



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS MOBILE PHONE SERVICES IN KOVILPATTI, THOOTHUKUDI DISTRICT (INDIA) - A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In fewer than twenty years, mobile phones have gone from being rare and expensive pieces of equipment used by businesses to a pervasive low-cost personal item. In the era of information explosion, people are to be provided with quick and timely access to information. Indian Telecom industry is one of the fastest growing telecom markets in the world. In earlier day the mobile phone being viewed as an expensive luxury only affordable to the power and rich. Today, not only in all urban areas, also in smaller towns and remote rural farms, the mobile phone has become a common, affordable, and convenient communication device. Reduction in the tariff has made affordable to all and increased its uses significantly. In telecom industry, service providers are the main drivers; whereas equipment manufacturers are witnessing growth. In this light, the present study deals with consumer preferences and their satisfaction level towards the mobile phone service providers available in Kovilpatti, Thoothukudi District, India. The present study conducted on 100 mobile phone users of various mobile phone service providers such as Vodafone, Airtel, BSNL, Reliance, Aircel, Tata Indicom and few other players. The results derived from the study indicate that the factor that induces the consumers to buy a particular mobile phone operator is call tariffs followed by network coverage and brand image.

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INTRODUCTION

Exchange of information becomes the necessity of life to a common man. In the modern world an individual tends to communicate anything to everything right from the place where he/she stands. Even while riding vehicle he / she wants to communicate. Within a fraction of second at quick speed with clear voice, without any disturbance, like line crossing, out of order, etc. most of which lack in the connection given by the department of telecommunication. Mobile phones emerges as a boon quench such a thirst, by providing facilities, which a common man cannot imagine. Though cell phone industry has its origin in the recent past and the growth has been excellent, the telecommunication services in India have witnessed the phenomenal change over the last few years. The craze for mobile services in India is increasing substantially. Keeping the high consumers demand in to consideration, many big players like Reliance, Airtel, Aircel, Vodafone, BSNL, Tata Indicom, Virgin Mobile etc. has launched their services in the market. Information technology has brought tremendous change in day-to-day activities of common man to entrepreneurs. Number of mobile subscriber went up from 10.4 million at the end of 2002 to 488.40 million in Oct 2009. Mobile as a medium is growing fast with its easy accessibility and reach. It is not just telecom centric.

From a communication tool, it has emerged as a device for all purposes. In many countries, mobile phones now outnumber land-line telephones, with most adults and many children now owning mobile phones. The mobile phone itself has also become a totemic and fashion object, with users decorating, customizing, and accessorizing their mobile phones to reflect their personality. In the rationale of modern marketing, the firm's existence is dependent on customer's satisfaction. Therefore, the knowledge of "what the customer thinks" and "what consequently would contribute to his satisfaction" is at the requirement of the marketer. After becoming the second most populated country in the world, India is set to achieve another record of having half a billion wireless connections, thus becoming the second largest group of mobile phone users after China. In fewer than twenty years ago, mobile phones were considered to be rare and expensive pieces of equipment used by business to a pervasive low-cost personal item but now it has become a common household item. Building trust and adapting to the individual and local needs of the community are critical success factors for the diffusion and success of cutting-edge information and communication technology. With the introduction of private sector telecom service provider in the state the competition in the telecom industry has increased significantly. "The Indian telecom sector, seen as providing the most affordable services in the world, has grown by leaps and bounds in the last decade. This remarkable journey to 100 million consumers is a testament to

the vision and commitment of a company that benchmarks itself with the best in the world," Sunil Bharti Mittal, chairman and group chief executive officer of Bharti Enterprises said. (Times of India May 2009).

Telecom Sector in India

India has come in a close second in the sale of mobile phones in the year 2006. China has led the race of mobile sales being the highest in the world. In India however the GSM phones rule over the CDMA handsets. Leading the categories are Nokia, Samsung, Sony Ericsson while Reliance takes a large size share in the corporate segment. Subscribers in India are basking in the glory of the ever increasing number of subscriber patronage. They want to be seen with better handsets as there is a quaint feeling that the mobile should match the designation or just make a status statement with a smart and expensive phone. Hence with such attitudes ruling the market everyone wants to stand out with the handset they own. Mobile Phones have a huge market in the world and especially in India. The sharks in this system like Motorola, Nokia, Samsung, Sony Ericsson, LG, Vodafone etc. continuously introduced latest Mobile Phone models at regular intervals in order to keep the smaller fishes aware of their superiority in the business. The range of accessories available for each handset caters to the demands of all kinds of users. With the rising living standards, many Mobile Phone Stores have come up in India that offers the entire range available along with special offers and free gifts. The Mobile phone sales have touched a new high ever since the introduction of technologies like Camera, Games, polyphonic Ringtones, extendable memories in the form of Memory Cards, Video Recording, Bluetooth, WiFi, GPRS etc. Mobile Phones Games have captured the interests of youngsters and adults alike. Many people are actually addicted to them. The large and bulky gaming devices have reduced to either handheld video games that are certainly passé or the play stations that are way too expensive.

At the end of 2006, there were 90 million mobile subscribers in India in comparison to 50 million subscribers for landlines. The main aim of this paper is to estimate future trends and analyze the pattern and rate of adoption of mobile phones in India. Consequently, the mobile subscriber base is projected to increase from 90 million in 2006 to 433 million in 2011 and nearly 900 million in 2016. The projected rapid growth in the mobile subscriber base will have important implications for future plans of mobile operators, infrastructure providers, handset suppliers and vendors.

Review of Literature

'Service Quality, customer Satisfaction, and Behavior intention: Evidence from China's Telecommunication Industry (Hing, 2002)'. In this paper the author paid attention to the measurement model of service quality in China's mobile phone market based on the well-known 'SERVQUAL' model, but with modification on the basis of focus group discussions & expert opinions to reflect the specific industry attributes and the special culture of China. Emphasis is then paid to the study of the dynamic relationships among service quality, customer value, customer satisfaction and their influences on future

behaviors after the key drivers of customer value & customer satisfaction are identified.

'Consumers Attitudes towards Mobile Phone Services in Bangladesh (Azam, 2006)'. The author observed customers' perception. The study report that among 16 service attributes the actual competition are taking place in network coverage, call charge, BTTB connectivity, internet service, service duration of prepaid cards, balance transfer facility, Text SMS service, Customer care, SIM replacement facility, as well as music and sports news service while no significant difference exists in the remaining attributes

Another study was conducted on 'Applying Theory Reasoned Action in anticipating Mobile Phone Usage Behavior in Bangladesh (Azam, 2008)'. The study reveals the Theory of reasoned action is applicable in the Bangladesh setting to significantly explain intension to use mobile phones. Attitude towards behavior emerged as the significant predictor of intension to use mobile phone in Bangladesh. Subjective norm is also observed as another strong predictor in explaining the intension to use mobile phone in Bangladesh; because it has become as part of the country's culture from upper class to lower class in connecting and making communication with the nearest ones or the associates through mobiles since the price of SIM card and charges for mobile uses are very low in Bangladesh at present as well as the penetration of mobile users are increasing rapidly. The situation insists the mass people to be connected through mobile phone. Thus the individuals expect their associations and family members, friends, relatives, colleagues and different stakeholders or partners in mobile networks having mobile connections.

Other study was on 'relationships between customer satisfactions and service loyalty: user's perception on telecommunication provider (Chong, 2008)'. This study seeks to contribute to the development of a conceptual framework that integrate service quality, corporate image, price, customer satisfaction, and service loyalty. The study uncovered that service quality, corporate image, and price are found to act on service loyalty via customer satisfaction. Muthumani and Thangavel (2008) in his study on consumer behavior towards mobile phone services (a comparative study between urban and semi urban mobile phone users in Tamil Nadu) highlights the perception and expectation of urban and semi urban customers towards mobile service providers in Tamil Nadu. Prominent among these were – celebrity endorsements, loyalty rewards, discount coupons, business solutions and talk time schemes. The most important consumer segments in the cellular industry were the youth segment and the business class segment.

Other study was on 'A study of the relationship between the values and customer decision'- making style of telecommunications of university students (Tang, 2009)'. The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between personal values and customer decision making style of telecommunication service of university students. Another study was on 'factors affecting customer equity of telecommunication enterprises (Wang, 2010)'. Based on this paper the author concluded that the factors affecting the customer equity of telecommunication enterprises are composed of value equity, brand equity, potential equity and

retention equity, and further put forward the management strategy to increase the customer equity of telecommunication enterprises.

Statement of the problem

Communication is the life blood for inter personal relations and for the development of social status. In formal organizations the role of communication is vital for the development of business and to perform it in a planned way. Communication plays a major role not only between the individuals but also between the organizations and countries. Communication helps in exchange of ideas, thoughts and for sharing knowledge required to the development of society. The present study made an attempt to consumer behaviour towards mobile phone services offered in Kovilpatti, Thoothukudi District, India.

Objectives of the study

- To know about the awareness level of the consumers regarding their mobile phone service provider.
- To find the most preferred service provider in Kovilpatti.
- To study the consumers' satisfaction level towards various services offered by mobile phone service providers.
- To assess the problems faced by the mobile phone users regarding their respective mobile phone service providers.
- To make suggestions on the basis of findings.

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, a questionnaire was used for data collection. A random sampling technique was adapted to consumers used in different mobile services in Kovilpatti, Thoothukudi District. The researcher has prepared well structured questionnaire for collecting the primary data from the users of various mobile service. Questionnaires were received from 105 consumers only out of 130 consumers after which were filled by them. This constitutes 70 percent of the total response.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected from the respondents through questionnaire were analyzed using simple percentage technique and presented (Table 1). The data presented in the above table-1 indicates that sample is dominated by male respondent as it is indicated by 65 percent respondent in the sample. Age analysis of the respondents indicates that most of respondents fall in the age group of 26-35 years as it was indicated by 32.38 percent respondents in the sample and 26.67 percent from age group of 21-25 years. The information related to educational qualifications of the respondents indicates that majority of the respondent falls in those categories who are educated up to higher secondary level. Out of 105 respondents, 44 percent people are employed, 24 percent people are students and 20 percent are businessmen, and remaining 12 percent respondents are house wife.

Table 1. General characteristics for Respondents

General characteristics for customers		No. of Respondents	per cent
Gender	Male	68	64.76
	Female	37	35.24
Age	Up to 20 years	19	18.10
	21- 25 Years	28	26.67
	26-35 years	34	32.38
	36-50 years	18	17.14
Education	51 and above	6	5.71
	Up to SSLC	29	27.62
	Up to HSC	40	38.10
Occupation	Graduate	24	22.86
	Post Graduate	12	11.43
	Students	25	23.81
	Employed	46	43.81
	House wife	13	12.38
	Businessmen	21	20.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 2. Name of the mobile phone service providers

S.No..	Name of Mobile service providers	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	Aircel	18	17.14
2	Airtel	21	20.00
3	BSNL	30	28.57
4	Reliance	8	7.62
5	Tata Docomo	5	4.76
6	Tata Indicom	4	3.81
7	Uninor	3	2.86
8	Vodafone	16	15.24
	Total	105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Chart-1

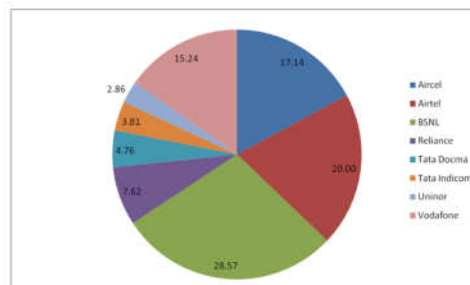


Table 2 and Chart-1 shows that majority of respondents (29 percent) prefer BSNL followed by 20 percent respondents who prefer Airtel. The services of Aircel are availed by 17 percent respondents and 15 percent respondents use Vodafone. Only 8 percent respondents prefer Reliance.

Table 3. Number of calls made in a day

S.No.	Number of calls made in a day	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	1-5 calls in a day	24	22.86
2	6-10 calls in a day	40	38.10
3	11-15 calls in a day	27	25.71
4	More than 15 calls in a day	14	13.33
	Total	105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Attempt was made through table-3 to know the number of call made per day by the respondents. The analysis indicates that 23 percent respondents make average 5 calls per day. Majority of the respondents (38 percent) make 6 to 10 calls per day. 26

percent of the respondent is equally divided among those who make 10-15 calls in a day and remaining 13 percent respondents are make more than 15 call per day respectively.

Table 4. Purpose of having mobile phones

S.No.	Purpose	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	To be touch with family and friends	52	49.52
2	Official	27	25.71
3	Security	13	12.38
4	SMS	8	7.62
5	Others	5	4.76
Total		105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

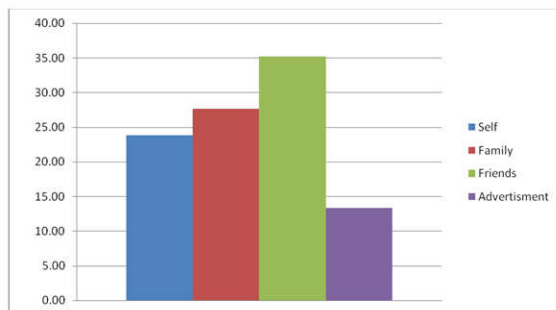
From the table 4, the survey indicates that most of the respondent (75 percent) keeps mobile to be in touch with their family and friends and official purposes.

Table 5. Factors that influence consumers to use a particular mobile phone service

S.No.	Major factors influence to use a particular mobile phone service	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	Self	25	23.81
2	Family	29	27.62
3	Friends	37	35.24
4	Advertisement	14	13.33
Total		105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Chart 2



From the table-5 and Chart-2, it is found that majorities (35percent) of the consumers are influenced by their friends to select their service provider and around 28 percent of the consumers are influenced by their family. Only 24 percent of the consumers are influenced by themselves. Another 13 percent are influenced through Advertisements.

Table 6. Better Network Coverage

S.No.	Better Network Coverage	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	Aircel	13	12.38
2	Airtel	17	16.19
3	BSNL	38	36.19
4	Reliance	12	11.43
5	Tata Docomo	6	5.71
6	Tata Indicom	4	3.81
7	Uninor	4	3.81
8	Vodafone	11	10.48
Total		105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

From table-6, Survey indicates that 36 percent respondent were of opinion that BSNL give the better connectivity. It is followed by the Airtel which was indicated by 16 percent respondent in the sample. Customer's response regarding

Reliance, Tata Docomo and Indicom and Uninor mobile are not so positive.

Table 7. Consumer satisfaction level towards Tariffs

S.No.	Level of satisfaction towards call tariffs	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	Aircel	15	14.29
2	Airtel	17	16.19
3	BSNL	18	17.14
4	Reliance	14	13.33
5	Tata Docomo	11	10.48
6	Tata Indicom	7	6.67
7	Uninor	10	9.52
8	Vodafone	13	12.38
Total		105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

India has seen rapid increase in the number of players which caused the tariff rates to hit an all time low. Due to cut throughout competition between the telephone operators, all the companies are reduced their tariffs. Table-7 indicates, all the respondents are satisfied towards the call tariffs offered by the mobile phone service providers.

Table 8. Consumer satisfaction level towards customer service

S.No.	Level of satisfaction towards Customer Services	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	Aircel	17	16.19
2	Airtel	21	20.00
3	BSNL	14	13.33
4	Reliance	12	11.43
5	Tata Docomo	9	8.57
6	Tata Indicom	8	7.62
7	Uninor	8	7.62
8	Vodafone	16	15.24
Total		105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 8 shows that in case of consumers' satisfaction level regarding customer care services of their mobile phone service provider, significant difference was found. The satisfaction level of consumers regarding customer care services is high in case of Aircel, Airtel and Vodafone compare with BSNL and other service providers.

Table 9. Consumer satisfaction level towards customer service

S.No.	Going to change the present mobile connection	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	Yes	42	40.00
2	No	63	60.00
Total		105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table-9 reveals that, 40 percent of the respondents reported that they are ready to change their connection and majority of the respondents (60 percent) were still keep the present connection.

Table 10. Reason for going to change the present mobile connection

S.No.	Reason for going to change the present mobile connection	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	High call Rate	9	21.43
2	Poor Network	21	50.00
3	Poor customer service	12	28.57
Total		42	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table-10 shows that, majority of the respondents (50 percent) indicated that due to poor network they will change the present mobile connection to other better connection provided by the other servicer. Another 29 percent mentioned that, due to poor customer service and remaining 21percent indicated that high call rate.

Table 11. Overall satisfaction with the present connection

S.No.	Overall satisfaction with current satisfaction	No. of Respondents	per cent
1	Yes	79	75.24
2	No	26	24.76
Total		105	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table-11, clearly indicated, the overall performance of the mobile phone connection, 75 per cent of the respondent satisfied with present connection facilities provided by the servicer.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

One of the important findings of this study is that the large numbers of respondents are satisfied with current mobile connection service. But, the most common problem faced by respondents are dissatisfied with the call rate, Network coverage, value added service, and Customer care. The following suggestions can be given after detailed and careful investigation of the research problem. These suggestions would definitely help the mobile phone service providers to enhance their subscriber base by delivering consumer satisfying services:

Call tariff is the most influencing factor which induced consumers to buy a particular mobile phone operator. Therefore, call rates should be made competitive and affordable in order to capture more consumers. Airtel connections are preferred by most of the consumers in the study area. It is because of the good customer service and various schemes introduced by Airtel. To attract the consumers all other cell phone providers should come forward to introduce consumer based services. Many respondents feel that net work problem is one of the most important problems they are facing. Enough signal Towers should be established in the rural areas to solve this problem. Customer care services play an important role in retaining consumers. Therefore, customer care services should be improved and there should be provisions of taking feedback from consumers so that necessary steps can be taken in this direction. Mobile phone operators should launch some schemes exclusively for senior citizens, housewives and students. Necessary steps should be taken in solving the problems of poor network, call drop and poor clarity. It is recommended that they should install more towers in order to have large network coverage area which ultimately brings clarity in network area. Mobile service provider should satisfy their current consumers by providing them innovative offers. Mobile service provider should accept valid feedbacks from consumers regularly and make sure that they satisfy the consumers.

Conclusion

Information technology has brought tremendous changes in the present socio-economic environment. The

telecommunication services in India have increased its horizon. The craze for mobile services in India is increasing substantially. The entry of private sector in the field of communication industry has intensified the competition. Therefore, the knowledge of “what the customer thinks” and “what consequently would contribute to his satisfaction”, is at the requirement of the marketer .The present study aims to assess the consumer’s behaviour towards different mobile service provider’s companies operating in Kovilpatti. After analysing the findings of the study, we suggest that cellular service providers concentrate more on increasing network stability and setting tariff rates competitively. If the mobile phone service providers consider the suggestions which are made by the researcher it will be helpful not only for the consumer but also for the service providers.

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