QUALITY DIMENSIONS, VALUE, SERVICE COST AND RECOMMENDATION BEHAVIOUR: EVIDENCE FROM THE NIGERIAN CELLULAR INDUSTRY

*ABOLAJI JOACHIM ABIODUN, KENNETH SOLA ADEYEMI,
ADEWALE OMOTAYO OSIBANJO*

Covenant University, Nigeria

Abstract

The present study proposed and test a model that connects both affective and cognitive factors in cellular service to customers' recommendation behavior. Results of the analysis of data collected through questionnaire from 293 respondents with cellular phones and active account in the Nigerian cellular industry indicate that core cellular service dimensions, service cost (price) and hedonic values are significant determinants of customers' recommendation behavior. In addition, the study found that customer service and utilitarian value exert negative effect on recommendation behavior. It seems that strengthening the performance of service providers on core service attributes, service cost (price) and the entertainment and emotion evoking aspects of cellular service is of more value in partnering with customer to enlarge customer base through recommendation.

1. Introduction

There is a growing recognition of the pivotal role of cellular communication in the economic landscape of most countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Accessibility, low cost and ease of use largely account for the increased adoption of cellular communication, even among the poor and less educated segment of the populace. Indeed, cellular communication has revolutionized the way people live and relate in close and culturally knit societies that exist in most societies in the region. Besides, it has proved to be a veritable panacea in circumventing the seemingly intractable transportation problems which are the result of the poor urban and regional planning approaches of succeeding governments in the region. Consequently, cellular industry in the region can be aptly described as a growth industry with increasing potentials buoyed by the socio-cultural orientation of the people, the rising levels of disposable income of families and the huge market at the bottom of the pyramid.

The growth and potentials of cellular industry has attracted the interests of government, business communities and academic researchers' interest. Government sets the regulatory framework that guides competitive conduct of operators, protects customers and increases competition; researchers attention on the other hand are been focused on different aspect of the industry (Oyeniyi and Abiodun, 2008, 2010, Abiodun and Oyeniyi, 2012; Oghojafor, Mesikez, Omoera, and Bakare, 2012.). It has been argued that the industry in Nigeria in particular has attracted national and international cellular providers. The industry's competitive landscape is characterized by intense competition as a result of new customers in new geographical areas, product and service duplication, customers' defection or switching, new system features, schemes and technological advancement in services. Service providers are interested in painstakingly building sustainable competitive advantage that enhances their financial performance.

These unique characteristics of the cellular market have not only made quality in service delivery critically important but have indicated these as drivers of customers' satisfaction and recommendation behavioural intentions. From strategy standpoint, service quality attributes are critical input to a firms' resource allocation strategy and quality improvement efforts (Gustafsson and Johnson, 2004).

Traditionally, cellular firms differ in their ability to develop competitive tactics around key service features in order to secure a link with customers' satisfaction; and satisfied customers' base in order to establish partnership in enlarging the market size. However, quality is a multi-dimensional construct and the general antecedents have been studied across industries as well as the interconnection between service quality and customers satisfaction. Indeed, customer satisfaction as a function of the consequence of quality is not a flawed presumption nor is it out-of-range that satisfaction should affect post-purchase behaviours. However, the inter-connections between cognitive factors such as service quality, customers' satisfaction, recommendations' intentions and affective factors: hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of value in the cellular industry have not, in general, been well documented empirically in literature from transition economies in Africa. Therefore, in terms of statistical evidence, little seems, to exist regarding how service quality and affective factors like hedonic and utilitarian dimensions relate to recommendations' behavioural intentions.

The dearth of empirical studies integrating these concepts cannot be compensated for by the fact that similar studies exist in developed economies. This argument becomes valid because accepting theories and theoretical interconnections of other cultures without empirical validation in other climes especially in transition economies such as we have in sub-Saharan Africa where unique cultures significantly impact on customers' behaviour, may not be appropriate (Lai, Griffin and Babin, 2009).

Therefore, the present study extends cellular communication research in Nigeria and examines the interconnections between cognitive factors such as quality dimensions, service cost and recommendation behavioural intention and affective dimensions of values. The objective of the current research is to provide an insight into quality of service dimensions as drivers of customers' recommendation behaviours and the interconnections of affective factors with cognitive aspect of cellular service. A guiding question is: do cognitive and affective factors significantly relate or determine recommendation behaviours in the cellular industry?

2. Conceptual Development and Hypotheses
2.1. Service Quality and Recommendation Intention
Conceptually, service quality is often viewed as a set of service dimensions evaluated relative to customers' expectations and perceptions (Schembri and Sandberg, 2011). The implication

is that, quality is the outcome of an evaluation of several attributes of a service, primarily controlled by a supplier (Baker and Crompton 2000). Consequently, according to Petrick (2004), quality is conceptualized as a measure of the provider's performance.

The increasing importance of the service sector in national economies has made service quality an important concept in the literature. Indeed, quality has become a strategic concern in service industry (Byers and Lederer, 2001; Vanniarajan and Gurunathan, 2009). In order to better understand the antecedent and consequence of competitive advantage and strengthen post-purchase behavior, it is often considered important to measure service quality as a core variable (Palmer and Cole, 1995; Zahorik and Rust, 1992). For example, studies seem to hold service quality as an indicator of customers' satisfaction which is being related to post purchase behaviours like loyalty, word-of-mouth or re-purchase behaviours (Lee, Lee and Yoo, 2008; Festus and Hsu,2006).

High quality, it seems, correlate with high customers' satisfaction (Cronin, Brady and Hult, 2000), albeit, the relative importance of service quality factors on customer satisfaction is found to differ across different service industries (Vanniarajan, et al, 2009). However, Lai, et al, 2009 posited that the connection between quality and satisfaction hold across cultures; and these provide more explanation to variance in customers' loyalty. A predominant view in literature is that service quality drives customer satisfaction indicating that satisfaction and recommendation are normally considered as higher order constructs (Brady and Robertson, 2001; Lai et al, 2009).

Conceptually, quality is adjudged and expressed through basic features and attributes of a product or service. Customers' perception of providers' performance on key attributes of cellular communication services defines overall quality. Quality or performance perceived is the outcome of experience of interacting with various dimensions and attributes of cellular services. Attributes of cellular services may be taken to include inter alia; call clarity, network coverage, price structure and customer support service (Kim, 2000; Kim, Park and Jeong 2004).

Quality in the context of cellular communications industry extend the traditional definition of service quality to incorporate aspects that are relevant to cellular services (Kheiry and Alirezapour, 2012). Customer service may be distinguished from core service component in that it supports core service element by providing care, intimacy and communication to strengthen service performance perceptions (Gremler, 1995). It is cellular service provider strategic effort at securing interpersonal relationship built on recurrent interaction with customers. Customers' response to service attributes provides organizations and its members' feedback about performance and serves as input in customers' retention and management of post-purchase behaviours (Turner and Krizek, 2006).

According to Turner et al (2006), feedback from customers' satisfaction provides organizational stakeholder information that has potential for customers' retention as well as the development of new ones. Literature indicates that satisfaction with service dimensions, affects individuals' motivations to recommend services or products (Lam, Shankar, Erramilli and Murthy, 2004, Morgan and Rego, 2006). Indeed, customers who have positive post-service impression about service features are willing to recommend services to others (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal and Evans 2006). Indeed, subscribers' recommendations to others are positive and desirable outcome of service experience which from service providers' perspective indicate subscribers' commitment to partner with providers in enlarging the market. Research evidences suggest the cost of attracting new customers and increased saturation of the market has made customers' recommendations to others a strategic option for telecommunication providers (Abiodun, Oyeniyi and Osibanjo, 2012)

2.2 Hedonic and Utilitarian Values

Literature is in agreement with conventional wisdom that perceived value should be related to post-service positive impression or satisfaction. Research evidence shows that the perceived value by customer correlates with satisfaction (Oh, 2000) and customers' satisfaction becomes more managerially useful in the light of integration with perceived value (Woodruff, 1997). Preponderance of evidence is that, perceived value holds more explanatory power to repurchase intention than quality or satisfaction (Cronin, Brady, and Hult 2000; Oh, 2000). Value for cellular services may be for utilitarian or hedonic purpose. Utilitarian value is task-related and rational such as the accomplishment of work or business-related calls, time saving-device or emergencies (Batra and Ahtola, 1991, Babin, et al, 1994, Aoki and Downes, 2003).

Materials are often acquired at least, in part, for their usefulness; other higher purposes for such acquisition are, in most cases, considered secondary. Hedonic value relates to responses evoked during service experience; it is both personal and subjective and results from fun and playfulness (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, Babin et al, 1994). In line of the logic of Maslow's motivations theory, hedonic values may assume additional dimension of importance in affecting behavior if the utilitarian aspects have been reasonably satisfied. For example, if many cellular providers compare reasonably on basic communications aspect of the competitive domain may reside on the hedonic aspect of their services.

The entertainment and emotional content of cellular services constitute the hedonic worth, such as example enjoyment and chat with friends (Lee and Murphy, 2006). However, while we may assume that the utilitarian value should be most prominent customers' need in cellular services, the advent of hedonic-friendly hand-held devices and providers' emphasis clearly indicates hedonic potentials of cellular services. Consequently, determining the antecedent of satisfaction in cellular phone use, should include the consideration of both utilitarian and hedonic aspect given the cultural and family orientation of some societies. Studies indicate that, youth tend to show higher hedonic consumption of cellular services (Wajcman and Beaton, 2004. Lee et al, 2008).

Understanding users' evaluation of cellular services ought to integrate both the cognitive aspect such as quality and the affective factors since service providers have shown more intense use of both factors in competitive conduct. Based on the preceding literature evidence, the following research model and hypotheses have been proposed for empirical verification.

H_1: Service costs (prices) positively affect recommendation behavior in the cellular industry.

H_2: Core service dimensions are significant predictor of recommendation behavior.

H_3: Customer service is a significant predictor of recommendation behavior in the cellular industry.

H_4: Utilitarian value of cellular service is a significant explanatory variable of recommendation behavior.

H_5: Hedonic value exert significant predictive power on recommendation behavior.

The proposed correlation between these hypotheses can be seen from the high-level view in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Proposed Research Model
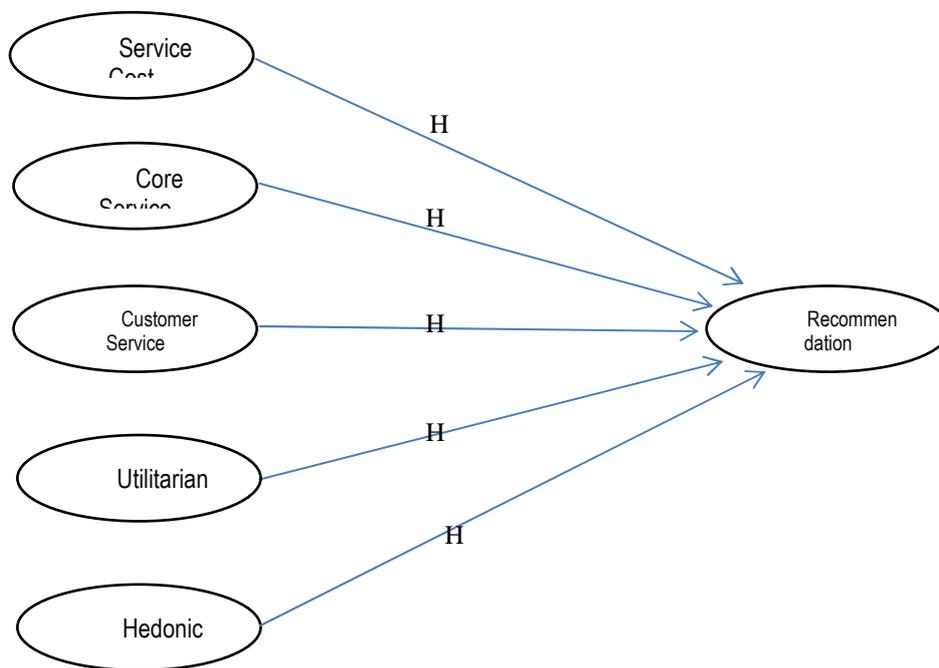
3. Materials and Methods

Consistent with the study's focus, we utilized survey research design. Survey research design was adopted because it is not only economical but feasible in addressing the research problem of interest. Data for the study was obtained from two hundred and ninety three (293) respondents with cellular phones and active accounts in Lagos, the commercial and economic capital of Nigeria, and at another location on the outskirt of the city.

The choice of these study locations is largely purposeful and influenced by the heterogeneous nature the population which is more or less a miniature of the country with most tribes in the country represented. Furthermore, the outskirt location in the area has a private university within its environ. Indeed, the population in these conveniently-sampled locations can be described as not only socially heterogeneous but homogeneous in terms of awareness and use of cellular services with somewhat refined taste or service expectations from cellular providers. We may as well describe these locations as pacesetters in cellular usage and expectations of improved services. Thus, the study area is made up of people who are conversant with the assortment of providers' cellular service offerings.

Respondents in this study, in most cases, subscribe to and utilize the services of more than one service providers. The advent of multi-sim hand-held terminals and reduced call rates within a network had largely encouraged this practice. These practices among subscribers impose significant competitive pressures on cellular providers as they strive for retention of subscribers and tactical moves to make their network the preferred choice. Respondents' argument for simultaneously subscribing to more than one service provider is premised on the need to hedge against erratic call signals and call drops.

In most developing economy where telecommunications providers need to provide energy that power fixed communication equipment, call drops and erratic signals are common phenomenon. It may, therefore, be reasonable to accept the evaluative opinions of these respondents as valid expression of their evaluation of the perceptions of cellular services in

the industry (Osuagwu, 2003). Besides, it indicate respondents' judgments of service providers' performance on the dimensions specified in the research instrument.

The research instrument utilized in the data collection was a set of structured questionnaire focused on key research variables in the study. The variables were developed from literature and supported by anecdotal and empirical evidence: service quality dimensions, value (hedonic and utilitarian), service cost and recommendations' behavioural intentions.

Each of the main variables was measured using multi-item indices with each item scaled on a 7-point likert scale to enable respondents indicate the intensity of their reactions for each item. Service quality was operationalized along two main sub-dimensions: customer service and core components of cellular service, for example, voice clarity over the network, call drop during calls, network coverage, among others. Customers' services relate to the competence, responsiveness, information quality and complaints handling procedures of customers' service personnel. These service dimensions are normally specified in service literature as indicator of quality in service. The logic is that although cellular users may not regularly interact with customer service personnel, one or two unpleasant encounters or poor complaints handling procedure may impact negatively on customers' perceptions of service and influence subsequent decisions or relationship with the provider.

In a transition economy with significant proportion of the populace on or below poverty line, the cost of service has implications for the acquisition, use and continuity of cellular service and may be a potent determinant of subscribers' satisfaction or quality perception. Some of the questionnaire items were adapted from measure validated from prior studies. These items, however, were adapted with reference to the context of the present studies, therefore, the question items designed for the study benefited immensely from literature, specifically from the works of Babin et al,1994, Stone, Good and Baker-Eveleth, 2007, Eshghi, Haughton and Topi, 2007, Bhattacherjee, 2001).

Question items on hedonic and utilitarian values were scaled so that respondents could react to the frequency to which they found cellular service usage as task- related or the use evoked emotions or they enjoyed the entertainment content. Scale identification was slightly varied so that 'not at all' was ascribed 1 and 'always' was ascribed 7. The costs of cellular services scaled included call rates and charges, short messages (sms) charges and internet charges.

Generally, all the items showed good reliability results as indicated by the Cronbach alpha scores which ranged from 0.8 to 0.9: core service (0.89), service cost (0.84), customer service (0.93), recommendation intention (0.93), hedonic value (0.82), and utilitarian value (0.80). We may reasonably conclude that the factor possesses adequate convergence. Data analysis procedure was done with SPSS version 19.0 for windows and AMOS 19.0 software was also utilized to perform statistical analysis of some aspect of the data set. In addition, the overall fit of the study model was assessed using various fit indices.

4. Results and Discussion

As shown in table 1, the effective sample for the study consists of 128 males and 165 females, indicating that 56.3% of the respondents were females. The profile of the sample indicates that 225 respondents are above 20years with 129 respondents or 44% of the sample located in the articulate age group of 30 and above. In terms of value, these age groups are more likely to emphasize the hedonic aspect in their usage of cellular service. Significant proportions of the respondents are married (45%) or had been in married relationship at a time (19 respondents are divorcees) with 48% of the sample been unmarried. Most of the respondents have means of livelihood: paid employment, 100 (34%); self-employed, 74(25%) and

students, 119 (40%). With reference to the background of participants in the study and subject to usual limitations associated with the research approach utilized, the sample may be considered as representing a rich data set.

Table 1 – Sample Profile

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	< 20 years	68	23.2
	21 – 40 years	163	55.6
	41 and above	62	21.2
Gender	Males	128	43.7
	Females	165	56.3
Marital Status	Married	142	48.5
	Single	132	45.1
	Once married (divorced)	19	6.5
Employment Status	Paid/Salaried Job	100	34.1
	Self-employed/un-salaried job	74	25.3
	Students/unemployed	119	40.6

The result of the structural models with standardized parameter estimates as schematically presented below indicate the hypothesized impact of the study variables on recommendations behavior (see figure 2) . The model as conceptualized, reasonably indicates that the latent variables in the study showed moderate explanatory power for recommendation behavior in the cellular industry. The model showed that service costs, customers service, hedonic value, utilitarian value, and core service dimensions account for 64% of variance of recommendation behaviours. Overall, the values of the fit index indicate that the research model did not achieve acceptable fit on some indices as common in studies.

Notwithstanding, more indices suggest that overall it is an acceptable model fit which compared favourably or better than model fit indices in similar studies (Kim et al, 2004, Ali, Waseemullah, Ahmed and Akram, 2009). The fit index indicates the following result: (RMSEA=0.09, CMIN/df=3.272, CFI= 0.902, IFI=.902). Minimum was achieved in the model with Chi-square = 648.453, d/f = 174, P = .000; traditionally, we would want a non-significant Chi-square value, however, it is argued that Chi-square is not a very good fit index in practice, because it is affected by sample and model size. The CMIN/df value of 3.272 indicates the acceptability of model fit as the value is within the acceptable CMIN/df value limit of less than 5 (Schumaker and Lomax, 2004, Kremelberg, 2011).

The research model proposed that service features or attributes, perceived value and cost (price) are significant predictors of customers' willingness to recommend cellular services.

The parameter estimates (standardized, figure 2 and regression weight, table 2) indicate that cellular providers' performance on core cellular service dimensions is the most significant predictor (H2:β= 0.458, p<001) with service cost or price (H1:β= 0.452,p<0.001); and hedonic value (β=0.383,p<0.005) being next in predictive ability of customers recommendation. Generally, the variables considered in the study exert statistically significant effect on customers' recommendation behaviours with service cost, core service and hedonic value being the significant predictors of recommendation behavior.

Customers support service activities (H$_3$) of the cellular providers and the utilitarian value (H$_4$) customers derived from cellular use were found to exert negative predictive influence on recommendations. However, the hypothesized impact of customer service is not statistically significant.

Figure 2 - Structural Model with Standardized Parameter Estimates
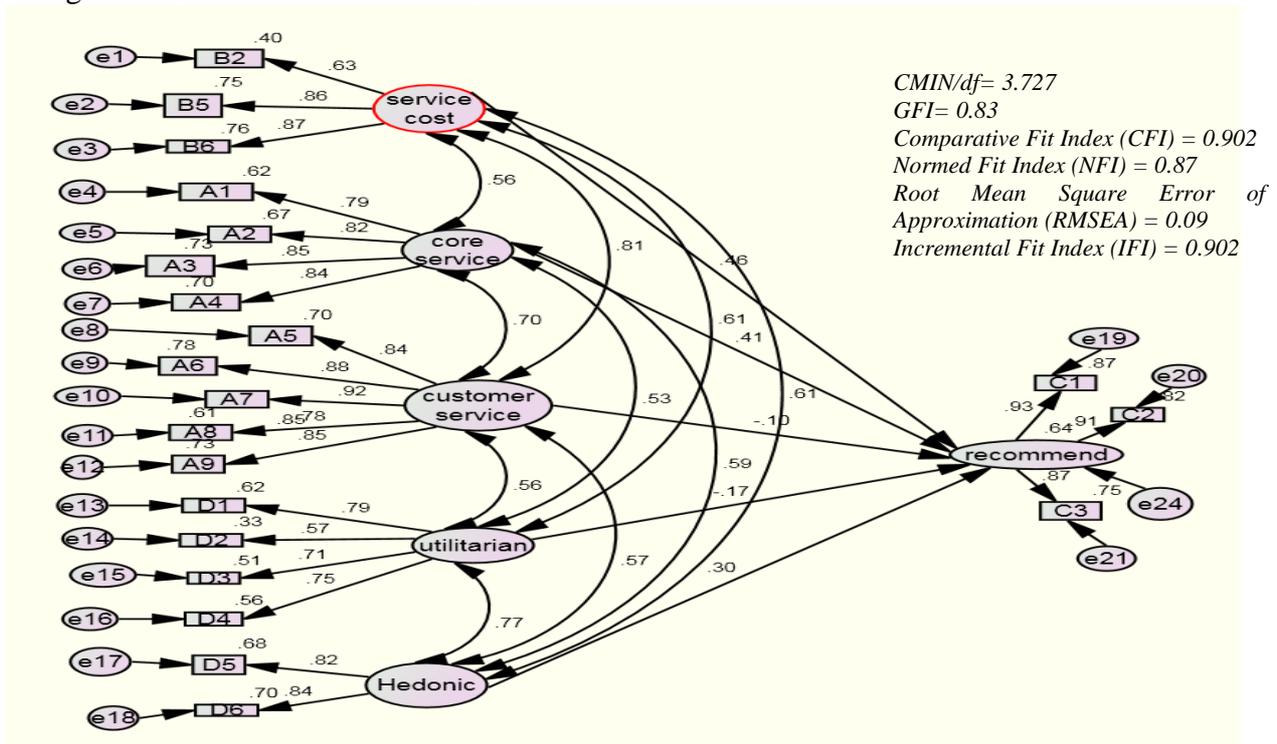
These variables (H3: customer service β= -0.096, p> 0.1; H4: utilitarian value β= -0.197, p<0.005) does not positively impact or engender customers' willingness to recommend, suggesting some mediating variables would be required to convert them to recommendations behavior. However, if the prevailing assumption that customer satisfaction as a lower construct to recommendation is accepted, the result here seems inconsistent with earlier studies which found positive relationship between customer support services and customer satisfaction (Ali et al, 2009; Kim et al, 2004).

Table 2 - Summary of Research Hypotheses Result

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypotheses
Recom ← Hedonic	.383	.125	3.068	.002	H5 Accept
Recom ← Customer_Service	-.096	.097	-.991	.322	H3 Reject
Recom ← Core_Service	.458	.084	5.428	***	H2 Accept
Recom ← Utilitarian	-.197	.110	-1.799	.072	H4 Reject
Recom ← Service_Cost	.452	.099	4.542	***	H1 Accept

The finding, however, corroborates the assertion that satisfied customer may not become loyal nor subsequently recommend (Jones and Sasser 1995). Indeed, in most transition economies cellular providers are reasonably comparable with respect to customer services activities; therefore, the contributory roles of customer support activities in securing competitive advantage may not be that significant. Hedonic value (H5) has significant direct effect on recommendation behavior than utilitarian value (H4) of cellular services which showed an inverse or negative predictive relationship. Customers seem to value the entertainment content and emotions evoked by the use of cellular services such that, the utilitarian aspect is taken for granted. A cellular service, by nature, is expected to fulfill utilitarian value that customers may perhaps only take notice of, if it fails on that line. Or the

best explanation could be found in the culture and unique nuclear and extended family system that prevail in the setting of the study.

5. Managerial Implications and Conclusion

The main thrust of the study is to relate both affective and cognitive factors in service management to recommendation behaviour in the cellular industry. Evidently, company's performances on key service attribute indicates perceived quality, therefore, the study provides practical insight to the interconnection between service attributes and the beneficial impact of service attributes in making customers' base partner in enlarging the market of the cellular industry. The implication for service management is that customers' perceptions of company's performance on key dimension of service attributes is an important antecedent of recommendation behavior which further serves as a strategic driver of product and service diffusion; and a source of competitive strength.

Competitive advantage through recommendation or partnership with customer base may be derived from effective performance on core service dimensions. However, similarity in augmented service packages (customer service) may not offer real advantage in terms of securing customers' recommendation. In addition, perceived task-related or utilitarian value of cellular service is weak as a tool for ensuring that service providers' customer base partner in enlarging the market. Subscribers, possibly, take the utilitarian aspect for granted when providers' performances on this aspect are comparatively similar.

Hedonic dimension of value, on the contrary, indicates beneficial customer recommendation advantage which suggests the need for cellular providers to monitor performance not only on key cellular features but also the entertainment and emotion-evoking features of their service. Indeed, the direct effect of the hedonic aspect of cellular service on recommendation behavior indicates that subscribers may be significantly influenced to recommend cellular service by considerations that are neither economic, functional nor task related. It seems evident that given the cultural and economic settings within which cellular companies perform on service attributes and service cost (price), the hedonic aspect of value is a strategic building block to customers' recommendation behavior or partnership with customer for market expansion. It may be reasonable to suggest that one of the competitive domain for cellular service providers seem to be in the hedonic aspect of their services. Consequently, it may be suggested that management need to focus its effort in enhancing the entertainment and emotion evoking aspects of cellular service as means to securing subscribers partnership for market expansion.

Future research effort may seek to explore the impact of demographic variables such as income, age, gender and culture on hedonic aspects of cellular service. Hedonic aspects of cellular service might show varied impact on recommendation behavior among different age groups, culture or income levels. Both managers and academics will benefit from empirical insight of the effect of hedonic value which might show variations across age on income levels.

Key to Research Variables

A1	Network coverage	B6	Internet Charges
A2	Calls clarity	C1	Recommend to friends and relations
A3	Network availability	C2	Recommend to acquaintances
A4	Connectivity without call dropping	C3	Explain benefits to friends and others
A5	Personalized attention	D1	Use only services I must
A6	Courtesy	D2	Use to accomplish goals
A7	Competence	D3	Use services I really need
A8	Communication of network's technical problem	D4	Use mainly for work related issues
A9	Customer service willingness to resolve complaints	D5	Enjoy use of mobile services
B2	Call rates and Charges	D6	In comparison time used on mobile is truly enjoyable
B5	SMS charges		

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