Customer Satisfaction, Loyalty and Switching Behaviour: A Conceptual Model of Mobile Telecommunications Consumers

S Chigwende[a] and K Govender[b]
[a] University of KwaZulu-Natal
[b]University of KwaZulu-Natal

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Abstract: The paper presents an overview of the mobile telecommunications sector by highlighting the effect of the sector on the economy. The was followed by a discussion of the different types of contracts, with much focus on customer switching, so as to highlight that this industry is highly susceptible to customers switching service providers. The discussion then progressed to why customers switch, the costs and barriers associated with switching and what can be done to minimize such behaviour. A thorough review of relevant literature on consumer behaviour in general and customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and consumer switching behaviour in particular, as well as the antecedents of the aforementioned constructs, culminated in the development of a conceptual model for managing customer switching in the mobile telecommunications industry.

Keywords: mobile telecommunications, customer behaviour, satisfaction, loyalty

1. Introduction

The use of mobile telecommunication is growing exponentially and has managed to substitute the fixed landline because it is highly portable (Kilaba and Manasseh, 2020). This growth is attributable to the many innovations and continuous development of mobile devices, including handsets which have many applications (David 2019). The introduction of pre-paid services has also contributed to the growth of the mobile telecommunications sector (Van Der Merwe 2015) and mobile telecommunication has also contributed greatly to the way people share information (Malhotra and Malhotra 2013), since they can now share information through the use of video calls, SMS, voice calls and social networking applications (David, 2019).

Changes in telecommunication policies in Africa in the 1990s led to the deregulation and liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in most African countries (Kilaba and Manasseh 2020), which has created opportunities for many private mobile telecommunication companies to be established in Africa. This resulted in greater competition and mobile subscriber growth has increased in African countries like Nigeria and Sudan (Casey, 2017), due to inter-alia, low call prices, low prices of handsets and increased coverage in many rural areas.

According to Patterson, Mittal and Weinelt (2017), the mobile network service providers have grown and matured and service providers have managed to develop new products for their customers. Africa's major players are France Telecom, Vodafone, MTN, Bharti Airtel, Econet Wireless and Millicom, among others (Chapeyama, 2017). Developments and growth in the telecommunications industry also have had an effect on the economy of a nation (Sharif, 2017; Musingrimi et al. 2020) and the telecommunications industry is also become necessary for development of the agricultural sector, education, manufacturing and banking industry. Sharif (2017) further added that the growth of the mobile telecommunications industry has greater impact on the economy especially in developing African countries. However, Africa still has potential for growth, as it still has large untapped markets (Chapeyama, 2017).

In the mobile telecommunications industry there are two types of subscriptions which are the pre-paid and the post-paid (Van Der Merwe 2015; Oteri et al. 2015), and these two types of subscriptions offer various calling plans (Oteri et al. 2015). Prepaid subscription allows subscribers to control their airtime usage and there is no long term contract with the service provider (Malhotra and Malhotra 2013; Cetinkaya, Basaran and Bagdadioglu 2014). This also means that prepaid subscribers can easily switch mobile network service providers, since there is no long term contracts with the service providers.

Mobile network operators have improved their service quality by entering into partnerships with hardware and software providers (Czamecki and Dietze, 2017). The software providers have managed to greatly improve the quality and speed of the devices (Czamecki and Dietze, 2017). Providers of telecommunications hardware have also improved the speed of devices and they have managed to improve the device from 4G to 5G, the quality of photos, video quality has also improved and this has allowed the use of video calling (Kaliba and Manasseh, 2020).

There are also many promotional activities and intense competition in the telecommunications sector and subscribers can easily switch network providers (Nhundu 2017). Hence, it is cheaper and simpler to switch network providers and subscribers are allowed to retain their mobile telephone numbers when they switch service providers. Thus, this paper presents a conceptual argument and model to manage mobile telecommunication subscribers, especially their switching behaviour by undertaking an intensive theoretical investigation of the literature pertaining to customer satisfaction, loyalty and switching behaviour and proposing some kind of association among the aforementioned constructs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Customer Satisfaction

The focus on consumer behaviour in the 1950s resulted in the origin of customer satisfaction (Prayag, Hassibi and Nunkoo 2018), which concept (customer satisfaction) was further developed. Some researchers (Famiye, Asante-Darko and Kwarteng, 2017) also argued that customer satisfaction really encouraged customer repurchase behaviour. According to Nazir (2015) customer satisfaction is an important aspect in marketing and it also has a strong impact on the profits and the future of an organization. Daikh (2012) and Sekyere (2015) suggest that satisfied customers usually repurchase the company's products and services and customer satisfaction has developed into a vital competitive strategy for many companies (Duong, 2016).

According to Setiawan and Sayuti (2017), customer satisfaction is defined as the company's goods and services being able to meet customer expectations. Some researchers (Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen and Phan 2018, Cuong and Khol 2019) agree that if performance of the products and services match customer expectations, then the customer is satisfied and if the performance exceeds the expectations, the customer is delighted (Nguyen et al. 2018; Phuong and Trang 2018; Cuong and Khol 2019). For the purposes of this study, the definition by Nguyen et al. (2018) which focuses on meeting customer expectations and which conforms with the expectancy and disconfirmation theory, is adopted.

2.1.1 Antecedents of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is regarded as the long term goal of almost every organisation and it is important for organisations to know the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction (Al-Msallam 2015). Moreover, customer satisfaction is an important concept in the field of marketing, since it assists marketers to predict the behaviour of consumers (Al-Msallam, 2015). Several researchers (Shode 2017; Afthanorhan, Awang, Rashid, Foziah and Liza, 2019) have investigated the different antecedents of satisfaction, namely, service quality, service features, perceived value, price, convenience, competitiveness and customer expectations. Other researchers (Irfan, Shamsudin and Hadi, 2016) also suggested commitment, service fairness, communication and relational benefits as antecedents of customer satisfaction and Oghjafor, Ladipo, Ighomereho and Odunewu (2014) also argued that core service, price, distribution, promotion and customer service are the main pillars of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Afthanorhan et al. (2019) also identified three customer satisfaction antecedents namely perceived quality, perceived value and customer expectations.

It is against the above background, that for the purpose of this research, service quality, price, expected service quality expectations of customers will be considered as the antecedents of customer satisfaction, a view which is also supported by several researchers (Shode 2017; Willys 2018 Chun, Tham and Azam 2019). However, more specifically with respect to the telecommunications sector, the main antecedents are effective service quality issues, such as network coverage and effective network (Gill and Waqas 2014; Chakraborty and Segupta 2014; Abdul, Salman and Olota 2014; Viriri and Phiri 2017). Several researchers (Abdul et al., 2014; Makanyeza et al., 2014; Khan and Khan, 2017), have shown that customer satisfaction has several positive consequences or outcomes that organisations are benefiting from and these are profitability, repurchase intentions and customer loyalty.

According to Viriri and Phiri (2017), network quality, clarity in voice without any network work problems are major service quality issues that determine service quality. The aforementioned further added that service quality issues like service experience and encounters, speed of complaints processing, ease of reporting problems and the billing system, are also major determinants of customer satisfaction in the telecommunications industry.

However, call quality is regarded as a major antecedent of customer satisfaction in the telecommunication sector (Gill and Waqas 2014). These researchers further stated that call quality involves listening quality, what the consumers hear when calling another person, conservational quality which refers to echoes or any delays that may occur in the reception of the voice and transmission quality which involves connection quality and quality network Thus, mobile network providers who offer high quality services which incorporate the above elements, are able to satisfy their customers (Chun et al. 2020).

Lenin Kummar (2019) further added that customers' perceived valued has a greater impact on customer satisfaction. Hult et al. (2019) and Al-Msallam (2019) assert that the customer's perceived value is a major determinant of satisfaction. Customer's perceived value is the difference between the expected benefits and costs of obtaining the product and it involves low price being charged and what the consumer wants from a product or service (Thusyyanthy and Tharanikaran, 2017).

Price is also a determinant of customer satisfaction (Ishard, Rahim, Khan and Khan, 2017; Nguyen et al. 2018). Chun et al. (2019) suggested that price is the amount paid to gain access in order to use the services of a network provider. Thusyyanthy and Tharanikaran, (2017) further argued that price can determine the standard of a product and it therefore determines customer satisfaction. Nguyen et al. (2018) assert that value perceived is a determinant of customer satisfaction because consumers compare the price charged and the benefits gained. If the value is below the consumers' expectations the customer is satisfied (Nguyen et al. 2018).

Price fairness is also regarded as a determinant of customer satisfaction (Abdul-Aziz et al. 2014; Chakraborty and Sengpta 2014). Sabir et al. (2014) further added that under perceived value, tariff rates offered by network providers, the billing system of the company, cost of calling to other networks are also major factors affecting customer satisfaction in the telecommunications industry. Consumers in the telecommunications sector are more satisfied if they buy and use the products and services at a low price (Shode 2017).

Customers have expectations before they purchase a product or service (Hult et al. 2019) and their expectations are a major determinant of customer satisfaction (Mollah 2014; Khuong and Dai 2016). Hamza (2014) and Khuong and Dai (2016) posited that if the product characteristics meet the expectations, the customer will be satisfied. Organisations that focus on producing goods and services that meet the customer's expectations in most cases results in satisfaction of customer's (Karim and Chowdhury, 2014). Customer satisfaction is measured by the comparing the expected and the actual service provided, so the service provider should be able to match the expected service or provide much better services (Almsalam 2014; Mollah 2014; Al-Msallam 2015).

2.1.2 Consequences of Customer Satisfaction

Satisfied customers usually do repeat purchases which in turn increases the profitability of the company (Shode, 2017; Srivastava and Rai 2018). Prayag et al. (2018) added that customer satisfaction increases the company's revenues, since satisfied customers usually have higher consumption of products and services unlike dissatisfied customers, so they higher sales which in turn increase the company's profits (Ha and Park, 2013). A number of scholars (Prayag et al. 2018; Mbango and Makhubela 2019), argued that customer satisfaction is an important competitive tool for the organisation that ensures long-term profitability, increase in profits, high market share and survival of organisations.

Several researchers (Srivastava and Rai 2018; Mbango and Makhubela 2019), suggest that satisfied customers usually make repeat purchases and these consumers also recommend the product to other potential customers and Willys (2018) also argued that customer satisfaction leads to high rates of repeat purchasing. Satisfied customers usually do repeat purchases and in most cases the customers become loyal to the organisation (Mannan, Chowdhury, Sarker and Amir, 2017; Srivastava and Rai 2018) and Bowers (2017) asserts that loyal customers have a great impact on the turnover and profits of a company, since it is cheaper to retain customers than to acquire new ones (Irfan et al. 2016). Moreover, satisfied customers at times pay less attention to competitor's promotional campaigns and may remain loyal to a certain organisation (Oghojaforet al. 2014).

Amegebe and Osakwe (2017) and Sitorus and Yustisia (2018) opine that customer satisfaction is a key aspect in determining customer loyalty and customer loyalty has a strong impact on company's revenues. Thus, on the basis of the above literature review, the forementioned relationship will be postulated into developing a conceptual model for the telecommunications industry.

2.1.3 Customer Satisfaction Models

According to Gamba (2015), many models of customer satisfaction have been developed. However, due to the close association with mobile telecommunications, only the confirmation / disconfirmation theory and the Kano (1984) model will be briefly explained.

The expectation/confirmation theory model which has been adopted by several researchers (Cicerali, Kaya Cicerali, and Saldamlı, 2017; Khalilzadeh, Ghahramani, and Tabari, 2017; Rather, 2018; Sipe and Testa, 2018; Zhang, Kim and Goodsir, 2018, Prayag, Hassibi and Nunkoo 2018), helps marketers to understand customer satisfaction and it is the basis of customer satisfaction models (Saroha and Diwan 2017). Before customers purchase any products and services, they have certain expectations that are usually based on the customer's past experience and on the experience of other customers whom they interact with (Pham, 2015: Nazir, 2015).

Pham (2015) and Nazir (2015) underline that confirmation is the evaluation of the perceived performance in comparison with the set quality standards and positive confirmation occurs when a customer is satisfied, whereas negative confirmation occurs when the customer is dissatisfied (Srivastava, 2015). Pham (2015) further suggested that when the perceived performance exceeds customer expectations, the customer is satisfied but if the perceived performance is less and does not meet the expected standards, then the customer is dissatisfied.

Go and Kim (2018) cite Kano (1984) who developed the Kano Model (Lin et al., 2017), as a tool to measure the happiness of a customer. This model is important as it helps understand and classify customer needs (Gamba 2015) and also assists organisations to determine the features and services that are able to satisfy and dissatisfy customer needs in service organisations (Pham 2015). The Kano model has also been used to classify customers' preferences, product quality and characteristics, and in other research it has been used with other tools to aid the understanding of customer requirements for them to be satisfied (Lin, Taai, Lee, Halao, Zhou, Wang and Shang, 2017).

2.2 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty originated from the concept of consumer behaviour (Agyei and Kalika, 2014; Taghi Pourian and Bakhsh, 2015; Hafez and Akther 2017). Brodin and Sand (2016) cite Kapferer (2012) who defines customer loyalty as the degree of manifestation of attachment which customers experience when buying specific brands. According to Akpoviroro, Amos, Oladipo and Adewale (2020) customer loyalty occurs when a customer buys the same brand of goods and services, instead of buying different brands. Several researchers (Saroha and Diwan 2017; Erzmoniet, Gustafsson and Westroth, 2017; Hafez and Akther 2017; Hassan and Shamusudin 2018; Kumar 2018; Umar 2018), assert that customer loyalty involves commitment of consumers to make repeat purchases from the same service provider, and also recommending the product to friends and relatives. Customer loyalty usually results in repeat purchases and the customers help in spreading the word of mouth (Umar 2018; Cuong and Khoi 2019).

With competition increasing in the telecommunications sector, having more loyal customers has become the main goal in order to survive and remain profitable (TaghiPourian and Bakhsh, 2015; Watson, Beck, Henderson and Palmatier, 2015).

In this research, the definition of customer loyalty by Erzmoniet et al. (2017) will be adopted, which states that customer loyalty is the process where a customer repeatedly purchases and prefers products from a specific organisation and is willing to have an ongoing relationship with the organisation.

2.2.1 Dimensions of Customer Loyalty

Seto-Pamies (2012), Stan, Caemmerer and Cattan-Jallet (2013), Khizindar,Al-Azzam and Khanfar (2015), Rajeswari, Srinivasulu and Thiyagarajan (2017), concur that customer loyalty can be divided into three different types, which are loyalty based on behaviour, attitudinal loyalty and cognitive loyalty. Lee (2019) also posited that customer loyalty has three dimensions, namely, behavioural, attitudinal and a combination of attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. However, some researchers (Morgan and Govender, 2017; Tartaglione, Cavacece, Russo and Granata 2019; Quach, Thaicon, Roberts and Weaven 2020;) argued that customer loyalty has two dimensions only, namely, behavioural and attitudinal loyalty. For the purposes of this study, customer loyalty can be divided into two broad categories, namely, loyalty based on attitudes and loyalty based on behaviour **(**Taghipourian and Baksh, 2015).

Some researches (Kipkirong and Rabach, 2013), argue that behavioural loyalty does not clearly explain the factors why consumers become loyal so alone it's not able to explain the customer attitudes towards a certain brand. Thus, behavioural loyalty is not enough to measure customer loyalty and there are other factors that can be used to measure customer loyalty (Rajeswari, Srinivasulu and Thiyagarajan 2017).

Attitudinal loyalty is regarded as emotional connection of customers to a certain specific product (Stanisavljević, 2017; Rajeswari et al. 2017). Several researchers (Mohammad, 2017; Dimitriadis and Zilakaki, 2019; Inegbedon and Obadiaru, 2019) posited that attitudinal loyalty is when a customer shows commitment to repurchase the company's products and also spreading positive word of mouth. Tartaglione et al. (2019) asserted that attitudinal loyalty is measured by customers' willingness and intention to keep on repurchasing specific company products or services. According to Sulibhavi and Shivashankar (2017), attitudinal loyalty also involves customers psychologically encouraging others to purchase a specific brand and customers then become committed to the brand, and focusing more on establishing a relationship with the firm (Nguyen, Leclcerc and Blanc 2013; Kipkirong and Rabach, 2013). According to Watson, Beck, Henderson and Palmatier (2015) attitudinal loyalty develops after a customer has a positive experience with the brand and develops emotional attachment to the brand (Abdolvand et al. 2016).

2.2.2 Antecedence of Customer Loyalty

Several researchers (Singh, 2017; Singh, Nayyar and Das, 2018; Bhat, Darzi and Parrey, 2019; Shamsudin, Esa and Ali, 2019), concur that the antecedents of loyalty involve commitment, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty incidents. Romdonny, Romsadi (2019) and Quach et al. (2020) also added service quality, perceived switching costs, customer engagement and price as loyalty antecedents and service quality improves customer loyalty. Hafez and Akther (2017) argue that customer loyalty programs are usually in the form of membership cards or reward programs have a direct effect on customer loyalty.

Somewhat similar to loyalty, commitment is the willingness to maintain an important relationship with the seller (Watson et al. 2015; Minh and Huu, 2016). Watson et al. (2015) and Quach et al. (2020) further indicate that commitment results in the development of relationships between the customer and the seller rather than just a passing business deal. This relationship it may be assumed, results in some kind of loyalty being established.

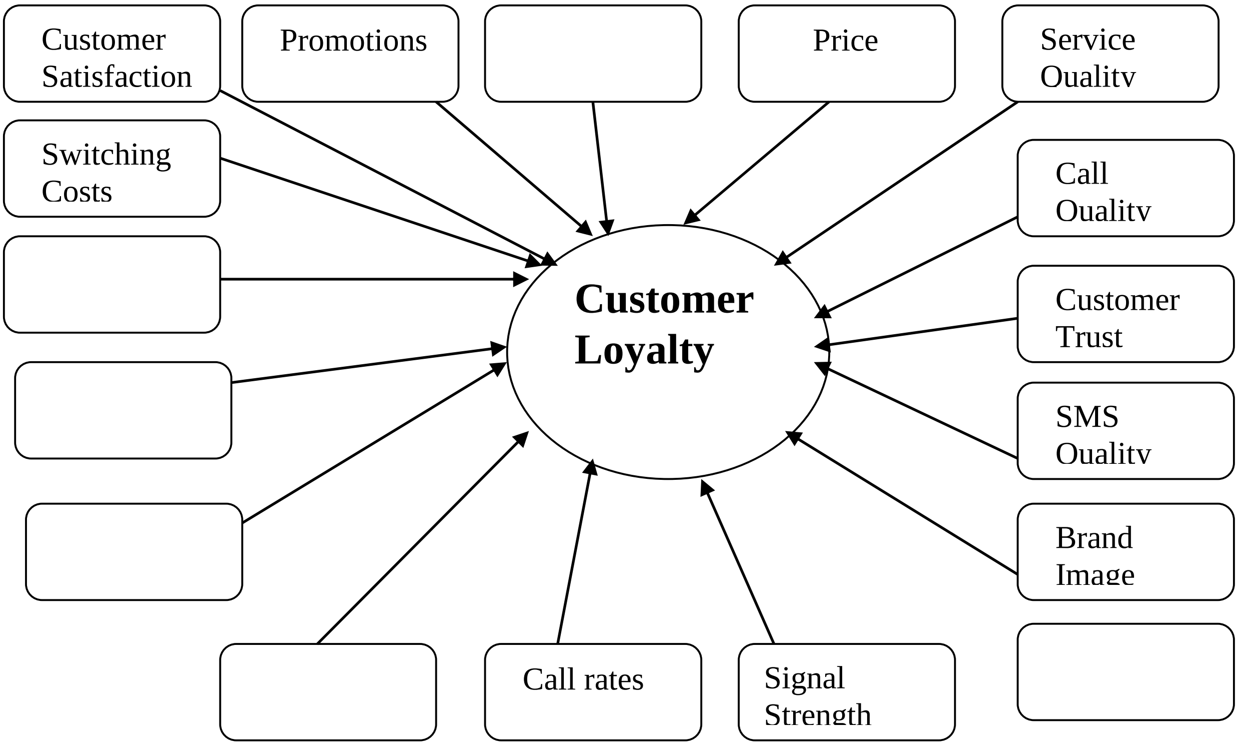
Customer satisfaction which often leads to customer loyalty (Quach et al. 2020) is not an antecedent of loyalty (Jere and Mukupa, 2018). Lee (2019) posits that customer loyalty has a direct impact on company profitability, company's competitive advantage and company performance. Customer loyalty reduces the switching of brands by consumers and encourages repeat purchasing (Sulibhavi and Shivashankar, 2017).

Jere and Mukupa (2019) have vehemently argued that it is important to understand and know the determinants of customer loyalty as they are important in the growth and customer retention of customers. Thus, in this paper, the researchers conceptualize loyalty in the satisfaction model. The review now progresses to loyalty as it applies to the telecommunications sectot.

2.3 Customer Loyalty in the Telecommunications Sector

Adjei and Denanyoh (2014 and Oghojafor et al. 2014) are of the view that promotional activities have a strong impact on customer loyalty because the more promotional materials the customer gets, the more loyal they become. Customer service also has a strong impact on customer loyalty (Adjei and Denanyoh, 2014). Oghojafor et al. (2014) added that customer services include being able to listen to customers, the service personnel response to customers and the efficiency of mechanisms to listen to the customers and if all this satisfies customers, they usually stay loyal to the mobile telecommunication service provider. Good network coverage and signal strength also have a great effect on customer loyalty (Adjei and Denanyoh, 2014). These researchers further argued that low call rate, call quality, SMS quality, GPRS and SMS rates, greatly influence customers to become loyal to the mobile network service provider as reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Factors Influencing Customer Loyalty in the Telecommunications Industry



Source: Adjei and Denanyoh (2014)

2.4 Consumer Switching Behaviour

Nguyen (2016) argues that switching means changing a service provider. Srivastava and Sharma (2013) argue that consumer switching refers to customers who are not loyal to a particular brand. According Dauda and Maiyaki (2019) consumer switching occurs when a customer partially or completely stops using the services of a certain organisation and begins using services of another organisation.

Mandal (2017) and Shah, Husnain and Zbarirshah (2018) define consumer switching behaviour as the process in which a customer stops being loyal to his/her usual service provider and moves to another either because of customer dissatisfaction or any other problems that might have arisen.

Consumer switching can either be partial or total switching in the telecommunications industry (Malhotra and Batra, 2019; Kukreja and Ajagaonkar, 2020). This therefore means that a consumer can temporarily stop subscribing to a certain network provider or can totally stop using their services. Dauda and Maiyaki (2019)'s definition of customer switching will be adopted in this study because they mentions partial and total switching behaviour, which is the case in the mobile telecommunications industry.

Switching intention refers to customer's intention/plan to remain or to move to another service provider (Van Der Merwe, 2015) or the possibility to switch service providers (Rizwan, Hayat and Ali, 2013). The difference between switching intention and switching behaviour is that switching intention is a plan to change a service provider but with switching behaviour the consumer actually switches the service provider (Van Der Merwe, 2015).

Consumers may decide to switch service providers because of a number of factors inter-alia, poor service quality and poor customer satisfaction (Jabeen, Hamid, and Rehman, 2015). Organisations should monitor consumers and be proactive in detecting consumer's intentions to switch in order to reduce loss of customers, sales and profits (Van Der Merwe, 2015). This researcher further argued that organisations should also be able to understand various factors (antecedents) that cause consumers to consider switching service providers.

2.4.1 Antecedents of Switching

There are predisposing and precipitating factors that cause consumers to move from one service provider to another (Van Der Merwe, 2015). Predisposing factors are factors which cause consumers to consider moving to another service provider whereas precipitating factors are factors which cause consumers to make a sudden decision to switch service provider like service failures or a sudden increase in prices. Sithole and Njaya, (2018) argue that it is of great importance for a company to know and understand consumer behaviour and factors that precipitate switching behaviours so that they can put in place preventive strategies in place.

Much research on switching intentions have been carried out in various sectors, including the telecommunications (Grigoriou, Majumdar and Lie 2018; Shah, Mudassir and Zubairshah 2018), the banking industry (Vyas and Raitan 2014), public transport (Chen and Chao 2011), dry cleaning and hair styling (Bansal and Taylor 1999). No consensus was reached regarding what causes consumers to move from one service provider to another (Aslam and Frooghi, 2018).

Since there are inconsistent findings on the causes of switching behaviour in the telecommunications sector (Malhotra and Batra, 2019), there is need to carry out more research to establish the factors that really cause consumers to switch mobile network providers as the results are inconclusive (Hwambo et al., 2017). Thus, this exploratory study which culminates in the development of a conceptual model, will contribute to the knowledge base.

In line with the aforementioned, the antecedents of customer switching, namely, price, core service failure, and employee's response to service failure, inconvenience, competition, service quality, customer dissatisfaction and corporate image, will be briefly discussed. Unique factors that have been identified which only apply in the telecommunications sector are network coverage and call quality (Kusotera, Chimire and Mapuwei, 2018). The various antecedents of switching intentions are briefly discussed below.

Many researchers (Fontana, Iori and Nava 2017; Chandal 2017; Sithole and Njaya 2018; Kusotera et al. 2018; Lim, Yeo, Goh and Koh 2018; Grigoriou et al., 2018; Malhotra and Batra 2019; Dauda and Maiyaki 2019), strongly support the view that price is the main reason why consumers switch service providers. Moreover, it was ascertained that price plays a big role on consumer switching behaviour in the mobile telecommunications industry (Shah et al., 2018). Grigoriou et al. (2018), Lee et al. (2018) and Salhieh (2019) indicate that when customers find out that competitors are offering better prices consumers can switch and move on to service provider offering cheaper prices. Shah et al. (2018) and Manzoor et al. (2020) assert that the pricing categories included all critical switching behaviours, namely, call rate prices, Internet browsing costs, penalties, price deals, coupons or promotions, all contribute to consumer switching behaviour.

Mandal (2017) also added that negative price perceptions impact greatly on consumer switching behaviour. Grigoriou et al. (2018) and Dauda and Maiyaki (2019) also highlight that high call rates and internet browsing fees usually make consumers switch mobile network service provider. The issue of gain or loss ratio plays an important role on consumer switching behaviour, if the consumers feel they are gaining they can stay with the service provider but if they feel they are losing they can shift to another better service provider (Shah et al. 2018). Ndebele at al. (2019) further added that even small changes in price packages can lead to consumer switching service providers, because consumers are constantly looking cost effective network and also saving their money as they are price sensitive.

Effective promotional offers provide customers with information, value, and create awareness, as customers are shown what the organisation will be offering (Thaicon, Quach, Bavalur and Nair, 2017). Sombultawee (2017) and Manzoor et al. (2020) also assert that switching incentives like discounts, product bundling and advertising activities encourage consumer switching behaviour.

Lee et al. (2018) argue that core service failure refers to failures in product quality and it is a very essential factor in the telecommunications sector. Aslam and Frooghi (2018) further described service failure as failure by the organisation to satisfy consumer needs and also failure to meet up their expectations. Thaicon et al. (2017) and Aslam and Frooghi (2018) observe that service failure often leads to consumers switching organisations. The aforementioned further added that if organisations fail to handle customer complaints the customers can switch service providers. Thaicon et al. (2017) also assert that consumers do not normally switch service providers because of one incident of service failure but if the problem continues they tend to exit. Lee et al. (2018) highlight that service failures like technical issues and problems are critical incidents that affect the quality of services and cause consumers to lose trust on their service provider. Lim, Yeo, Goh and Koh (2018) further add that core service failures lead to consumer switching behaviour in the telecommunications sector.

Mandal (2017) cites Keaveney (1995) who argues that in some cases customers do not switch service providers because of service failures but they can switch if employees fail to handle service failures properly. Lim et al. (2018) further added that poor responses to services failure contribute greatly to consumer switching behaviour. Employee service failures include reluctant responses, failure to take action and giving negative responses (Mandal 2017).

Aslam and Frooghi (2018) and Manzoor et al. (2020) argued that inconveniences also cause consumers to switch service providers. In addition, Aslam and Frooghi (2018) observe that inconveniences refer to time a customer waits to get a service, short hours of operation and all these contribute to consumer switching service providers.

According to Aslam and Frooghi (2018) and Salhieh (2019), if competitors are providing better services, customers usually switch to another service provider. Promotional activities by competitors can cause a consumer move from one service provider to another (Grigoriou et al. 2018; Aslam and Frooghi, 2018). Price has a positive effect on consumer switching behaviour and if service providers charge high prices, consumers can move to other service providers (Hwambo et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018). Competitor actions also impact on consumer switching behaviour (Lim et al., 2018).

Hidayat et al. (2017) also opine that poor service quality leads to consumer switching service providers. These authors also suggest that poor service quality leads to dissatisfaction which ultimately leads to customer switching behaviour. Voice communications as part of service quality are mainly used by mobile network users in the whole world and it is also a major driver of consumer switching behaviour in the telecommunications industry (Grigoriou et al., 2018 and Kukreja and Ajagaonkar 2020). Therefore, data download quality is also factor that affects consumer switching behaviour; subscribers also download music, pictures and check email if data downloading is slow it consumers tend to switch to better service providers.

Grigoriou et al. (2018), Sithole and Njaya (2018), Wimalasiri (2018) and Malhotra and Malhotra (2019) concur that if the network quality, coverage and clarity of a telecommunications company are poor, consumers tend move another service provider. Consumers also consider network coverage when selecting mobile network operators, if the service provider has large network coverage consumers tend move to that network in order to have better coverage (Ofori, Larbi-Siaw and Addae, 2015). Malhotra and Batra (2019) also argued that poor network quality usually forces subscribers to move to another service provider. This researcher further added that frequent network problems usually frustrate subscribers and it usually makes them switch mobile network service providers. Afzal et al. (2013) and Shujaat et al. (2015) and both concur that negative experience by consumers due to poor quality services causes consumers to change from one network user to another. Quality is important in the telecommunications sector, service providers who have poor signals tend to frustrate consumers and it makes them switch service providers (Shujaat et al. 2015).

Manzoor et al. (2019) argues that if an organisation has a bad image and poor reputation, consumers usually switch to better network service providers. Mandal (2017) asserts that an organisation's reputation especially in the banking industry can lead to consumers switching banks. The company's image helps to retain customers, if the company has a bad image consumers usually switch to a company with a better brand image, therefore, a negative company brand image leads to consumers switching service providers (Jayawickramarathna, 2014).

Hwambo et al. (2017) suggested that customer dissatisfaction, is also another factor that leads to consumers switching networks. If a consumer is dissatisfied usually moves to a better service provider (Hwambo et al.2017). If consumers do not like the products being offered by a company, they tend to move to other the service providers but if they are satisfied they tend to stay with their service providers (Hwambo et al.2017; Parganas, Papadimitriou, Anagnostopoulos and Theodoropoulos, 2017). Martins et al. (2013) further highlights that when customers are satisfied and believe that they are getting the best service, they will continuously maintain their relationship with service providers.

Thaichon et al. (2017) are of the view that dissatisfied customers have a higher switching rate. These researchers further argued that customer satisfaction is also a main exit barrier and it increases consumer switching behaviour. Saleh, Althonayan, Alhabib, Alrashhedi and Alqahtani (2015) are also of the view that mobile services are continuous in nature and consumers also continuously assessing the service delivery process and if their needs are not met they usually switch to another better service provider. These researchers further highlighted that if mobile network operators fail to satisfy the needs and wants of their consumers they tend to switch service providers.

Family and friends are able to influence one another to switch mobile network service providers (Malhotra and Batra. 2019). Shah, Husnain and Zubairshah (2018) also added that family and friends have a great impact on the mobile network service provider their relative can use. The aforementioned authors also suggest that family and friends usually bear in mind the service provider their friend or relative is using, in most instances they switch in order to use the same service provider because it becomes cheaper to call one another from the same network provider.

Customer service is comprised of systems that support customer complaint procedures, processing of customer complaints and friendliness of the service personnel (Kusotera et al., 2018). They further point out that when customer service care is poor, customers may switch to another efficient service provider. Lee et al. (2018) also added that customer service care involves employee interaction and communication quality levels with mobile service subscribers. In addition, employees' bad attitude and unprofessional behaviour influences consumers to switch service providers.

2.4.2 Switching Costs

Switching costs are incurred when consumers switch service providers (Nguyen 2016). Nguyen (2016), cite Porter (1988) who argued that switching costs are costs that are involved when consumers switch from one provider to another, the costs are in monetary units and also psychological costs of being a new customer, effort and time wasted looking for information to join the new service provider. Nguyen (2016) also added that switching costs are defined as the challenges that consumers face when they switch service providers. Sharmin (2017) defines switching as onetime costs that customers incur as they move from one service provider to another. Pourabedin, Foon, Chatterjee and Ho (2016) defined consumer switching costs as time spent, financial costs and psychological effects that a consumers suffers after switching a service provider. Switching costs are a barrier that stops a consumer from switching to another service provider (Van Der Merwe, 2015). This researcher further added that switching costs can also be regarded as lock in costs which prevent the consumer from leaving the current service provider. Switching costs are also used as a defensive marketing tool that can give the company a competitive advantage (Sharnim, 2017). Switching costs can determine if it is easy for consumers to switch service providers, if the switching costs are low consumers can easily switch service providers (Van Der Merwe, 2015; Yin, 2014).Yin (2014) further added that switching costs can also lock in and make it hard for them to change service providers.

Van Der Merwe (2015) suggests that different types of switching models have also been developed by different authors notably (Hu and Huang (2006), Edward and Sahadev (2011) and Huang and Hsieh (2012). Eappen (2014) also postulate that various forms of switching costs exist which are search costs, learning costs, loyal customer discount, customer habit, emotional costs, cognitive effort and consumer risk perception. Various researchers (Masuku, 2015; Sharmin, 2017; Shah et al. 2013; Pourabedin, et al. 2016; Willys, 2018; Bhattacharya 2013; Martins et al. 2013), suggested three types of switching costs, which are procedural costs, financial costs and relational switching costs. In this study, the aforementioned three factors will be considered since they have been mainly used.

Procedural switching costs, also referred to as learning costs (Martins et al. 2013), involve the effort the consumer puts in collecting information about the brand and following all the stages in switching the service provider (Masuku, 2015; Sharnim, 2017). Procedural switching costs are costs that are incurred when the consumer is moving from one service provider to another; the switching costs involve time lost and the extra effort that is put looking for another service provider (Van Der Merwe, 2015). Procedural switching costs can also be divided into pre-switching search and evaluation costs (Nguyen, 2016; Masuku, 2015). Pre-switching costs are costs that are incurred when the consumer will be gathering information about the product the consumer intends to shift to another service provider. Masuku (2015), Nguyen (2016) and Willys (2018) argue that pre-switching costs also involve an evaluation of the type of service being provided by the new service provider, costs of starting a new relationship and the process of learning the procedures of the new service provider.

Willys (2018) also suggests that procedural switching costs involve risks, setup time and costs of analysing the type of services being provided. Procedural switching costs can be very expensive and during the learning process the consumer may experience negative utility which may change their mind and abandon the idea of switching service providers (Masuku, 2015). Masuku further argues that procedural costs are incurred because of customers' lack of knowledge and ability to gather enough information about other brands. Procedural costs differ depending on the industrial sector and the product offering (Masuku 2015; Nguyen 2015). In the telecommunications industry a consumer incurs costs by breaking long time relationships with the mobile network service provider and also costs of learning the operations of the new service provider (Shah et al, 2013).

Financial switching costs are representing a loss in monetary resources of a customer (Nguyen, 2016; Van Der Merwe, 2015; Willys, 2018). These costs usually occur in the insurance, furniture and telecommunications industry (Masuku, 2015). Masuku (2015) further added that financial cost make switching impossible because the customers will be in a long term contract with their service provider, if the consumer switches he/ she will incur sunk costs. Financial switching costs reduce the intention of switching service providers (Van Der Merwe, 2015). If the products and services are being provided efficiently, the financial switching costs can be insignificant, and in the telecommunications sector the service providers have similar products and the switching costs are insignificant as the service providers provide incentives which reduce the switching costs. Shah et al. (2013) also argue that in the telecommunications sector, the consumer incurs costs when they inform family and friends that they have moved to a new mobile network service provider and that they also incur costs of buying a new line or SIM card.

Masuku (2015) and Willys (2018) agree that relational switching costs cause psychological and emotional harm. Relational switching costs also involve individual and brand relationship losses (Martins et al. 2013). Changing service provider's results in broken relationships between the service provider and consumer (Masuku, 2015). The telecommunications company offers both contract lines and pre-paid lines which are making it easy for consumers to switch mobile network service providers (Shujaat et al. 2015). In the telecommunications sector the customers face uncertainties and experience emotional pain when joining a new mobile network service provider (Shah et al. 2013). When consumers repeatedly purchase from one service provider a bond develops between the two parties, this bond can be a strategy that reduces switching of service providers (Van Der Merwe, 2015).

For the purpose of this research, all three of the aforementioned switching typologies will be used as they all apply in the telecommunications sector (Van Der Merwe, 2015).

2.4.3 Switching Barriers

In the telecommunications industry, there are positive and negative switching barriers (Yin 2014). Switching costs, lock-in consumers and consumers will be unable to leave a service provider; they prevent consumers from leaving (Van Der Merwe 2015). There are hard lock-ins and soft lock-ins (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013; Van Der Merwe, 2015). Hard lock-ins are negative switching barriers whilst soft lock-ins are positive switching barriers. Companies benefit to a greater extent if consumers are locked-in (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). These researchers further added that soft lock ins are the relational benefits the consumer enjoys for being an organisations customer. Mobile network operators have two types of subscribers which are the pre-paid ones and the contract subscribers (Van Der Merwe, 2015; Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). Pre-paid customers are usually in a soft lock-in switching barrier whilst hard lock-in strategies are for contract customers (Van Der Merwe, 2015; Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). Some consumers remain in relationship because of lock-ins and some consumers remain in the relationship against their will lose out because of switching costs (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). Examples of hard lock-ins are financial switching costs and soft lock-ins are relational benefits that consumers gain from being in a relationship with the service provider.

Hard lock-in strategies exist and are a result of procedural switching costs like entering into contracts, starting up costs, learning products costs (Van Der Merwe, 2015). If the consumer is in a contractual agreement with the service provider he is obliged to stay until when the contract expires (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013; Cetinkaya and Basaran, 2014). Contracts are regarded as effective lock-in strategies that prevent consumers from switching a service provider (Van Der Merwe, 2015). Contract subscribers have higher switching costs than pre-paid consumers (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). These researchers further argue that procedural lock-in strategies discourage consumers from switching but may also encourage negative word of mouth.

Besides contractual agreements, consumers also lose their mobile numbers if they switch to other mobile network service providers (Van Der Merwe, 2015; Astbury 2018). Some people do not accept calls from unknown numbers because of the increased number of unsolicited calls and telemarketing (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). There is a higher chance that the recipient may reject the incoming call if the caller is unknown (Van Der Merwe, 2013). Changing numbers will also increase costs on the customer as he or she has to incur costs trying to inform relatives that he or she has a new number and also costs of making new business card with a new number (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013; Van Der Merwe, 2015). However, in some countries such as South Africa, it is now possible to use the same mobile number, when one changes mobile network providers (Van Der Merwe, 2015; Astbury 2018). Mobile number portability is also now possible in many countries and it is contributing greatly to consumer switching behaviour since consumers are allowed to retain their mobile numbers (Grigoriou and Lie. 2018).

Vermeulen (2015) posited that mobile network operators provide handsets that do not function when another service provider's SIM card has been inserted. Consumers are therefore prevented from switching because they will be forced to buy another handset (Van Der Merwe, 2015; Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). These researchers further added that hard lock-in strategies prevent consumers from switching service providers even when they are not satisfied.

Soft lock-in strategies decrease switching intention and at the same time if a competitor has better service offerings the consumer can easily switch service providers (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2013). The soft lock-in strategies are promotions, cheaper calling rates, competition. Before consumers switch providers, they, usually tell at least one person, either a relative, friend or work colleagues (Msibah (2014) and Mandal (2017). These researchers added that switchers usually look for information before they switch service providers and they find information from the marketing communications usually posted by other companies.

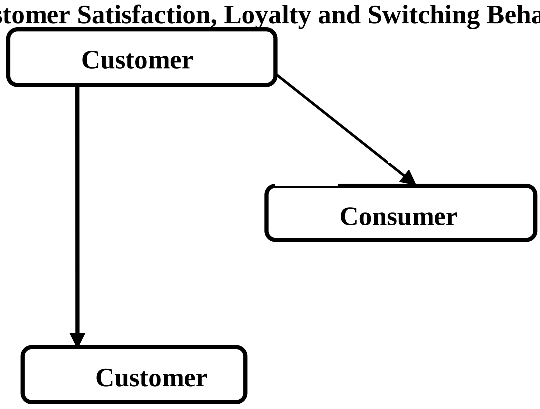
3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The literature review helped to define customer satisfaction and understand customer satisfaction approaches, antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction. Customer loyalty, more specifically the antecedents and consequences of customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry was also discussed. Consumer switching behavior was discussed in much detail and the factors contributing to consumer switching behaviour and the consumer switching behaviour models that clearly show processes and antecedents of consumer switching behaviour were also discussed. It was evident that various theories have been developed in an effort to understand consumer switching behaviour, and these include Purchase Process Model, Consumer Switching Model, and Push-Pull-Mooring model, The Purchase Process, Switching Process Model and the General Systems Theory. However, these were not discussed in much detail since it would have contributed to an unnecessary increase in the length of this paper.

In summary, it became apparent that high levels of customer satisfaction reduces consumer brand switching (Garga, Maiyaki and Sagagi, 2019). The aforementioned authors further added that consumer switching behaviour is greatly influenced by customer satisfaction levels, if consumers are dissatisfied they move to another service provider. Furthermore, thorough the elaborate discussions, it also became evident that the satisfaction of customers positively affects their loyalty (Kariuki, 2015; Kunanusorn and Puttawong, 2015; Karyose, Astuti and Ferdiansjah, 2017; Ashraf et al. 2018).

Thus, by drawing on the extensive literature review, the following model is conceptualized to manage customers switching behaviour in the telecommunications industry.

Figure 2: Customer Satisfaction, Loyalty and Switching Behaviour



It is recommended that the above model be tested by conducting an empirical study among a sample of mobile telecommunication customers by postulating and testing hypotheses using inferential statistics.

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