



Research Article

An Analysis of the Implementation of the Factors of Customer Retention by Nepal Telecom

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Abstract

The world is travelling in information era where information is the essential element for every individual, institution, society and country. Communication of information is done by every individual to perform their daily activities, so the mobile telecommunication service has become a basic need where everybody needs telecommunication services. From the latest MIS Report of Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA), Market Penetration Rate (MPR) for mobile service 134.41%, which clearly indicates that the number of mobile service users has surpassed the population, and this actually means, at least mathematically, that there are no more people who aren't using a mobile service in the market. This also means that there are no new customers for mobile service as they must be a new customer to us churning out from some other mobile service provider. Additionally, the data of MPR above 100% means the mobile market has reached the saturation level. When a market becomes highly saturated it's not only hard to find a new customer, but also costly to get a new customer. Now, the main focus of every company is about retention of customers. Customer retention will be more and more crucial for survival of the company in the mobile telecommunication sector in upcoming days. There are different factors of influence of a customer retention like price, service quality, promotion mix, innovation and customer care. This study will analyze the implementation of the factors of customer retention by Nepal Telecom.

Keywords: Customer retention; Customer Loyalty; Nepal Telecom (NT)

Introduction

Background of the Subject

Customer Retention is the process to hold customer for being churned and to make them repurchase our service repeatedly by satisfying them. Customer Retention was never an issue to Nepal Telecom before the telecommunications sector was liberalized and opened up to competition. In those days, even the unsatisfied customer

had to stick to the only service providing company. Now the scenario has been changed.

At present, the mobile telecommunication sector has numerous operators making the sector highly competitive among each others. Customers have choices to choose any operator they feel is right and valuable for them. The customer we have today may not remain with us forever until and unless we work to hold them. Once a market leader in mobile phone company NOKIA CEO Stephen told "we

Cite this article as:

P. Thapa (2018) Int. J. Soc. Sc. Manage. Vol. 5, Issue-3: 89-97. DOI: [10.3126/ijssm.v5i3.20408](https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v5i3.20408)

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Peer reviewed under authority of IJSSM

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didn't do anything wrong, but somehow, we lost "when they dramatically loss all their business. So we need to think that **today might be favorable for us, but tomorrow we might get wiped out.**

In such a rapidly changing market trend, we may not get a chance to hear the alarm coming from the competitors. Our life are customers, if we are not able to retain customer it is for sure we are digging our own grave.

Statement of the Problem

Mobile Penetration Rate (MPR) in most of the Asian countries has crossed 100% or is about to cross 100 % which is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Countries by Number of Mobile Phones Numbers in Use

S.N.	Country	MPR (%)
1	India	89.12
2	South Korea	111.5
3	Japan	115.2
4	China	96.4
5	Nepal	134.41
6	UAE	203.7

Source:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_number_of_mobile_phones_in_use

Analyzing the above data, of MPR, it depicts that the customers in the mobile telecommunication sector has reached the saturation level. Considering the dual SIM (subscriber identity module) mobile users, we can say that there are only few new customers to mobile service, they might be a new customer to us but they were already the customer to other mobile service provider. Switching of customer from one service provider to another service provider is happening in the current market scenario. Hence, in this highly saturated market the battle of the game is CUSTOMER RETENTION to win the throne of market leader.

The Concept

At first, we need to know who are the customers for the mobile telecommunication sector, the influencing factors of customer retention and the function of employees to analyze the implementation of the factors of customer retention by Nepal Telecom.

Customer for the mobile telecommunication sector

- Are they the one same as who buy an LED TV or Refrigerator?
-No, they buy just once in a decade.
- Are they the one same as who buy medicine?
-No, they are active to buy only when they get ill.
- Are they the one who buys sporty CARS?
-No only rich people buy sporty cars.

- Are they the one who buys HOME?
-No, they just buy once in the lifetime.
- Are they the one same as who buy vegetables, fruits and food daily?
-May be, but still there is a difference they get tangible benefit they can taste it.

I put these simple questions to show that customers in mobile telecommunication sector are unique. Mobile telecommunication services have become a basic need for us where poor or rich, passive or active, student or workers; everybody needs telecommunication services. Mobile telecommunication service providers are selling services to the customer not for a decade or once in a lifetime, but on a daily basis, so it's more essential to make them satisfied continuously to continue the relationship.

Influencing factors for Customer Retention

Price (P) – Price of the service is considered as the first prime influencing factor of customer retention .Telecommunication is being a part of our basic need we use the services but choose the service provider who can provide lower price compare to other. Pricing strategy can be categorized into three groups: cost-based pricing, competition-based pricing and customer value-based pricing as presented by Andreas Hinterhuber (2008). Among them customer value based pricing is superior which take into account the customer willingness to pay. Price must have a value.

Service Quality (SQ)- Every telecommunication service provider provides the similar voice and data communication as their service to the customers. However, what differentiates them from the other service providers? It is the service quality. Service quality of the second prime influencing factors of customer retention. Service quality in mobile telecommunication sector is the integration of the **quality of mobile network** and **quality of delivery of service**. The **quality of mobile network** for voice and data must meet all the QoS parameter is given in Table 2.

Table 2: QoS Parameter for Voice and Data

QoS Parameter for Voice	QoS Parameter for Data
Speech Quality	Data Throughput
Service Coverage Area	Congestion in the networks
Call Setup Success Rate and Setup Time	Latency and Jitter
Call Drop Rate, etc.	Packet loss, etc.

And **the quality of delivery of service** must meet all the five antecedents of Servqual (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1991) like tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Services are delivered to the customer. These five antecedents are a part of customer care which will be discussed later.

Promotion Mix (PM) - Promotion is the means to communicate about the service between the service provider and customer. Promotion mix (Belch and Belch, 2004) is the mixture of different ways of promotion like advertisement, sale promotion, personal selling, direct marketing and publicity as agreed by various researchers. Also word of mouth and recommendation from a satisfied customer is the best way of the promotion mix. Promotion aware, customers about the promise delivered by the service provider and how their service benefits customers if they purchase.

Customer purchase behavior and customer repurchase behavior are affected by promotion mix. The customer gets information from different sources of promotion mix, which they learn and store in their memory. They start to develop their own perception about the service. When they purchase a service they try to match the service with their learnt perception. If the exception of the service is met trust develops and the customer starts to repurchase services from the same service provider. So, customer retention is achieved (Table 3).

Customer Care – Even to retain a relationship among family members care is needed, to retain customer means to take care of them. Customer seeks care both before purchasing of services as well as after delivery of services. Moreover, customer care is a continuous process. “*How to take care of the customer?*” Table 4 shows the answered by the five antecedents of Servqual.

Table 3: The elements of promotion mix

Elements	Merit	Demerit
Advertisement	Simultaneous Mass Communication on TV, FM and newspaper.	One way communication, reaches many people who are not the potential buyers to waste of promotional cost.
Sale Promotion	To increase sell in short time through discounts, offer and bonus free service.	Short term impact, over use of discounts, offer and bonus free service will decline brand image and profit.
Personal Selling	Face to Face two way communication, efficient for awareness and feedback.	Cost per contact is high and perception of the customer depends on salesperson interactive skill and attitude.
Direct Marketing	Direct communication with customer through emails, online response, telemarketing.	Extra cost to maintain and manage a database of customer.
Publicity	More credible to customers and to drag their attention as it's the new covered by the media.	If publicity went wrong, it will damage the brand of the company .Media may cover only the bad news.
Word of Mouth	Free of cost and very effective advertisement done by our satisfied and loyal customer.	It's not in the control of the service provider

Table 4: The five antecedents of Servqual

Tangibility	Clean Surroundings, Modern Facilities, Neatly Uniformed Employees.
Reliability	Expected Quality, Accurate Billing and Records, Timely Performance.
Responsiveness	Employee Willing to help, Quick Response, Prompt Technical Assistance.
Assurance	Knowledge, Competence and Courtesy of Employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence
Empathy	Individual Attention, Understand Specific Needs, Opinion and Complaints of Customer are Implemented.

When customers feel that the service providers is taking care of them, they prefer to do more business with the service provider. Customer satisfaction and customer loyalty can be achieved through customer care, which is the important factor for customer retention.

Innovation - Innovation means anything new created for the first time. Innovation is classified into two types as technical innovation and administrative innovation (Damanpour, 1991). Here technical innovation for telecommunication service provider is the innovation in the technology of their voice and data services. Administrative innovation is the innovation in the organizational structure, administrative and management processes, business, marketing and delivery of services .

The thing we have considered as best for today continuously gets degraded, as the time passages. In this competitive world, each service provider works to provide new things to attract and hold customers. So, innovation is the vital factor for customer retention.

Literature Review

Nepal Telecom and Telecommunication Market in Nepal

Nepal Telecom is the government-owned first mobile network service provider in Nepal. Nepal Telecommunication Corporation was transformed into Nepal Doorsanchar Company Limited (NDCL) from April, 2004. The company is known to the general public by the brand name "Nepal Telecom" as its registered trademark.

The Importance of Customer Retention

The importance of customer retention has increased since a majority of firms started to suffer a noticeable loss of customers, along with the complexity and high costs of acquiring new customers (Bird, 2005). Thus, the model of competition has shifted from acquiring new customers to retaining existing customers and luring customers away from rival companies (Kalakota et al., 1996).

In the telecom sector, it has been estimated that about 27% of a given cellular supplier’s subscriber are lost each year, which is estimated to be around 2.2% every month (Vandenbosch and Dawar, 2002).

It's more costly to acquire a new customer than to retain existing customers. Also, according to Hanks (2007), a mere 5% improvement in customer retention can lead to a 75% increase in profitability. We can relate these two facts to conclude that existing customer generates more profit not only by repurchasing service frequently, but also by saving expenditure on promotion mix.

Study on factors for Customer Retention

There are lots of scholar who has studied on factors of customer retention. They have mentioned about customer satisfaction, loyalty, trust and behavior relationship relating to the customer retention. Loyalty, trust and behavior relationship begin when the customer gets satisfied and for the satisfaction of the customer towards the service and product of the company the governing factors are price, service quality, promotion mix, innovation and customer care . Consuegra *et al.* (2007) and Henning-Thurnau *et al.* (2002) distinguish service price-value, service quality, customers’ services as factors having an influence on loyalty. Loyalty is defined as repeat purchase and word of mouth behavior. Terms used interchangeably in business include loyalty, customer retention, and switching behavior. (Vahid, 2009)

Pricing issues have been identified as key triggers for switching between service providers (Colgate and Hedge 2001). According to Martin-Consuegra (2007), customers those who are price conscious are usually not ready to pay prices for service or product if they seemed that the price is not reasonable. Peng and Wang (2006) explored that customers often switch their service providers mainly due to some pricing issues.

Table 5: Four known GSM mobile network service provider in Nepal with their market share:

S.N.	Mobile Network Operators	GSM Mobile Market Share (%)
1	Nepal Telecom	47.9726%
2	Ncell Pvt. Ltd.	46.0086%
3	Nepal Satellite Telcom. Pvt Ltd	0.9217%
4	Smart Telecom Pvt. Ltd	5.0967%

Promotional strategies enable firms to attract and retain customers thus increased growth in terms of return on investments due to expanded client base (Kotler, 2007). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012), the main functions of promotional mix being advertising, direct selling, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations through which the customer loyalty or promotion of the product is maintained.

In this periods of high competition companies are suffering with losing their customers (Athanasopoulou, 2009). The competition is also becoming more and sharper. In order to obtain sustainable competitive advantage, telecommunication firms are forced to make innovation and do the best for customer satisfaction. (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2013).

Business performance can be enhanced only to putting efforts in present customers care for long term relationship. The customer-support service is crucial because now a day every company whether it is manufacturer or a service company the presence of customer-support service is important in any form (Roos and Edvardsson, 2008). Customer service is the gateway for a mobile customers' experience. Mobile operators that can achieve a high-level of service will be in a great position to win market share away from low-cost competitors. Great customer service is the key to retain existing customers (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2013).

Customers are becoming more sophisticated, segmented and demanding, and expect more in terms of customization, newness, quality and price (Stark, 2011). In order to survive in current conditions of market, firms within the industry must enhance their innovation capabilities in order to satisfy market demands and customer preferences to maintain a long-term competitive advantage (Panayides, 2006).

In the study, Innovation and Customer Retention in the Ghanaian Telecommunication Industry, an attempt was made to determine the relationship between innovation and customer retention. A regression analysis of ANOVA was calculated, customer retention as a dependent variable and innovation as independent variable. It can be seen that, with a significance of 0.000 ($P \leq 0.000$), an F-statistic value of 89.415 was obtained implying that there is a significant relationship between innovation and customer retention. In other words, innovation of the retention. (Kyei and Bayoh, 2017).

The research study Service Quality and Customers Preference of Cellular Mobile Service Providers (Rajkumar P. et al 2011) concluded that consumers' perception is widely varied in accordance with the communication quality, call service, facilities, price, customer care and service provider's quality.

Following are the already studied hypothesis, which are supported:

Price has positive effect on customer retention (Usman *et al.*, 2014; Nusrat, 2018).

Perceived service quality has a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction, and also indirect positive effect on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction (Emmanuel, 2012). This finding is consistent with prior research where it was concluded that service quality is antecedent of customer loyalty (Rust and Oliver, 1994)

Promotion has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty (Ameur *et al.*, 2015). Customer loyalty is described as a customer's repeated visitation or repeat purchase behavior while including the emotional commitment or expression of a favorable attitude toward the service provider.

There is no impact of customer care services on the overall satisfaction of the mobile Phone subscribers is rejected; the customer care services have an impact on the overall satisfaction of the mobile phone subscribers. There is no relationship between overall satisfaction and switching intention of the subscribers is rejected, in case of satisfaction subscribers do not prefer to have the switching intention. (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2013). A positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer service and a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and retention (Nusrat, 2018).

Innovation has positive relationship with customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Ali, 2010; Tahir *et al.*, 2012).

Objectives of the Study

To analyze the implementation of the factors of Customer Retention by Nepal Telecom.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research is descriptive in nature, which describe if Nepal Telecom has implemented the factors of customer retention to retain customers.

Data Process

Population

All individual using mobile networks and stakeholder related to the mobile telecommunication sectors are the population.

Sample Design

Total 200 respondents are selected from the population for the purpose of the study.

Data Collection

Mixed Questionnaire was developed to identify whether or not the Nepal Telecom has implemented the factors of customer retention. Separate types of questions sets were

designed to the customer of Nepal Telecom and to the customer of Ncell who left NT services.

Two to three questions related with each factors price ,service quality, promotion mix, customer care and innovation of customer retention were asked in the mixed questionnaire to the existing customer of Nepal Telecom. The customers of Ncell who left the service of Nepal Telecom were asked specific questions about the reasons to change service provider

Table 6: Respondent Chart

S.N.	Descriptions	Numbers of Respondent
1.	Random Selection of Existing Customer of Nepal Telecom	100
2.	Selection of Customer of Ncell (Rival of Nepal Telecom) who left using Nepal Telecom service.	100

Findings and Description

Findings from the Response of the Existing Customers of NT

The findings of the data collected from hundred randomly selected existing customer of Nepal Telecom is shown in Table 7. Here A,B,C,D and E represents the format of a typical five-level Likert Scale i.e Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree respectively.

Description from the finding of the Response from the existing customer of NT

The findings imply that the Nepal Telecom is not more focused on retention of customer. Among the factor of influence of customer retention price is in favor in Nepal Telecom (NT) as 71 % of the customer thinks it has cheaper service than other. Regarding service quality i.e mobile network coverage, mobile data speed and call quality customers seems annoyed .79% of the customer disagree that network coverage is best . 80% of the customer says that there is call quality and call drop issue in the service of Nepal Telecom.70% of the customer says that there is issue to data speed . As service quality is correlated with customer satisfaction (Emmanuel, 2012) which is in turn correlated with customer retention, it seems Nepal Telecom must work urgently on improving the quality of service to retain customer.

25% of the customer are ready to pay more if the service quality of the NT is improved ,which basically means revenue can be increased ,as these type of customer are less price sensitive rather more concerns on quality. Despite of lots of advertisement in media (TV, Radio and Newspaper), its surprise to know that 44% of the customer disagree about the awareness of information on the offer of voice and data package given by NT, 49 % of the customer disagree about the easiness to recharge the service and 39% of the customer are unaware of bonus voice, sms and data on using more services. This shows that NT has not use integrated promotion mix to make aware and inform customer properly about their services and offered package. Promotion has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. (Ameur *et al.*, 2015).

Table 7: Statements of the Existing Customers of NT

S.N.	Statement on Factors of Customer Retention	Response of Existing Customer				
		A	B	C	D	E
1.	The Price of service of Nepal Telecom in Cheapest among Others.	2	6	21	47	24
2	Network Coverage of Nepal Telecom is best among others .	67	12	5	11	5
3	Nepal Telecom does not have issue in Call Quality with less call drop.	52	28	9	7	4
4	NT does not have issue in data speed for internet (facebook ,youtube) .	38	32	24	4	2
5	You are willing to pay more if the service of Nepal Telecom improves.	12	17	46	10	15
6	Nepal Telecom informs you about the offer of voice and data package.	13	31	36	8	12
7	You are able to recharge services easily.	38	11	21	17	11
8	You get bonus on voice, sms and data on using more services .	12	27	37	19	5
9.	Nepal Telecom shows interest to solve your complain.	67	21	11	1	0
10.	Are you satisfied by the behavior of the employees of Nepal Telecom	72	24	2	1	1
11.	Nepal Telecom provides innovative technology of voice and data services	20	24	34	9	13
12.	Your will not switch to other service provider from Nepal Telecom	27	39	21	8	5

Table 8: Response of Ncell customers who left NT services

S.N.	Reasons to Leave the NT Service	Response of the Customer				
		A	B	C	D	E
1.	High Price on Voice and Data	39	47	4	6	4
2.	Issue of Network Coverage	3	17	5	42	33
3.	Issue of Service Quality (Call Quality ,Call Drop)	2	11	3	38	46
4.	Data Speed Issue	0	19	9	35	37
5.	Frequent Network Distrubance	0	3	3	26	68
6.	Better service of Ncell	7	7	35	18	33
7.	Better Offer and Bonus from Ncell	2	8	23	41	26
8.	Ncell Easy Available of Recharge Card	1	4	12	53	30
9.	Better Complain Resolution from Ncell	5	3	47	26	19
10.	Better Customer Care from Ncell	2	0	43	32	23

88% of the customer disagree that Nepal Telecom shows interest to solve your complain and 96% of the customer aren't satisfied by the behavior of the employees of Nepal Telecom. This shows the pathetic situation of complain resolution and customer relationship of the service provider. Even to retain a relationship among family members care is needed, to retain customer means to take care of them. Customer seeks care both before purchasing of services as well as after delivery of services. Moreover customer care is a continuous process. NT must urgently work to improve customer care system..

Only 21% of the customer agree that NT provides innovative technology of voice and data services and 34% neither agree nor disagree. Most important is that 66% of the customer disagree that they will not switch to other service provider from Nepal Telecom. Means if NT does not put immediate concerns to retain customer, it may suffer from huge customer churn.

Findings from the Response of Ncell customers who left NT services

The findings of the date collected from eighty Ncell customers who left NT services were specifically asked the reasons to leave the service of NT is given in Table 8.

Description from the finding from the Response of Ncell customers who left NT services

The main cause of customers to switch to Ncell service provider is the issue in service of NT as:

- 96% of the customer says NT has frequent Network Distrubance.
- 84% of the customer says NT has issue of Service Quality (Call Quality ,Call Drop).

- 75% of the customer says NT has issue in network coverage.
- 72% of the customer says NT has issue in Data Speed.

Other reasons are better service, offer, complain resolution and customer care from Ncell as:

- 83% of the customer says Ncell has easy availability of recharge card.
- 67% of the customer says Ncell offer and Bonus are better than NT.
- 55% of the customer says Ncell has better customer care.
- 51% of the customer says Ncell has better service than NT

Conclusion

Now, customers have the choice to choose the service provider whichever they feel is valuable and retain to that service provider .So, customers are the King .This study about the implementation of customer retention by NT shows that NT need to improve a lot and make effective strategies for customer retention . If right strategy only implement as soon as possible ,it's in the position to face a huge customer churn.

Lower price of service may have hold the existing customer but still 66% of the customer disagree that they will not switch to other service provider from Nepal Telecom. Customer are annoyed due to the service quality and frequent network disturbance. This halts customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Ultimately, occurrence of customer churn.

It seems NT is unable to maintain service quality and customer care, so to compensate this, it has lowered price of the its service among other service provider .This compensation may not work in upcoming days as customer are becoming more conscious on service quality and customer relation behavior of the service provider rather than price. 78% of the customer s in the survey said that they are ready to pay more for better service. NT need to solve its service issue, use integrated promotion mix to inform its customer about offer and develop effective customer relationship management system to hold existing customer before it's too late.

Further Study

- For further study customer of different geographical location must be included as service quality of different service provider may differ in different area. Also consideration of the gender, age, occupation of the respondent.
- Employees Role it the customer retention process of NT. Correlation of employees satisfaction and motivation.

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