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The Impact of Customer Service, Network Quality, Promotions, and Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image: An Empirical Study of the Telecommunication Industry in Guinea"

Ousmane Conde, ChutimaWangbenmad

^a *Faculty of Business Administration, Hatyai University, conde.ous003@hu.ac.th*

^b *Faculty of Business Administration, Hatyai University. drchutima@hu.ac.th*

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of customer service, network quality, promotions, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) on brand image in the telecommunication industry in Guinea. Given the competitive nature of the sector and the growing demand for reliable services, companies must understand the key drivers that shape consumer perceptions of their brand. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected through surveys from telecommunication customers in Guinea. The findings reveal that customer service are the most significant factors influencing brand image, while network quality, promotions and CSR efforts also play a positive but lesser role. The study suggests that telecommunication companies in Guinea can enhance their brand image by improving customer service, upgrading network quality, implementing creative promotional activities, and engaging in meaningful CSR initiatives. These insights are valuable for managers aiming to strengthen their competitive position and improve customer retention in a dynamic market.

Keywords: Customer Service, Network Quality, Promotions, Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Image, Telecommunication, Guinea

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive telecommunication industry, brand image plays a critical role in shaping customer perceptions and fostering consumer loyalty. In Guinea, a rapidly growing market with increasing demand for telecommunication services, companies face substantial challenges in differentiating themselves in a crowded marketplace. A strong brand image is essential not only for retaining existing customers but also for attracting new ones and achieving long-term success.

In the telecommunication sector, the strength of a brand often defines the success of its services. Developing a brand name that is memorable and evokes a positive image in customers' minds is no easy task. It requires a series of strategic efforts to establish a brand

image that resonates positively with consumers. A favorable brand image increases the likelihood of attracting new customers while ensuring a growing base of satisfied users. Additionally, customers are less likely to switch to competing service providers when they perceive a strong and positive brand image (Ramadhan & Usman, 2020). Several researchers have highlighted the significance of brand image in marketing literature. For instance, Park and Park (2019), Dam and Dam (2021), and Puspaningrum (2020) argue that brand image is a key factor in differentiating companies and serves as a powerful marketing tool. A strong brand image indicates consumer preference for the product, which can lead to improved sales and enhanced financial performance for the company (Puspaningrum, 2020).

Previous studies have delved deeply into the concept of brand image, including works by Ali and Mappesona (2016), Ali et al. (2018), and Djumarno et al. (2019). Building on this body of research, the present study aims to further explore and analyze the brand image of telecommunication services to address gaps in the existing academic literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors influence on brand image

2.1 Network Quality

In the telecommunications market, network quality is one of the most important drivers of service quality. Network quality includes signal strength, number of errors, download speed, and uploading speed. Poor perception of network quality can be caused by breaks in internet connections (Thaichon et al., 2014). According to Demir et al. (2021) stated that Voice clarity, coverage, and connection clarity are all indicators of network quality.

Based on Nwakanma et al. (2018) found that customers' switching decisions are impacted by network quality. Besides, the availability and quality of signals/network of telecom service providers are defined as network quality (Njoroge, 2016). Furthermore, Based on research found for the service quality construct. These included network quality as demonstrated by network coverage area, call clarity and quality, and customer service representative attitude, handling of customer complaints, billing system and convenience of procedures and outlets, pricing of mobile devices (Shafei and Tabaa, 2016). In addition to this, many researchers (Shafei and Tabaa, 2016 and Kim et al., 2004) have highlighted the impact of network quality is one of the parameters of service quality (Demir, 2019).

2.1.1 Network quality and brand image

Competitive advantages of the telecommunication industry are determined by network quality, which aids in keeping and maintaining the customer (Hossain et al., 2017). Network quality is very important for GSM companies to build a better corporate image and trust (Demir et al., 2021). However, some authors have identified the relationship between network quality and brand image. For instance, According to Heri (2017); Wijaya et al. (2020); Nyadzayo and Khajehzadeh (2016) and Demir et al. (2021) conducted studies that support the relationship between network quality and brand image. According to the research, some authors showed that network quality was an important factor in determining brand image

and that it had a positive impact (Dam and Dam, 2021). We anticipate that network quality and brand image will have a positive relationship in this study based on previous findings. As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Network quality has a positive influence on brand image.

2.2 Price

Price is regarded as a factor that has a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions and as a perfect variable that can affect customer retention. It is well-known as an important component in carrying out all business operations and marketing strategies, which improves a company's performance while boosting customer trust and satisfaction (Yasir et al., 2022). Based on Kotler and Armstrong (2010) defined the price as the amount of money that consumers paid for a product or service. Consumers consider a reasonable price to be the criteria to evaluate the fairness of price, appropriateness, or acceptability (Rahman and Chowdhury, 2022). According to Puspita et al. (2022), Price is the only factor of the marketing mix that makes money for the organization. Meanwhile, the price is an agreement about the sale and purchase of goods or services that both parties agree on. On the other hand, Price is characterized as a personal sacrifice or as what the customer gives up in exchange for the product (Havidz and Mahaputra, 2020). Besides, previous researchers, such as (Widayati et al., 2020), (Yasir et al., 2022), (Rahman and Chowdhury, 2022) and (Puspita et al., 2022) have thoroughly studied price.

2.2.1 Price and brand image

Before making a purchasing decision, it is crucial to take pricing into account. Price is the exchange rate in monetary terms that customers must pay producers to receive the benefits offered by a good or service. Thus, Price plays a significant influence in marketing for both customers and sellers. However, pricing determines how successful the products are (Hasmiati et al., 2020). Some scholars confirmed the relationship between price and brand image, this is in line with earlier studies by (Ali and Mappesona, 2016), (Ali et al., 2018), (Djumarno et al., 2019), (Havidz and Mahaputra, 2020), (Puspita et al., 2022), (Khan, 2018) and (Hasmiati et al., 2020). According to earlier research, price that have a significant impact on brand image. We anticipate that price and brand image will have a positive relationship in this study based on previous findings. As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Price has a positive influence on brand image.

2.3 Promotion

The company's marketing mix consists of promotional activities that provide information to the public or consumers about the products or services offered by the company. Communication activities between companies and customers are also included in promotional activities (Richardo et al., 2020). Promotion, according to Havidz and Mahaputra (2020), is defined as "activities that communicate the merits of the product and persuade target customers to buy it". Gulliando and Shihab, (2019) Define promotion as a variety of activities carried out between companies to communicate the benefits of their products and persuade the target customers to purchase them. Meanwhile. According to Richardo et al. (2020) mentioned that Promotion is a component of marketing that focuses on communicating

marketing programs persuasively to target customers, and to promote the establishment of exchange transactions between companies and consumers. Besides, Previous scholars have studied promotion extensively, including: (Prihartono and Ali, 2020), (Richardo et al., 2020), (Mappesona et al., 2020), (Sulistiorini and Ali, 2017), (Ali and Hairiyah, 2017), (Ali et al., 2018), and (Brata et al., 2017).

2.3.1 Promotion and brand image

Many activities of a company are interrelated with one another and include producing products or services, setting prices, and selling products, Promotion is one of them. The company's marketing mix includes promotional activities that provide information about the products or services offered by the company. Though, communication activities between companies and customers are also included in promotional activities (Richardo et al., 2020). Some authors have identified the relationship between promotion and brand image, according to Havidz and Mahaputra (2020) promotion has a positive impact and a relationship with the brand image. This is consistent with the findings of earlier studies by (Widayati et al., 2020). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Promotion has a relationship and affects the brand image.

2.4 Customer Service

Customer care service is among the crucial attributes of mobile service. It offers the potential for mobile phone network operators to manage satisfactorily and timely customer complaint; Keeping clients knowledgeable as to when services will be accomplished and willing to reply to customer's requests. Moreover, Good Customer service or care increases loyalty and retention (Asiegbu et al., 2015). Otherwise, Customer service is a set of actions that includes mechanisms for handling complaints, ease of reporting complaints, speed of complaint processing, simplicity in filing complaints, and friendliness while reporting complaints (Agbonifoh and Ogbeide, 2022). Moreover, customer service refers to the procedures established by the telecom provider to address client inquiries and complaints (Njoroge, 2016). According to Nwakanma et al. (2018) argue that customer service encompasses all help and support network providers offer to the customer directly or indirectly before, during, and after purchase to create an unforgettable experience for the customer. Customer care is more than just customer service and support, it is the entire service delivery value chain (Nwakanma et al., 2018). Moreover, regarding customer care services, some researchers distinguish between two main aspects, namely technical and functional approaches. Technical way refers to the way of getting service while functional is how a service provider provides a service to the client (Bhattacharjee et al., 2019).

2.4.1 Customer service and brand image

Customer service involves customer support systems, speed of complaint processing, ease of reporting, and friendliness when reporting a complaint. However, Customer service includes all help and assistance network providers' render/offer before, during, and after purchase to provide an exciting customer experience with their products (Nwakanma et al., 2018). Moreover, good customer service or care boosts customer retention and customer loyalty (Asiegbu et al., 2015).

Although, according to earlier research, some authors have identified the relationship between customer care/service and brand image. The result found that Customer care/service has a significant impact on brand image. This is consistent with the findings of

earlier studies by (Amaresan, 2022; Puspita et al., 2022) customer service is strength of any business and has a positive impact on brand image. Based on previous findings, As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: customer service has a positive influence on brand image.

2.5 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Researchers have examined corporate social responsibility in great detail and connected it to business performance. However, The following definition has been produced in management and marketing literature: corporate social responsibility is a company's pledge to use discretionary business practices and corporate resources to ensure the well-being of society and stakeholders. As a broad concept, making charitable contributions, treating employees fairly, and an environmentally friendly production policy are some of the business practices that can be included in corporate social responsibility. While the primary goal of CSR is to help society, many businesses also use it as a means of "do better by doing good" and gaining an advantage over competitors (Van Doorn et al., 2017). In recent days corporate social responsibility has become a competitive strategy for corporations to increase profits, customer satisfaction, corporate reputation, customer loyalty, and favorable perceptions of their brands (Islam et al., 2020). Mainly, as a perception, corporate socially responsible activities has no generally acknowledged definition but is commonly defined in light of multifaceted expressions (Mohammed and Rashid, 2018). However, numerous terms are interchangeable when referring to CSR, including stakeholder theory, corporate philanthropy, sustainability development, social marketing, corporate citizenship, and corporate social performance. Furthermore, the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility emphasizes the importance of incorporating societal interests into business operations. Besides, Customer satisfaction and stakeholder commitment are created by the implementation of corporate social responsibility. Also, CSR has become a way for businesses to improve their relationship with customers. Similarly, the World Bank defines CSR as "the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development working with employees, their families, the local community and society to improve the quality of life in a way that is both good for business and development". (Emmanuel and Priscilla, 2022). Finally, there is a consensus that corporate social responsibility contributes to firm performance (Afiuc et al., 2020).

2.5.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand image

Brand image is considered among the highest perceptions in the field of marketing and is mentioned to as the perceptions of the brand by the customers as addressed by the brand relationships in the customers' mind. However, a positive brand image is an advantage as it impacts the perceptions of consumers regarding the company's communication and operations (Mohammed and Rashid, 2018). Likewise, Tingchi Liu et al. (2014) claimed that CSR activities regarding the environment, society, and partners (stakeholders) positively impact brand preference among Chinese customers, while Deegan (2015) indicated that CSR development can prompt the improvement of brand image and reputation of the company, demonstrating that CSR perceptions offer a valuable involvement to brand image (Martínez et al., 2014). Furthermore, Mohammed and Rashid (2018) mentioned CSR activities as an organization's capacity to distinguish its services/products through the creation of a further positive brand image that helps with keeping up the company's positive

reputation. This is consistent with the finding of earlier study by (Latif et al., 2015). Corporate social responsibility increases the probability of brand image. In This consideration, Despite the significant role of CSR in increasing brand image, Coles et al. (2013) indicated that there is still a scarcity of studies examining the influence of CSR measurements on brand image, especially in the hotel sector (Mohammed and Rashid, 2018). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: There is a positive and significant relationship between corporate social responsibility and brand image.

3. METHOD

For this study, a quantitative data collection approach was used, gathering primary data from customers (students) using mobile telecommunications in Guinea Conakry, aligning with the research objectives. The study's conceptual framework encompasses seven variables: network quality, price, promotion, customer service, corporate social responsibility, brand image, and customer retention. Bachelor students use this technology in their daily communication activities. The survey was conducted among subscribers of mobile operators such as Orange Guinea, MTN Areeba, and Cellcom Guinea. The target groups of the study were students of the Julius Nyerere University of Kankan, Guinea-Conakry, a public University in the historic city of Kankan. The study area was chosen because most researchers underestimated the inland study, as few studies have been conducted in this area. Respondents are randomly selected and use mobile telecommunications services in Guinea-Conakry. The information regarding the total population of the respondents was obtained from the registry department of the university. A sample size of 383 university students was used in this study, which was calculated from the total population of 8,572 students studying at the university following the method of Yamane (1967).

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

When e = Deviation of random sampling

N = Number of population

n = Sampling size

Set sampling deviation to 0.05 therefore:

$$n = 8572 / (1 + 8572(0.05)^2)$$

$$= 382.17$$

$$n = 382.17 \text{ rounded up to } 383.$$

Consequently, the sample size comes to 383 respondents.

In the research, respondents were approached randomly at various locations within the university, such as lecture halls, the library, the cafeteria, and other social areas. The study employed a cross-sectional survey method to collect opinions from the target population at a single point in time. To achieve the study's objectives, a specially designed questionnaire was used to gather data.

Scale Items

The validated scales for network quality, price, promotion, customer service, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and brand image were adapted from the existing

literature (Njoroge, 2016; Qadri & Shah Khan, 2014; Jere, 2013, Alam & Rubel, 2014; Yeboah-Asiamah et al. 2016)

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducted a study in Guinea-Conakry to evaluate the satisfaction and engagement of individual customers (students) with telecommunications service providers. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used, which included a brief description of the study's purpose and significance, as a data collection tool. The questionnaire consisted of 38 statements categorized under different constructs, and respondents were required to choose the most appropriate answers from a predetermined list. The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographic variables, while the second part addressed questions related to mobile telecommunication service providers, and the last part addressed questions related to the recommendation.

4.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Socio-demographic Details of the Respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	16-20 years	79	20.63
	21-25 years	131	34.20
	26-30 years	159	41.51
	31 and above	14	3.66
	Total	383	100
Gender	Male	200	52.22
	Female	183	47.78
	Total	383	100
Degree Level	Bachelor	383	100
	Masters	0	0
	Ph.D.	0	0
	Total	383	100
Level of Studies (Year)	1 st	35	9.14
	2 nd	125	32.63
	3 rd	149	38.91
	4 th	74	19.32
	Total	383	100
Current Mobile Network Service Provider	Orange	271	70.76
	MTN Areeba	65	16.97
	Cellcom	47	12.27
	Total	383	100
Duration (Years)	2-5	78	20.37
	6-9	253	66.06

	10-13	41	10.70
	14 and above	11	2.87
	Total	383	100
Mobile Network Service Provider Used Before	Orange	43	11.22
	MTN Areeba	215	56.14
	Cellcom	125	32.64
	Total	383	100

Table 2: Multiple regression results for factors affecting brand image

Variables	β	T	Sig
Customer Service	.472	10.258	.000
Network quality	.173	3.599	.000
Promotion	.169	3.302	.001
CSR	.104	2.102	.036
R ²	.428		
Adjust R ²	.422		

***Note:** Stepwise multiple regression (only statistically significant variables are included).

From Table 2, the results of the regression analysis of the four factors (customer service, promotion, network quality, and corporate social responsibility) show that these variables explain 42.8% of the total variance in brand image. The four factors: customer service ($\beta = 0.472$, $p < 0.001$), network quality ($\beta = 0.173$, $p < 0.001$), promotion ($\beta = 0.169$, $p < 0.001$), and CSR ($\beta = 0.104$, $p < 0.05$) are significantly and positively related to brand image.

Table 3: Summary of Hypotheses testing of independent variables and mediating variables

Hypothesis	Statement	Findings
H1	Network quality has a positive effect on brand image	Supported
H2	Price has a positive effect on brand image	Reject
H3	Promotion has a positive effect on brand image	Supported
H4	Customer service has a positive effect on brand image	Supported
H5	CSR has a positive effect on brand image	Supported

***Note:** Significant at the 0.05 level

The findings of this study reveal that multiple factors, including network quality, price, promotion, customer service, and corporate social responsibility (CSR), significantly influence brand image in the telecommunication industry. These results align with existing literature, underscoring the multifaceted nature of brand image development. Below is a detailed discussion of each factor.

Network Quality and Brand Image

The study confirms that network quality positively impacts brand image, emphasizing the crucial role of reliable and efficient network services in shaping customer perceptions. High-quality network performance, characterized by strong connectivity and minimal disruptions, enhances customer satisfaction and builds trust, ultimately strengthening the brand image. This finding aligns with prior research, which highlights network quality as a key factor

contributing to a stronger and more favorable brand image. (Heri, 2017; Wijaya et al., 2020; Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016 and Demir et al., 2021)

Price and Brand Image

The rejection of the hypothesis that price has a positive effect on brand image suggests that price may not significantly influence how customers perceive the brand in this context. This outcome indicates that other factors, such as network quality, customer service, or promotional efforts, might hold greater weight in shaping brand image. One possible explanation is that customers, particularly within the study's demographic, may view price as a baseline expectation rather than a defining characteristic of a brand. If the prices offered by competing providers are similar, it reduces the potential for price to distinguish one brand from another. Additionally, the findings may reflect that customers prioritize service quality and value over cost when evaluating a brand. This result underscores the importance of understanding the nuances of customer behavior and perception. For telecommunication companies, the implication is that strategies aimed solely at pricing adjustments may have limited impact on enhancing brand image. Instead, a comprehensive approach that combines competitive pricing with improvements in service quality, reliability, and customer engagement may be more effective in building a strong brand image.

Promotion and Brand Image

Promotion plays a crucial role in shaping brand image, particularly in the telecommunications industry, as consistently highlighted in academic literature. Research by Havidz and Mahaputra (2020) supports the significant influence of promotional activities on brand image, revealing a strong correlation between effective promotions and a positive brand perception. Similarly, Desideria and Wardana (2020) emphasize the importance of integrating marketing communications to build and sustain robust brands. Their findings demonstrate that promotional strategies have a substantial and positive impact on brand image, enhancing consumer perceptions and fostering a favorable impression of the product or service. This underscores the need for companies to implement well-designed promotional campaigns to strengthen their brand identity and reputation.

Customer Service and Brand Image

Customer service has been found to have a significant positive effect on brand image, with various studies highlighting the connection between these two variables. For instance, Hartline and Jones (1996) examined the influence of employee performance on customers' perceptions of service quality and brand image, demonstrating that exceptional employee performance can positively shape brand perception. Conversely, Dean (2004) highlighted the adverse effects of service failures on brand image. The study found that when companies fail to address service issues or take responsibility for resolving them, customers may perceive the brand as irresponsible and unreliable, leading to a loss of interest and trust. Such failures can have a detrimental impact on the business's overall brand image. In summary, a company's success is closely tied to its brand image and the quality of service it provides. When customers' needs are effectively met, the company thrives, and its image is positively valued by the public. Conversely, if service deficiencies lead to an unattractive brand perception, both the company's image and its long-term success are at risk.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Image

The study identifies CSR as a critical factor that positively influences brand image. Telecommunication companies that engage in socially responsible practices, such as environmental sustainability, community development, and ethical business conduct, are more likely to be viewed favorably by customers. This finding aligns with existing research, which suggests that CSR initiatives foster an emotional connection between the brand and its stakeholders, thereby enhancing the brand's overall image. CSR efforts not only improve a company's brand image but also emphasize the importance of CSR perceptions in shaping that image. Similarly, Singh et al. (2008) found that performance in specific CSR domains positively impacted brand image in both the UK and Spain. This is consistent with research by Lee and Lee (2018), which also highlighted a positive influence of CSR on brand image.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that telecommunication companies should adopt a comprehensive approach to brand management, emphasizing four key factors: high-quality network infrastructure, impactful promotional campaigns, exceptional customer service, and meaningful CSR initiatives. By focusing on these areas, companies can strengthen their brand image and cultivate long-term customer loyalty. Additionally, for companies operating in highly competitive markets like Guinea, these insights offer valuable strategies to differentiate themselves and gain a competitive edge in the telecommunication industry.

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