**Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual framework of this study is presented in table 2.1 below. The framework was designed on the knowledge of existing theories, models and findings of empirical studies related to customer complaint management strategies and its effect on organizational performance.

**Customer Complaint Management Strategies (Independent Variables)**

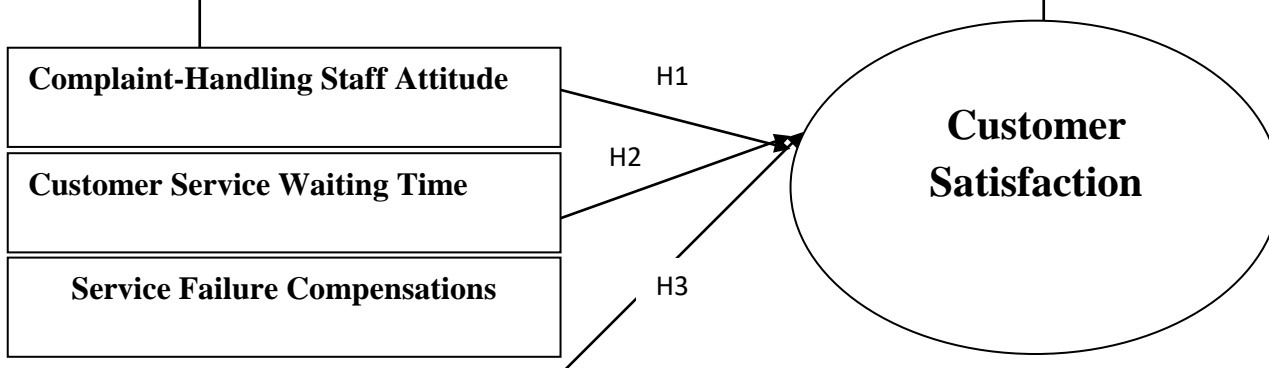**Customer Satisfaction (Dependent Variable)**



**Figure 2.1: Model of the Influence of Customer Complaint Management Strategies on Customer Satisfaction.**

**Source: Adapted from Kelley and Michela (1980)**

Customer complaint management strategies refers to the tools management of an organization adopt in handling customer complaint. Research and theories show that organizations adopt various strategies in handling customer complaint ranging from apologies, to retribution polite attitude staff training, simple complaint procedure, complex complaint procedure and adequate compensations. However, this study centers on three major strategies for complaint management. These are: service provider attitude, service waiting time and service failure compensations. Each of them and their relationship with customer satisfaction is explained below.

**Complaint-Handling Staff Attitude and Customer Satisfaction**

Customers' Attitude As the service company invests money in technology and in informing, convincing, educating and training the customer, it is important that customers keep using the service option. As satisfaction is said to have more antecedents than service quality, we ought to gain better insight into customer preferences and the relevance of service quality by comparing the relationship between satisfaction and preferences with the relationship between service quality and preferences for Technology-Based Self-Service. Some factors impacting on customer's preferences to participate in technology-based service systems may be easily explained in terms of satisfaction. Satisfaction is recognized as having more antecedents, being a wider attitude and a better predictor of behavior and given that we know very little about how influential service quality is in evaluating and forming preferences for Technology-Based Self-Service options (Foley, *et al* 2020).

**Customer Service Waiting Time and Customer Satisfaction**

A call center constitutes a set of resources (typically personnel, computers and telecommunication equipment), which enable the delivery of services via the telephone. The working environment of a large call center could be envisioned as an endless room with numerous open-space cubicles, in which people with earphones sit in front of computer terminals, providing tele-services to unseen customers. Most call centers also support Interactive Voice Response (IVR) units, also called Voice Response Units (VRU's), which are the industrial versions of answering machines, including the possibilities of interactions. But more generally, a current trend is the extension of the call center into a contact center. The latter is a call center in which the traditional telephone

service is enhanced by some additional multi-media customer-contact channels, commonly VRU, email, fax, Internet or chat (in that order of prevalence (Koole & Mandelbaum, 2021).

**Service Failure Compensations and Customer Satisfaction**

Compensation is designed to overcome negative consumer outcomes regarding the experience by providing tangible evidence that the service provider is fair. It is considered an important tool to overcome service failure, and can restore equity to an exchange relationship or connote associations with distributive justice (Bhandari, Tsarenko, & Polonsky, 2022). Consumers expect compensation for the damages the failure may have caused them and/or the costs they incurred to obtain a solution and is considered the second crucial recovery action of telecommunications (La & Kandampully, 2023). Firms can assign tangible resources to correct problems and restore the interchange with the client by returning the money, replacing the service, or offering discounts on a future purchase (Akbar, Mat Som, Wadood, & Alzaidiyeen, 2020). Compensations may also include upgrading to a better hotel room, a free ticket, or a free meal (Boshoff, 2023).

**2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The study was underpinning on Attribution theory.

**2.3.1 Attribution Theory**

Kelley and Michela (1980) referred to attribution theory as the study of perceived causation and peoples' behavior is interpreted in terms of its causes and these interpretations are responsible to in determining reactions to the behavior. The general model of attribution field depicts attributions (perceived causes) as the link between antecedents (information, beliefs, motivation) and the consequences which include behavior, affect and expectancy. One will thus attribute responsibility for an event and will experience an emotional reaction (anger and sympathy being the core emotions) to the event as these two serves as motivations to an action. As a result, person will be judged not to be responsible when behavioral responses are positive leading to aroused empathy. Based on the attribution theory, an organization which has a history of crisis will be deemed to have ongoing problem that needs to be addressed while a prior relational reputation which is unfavorable suggests that an organization shows little consideration for stakeholders across a number of domains, not just in this (Coombs, 2017). From the theory, it is essential that an organization maintains positive working relations so as to have a good reputation and maintain a good relationship with the customer. Numerous customer complaints could lead to outsiders feeling that the organization does not care on its stakeholders hence affect customer satisfaction.

**2.4 Empirical Studies**

Shammout and Haddad (2022) sought to identify the most important impacts of complaints' handling on customers' satisfaction in the commercial banks' in Jordan. The results of the research showed that there is a statistically significant impact of the overall dimensions of complaint handling (service recovery, service quality, switching cost, service failure, service guarantee, and perceived value) on customer satisfaction.

Ateke and Ezema (2021) conducted study complaint handling and post-complaint satisfaction of customers of eateries in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Based on the analyses, the study found that complaint handling and post complaint satisfaction have a positive and significant correlation; as all the dimensions of complaint handling considered in the study were found to have strong positive links with post-complaint satisfaction.

Wanjiku, Ombui and Iravo (2023) studied the effects of customer service strategies on customer satisfaction of firms in the telecommunication sector in Kenya. The main aim of the study was to examine the effects of customer service strategies on customer satisfaction of firms in the Telecommunication sector. The study reviewed several theories of satisfaction as possible avenues towards a framework of understanding what satisfies customers.

Chepkwony (2023) examined the effect of customer complaints resolution strategies on customer satisfaction Eldoret based Banks in Kenya. The study explores the effects of customer complaint resolution strategies on customer satisfaction with particular emphasis on the specific objectives namely; a distributive complaint resolution strategy, interactive complaint resolution strategies and procedural complaint resolution strategies. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between the study variables.

Nadu and Kannan (2023) investigated the customer attitude and satisfaction towards direct marketing of amway products-a study with special reference to theni district in India. This study also revealed the reason for buying the Amway product with factor analyses. Random sampling and convenience sampling are used for the study. The technique used for data collection is questionnaire. The study covered about 300 respondents belonging to Theni district only. Tools and techniques used are simple percentage.

**Gaps in Reviewed Literature**

There exist past studies on customer satisfaction and strategies used to enhance customer complaints. For instance, a study by Kutol and Juma (2020) sought to establish customer relationship management complaints on customer satisfaction in multinational companies in Kenya focusing on Laborex Kenya Ltd. Cho, Im, Hiltz, and Fjermestad, (2022) conducted a study on online customer complaints and suggested that e-businesses need to provide topnotch online customer services since it is a key factor in online customer satisfaction. Further, Oloko, *et al.,* (2021) sought to determine the complaints strategies that enhance customer satisfaction. The study suggested that a firm's monitoring tools plays a key part in cases of badmouthing as the customer does not contact the company to give an opportunity for the issue to be sorted. These studies reveal both conceptual and contextual gaps as there are no studies that have focused on the relationship between customer complaints response strategies on customer satisfaction among telecommunication companies in Nigeria. This study sought to fill this gap.

**Research Design**

The objective of the current study was to determine the link between customer complaints strategies and customer satisfaction. The study adopted survey research design. The study employed the use of questionnaire to collect primary data though primary source of data was used. Primary sources were used for the study and this was sourced from the questionnaire distributed to MTN customers in Enugu metropolis. The population of the study consisted of 97,700 customers of high subscribers for data (internet) services, the highest number of active subscribers held by a telecoms service provider in Enugu Branch, Nigeria. The total population of the study was 97,700.

**Sample Size Determination**

(i) Sample size of customers Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample size when the population is known as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = The required sample size.

N = Population of MTN Customers =97,700

e = Level of significant 5% = 0.05

1 = constant

$$n = \frac{97,700}{1 + 97,700(0.0025)}$$

n = 97,700

$$\overline{245.25}$$

n = **398** Sample Size

The sampling frame was not available, the researcher used convenience sampling techniques for selecting the required sample size of customers in MTN Nigeria, Enugu Branch used for the study. The research instrument was structured questionnaire distributed to the respondents in MTN call centers in Enugu Metropolis. In responding to the questionnaire, respondents were required to indicate the extent to which items on the study instrument describe their perception and experience on the variables under investigation by ticking from 1-5 on a scale where 1= very low extent; 2= low extent; 3= moderate extent; 4= great extent; and 5= very great extent. Methods of Data analysis was consist of descriptive and inferential statistics, descriptive statistics such as bar charts, percentages, frequency tables, and pie charts while inferential statistics of the study, regression model was used to test hypotheses.

**Test for Hypotheses One, Two and Three**

$H_{01}$: Complaint-handling staff attitude had no significant positive influence on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

$H_{a1}$: Complaint-handling staff attitude had significant positive influence on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

$H_{02}$: Customer service waiting time had no significant positive influence on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

$H_{a2}$: Customer service waiting time had significant positive influence on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

$H_{03}$: Customer service failure compensations do not have significant positive on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

$H_{a3}$: Customer service failure compensations have significant positive on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu State Metropolis.

**Fitness Model of the Variables**

| Indicator | Coefficient |
|---|---|
| R | 0.702 |
| R Square | 0.492 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.454 |

In statistics, the relation value between the independent and dependent variables is indicated using the significance testing hence a significance number less than 0.05 which is the probability value shows a model significant in explaining the variables relations.

An analysis of variance was calculated and the results showed a statistically significant model which is translated as the independent variables supports the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) in the MTN Nigeria in Enugu State. The F statistic was also in support with a value of 12.939 and a critical value of (0.000) which is less the 0.05 significance level.

**Variance Analysis**

| Indicator | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 0.445 | 3 | 0.148 | 12.939 | 0.000 |
| Residual | 0.459 | 97 | 0.011 | | |
| Total | 0.904 | 100 | | | |

Results of the regression of coefficients in table 4.2 show a significant positive influence of complaint-handling staff attitude, customer service waiting time and service failure compensations on customer satisfaction in the MTN Nigeria Enugu metropolis since the beta coefficients obtained were 0.100, 0.240 and 0.228 respectively. This shows that a unit change in the independent variables would result to a change in the dependent variable.

**Regression Coefficients**

| Variable | B | Std.Error | t | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 1.415 | 0.15 | 9.43 | 0.000 |
| Complaint-Handling Staff Attitude | 0.100 | 0.039 | 2.551 | 0.015 |
| Customer Service waiting Time | 0.240 | 0.045 | 5.279 | 0.000 |
| Service Failure Compensations | 0.228 | 0.054 | 4.227 | 0.000 |

**Sources: Extracted from SPSS version 0.25**

**Discussion of Findings**

**Objective One:** To examine the influence of complaint-handling staff attitude on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis. The study of Cho *et al* (2022) prove that the role of consumer attitude and consumer behavior in Pakistan. All over the world every business and profit earning firm want to make their consumer loyal. Results of the study showed that customer loyalty is more dependent upon Customer satisfaction in comparison of customer retention. Customer perceived value and customer perceived quality are the major factors which contribute for the customer loyalty of Universities students for mobile handsets. Here the findings is not in consistence with current study evidence. But the study of Nadu and Kannan (2017) investigated the customer attitude and satisfaction towards direct marketing of amway products-a study with special reference to theni district in India. This study also revealed the reason for buying the Amway product with factor analyses. Random sampling and convenience sampling are used for the study.

**Objective Two:** To examine the influence of customer service waiting time on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis. With the evidence of Ateke *et al* (2021) examined production and operations management society the modern call center call centers are an increasingly important part of today's business world. In addition, as telecommunications and information technology have advanced over the past several years, the operational challenges faced by call center managers have become more complicated. Issues associated with human resources management, sales, and marketing have also become increasingly relevant to call center operations and associated academic research. The study revealed provides a survey of the recent literature on call center operations management. Along with traditional research areas, we pay special attention to new management challenges that have been caused by emerging technologies, to behavioral issues associated with both call center agents and customers, and to the interface between call center operations and sales and marketing.

**Objective Three:** To examine the influence of service failure compensations on customer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis. Wamuyu, Gichira, Wanjau, and Mung'atu (2015) studied compensation in service recovery and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Kenya. This competition and perpetual differences between the customers and the service providers leading to service failures, service recovery is an important strategy to reduce the dissonance with customers. In Kenya the hospitality industry has been characterized by poor service quality which threatens their long-term survival, thus the need for the research in order to come up with innovative strategies to improve service quality. This study used a survey approach guided by cross-sectional research design. The study was guided by compensation as the independent variable and customer

loyalty as the dependent variable. The study found out that compensation has a significant influence on customer loyalty.

**Summary of Findings**

➢ Complaint-handling staff attitude had a significant positive influence on consumer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis.

➢ Customer service waiting time had a significant positive influence on consumer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis.

➢ Service failure compensations had a significant positive influence on consumer satisfaction in MTN Nigeria in Enugu metropolis.

**Conclusion**

Based on findings, we conclude that customers of MTN will be satisfied if complaint-handling staff attitudes are good, customer service waiting time are highly reduced and customers are well compensated when they suffer injury or loss of any kind from MTN.

**Recommendations**

Based on findings, we recommend the following:

• Complaint-handling staff attitude should be improved. Complaint-handling staff should be polite, responsive, friendly and highly reliable.

• Management should do all they can to ensure that customer receive services quickly without delay. Time customers spent in waiting for service should be highly reduced.

• Management should ensure that injured customers are adequately compensated either by cash, apology and other form of compensations commensurate to the offence committed.

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