

# An Assessment Of Ethiopian Telecom Customer Satisfaction

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**Abstract-** The primary purpose of this research article was to explore Ethiopian telecom customer satisfaction levels. To attain this objective questionnaire was designed and distributed to 400 customers in Addis Ababa region and were asked regarding the customer service delivery of sole telecom service provider of the country Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (ETC). Through structured questionnaire and in-depth personal interviews with 400 Ethiopian telecom customers of both the sexes (252 male and 148 female) in and around Addis Ababa region collected the opinions on service interaction, service delivery process, customer complaint handling procedure, overall satisfaction levels and also customers opinion on improvement on telecom service providers ability in the last five years. This study used both quantitative as well qualitative survey research designs. The study measured customer satisfaction levels with recalled service encounters and the method of data collection was convenience type. The data collected was analyzed with the help of SPSS 15.0 and Microsoft Excel software packages. The findings of the analysis showed that 41% customers of ETC were dissatisfied with employees' interaction skills. Furthermore another 47% of the customers were also disappointed with customer service delivery system and 70% customers were not pleased with the Complaint Handling Procedure and its outcome. And 57% of the customers expressed overall dissatisfaction on the services provided by ETC. Furthermore 90% respondents robustly acknowledged ETC is improving tremendously in providing all kinds of services in the last five years.

**Keywords-** Customer Satisfaction Ethiopian Tele Service Encounter Service Delivery Process Complaint Handling Procedure

## I. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is one of the liveliest fields within the management field. The market place continually throws out fresh challenges, and companies must respond. It is not surprising that new marketing ideas keep budding to meet the new marketplace challenges. Marketing theory and practice developed initially in connection with physical products such as toothpastes, cars and steel. Yet one of the major mega trends has been the phenomenal growth of service. A service is any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of

anything. The perception of service marketing focuses on selling the services in the best interest of users/customers. It is concerned with a scientific and planned management of services which makes possible a fair synchronization of the interests of providers as well as the users. Services are important segment of all economies and they become increasingly more everyday life as economies develop. The size of service sector is increasing in all economies around the world.

The introduction of telecommunication services in Ethiopia dates back to 1884, seventeen years after the invention of telephone technology in the world. It was Minilik II, the King of Ethiopia, who introduced telephone technology to the country around 1884, with the installation of 477km. long telephone and telegram lines from Harar to Addis Ababa. Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (ETC) is the oldest public telecommunications operator (PTO) in Africa. It is a state owned enterprise and the sole telecom service provider in the country. The telecommunication services in Ethiopia have made rapid stride both in quality and quantity. However, the user at large are found dissatisfied with quality and quantity of the services made available to them. The process of technological sophistication has gained the momentum but the users are yet to get the quality and quantity of service (Tele Negarit, 2007).

This is an exciting time for telecommunications development, since new technologies are revolutionizing the services worldwide. These fundamental and rapid changes being experienced by telecommunication markets throughout the world are brought about among other factors primarily by the technological developments and by competition oriented reform policies. This creates different expectation on customers' perception towards the product or service of the company. In these days globalize and borderless market, responsiveness, quality and productivity are essential for the survival and growth of any organization. These factors depend mainly on the attraction and retention of customers. Customer satisfaction significantly affects company performance and survival. Thus customer orientation is the main focus for any successful business organization to be successful in the market place. In recognition of the huge challenges created by the increasing requirement for a modern telecommunications services by its customers and in response to the civil service reform program of the nation, ETC is commissioning a system overhaul.

In this research study, the focal points were to identify the real problems of customer dissatisfaction in ETC service delivery from the customers' point of view. This study

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investigated how customers evaluate the service delivery process of ETC by recalling the past six month's interaction with ETC in the process of service delivery. This research also tried to identify the interaction frustrations with the ETC frontline employees.

ETC provides national and international telecommunications services, using communication media of satellite, optical fiber, microwave, multiple access radius, very small aperture, ultra high frequency and very high frequency. Currently, it provides the following major types of service packages such as landline and wireless fixed, mobile, internet and data services for its government, business, and private and other non-government organizations which are locally and internationally. The researcher considered all categories of subscribers in order to get information regarding their evaluation of ETC service delivery and to identify the major area of dissatisfaction in service delivery activity from the point view of customers.

Unfortunately no service is ideal all of the time. During the service encounter there are a variety of things that can go wrong. Since the service provisions need real time performance, customer involvement, and people as part of the product greatly increase the chance of service failure. Service failures can be due to unprompted employee actions (e.g. rudeness), failure to respond to specific customer needs or preferences, or core service failures, e.g. unavailable or unreasonably slow service (*Bitner, 1990*). These service failures can vary in severity, frequency, and timing, resulting in dissatisfied customers (*Kelly and Davis, 1994*). Many companies have recognized their customers are valuable assets and take steps to ensure that when service failures do occur, there are processes in place to respond quickly. Service recovery consists of those actions a service provider takes in response to a service failure (*Gronroos, 1988*). *Zemke and Bell (1990)* note that a good service recovery enhances customers' perceptions of the firm's competence, the services already purchased, and the value of the organization's other offerings. As such, converting dissatisfied consumers to satisfied (i.e. recovered) customers is an important objective for most companies. Particularly, in competitive environment the types of service recovery strategies companies are using directly impact organizational profitability and future successes. Although the actual performance of services takes place in service encounters at an operational level, services management is crucial to the overall strategic and tactical management of business operations. Services have many typical features: These include the following: service are ephemeral and heterogeneous; their production, distribution, and consumption are simultaneous processes; they are essentially activities or processes; they represent a core value that is created in buyer-seller interactions; customers participate in their production; they cannot be kept in stock; many services are difficult for customers to evaluate; the time factor assumes greater importance; and there is no transfer of ownership. These characteristics reflect the essentially interactive nature of service encounters-that is, services are produced, distributed, and consumed in the

interaction between the service provider and the service receiver.

The above mentioned characteristics of service are common in telecommunications service. Even though, there are tangible physical product associated to provide service such as customer premise equipment and cable, the major product is intangible in nature and the production and consumption of the final product take place simultaneously. These characteristics reflect the essentially interactive nature of service encounters-that is, telecommunication services are produced, distributed, and consumed in the interaction between the service provider and the service receiver. The extent of customer interaction to service provider varies among service provider. Many service provider most of their activities are automated so that there is less contact to front desk personnel, however, in those companies which do not automate their service provision there is high chance of interaction between service personnel and customers. In the case of ETC, there is high degree of person-to-person interaction between front desk employees and customers.

*Service Interaction:* Interactions or Encounters between customers and employees are a critical component of service quality. This is especially true for services characterized by a high degree of person-to-person interaction and by the absence of an exchange of tangible goods. The client comes away from service interaction with feelings of satisfaction or frustration. Service encounter is an interpersonal association between the firm's staff and customers. Some service encounters are very brief and consists of just a few discrete delivery steps, however, other may extend over a long time frame and involve multiple steps. Therefore, the service encounter often begins with submitting applications requesting service and placing an order. Contact may take personal exchange between customers and service employees or impersonal interaction with machine or computer. It is difficult to improve service quality and productivity without full understanding of customer's involvement in a given service environment. This study defines the service encounter as the entire exchange between customer and service provider from the initial contact through conclusion of the exchange.

*Service Delivery Process:* Processes are the architecture of services, describing the method and sequence in which service operating systems work and how they link together to create the service experiences and outcomes that customers will value. In high-contact services, customers themselves become an integral part of the operation. Badly designed processes, often result in slow, frustrating, and poor-quality service delivery and are likely to annoy customers. Similarly, poor processes make it difficult for frontline staff to do their jobs well, result in low productivity, and increase the risk of service failures. (*Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004*). Organizations which are involved in high-contact, people-processing service sector should design highly convenient process blueprint for both frontline staff as well customers. This process blueprint should clearly prescribes the sequence of actions while service delivery. After completion of this kind of blueprint process document, organization's middle level management

should have the responsibility to oversee the service encounter stage just to know the process is implementing according to blueprint or not. If any discrepancy they have observed, they should correct it then and there itself. In the mean time organization's think tank should identify where things are particularly at risk of going wrong. From a customer perspective, the most serious fail points should be better to identify and address them with utmost care. Service delivery to customers involves decisions about where, when, and how. At the time of service delivery, there is also the possibility of delays between specific proceedings, requiring the customers to wait. Very frequently, management should identify that kind of locations and better to control the operations which are leading to delays in service delivery. Through both continuous official research and on-the-job experience, service managers can find out the nature of customer expectations at every stage of service encounter. And bring in required modification in the existing service delivery process to increase customer satisfaction. If any service firm failed to identify the loopholes in their service delivery process, it is an uphill task for them to retain the customers even though the firm is planning to introduce service recovery as a healing strategy.

Failure to ensure customer satisfaction, both initially and belatedly, through service recovery could lead to a decline in customer confidence, lost customers, negative word-of-mouth, possible negative publicity and the direct cost of re-performing the service (Berry and Parasuraman, 1992). In essence, the service firm's true test of commitment to service quality and customer satisfaction depends on how it responds after disconfirmation (Zemke and Bell, 1990). Effective managerial responses depend, however, on effective research of the phenomenon. Unfortunately, several limitations in consumer complaint behavior research have been noted.

The explanation above suggested that the importance to firms of ensuring that if something goes wrong, then there is a mechanism in place to recover it. Of greatest importance in the service recovery process is the assurance that customers have a dedicated means by which they can express their dissatisfaction. A range of techniques must be used to ensure customers have adequate means by which they can register their views. "Self-completion questionnaires" are the most commonly used of these as they are able to identify all potential problems. They may also be completed once the service has been received, either immediately or at a later date. However, if the latter option is taken and a complaint is registered, there is little an organization can do to recover the situation. Therefore a more customer-focused approach is required. Rather than to depend on the service recovery system, its better to concentrate more on curbing the minus points in the service delivery process based on old proverb "prevention is better than cure".

To ensure customers are satisfied, staff members can be selected to walk around the service area checking that all needs are being properly met. This ensures that customers can voice their dissatisfaction in an environment where the

situation may be considered and rectified. It is here that a professional and efficient service recovery process operates. Successful service recovery strategies can restore customer satisfaction and can also influence other important organizational outcomes including loyalty, positive and negative word of mouth behavior, and profitability. Poorly executed service recovery tends to exacerbate customer dissatisfaction, may drive customers to competing firms and, at the very least, encourages customers to badmouth the organization.

#### *Customer Complaint Handling Procedure and Its Outcome*

Most of the organizations in these days have treated customer handling procedure as a strategic marketing tool. Service providers are frequently exhorted to strive towards a "zero defects" service; the ability to "get it right first time" is thought to offer significant benefits to organizations in terms of both customer evaluations and costs of delivery (Schaefer and Christine, 2005). If any organization is striving for zero defects, they need not give that much importance for complaint handling sections. In practice, it is often difficult to imagine how service providers can attain such a goal, not least because of the inherent heterogeneity in service provision and limitations on the extent to which a provider can control the range of different interactions with customers. In general, customers are complaining with four major ideas like to get compensation, find expression for their anger, and help to improve the service and for unselfish reasons. Service organizations should build up the culture of straightforwardly to invite the complaints with a motive to improve the service and with selfless reasons. And at the same time, organizations should be cautious enough about the complaining nature of some consumers with an intention to demand compensation and spoil company image.

Whatever the reason in the customer mind behind the complaining nature, that is irrelevant to the organization. Their main accountability is to genuinely solve the complaint and be successful in explaining the reasons for that in a convincing way. However service businesses in advance clearly recognize the various reasons behind the complaining nature of the market and should devise special strategies to give a legitimate reason. And another important element in this aspect, organizations has to develop complaint procedure with minimum of fuss. If customers are treating complaint procedure is too lengthy and clumsy, it will also affect the performance of entire organization. Thus, organizations should be very watchfully design the complaint procedure with minimum of paper work. Related to the outcome of the complaints, market has one strong notion i.e. result always in favor of organization whatever the problem, who ever the reason for that. The market is feeling that they are not treated fairly and far away for adequate justice. This kind of belief in the market is more dangerous for any business in the present day's highly cut-throat competitive business world. Therefore, while analyzing the complaints, service firms' complaint handling sections should be more vigilant in finding the legitimate reasons and also the responsibility to provide ample justice to the customers' community. This class of legitimate judgment will give great confidence in the minds of

customers while solving their indisputable problems and in turn increase the image of the firm. Finally, service firms should be better to realize the importance of complaint handling procedure and its outcome and also well again to bring into play this one as a strategic marketing tool to accomplish the benefits such as customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, favorable word-of-mouth publicity, and to decrease litigation.

*Customer Satisfaction:* The concept of customer satisfaction occupies a central position in marketing thought and practice. Many companies today are aiming for TCS- Total Customer Satisfaction. Satisfaction is a major outcome of marketing activity and serves to link processes culminating in purchase and consumption with post purchase phenomena such as attitude change, repeat purchase and brand loyalty. Satisfaction is defined as a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under-or-over-fulfillment (Oliver, 1981). According to Tse and Wilton (1988), satisfaction is the consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption. Attitude also shapes consumer expectations and expectations are, therefore, either positively or negatively inclined. Expectations, according to the disconfirmation paradigm, exert an important influence on customer satisfaction with the service encounter and thus on service quality perceptions (Bitner, 1990). Customer satisfaction will occur only through conscious efforts to alter the way the firm's approach to work. Service firms must not only change their attitudes but also change the way they organize their effort. Therefore, organizations must rethink how they do business as customers move from the periphery to center stage, old ways of doing business no longer work. Every company would be wise to measure customer satisfaction regularly because one key to customer retention is customer satisfaction. Understanding what customers expect from a service organization is necessary for service managers, because expectations provide a standard of comparison against which consumers judge an organization's performance. Customers of services have expectations about what they will receive from the delivery system. Undoubtedly, customer satisfaction is the key to survival and thriving in the competitive time is to win the customer and to keep them in our service or product range. Obsession with customer satisfaction is what driving change is today particularly in service sector. Customer satisfaction will occur only through conscious efforts to alter the way we approach our service delivery process. Service companies must not only change their attitudes towards market but also change their way in providing services with market expected parameters like quality, reliability, tangible evidences, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, price, availability, accessibility, etc. Therefore, organizations in general, service firms in particular must rethink how they do business as customers move from the periphery to center stage, old ways of doing business no longer work.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since 2005, Ethiopian Tele has initiated a corporation wide reform program to overhaul its entire system. To facilitate this reform program the corporation has undertaken Business Process Reengineering to bring radical changes and Quick Win to make incremental change. The main component and the first priority for this program was the reengineering of the customer service delivery at a corporate level. Even though the reform program has been undertaken to curb the customer dissatisfaction, the company records shows that customer complaints are increasing. Since customers are the cornerstone of any organization, therefore, considering the views of customer expectation is a tantamount in service delivery for Ethiopian Tele service provider.

The principal objective of this research is to explore issues related to Ethiopian telecom customers' satisfaction levels from the point view of customers. More specifically, to investigate the causes of customer dissatisfaction across service encounters related to all kinds of telecom services rendered by Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation. This study used a quantitative survey recall research design to recognize their satisfaction levels and also used personal interview method just to collect the views about the reasons for their dissatisfaction. Structured questionnaire were used for primary data collection. The questionnaires were translated to local language Amharic. Research participants were drawn from existing customers of all services of ETC. The method of data collection was convenience type. The research was conducted in four zonal offices found in Addis Ababa.

The sample frame for this study selected was only the present Ethiopian telecom customers which are living in and around the country's capital Addis Ababa. The sample size was 400 customers, out of which 252 male and 148 female customers who were randomly selected from different telecom services viz. mobile, landline, internet, and data services. Mostly these were selected based on the issues like willingness and the time allotted by the respondents for the collection of information. Data was collected at various areas of Addis Ababa City. Data was analyzed by using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The analysis was completely done on the basis of data and information collected from four hundred respondents (252 male and 148 female in sex composition) through questionnaires and personal interviews. Statistical analysis techniques frequency was applied to compute percentages and other quantitative data to analyze and interpret the outputs. The analysis was done using frequency distribution and percentages to show which part of the service delivery were more accountable for the dissatisfaction of customers in ETC. Data manipulation was done by using SPSS 15.0 and also Microsoft Excel software packages. The secondary sources of information included data from the company records, library and internet search. This research covered only the customer's service delivery in four Addis Ababa zonal offices (North Addis Ababa, East Addis Ababa, Central Addis Ababa, and South Addis Ababa Zones). It

does not include the point view of ETC employees. This study was unable to include the views of other parts of Ethiopian telecom customers due to time and resource constraints. As far as the research is designed to be undertaken from the point views of customers, therefore, some respondents may probably bias in filling questionnaires.

### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The customers at different parts of the country's capital were asked to fill questionnaires to evaluate ETC service

Table: Analysis of Considered Parameters for Ethiopian Telecom Customer Satisfaction

Considered Parameters	Male		Female		Total	
	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)
1. Service Interaction	53	47	70	30	59	41
2. Service Delivery Process	48	52	60	40	53	47
3. Customer Compliant Handling Procedure and its Outcome	20	80	48	52	30	70
4. Overall Customer satisfaction Level	37	63	54	46	43	57
5. Last 5 Years Service improvement	92	8	89	11	90	10

**Service Interaction:** Out of 400 respondents, only 41 per cent expressed their dissatisfaction about the interactive expertise of the front desk employees of the Ethiopian Telecom. One important point in this facet, when compared to female customers, male customers were more dissatisfied about the service interaction skills of the sole telecom service provider of Ethiopia. This means the frontline employees were showing clear variation while interacting with the male customers. This should be curbed by the middle level management with careful introduction of change in the minds of front desk people. In our qualitative research, most of the respondents said employees were more mechanical and straight to the point while clearing or giving information about telecom services. Some of the respondents expressed doubts about the product/service knowledge, interactive and problem solving abilities of the frontline employees of the corporation.

**Customer Service Delivery Process:** Another 47 per cent respondents articulated their displeasure on service delivery process. They were treated the process has lot of complications and clumsy one in the areas of applying, and receiving telecom service, bill payments etc. This means market is expecting certain changes in the service delivery process of Ethiopian telecom. Based on the expectations of

delivery system. Those who are willing to fill the questionnaire were only approached. The questions which were asked to know the satisfaction levels about employees' interaction, service delivery processes, customer complaint handling procedure and its outcome, overall evaluation of customers' satisfaction and finally about improvement of service quality in the last five years.

the market, ETC's think tank should be better to study the clumsy parts of the existing service delivery process and if they observe any duplication at any area, it is better to get rid of that kind of activity to save the time and effort of both their employees as well customers.

**Customer Complaint Handling Procedure and its Outcome:** Significantly 70 per cent of customers uttered their unhappiness about this issue. They were thinking complaint handling procedure was lengthy and time taking, most of the timings the outcome also in favor of service provider. The Ethiopian telecom market was feeling that they were not treated fairly and far away for adequate justice while handling their complaints. This means a serious thinking is required from the top officials on complaint handling procedure and its outcome to regain the confidence among the customers as well to bring in the benefits like customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and positive publicity and also to minimize litigations.

**Overall Satisfaction Level:** About 57 per cent respondents conveyed their disappointment on the overall performance of the telecommunications corporation of Ethiopia. This means it should be healthier to identify the areas which led to this kind of dissatisfaction and introduce complete overhaul to recover the situation. The researcher identified some areas of dissatisfaction particularly service quality,

tariff structure, service encounter, service delivery process, bill payment areas, complaint handling procedure, after sales service etc. through his qualitative research. The Ethiopian telecom service provider has already working on above areas which has led to great customer dissatisfaction with the support of overhauling of most of the existing plans, procedures, programs, strategies, policies and even budgets also.

*Service Providing Ability:* In the entire 400 respondents, 90 percent expressed confident opinion about the improvement of service providing ability of the telecom corporation in the last five years. The majority of the customers even now has treated ETC's services are the voice of Ethiopians. But some respondents opined that the pace of improvement in providing quality telecom service is not sufficient when compared to the speed of improvement in the telecom world. Most of the Ethiopian telecom customers are totally in high spirits with the way the telecom service provider improves its telecom infrastructure, service quality, service recovery strategies for maximizing their customer satisfaction levels. In their thoughts, Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporations is shining and number one service provider in the entire African continent. Keep it up ETC.

#### IV. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

The current study provides insights to telecom corporation's higher officials about the customer dissatisfaction areas in providing quality telecom services. Because of significant dissatisfaction percentage levels among customers, ETC's think tank need to seriously evaluate its customer service delivery system in the first phase. Particularly, the service delivery processes require more attention from the top officials and it will need to undertake redesigning just speeding up processes and weeding out unnecessary steps to avoid wastage of time and effort of both employees as well customers. And in the second phase, ETC has to concentrate on staffing and training of frontline employees and their interactive marketing skills. Furthermore it is better to introduce complete changes in customer complaint handling system and its outcome by giving clear cut instructions to the concerned sections for legitimate evaluations on customer complaints. Finally, the corporation is also supposed to assign an overriding priority to the Total Quality Management that focuses on quality technologies, quality employees, quality maintenance, and quality environmental conditions at work to achieve Total Customer Satisfaction.

*Conclusion:* In view of the above, the boardroom, senior professionals, the marketing and maintenance professionals are required to assign due weightage to the areas of dissatisfaction and introduce radical changes in their existing practices for meeting the telecom needs of the country. Just like world telecom giants, Ethiopian Telecom Corporation also better to make every effort for Total Customer Satisfaction (TCS) by expecting the clear

attitudinal changes among the existing customers for retaining them. For this they have to once again review their existing plans, policies, procedures, programs, strategies, and even budgets for offering confident and market expected telecom services to win the hearts of the 76 million Ethiopian people. All the best to the Africa's oldest telecom service provider: Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation.

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