



THE INFLUENCE OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON CUSTOMER RETENTION IN THE TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY.

A CASE OF VODACOM COMPANY

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Abstract

This study aimed at analyzing the Influence of integrated marketing communication on Customer Retention in the Telecom Industry in Tanzania. Specifically, the study intended to examine the effects of integrated marketing communication on customer retention in Tanzania telecommunication industry. Moreover, the study used explanatory research design to search for causal relationship between the study variables. The questionnaire instrument was used to gather the statistical data in order to test the hypothesis and model used. Stratified sampling technique was used to get the strata of Vodacom customers in Dar-es-salaam; the strata include Kinondoni, Temeke and Ilala. Thereafter, a simple random sampling technique was used to draw the sample of 400 for in-depth analysis. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM), it was revealed that integrated marketing communication have positive and significance influence for the telecommunication companies to retain their customer. The study concludes that customer retention is compatible to unique factors such as Integrated Marketing Communication was found to be positive and significant at (p) value of 0.05. Specifically, it was found critical factors of integrated marketing communication such as customer support, service customization and customer resolution attract customer retention in telecommunication company. While, factors of integrated marketing communication were found to be significant it calls for managers to enhance integrated marketing communication by improving the customer support, service customization and customer resolution.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing, Marketing Communication and Customer retention

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has been widely adopted by businesses around the world as a strategy for retaining customers (Ahmed and Jawaberh, 2012). It is also argued by Mohammed *et al.*, (2014) that IMC tend to create value for both the company and customers in telecommunication industry. On the other hand, Rahim (2016) consolidated that IMC used to collect customer details from which the business creates a platform to communicate with customers. It is

from the IMC, firms in telecommunication industry are engaging various communication means to provide a scalable brand loyalty and service quality that attracts customers satisfaction eventually retention. Peppers and Rodgers (2016) acknowledges that IMC helps to develop long lasting relationships with clients, which goes hand in hand with customer satisfaction derived from unique needs of individual groups among the telecommunication services clients. Moreover, scholars including Kotler and Armstrong (2011) asserts that IMC assists the business to maintain its sales volume through repetitive purchase as customers experience good service quality. Thus, IMC is considered as a viable tool in retaining customers within the telecommunication industry.

Realizing the contribution of the Integrated Marketing Communication on customer retention, both governments and business firms adopt various initiatives towards attracting customers' retention. In US, telecommunications network companies such as Verizon Communications Inc, AT&T Inc and Softbank Group Corp invested heavily on Integrated Customer Communication and Price schemes in order to create long term customer relationship and intimacy with customers (Cognizant, 2014). Likewise, the telecommunication networks in UK such as Vodafone, T-Mobile and Virgin Mobile adopted brand loyalty schemes through improving its image and trust for retaining customers and sell more of their products (Rahim, 2014).

In the context of Asia, the study by Djajanto, *et al* (2014) identified that telecom firms are implementing customer centric initiatives to retain customers through intimacy and service reliability. In the same vein, African telecommunication market, Dubihlela and Molise-Khosa (2014) pointed out that call centers initiatives are adopted to ensure quality and reliability on service provision for customer retention. Also, Mkono and Kapinga (2014) confirmed that majority of telecom firms in Tanzania including Vodacom Tanzania are offering competitive service packages to customers. For instance, Vodacom Tanzania initiated and improving mobile payment, internet services and call tariffs as part of its IMC campaign (Lancaster, 2017). On the other side, the government initiated the ICT policy in 2016 as part of the government effort to ensure that telecom firms are offering quality integrated marketing communication services that meets the preferences (URT,2016).

Despite of the contribution of IMC and initiatives used by the telecommunication industry to retain customers, yet companies in telecom industry has been facing a high level of customers' retention problems in both developed and developing countries. Notably in India recent, it was found that the biggest challenge for telecom service providers is to retain the customers (Rajini and Sangamaheswary, 2016). On the other hand, in Jordanian Mobile Telecommunications Companies where very intense competition exist, firms are using large amount of their resources and effort to retain customers (Awwad and AL-Qrallah, 2014). This was also evidenced in South African Cellular Industry, where it was found that the pressure on companies to retain customers is very high. As a result of high pressure on retaining customers, companies face slow market share increase which consequently hinder their profitability (Molapo and Mukwada, 2011). In Ghanaian telecommunication industry, it was found that customer retention is much harder and competition within telecommunication industry is getting harder day by day due to globalization and deregulation (Kyei and Bayoh, 2017).

Like other countries, Tanzanian telecom companies also face customer retention challenges. For instance, Vodacom, the leading cellular network in Tanzania, experiences customer retention challenge too. The company's financial statistics shows, in the first quarter of 2014 Vodacom had 36.7% market shares of subscribers, but in the last quarter of 2015, the company dropped down to 32.6 shares in the market (Tanzania Telecommunications Report, 2016).

Despite the existence of this challenge in Tanzanian telecom industry, however, less attention has been paid to ascertain the influence of IMC on customer retention specifically in the telecom industry. Nonetheless, studies conducted in the area have come up with unique findings. Ofori-Dwumfuo, *et al* (2013) conducted a study on the relationship between ICT as integrated communications and customer retention in the Ghanaian mobile telecommunication, found that the constructs such as customer support, service customization and differentiation, were found to have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction and retention. While, Magasi (2015) studied on the effects of selected factors on customer relationship marketing and its influence on customer retention in Tanzania, found out that a satisfied customer will not always enter into a long-term relationship with the firm. From the inconsistent findings presented by the two accessed empirical studies, it is obvious that factors that specifically influence customer retention in the telecom industry in Tanzania were not clearly articulated. Thus, this study sought to fill the gap by analyzing the factors that influence customer retention in the Tanzanian telecom industry.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To address the specific objective of this study, it was hypothesized that, integrated marketing communication have positive and significant influence on customer retention in telecommunication industry in Tanzania. Standardized estimate and critical ration in structural equation modeling was used to evaluate the strength of significant influence of integrated marketing communication on customer retention. A positive path coefficient ($\gamma = .298$) using standardized estimate was found which indicates that integrated marketing communication is positively related to customer retention in Tanzania telecommunication industry.

Positivism research paradigm was employed along with exploratory factor analysis cross-sectional research design to ascertain the causal relationship between the study variables. Positivism research philosophy was adopted based on the assumption that the researcher can produce knowledge and understand realities through theory and empirical testing. Within positivism paradigm assumption, the current study is based on various theories on integrated Marketing communication in influencing customer retention, from which the study hypotheses were developed and validated through empirical data (Bryman, 2015). Thus, the applicability of positivism paradigm in this research is justified as it offers a chance to a researcher to use theory and test the significant influence of integrated marketing communication on customer retention in telecom industrial in Tanzania. Quantitative research approach guided the study on the methods of data collection as well as the analysis (Creswell, 2009). Similarly, Saunders *et al* (2012) advocated that quantitative approach has the ability of explaining the causal relations between the variables and hypothesis testing through data collected in statistical characteristics. In the study, the researchers developed hypothesis on testing the causal relationship between integrated marketing communication and customer retention.

For statistical purpose the stud, a sample formula to calculate a representative sample was used to determine the sample. The study employed Slovin's formula as adopted from Guildford and Fruchter (1973) in order to calculate the sample: formula to determine the sample size for the study population, thus: $n = N / (1 + (N * e^2))$ Where: n = number of samples, N = the targeted population (Vodacom customers), e = margin of error and the confidence level is 95% or 0.95, n=sample size (Vodacom customers).The study targeted a grand total population of 1,224,000 Vodacom subscribers from Dar-es-salaam region (i.e., Ilala, Temeke and Kinondoni). In order to calculated the sample, the researcher used the margin error of 5%, thus the study sample calculated (n) was 400. The study sample was 400 participants was adequate to conduct SEM, as stated in Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) that the study sample has to range between 100 and 400 participants. This study used the sample error 5% to maximize the sample in order to accommodate the non-response. This can occur during the time of questionnaire administration and it can lead into smaller sample. Purpose of

selecting this sample was to get a manageable number and representative sample. From which the study was able to gather adequate data and achieve the study objective and avoid biasness.

Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to assess the underlying structure for the forty (40) items from the survey questionnaire. In selecting factors to retain, four criteria were adopted namely, Eigen values, scree test (i.e., screen plot), the conceptual theoretical assumption and factors that have at least three items. The use of a combination of criteria are recommended by Yong and Pearce (2013) to help to offsite the weakness of using one criterion.

Given this situation, four factors were produced based on the coded questionnaire attached at appendix V with 70% of the cumulative variance as attached in the appendix V. The four factors had the Eigen values >1, were all above the break/cut off point on screen graph and had at least two items aligned as in the conceptual framework. This means that all retained factor meets the Kaiser's criterion.

After discovering that the four factors have met the criteria and they were qualified to be retained, further analysis of measured variables was done in order to see if the indicators really fit to their underlying factors. In order to assess the suitability of each measured variables to their underlying structure, the following criteria as recommended by Yong and Pearce (2013) was adopted for retaining/dropping an item/indicator as follows:

First, all items loaded into their associated factors were retained and those loaded into more than one factors were dropped. Second, if more than two items were loaded in one factor, all item were retained and if less than three items were loaded in one factor, all were dropped. Third, all items with KMO p-value greater than 0.5 were retained and those with less than 0.5 were dropped. Fourth, all items with loading ranging from 0.4 to 0.8 were retained and those with loading less than 0.4 or above 0.8 were dropped.

Yong and Pearce (2013) suggested these criteria to be adopted for either retaining the items or dropping the items in order to improve the model. As far as this study is concerned, table 4.6 presents a selected output of SPSS items which were dropped.

Table 4.6The Selected exploratory factor analysis output of Items dropped

FACTOR	ITEM REMOVED
IMC: Integrated market communication	IMC2: and IMC6
CR: Customer retention	CR1

Integrated Market Communication (IMC): IMC2 and IMC6 were eliminated from the analysis because they had weak loadings and hence affected its fitting. For example, IMC2 had a multiple loading on IMC. For IMC6, it was eliminated because it was loading weakly with the value less than 0.5.

CR1: For CR1, it had a negligible contribution because it was loaded alone in a single factor which failed to support theoretical assumptions. Given this perspective, the items that did not fit well with the factor solution were dropped from the analysis as described in table 4.7 and those which fitted very well were retained as described in table 4.7:

	IMC	CR
IMC8	.927	
IMC1	.895	
IMC5	.892	
IMC4	.759	
IMC3	.626	
IMC7	.606	
CR3		.915
CR4		.887
CR2		.884

Having established the study framework from the exploratory factor analysis, the next step was to perform a confirmatory factor analysis as described in detail in the following section:

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis

While exploratory factor analysis failed to assess the loadings of the measures, error variances and covariance. In the current study, it was necessary to carry out confirmatory factor analysis to analyze theoretical constructs through assessing the loadings of the measures, error variances and covariance (Hooper, et al., 2008). At this stage the aim was to confirm and harmonize a belief about how the original variables are organized in a particular way using CFA. To carry out a confirmatory factor analysis, a measurement model was developed to test for measurement errors and the correlation between the latent variables (Yong and Pearce, 2013). In this section, measurement models of composite structure as used in the conceptual framework is presented.

Model Fitness Evaluation in a Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The following criteria were used to guide the model refinement process to achieve a better fit as recommended by Schermelleh-Engel, et al. (2003) that a Standardized regression weight (S.R.W) value should be above 0.5 and Modification indexes (MI) that reveal high covariance between measurement errors accompanied by high regression weights between these errors' construct and cross loading items are candidate for deletion.

Measurement Model for Baseline Model

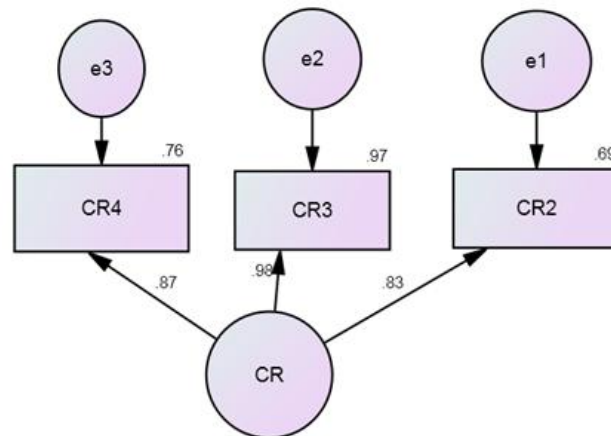
In the current study, in order to reach a baseline measurement, model that fits both components, the four individual measurement models which were developed earlier were combined and a CFA was run with the maximum likelihood estimate in IBM Amos 20 to determine its fitness. After initial run, the results showed a bad model fit with CMIN/DF= 5.263, GFI=0.811, AGFI=0.762, CFI=0.702 and RMSEA=0. 109. Based on Hoe (2008) recommendation which require a model to achieve the following minimum requirements CFI (>0.90 indicates good fit), RMSEA (<0.08 indicates acceptable fit), and commonly used χ^2 statistic (χ^2/ df ratio of 3 or less) in order to be considered fit.

In order to improve the model, some items that were affecting the significance of the model's fitness were removed as recommended by Hooper, et al. (2008) to remove the items that demonstrate low loading, those items standardized regression weights (S.R.W) values less than 0.5. The items that were removed including:

Integrated Market Communication (IMC): IMC3, IMC5, IMC6 and IMC7 were eliminated from the analysis because they had weak loadings and hence affected its fitting.

Measurement Model for Customer Retention (CR)

Initially, CFI was run using IBM Amos 20 to test and confirm for measurement model base on the following observed variable namely CR2, CR3 and CR4. The model output as illustrated in figure indicating that the model fit well based on Hoe(2008) commonly applied fit indices which require a model to achieve the following minimum requirement CFI (>0.90 indicates good fit), RMSEA (<0.08 indicates acceptable fit), and commonly used χ^2 statistic (χ^2/df ratio of 3 or less) in order to be considered fit.

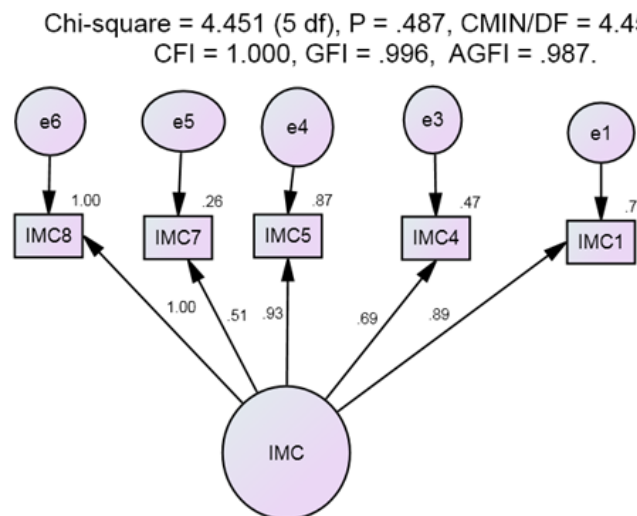


STANDARDIZED ESTIMATES MEASUREMENT MODEL FOR CUSTOMER RETENTION

Figure 4.1 Measurement Model for Customer Retention

Measurement Model for Integrated Market Communication (IMC)

Initially, CFI was run using IBM Amos 20 to test and confirm for adoption (AD) measurement model base on the following observed variable namely IMC1, IMC3, IMC4, IMC5, IMC7 and IMC8. After run, IMC3 was dropped to enhance model fit. The model output as illustrated in figure indicating that the model fit well based on Hoe (2008) commonly applied fit indices which require a model to achieve the following minimum requirement CFI (>0.90 indicates good fit), RMSEA (<0.08 indicates acceptable fit), and commonly used χ^2 statistic (χ^2/df ratio of 3 or less) in order to be considered fit.



STANDARDIZED ESTIMATES MEASUREMENT MODEL FOR INTEGRATED MARKET COMMUNICATION

Figure 4.2 Measurement Model for Integrated Market Communication

I. THE BASIC MODEL PATH COEFFICIENTS AND RELATIONSHIP TESTING

The structural model in figure 4.6 was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The hypothesized relationships are examined against various coefficients and scores obtained from the analysis. In this research, the hypotheses are tested based on the direction, strength and the level of significance of the path coefficients. A standardized paths coefficient, critical value (C.R) and a significant level (p) was used in this study in the testing and evaluation of the strength and the level of significance of the hypotheses. Testing hypotheses at each run is done for comparison purposes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first postulated relationship of this study hypothesized a positive and strong significant relationship between integrated market communication and Customer retention as stated below.

H1: Integrated market communication have a positive and significant influence on Customer retention

For testing the stated hypothesis, descriptive statistical analysis was run first to profile the influence of Integrated market communication on predicting Customer retention as illustrated in table 4.10.

Table 4.10 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
IMC8	392	1	5	4.12
IMC1	392	1	5	4.04
IMC4	392	1	5	3.84
Valid N (listwise)	392			

Table 4.10 shows the results of the analysis. Among the three attribute of integrated marketing communication in table 4.10 above, customer support had high impact on customer retentions in telecommunication followed by service customization and customer resolution. This means that customer support yields a high mean value of 4.00 service customization with mean 4.04 and customer resolution which yield a mean value of 3.84. The greater the mean the high the impact or the more the mean value close to five the more the impact. Further analysis was done using SEM in order to determine the significant influence of integrated market communication on customer retention as illustrated below in table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Integrated market communication path coefficient

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	S.R.W	REMARKS
CR <--- IMC	.292	.052	5.648	***	0.298	Accepted
IMC1 <--- IMC	.958	.034	28.096	***	0.896	
IMC8 <--- IMC	1.000				0.991	
IMC4 <--- IMC	.834	.049	17.096	***	0.694	

The path leading from IMC to CR in table 4.11 used to examine the relationship between Integrated market communication and customer retention. A positive path coefficient ($\gamma = .298$) using standardized estimate results in table 4.11 indicates that Integrated market communication is positively related to customer retention. This concurs with Chin (1998) and Hoe (2008) who argued that a standardized paths coefficient (γ) should be at least 0.2 in order to be considered significant and meaningful for discussion. The results thus in the current study confirm a strong positive relationship between Integrated market communication and SMEs customer retention.

Discussion of the findings

This study seeks to establish how integrated market communication is related to customer retention of telecommunication industry in Tanzania. Findings from the standardized estimate shows a positive path coefficient ($\gamma = .298$) which indicates that integrated marketing communication is positively related to customer retention in Tanzania telecommunication industry. Further results using critical ration on the tested hypothesis yielded a significant critical ration greater than 1.96 of 5.648. The result concurs with Hox and Bechger (2014) who argued that any relationship resulting in a critical ration greater than 1.96 is considered significant. On the other hand, customer support, service customization and customer resolution that were used to measure the integrated market communication, all had standardized estimate greater than 0.2 and critical ration greater than 1.96. This implies that customers in telecommunication industry are retained by integrated market communication attributes such as customer support, service customization and customer resolution.

The study findings are in line with other studies including Ghadimi, *et al.* (2017) and Omotayo (2011) who found significant relationship between integrated market communication and customer retention. For example Ghadimi, *et al.* (2017) found that the closeness of staffs' relationships with customers enhance customer's personal loyalty to staffs and intention to repeat purchase in the organization. These findings imply that when telecom staff maintain good customer communication and treat them with dignity (i.e., good customer care), this will in turn motivate customers to repeat purchase and hence retain them in their business. Also, the study findings are supported by the argument made by Omotayo (2011) who stressed that sales promotion as marketing communication tools tend to be used in attracting the attention of the customer and build their retention. He further argued that for the company to retain their customers in telecommunication industry, they must enhance their marketing communication using sales promotions.

In the same vein, the study findings are complimented by Kapai and Moronge (2015) study in Airtel Kenya, who stress that sales promotion as market communication tool should match with the changing environment, the organization should have a wide range of sales promotion to suit different people, offer continuous sale-promotion to its customers, enact strategies to ensure robust sales promotions more than rivals and ensure customers are well satisfied. This implies that the use of promotion tools has significant influence on customer retention.

Despite the fact that Integrated Marketing Communication is significant, but the possible explanation of its significance tends to differ from context to context. Sakara, 2014; Gul, *et al.*, (2018) Integrated Marketing Communication significantly tends to differ from one study to another. For example, Sakara (2014) asserts that sales promotions as an integral part of IMC significantly influences customer retention in Ghanaian telecommunication industries. The study further explains that sales promotion is capable of retaining customers in a telecommunication network through sales promotional incentives. While Gul, *et al.* (2018) explains that the significant influence of IMC on customer retention lays on the ground of companies' investment on customer engagement, customer attachment, and sense of community. On the other hand, Hanaysha, *et al.* (2017) found that IMC activities through social media marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) explain why IMC influences customer retention. Omotayo (2011) further point out sales promotion which is an integral part of IMC as a key in attracting the attention of customers and build long term relationship in Nigerian telecommunication industry. This implies that despite IMC being significant in attracting and retaining customers in the telecom industry, but tends to differ from context to context.

Moreover, IMC is not a standalone theory to study customer retention, such counter argument to the current study findings was found true in the studies conducted by Hanaysha, *et al.* (2017) found that over use of sales promotion is insignificant in retaining customer. Similarly, Agumba, *et al* (2017) stress that IMC is only useful for sharing, giving feedback as the channel for resolution, and involvement. Also, Joshi and Jog (2015) further argued that though IMC endowed with salient determinants for customer retention, but is not a standalone theory to study customer retention.

Based on Joshi and Jog (2015) findings on the IMC theory, the latter argued that the theory assists to understand the impact of communication technology on appealing customers and retaining customers. Likewise, the findings from this study shares the same understanding that IMC is positively related to customer retention in Tanzania telecommunication industry. While, factors such as customer support and service customization had a high level of positive and significant influence towards customer retention. These factors differ from the ones used by Agumba and Ofori-Dwumfuo, *et al* (2013). The two studies identified that IMC is useful for sharing, giving feedback as the channel for resolution, and involvement. This further supports the fact that customer support and service customization (which are integral parts of IMC) are useful tools for customer retention. Also, the findings support the significance of IMC theory that it predicts the impact of channels and technology that fuel communication and customer retention.

It is thus, imperative to note that the influence of the customer retention strategies varies depending on the nature of Marketing Communication Technology used (Magasi, 2015). Belch and Belch (2012) further points out that IMC theory focuses on evaluation of communication strategies and how the technology can persuade and appeal customers to remain loyal (retention). Furthermore, the study by Kotler and Keller (2012) summarizes the attributes leading into effective Integrated Marketing Communication and recommended attributes such as sharing, feedback, channel for resolution; customer involvement can lead into customer retention. This study, found that the factors identified by (ibid) had a significant and influence customer's retention in the telecommunication industry.

III. Conclusions, implications and recommendation

Generally, the study concludes that, integrated market communication has a positive and strong significant influence on customer retention in telecommunication industry. However, based on the study discussion of the findings, this study further concludes that basing on the findings from previous studies and the current study it can be further concluded that not all integrated market communication attributes are useful in retaining customers as some are not rewarding. This may be due to the contextual difference in which telecommunication companies operate which tend to explain the unique contribution of integrated market communication on customer retention. Theoretical implications highlight the contributions of the study to the literature on customer retention in telecommunication industry. Implication for researchers addresses the contributions of the study in advancing the methodology of the prior studies on customer retention in telecommunication industrial. Managerial implications relate to the work practices of telecommunication companies in the support of customer retention where the policy implications include recommendations for addressing policy issues relating to the development and speeding up customer retention strategies.

The study finds and concludes that the integrated market communication has some potential contributions in retaining customers in telecommunication industry. The validated models segregate the characteristics of customer relationship management that could influence customer retention in telecommunication industry. In each case service customization, customer problem resolution and customer support are of an overriding influence on customer retention in telecommunication industry. Moreover, service customization, customer problem resolution and customer support principal influence for telecom customers to be retained for services as they are significant and source of customer retention respectively.

These calls for policies that create conducive customer care services environment, encouraging telecom employees to use integrated market communication strategies and embrace customer support culture that leads to greater opportunities for telecom companies to retain their customers through

service customization, customer problem resolution and customer support in their marketing program.

While national policies and strategies have put a lot of emphasis on the use of ICT in general, the current study suggests that development of National policy that address the service customization, customer problem resolution and customer support at the national level and at firm level is imperative for proper deployment and offering of good telecommunication services. Similarly, technology infrastructure should be given priority as they pave way for better market communication and use of telecom resources and thus augment the internal capabilities of the firm in service customization, customer problem resolution and customer support. Therefore, the study urges for policies that address market communication barriers issues at the national and at the firm-level which underscore enterprising culture as necessary for customer relationship management and good customer services.

Policy and public interventions that emphasize both skills and mobile infrastructure on marketing communication are important. Marketing communication among the telecommunication industry should be facilitated through better policy interventions that enhance learning and knowledge sharing on opportunities offered by telecom companies and its impact on their business. Additionally, telecom companies should be encouraged and assisted to embrace customer support and problem resolution programs through proper policy guidelines. There is a need to have policy interventions designed to address the use of market communication and special characteristics of customers in telecommunication companies. In line with this, customers should, in a way, be encouraged to share business and knowledge, experience and skills with telecom companies. In that way, even market firms' performances are likely to soar.

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