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Customer Based Transparency and Attributive Perception of Telecommunication Subscribers in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

The study was conducted within Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, aiming to explore four specific research questions alongside corresponding hypotheses. A descriptive survey method was utilized to carry out the research. The population of interest consisted of telecom users within this region, particularly those subscribed to major providers including MTN, GLO, AIRTEL, and 9mobile. Through simple random sampling, 384 participants were selected across Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, and Delta States. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire developed using a 5-point Likert scale format. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by a panel of three marketing experts from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Reliability testing, implemented through a test-retest method, produced a correlation coefficient of 0.76, signifying a satisfactory level of reliability. Analytical tools such as descriptive statistics (weighted mean and standard deviation) were employed to interpret the research questions, while the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to assess the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Key findings revealed that information disclosure had a moderate effect on subscribers' perceptions, network clarity had a strong positive influence, while data and call accuracy showed minimal impact. Additionally, trust in service delivery moderately shaped user perceptions. The study concluded that transparency from telecom providers significantly enhances subscribers' perceptions of service quality in the South-South region. Consequently, it was recommended that telecom operators emphasize transparent communication, particularly regarding service-related information, to foster greater customer trust and improve brand perception.

Keywords: *Customer Based, Transparency, Attributive Perception, Telecommunication Subscribers, South-South Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of empowered consumers, transparency has become a critical element of a strong and credible brand. Without transparency, a business cannot truly be considered a brand; at best, it remains a commodity. Transparency entails being candid and clear about a brand's identity, actions, and values acknowledging both its strengths and weaknesses. While the importance of transparency is not a recent development, what has significantly evolved is the public's access to information. With increasing connectivity and digital literacy, consumers now have unprecedented power and awareness. As such, companies can no longer afford a disconnect between their brand promises and actual practices.

The growing accessibility of information forces businesses to make a crucial choice: either resist transparency or fully embrace it. Choosing the latter lays the foundation for trust, which is essential for meaningful customer relationships. These relationships foster loyalty, and loyalty is what differentiates a brand from a mere commodity one that can be easily replaced (Grenville, 2019).

Globally, including in the telecommunications sector, transparency is increasingly recognized as a strategic asset for driving business success. In Nigeria, prior to the launch of the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) in 2001, telephone access was severely limited. The industry was dominated by NITEL, with minimal availability of mobile services. The introduction of GSM, marked by the licensing of providers such as Econet, MTN, Mtel, and later Glo and Etisalat (now 9mobile), revolutionized the market. In the early stages, simply offering mobile services was sufficient for rapid growth, as demand far exceeded supply. During this period, telecom companies gained subscribers quickly, often without prioritizing transparency or earning customer trust.

However, the market has matured. Competition has intensified, and the rapid subscriber growth seen in the early years is no longer guaranteed. To thrive in the current environment, telecom operators must adopt more sophisticated marketing strategies ones that prioritize transparency and trust-building (Woweffect, 2018). As customers become more discerning, addressing their evolving needs requires greater accountability and openness from service providers.

MTN Nigeria PLC stands out as the industry leader in terms of subscriber base, revenue, and network coverage largely due to its strategic marketing approach. From expanding its network reach to refining its brand message, MTN has continuously evolved. Its rebranding from the generic tagline “The Best Connection” to the more impactful “Everywhere You Go” demonstrated its commitment to positioning itself as the most reliable option for nationwide coverage. To maintain its leadership, MTN must continue to leverage transparency as a core pillar of its customer engagement strategy.

Similarly, Globacom, under the leadership of Mike Adenuga, entered the industry with a bold vision to revolutionize Nigeria’s telecom sector. Over the years, Glo has demonstrated its capacity to compete at a high level, and its growth trajectory positions it as a potential market leader not just in Nigeria, but across Africa.

Globacom’s introduction of the per-second billing system in 2003 marked a major milestone in Nigeria’s telecommunications industry. Even more groundbreaking was its decision to reduce the cost of SIM cards to as low as ₦200, which at the time was seen as one of the most exciting developments in the sector. This move reshaped the competitive landscape, compelling other operators to introduce flexible tariff options within their networks. Today, SIM cards from all major providers are virtually free, often bundled with complimentary airtime. Remarkably, within just nine months of entering the market, Globacom had already made a significant impact. Glo Mobile, Globacom‘s cellular arm made history as the fastest growing network in Africa with an unprecedented 1 million subscriber‘s mark, covering over 87 towns in Nigeria. Today, Glo has astronomically risen to become Nigeria second leading GSM operator with over 20 million subscribers covering the widest of communities, towns and states of the country. Nevertheless, other telecom giants such as Airtel and 9mobile as had their fare break-through in the industry making them third and fourth position in the rank (NCC Bureau of Statistics 2019). However, Burnett (2007) opined that companies are more liked if they disclose authentic information, good or bad, as fully as possible. Jermyn (2018) however, argue Telecommunications companies have an important obligation to do everything possible to keep their businesses as clean as possible and stop corruption in their companies." A new Transparency International report has found weak disclosure by telecom companies on corporate holdings, making it difficult to hold them accountable for their actions. This was the first assessment by Transparency International on major telecom companies in corporate reporting, and it found that 27 out of 35 of the world's biggest telecom giants did not disclose the operating location of their subsidiaries. Just four out of five companies revealed information about their tax payments in the countries where they operated. The telecommunication industry in Nigeria has developed to be very competitive, as different telecom companies jostle for the attention of subscribers. One of the key challenges confronting these telecommunication companies is how they manage their service quality and customer satisfaction which is very essential in maintaining customer loyalty. Customer service as observed by Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) consist of a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customers’ satisfaction that is, the feeling that a product or service has met customer’s expectations. However, since the inception of mobile telephony, there had been many complaints from customers about the quality and inconsistency in product and service delivery of the Mobile Telecommunication Networks in Nigeria. These developments have no doubt created a sort of negative memory, bias and doubt in the minds of customers which have negatively influenced their loyalty. From the firm’s perspective, it is important therefore to ensure that customers are satisfied with the product they purchase as well as with the way the product is delivered.

Charles-Davies (2018) however, posits that modern companies are taking steps to drive company performance through increased efficiency delivered by increased transparency. Transparency in the telecom industry embodies building a reputable brand image, maintaining consistency in product and service offering and guaranteeing quality network service for the teeming network subscribers. In a world where customers deliberately block out businesses that are not trustworthy and reliable, the key to success is showing your target audience that you’re worth their time and the easiest way to do this is by ensuring better brand/organizational transparency. However, investigators of consumer behavior have propounded theories to seek to identify the conditions under which an individual will attribute or misattribute a personality trait, disposition, or attitude to a person or even an organization.

Companies try to influence consumer perception by making impressions that aim to persuade them toward making patronage. The objective might be to attract new customers, retain the current ones or increase sales per customer. With a defined purpose, a firm can apply only one or a combination of different marketing techniques such as advertising, promotions, samples, social media and public relations, among others in order to have valuable inputs that help them design techniques, messages and channels that are assumed to influence customer's perception. Firms can also improve her brand image by vigorously taken steps that constantly remind customers that they are brand to reckon with in terms of quality service delivery, efficient and reliable network service and offering best customer service. In due course, customers can associate and identify with such brand and decide to be a loyal customer to that brand and even rendering advocacy services through referrals. This level of association defined by brand experience is referred to as attribution. *Perez (2008) explained that* attribution is the process by which people use information to make inferences about the causes of behavior or events. Simply put, this is how we go about inferring behavior (our own and those of others). It plays an important role in a number of aspects of our everyday lives and allows us to recall past experiences, navigate our environments, and learn new tasks. Attribution concept in marketing implies that people draw upon their past experiences when facing a new situation. People assess the quality of a product as they are using it. Regardless of whether they are happy or disappointed with its performance, people draw conclusions about the product or services they use, the manufacturer, or perhaps the country of origin where such product or services is said to have been initiated. When the consumer sees a similar product on the market, his past experience will influence his future purchase decisions Jones & Harris, 1967). Attribution is the process by which individuals explain the cause of behavior and events. It is the identification of a set of user actions that contribute in some manner to a desired outcome, and then the assignment of a value to each of these events. He further reiterated that, the purpose behind making attribution is to achieve cognitive control over one's environment by explaining and understanding the cause behind behavior and environmental occurrence. Hence, marketing departments should try to identify previously the most relevant elements that can induce and influence customer's attributive behavior and purchasing decisions. Certainly, enhancing customer's attribution perception is a complex process that can change from one individual to another. Elements such as price, quality and benefits are appreciated uniquely in every consumer's mind.

Heider cited in Perez (2010) describe attribution as a process by which people use information to make inferences about the causes of behavior or events. Misattribution according to him is the act of attributing an event to something/entity with which it really has no connection or association. Succinctly speaking, The consumer' s perception of these attributes combine to form some psychological state such as an attitude, decision making process, habit, etc. which determines subsequent purchase behavior and so, businesses must do much more than tout the virtues of their wares. Indeed, various marketing performance measures have been extensively studied in the past, many such studies focused on promotional tools in enhancing organizational performance(e.g. Shi, Cheung, & Prendergast, 2005;Mcneill, 2013). Against this backdrop, this research investigates the impact of customer based transparency and attributive perception of telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria.

A user's buying experience has evolved into a much more time consuming process in which comparisons between a great numbers of different options can become overwhelming. To make things worse, brand disappointment has become commonplace and the collective apathy is making it harder for companies to find ways to engage with their clients. Customers are constantly getting let down by brands who are not being truthful or are trying to benefit for their own expenses. Typical symptoms of lack of transparency have been identified to include sub-optimization, duplicate work, bad decision-making and inability to innovate. These things don't just impact the bottom line results negatively they also hamper an organization's ability to compete and survive in the long haul.

One of the major problems facing most profit oriented organizations in the twenty first century is how to satisfy the customer and sustain the patronage of customers. This is crucial because lack of customer patronage can spell doom for an organizations resulting to low customer patronage with its attendant multiplier effect in terms of poor sales volume, poor returns on investments, low profitability and very low market share which will inadvertently lead to liquidation of the company and by extension result to job loss and increased unemployment rate in the society (Kotler, 2007 cited in Amankwe 2013). Today the debate focusing on transparency is very crucial as today's customers want to know about the product they are purchasing and what their values are and if brands/organizations fails to offer the information they need, then the customers will most certainly hunt for information elsewhere. In view of the importance of customer patronage on business organization survival, it is imperative that firms should sustain the positive image of their firm through positive "word of mouth" advertising, promoting customers' attribution perception and maintaining brand/organizational transparency (Simon, 2016).While numerous studies have extensively examined various marketing performance indicators, much of the existing research has primarily concentrated on the role of promotional strategies in driving organizational success (e.g., Shi, Cheung, & Prendergast, 2005; McNeill, 2013). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a lack of empirical studies specifically investigating the impact of customer-based transparency on the attributive perceptions of telecommunications subscribers within the South-South region of Nigeria.

Conceptual frame work

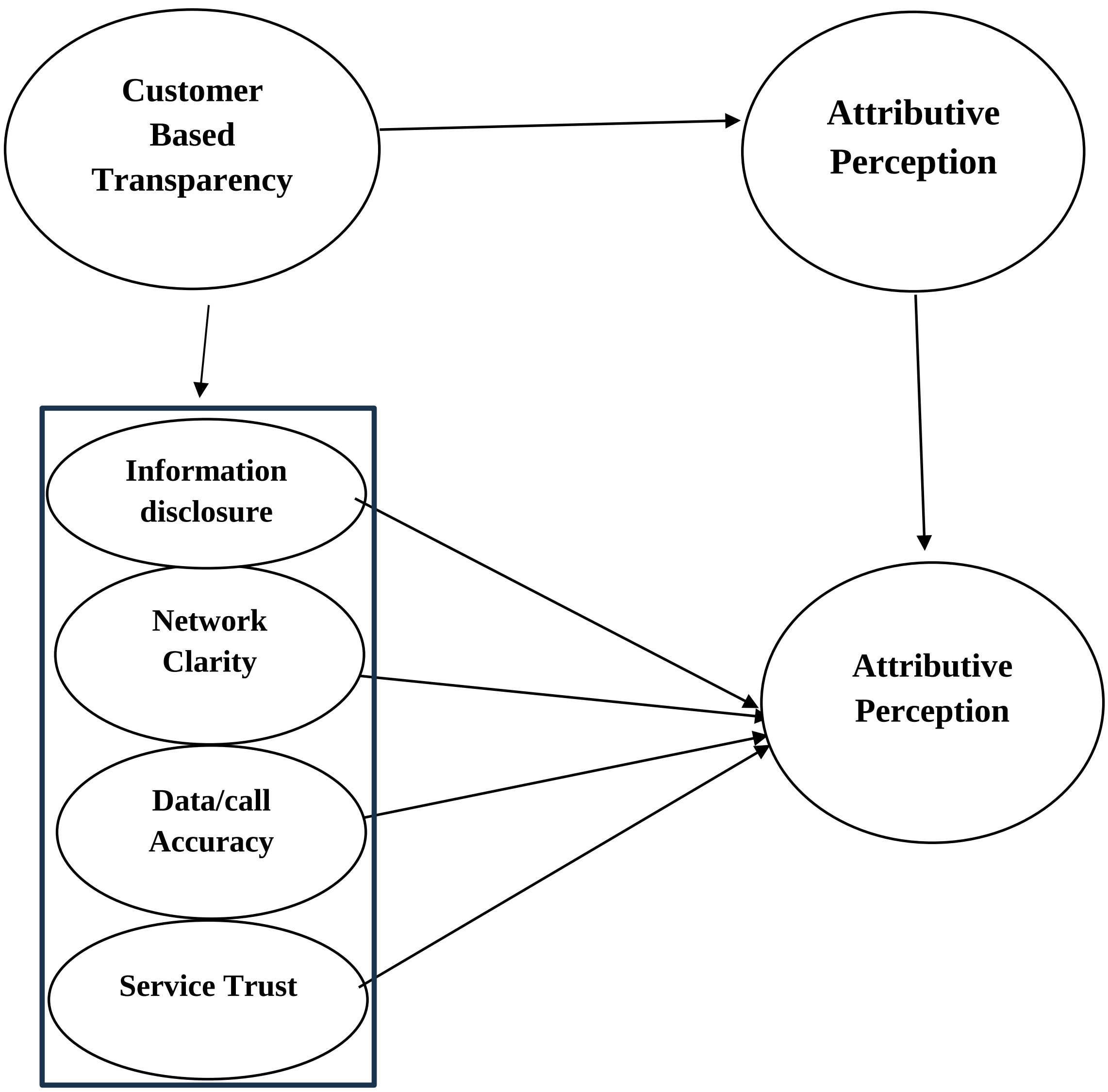

Fig1.1 Customer Based Transparency and Attributive Perception of Telecommunication Subscribers in South-South Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions are developed to guide this study:

1. To what extent do information disclosures relate to customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria?
2. To what extent do network clarity relate to customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers s in south-south Nigeria?
3. To what extent do data/call accuracy relate to customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria?
4. To what extent do service trust relate to customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated and tested:

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between information disclosures and customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between network clarity and customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between data/call accuracy and customers' attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

Ho_4: There is no significant relationship between service trust and customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory (1958)

The foundational theoretical framework for this study is Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory (1958), which has significantly influenced research in consumer behavior and marketing. Heider proposed that individuals function as "naïve scientists," seeking to understand and interpret the causes of events in their social environments. In the context of marketing, attribution theory is used to analyze how consumers interpret and assign causes to the performance or outcomes of products and services they experience.

According to this theory, consumers rely on prior experiences to make judgments about new or repeated purchasing situations. When evaluating a product or service, individuals consider not only their current satisfaction or dissatisfaction but also the broader implications such as the reputation of the manufacturer or the country of origin. These judgments influence future purchase decisions, especially when encountering similar products or brands.

Applications of Attribution Theory in Consumer Behavior:

1. **Product Value:**
   Consumers assign value to products based on various factors, including brand recognition, pricing, and social influence. For example, while some consumers are loyal to established brands, others may be more open to trying generic alternatives. Low pricing can sometimes be associated with poor quality, and peer influence also plays a critical role in shaping product perception. Marketers leverage these insights when designing pricing strategies, packaging, and advertising content tailored to specific demographics.

2. **Personality Influences:**
   Social interactions and personality traits also affect purchasing behavior. For instance, in a workplace setting, employees may model their dress and lifestyle choices based on the preferences of supervisors or colleagues. This behavior is often rooted in the belief based on past experience that conforming to such norms can lead to social approval or career advancement.

3. **Role Playing:**
   Consumers' buying decisions are often influenced by the roles they play in society. For example, professionals in certain industries may feel compelled to purchase high-status items (e.g., luxury cars, club memberships) to reflect success and credibility. These purchasing behaviors are aligned with societal expectations associated with particular roles, which businesses can target through role-specific marketing strategies.

The Integrative Theory of Patronage Preference and Behavior Jagdish Sheth (1982)

Another relevant framework guiding this study is the Integrative Theory of Patronage Preference and Behavior developed by Jagdish Sheth (1982). This theory explains consumer choice behavior through three primary decision-making heuristics, as well as the role of environmental factors that cause discrepancies between preference and actual patronage.

Three Consumer Choice Heuristics:

1. **Sequential Calculus:**
   Consumers eliminate options based on the priority of their shopping motives. Alternatives are grouped into acceptable and non-acceptable categories. If all options are eliminated, consumers either seek new alternatives or adjust their expectations. If several are retained, they are treated as equally preferred.

2. **Trade-Off Calculus:**
   Here, consumers evaluate each option based on multiple criteria such as price, convenience, or brand. A negative score in one area can be offset by a positive score in another. All options with an overall positive evaluation are retained, and preference is distributed proportionally based on the aggregated scores.

3. **Dominant Calculus:**
   In this approach, the consumer bases their decision

solely on one dominant motive (e.g., price or convenience). Preferences among retained options depend on how each alternative performs in relation to this dominant criterion. If the criterion is binary (e.g., availability of one-stop shopping), retained options are treated as equally preferable.

Factors Affecting Patronage Behavior:

Sheth further identifies four categories of unexpected events that may cause a gap between what a consumer prefers and their actual purchasing behavior:

1. **Socioeconomic Setting:**
   Broader conditions like inflation, unemployment, and even the presence of friends or relatives during shopping can influence decisions.
2. **Personal Setting:**
   Individual-level constraints such as time, financial resources, or physical effort can shape shopping choices at the moment of purchase.
3. **Product Setting:**
   Factors such as in-store pricing, product availability, promotional offers, or shelf placement can unexpectedly impact consumer decisions.
4. **In-Store Marketing:**
   Surprises in the store environment like a new brand, promotional displays, or interactions with persuasive sales staff can alter buying behavior in ways not anticipated during pre-shopping preference formation.

Both Attribution Theory and the Integrative Theory of Patronage Preference and Behavior provide strong theoretical grounding for understanding consumer decision-making in the telecommunications sector. While Attribution Theory explains how consumers interpret and internalize product experiences, Sheth's framework sheds light on the decision-making process and external factors that lead to actual purchase behaviors. Together, they offer a robust basis for examining how customer-based transparency influences subscriber perceptions in Nigeria's South-South telecom market.

Conceptual Framework

The Concept of Customer Based Transparency

Today, customer loyalty is a company's most valuable currency, as well as its biggest challenge, (Galan, 2018).

In the midst of a customer revolution in which clients are no longer willing to put up with dishonest or dubious information, the growing trend towards **transparency becomes relevant as a path on the road to facing customer disengagement. Transparency is a valuable commodity which defined peoples' relationship even beyond business engagement. Relating information to customers is therefore a critical aspect of business operation which is valued high following trust and confidence builds between the parties.**

Within the field of organizational science, early discussions on transparency can be traced back to the mid-20th century, notably in the context of organizational roles and societal conformity (Coser, 1961). However, transparency remained a peripheral concept for many years, often employed more as a rhetorical tool than a formal construct. It wasn't until the late 20th century particularly in response to major corporate scandals such as Enron (2001), WorldCom (2002), Lehman Brothers (2008), and the Madoff investment scandal (2009) that transparency gained significant scholarly attention as a serious organizational concern.

Over time, organizational researchers across various domains have proposed diverse definitions of transparency, each reflecting specific disciplinary perspectives. In the context of strategic alliances, for instance, Akkermans, Bogerd, and van Doremalen (2004) defined transparency as the open exchange of data relating to order statuses, production schedules, and forecasts among supply chain partners. In financial markets, Bloomfield and O'Hara (1999) characterized transparency as the real-time dissemination of trade and pricing information. Similarly, Flood et al. (1999) described it as the clarity with which market participants can view outstanding price quotes. This perspective aligns with that of Jordan, Peek, and Rosengren (2000), who emphasized the timely and accurate disclosure of financial information.

Pagano and Roell (1996) contributed to this discourse by defining transparency as the extent to which the flow of orders is visible to market makers involved in price setting, while Madhavan, Porter, and Weaver (2005) underscored its importance in allowing market participants to observe the trading process itself.

In monetary policy, Eijffinger and Geraats (2006) conceptualized transparency as the degree to which central banks communicate relevant information about their decision-making processes. In electronic marketplaces, Granados, Gupta, and Kauffman (2010) defined it as the accessibility of market information to stakeholders, a view supported by Zhu (2004), who emphasized the visibility and availability of such data.

Within organizational culture, Kaptein (2008) described transparency as ensuring visibility within the organization, enabling employees to adjust behavior accordingly. In strategic management, McGaughey (2002) referred to transparency as the degree to which individuals recognize and understand intellectual assets within a population. From a governance standpoint, Nicolaou and McKnight (2006) defined it as the availability of sufficient information to evaluate the quality and validity of data exchange, while Potosky (2008) emphasized the role of communication media in facilitating clear and unobstructed exchanges. Furthermore, Prat (2005) highlighted the importance of a principal's ability to observe an agent's behavior and its outcomes. Bushman, Piotroski, and Smith (2004) also stressed transparency as the accessibility of firm-specific information to external stakeholders in the context of publicly traded companies.

Andrew and Edward (2014) synthesized these various viewpoints by defining transparency as the perceived quality of deliberately shared information by a sender. This conceptualization integrates two critical components found throughout the literature. First, transparency is fundamentally centered on information. Scholars widely agree that greater transparency enhances knowledge sharing, thereby increasing awareness, clarity, and mutual understanding in communication (Pagano & Roell, 1996). For instance, Kaptein (2008) argued that transparency is necessary for employees to reflect on and modify their behaviors in response to organizational conduct. Likewise, Madhavan (2005) explored transparency as the extent of financial disclosure made available to market participants, and Nicolaou and McKnight (2006) examined it within the framework of electronic information exchange.

Second, transparency involves deliberate and intentional information sharing. It excludes incidental or inconsistent information flows that may result from unplanned communication. Rosengren (1999), for example, discussed the kinds of data that financial institutions could voluntarily disclose to enhance systemic transparency. In central banking, Winkler (2000) advocated for proactive disclosure strategies to improve the clarity and accessibility of monetary policy communications. Other scholars have examined how organizations strategically transform internal data into formal communication such as policies, contracts, or statements to shape external stakeholder perceptions (Bloomfield & O'Hara, 1999; Granados, 2005; Larsson et al., 1998; Winkler, 2000). These works rest on the idea that genuine transparency requires intentionality; unstructured or accidental disclosures do not meet the conceptual threshold of true transparency.

In the contemporary business landscape where consumers are more informed and empowered than ever transparency is not just a best practice; it is a competitive necessity. A brand that lacks transparency risks being reduced to a mere commodity, easily substituted and lacking customer loyalty. True transparency entails openness and honesty about a brand's identity, practices, and values, even when such truths are uncomfortable or unflattering. While the demand for transparency has long existed, what has evolved is the ease with which consumers can access information.

In a hyper connected world, discrepancies between what a brand claims and what it actually delivers are quickly exposed. As access to information continues to expand, consumers are increasingly aware of their influence and expect brands to be accountable. Businesses are faced with a clear choice: resist transparency and risk obsolescence or embrace it as a pathway to trust, relationship-building, and long-term loyalty. Without transparency, there can be no trust; without trust, no meaningful relationship; and without relationship, loyalty cannot exist. In such a scenario, the product becomes nothing more than a replaceable good (Grenville, 2019).

Information Disclosure

Understanding Disclosure as a Component of Transparency

Disclosure is widely acknowledged in academic literature as a fundamental element of transparency. It is commonly understood as the extent to which stakeholders perceive that relevant information is provided consistently and in a timely manner (Bloomfield & O'Hara, 1999; Williams, 2008). Numerous studies emphasize the importance of disclosure in fostering transparency within organizational and stakeholder relationships (Bushman et al., 2004; Finel & Lord, 1999; Madhavan et al., 2005; Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006; Pagano & Roell, 1996). For instance, Pirson and Malhotra (2011) define transparency in terms of stakeholders' beliefs that organizations communicate openly and fully, ensuring access to all pertinent information.

Perotti and von Thadden (2005) emphasize that transparency is closely tied to a stakeholder's ability to access and evaluate essential information about an organization. This is grounded in the idea that when information is inaccessible, stakeholders are unable to form a complete understanding of the organization's operations and intentions (Zhu, 2004). However, disclosure is more than just the dissemination of information it requires thoughtful determination of what information is actually relevant to stakeholders. Williams (2008) outlines four critical processes involved in effective disclosure:

i. **Analysis** – identifying the appropriate audience;
ii. **Interpretation** – determining which information is relevant;
iii. **Documentation** – encoding information for distribution;
iv. **Communication** – delivering the information to internal and external audiences.

Of these, only documentation and communication involve the outward flow of information. Analysis and interpretation are equally important, as they ensure that only pertinent and contextually useful information is disclosed.

Various scholars have used synonymous terms to describe transparency, reinforcing its multifaceted nature. For instance, Granados et al. (2010) refer to **availability** and **accessibility**; Kaptein (2008) uses **visibility**, while Bernstein (2012) employs the term **observability**. Bloomfield and O'Hara (1999) highlight **real-time** access as a defining characteristic. These terms all reflect aspects of disclosure whether it's the timeliness, visibility, or accessibility of information. However, a consistent challenge in developing a comprehensive theory of transparency lies in the concept of **relevance**. Many conceptual definitions assume relevance by default, especially in specific domains like finance or operations. This limits the universal applicability of transparency as a theoretical construct. As such, Williams (2008) advocates for anchoring transparency in the broader framework of disclosure, which explicitly addresses the issue of relevance while allowing flexibility across disciplines.

Principles of Effective Information Disclosure

A positive perception of transparency is rooted in the delivery of relevant and accessible information to stakeholders especially customers. Organizations are expected to proactively disclose valuable information to foster trust and engagement. For information to be perceived as transparent, it must meet certain foundational criteria, commonly referred to as principles of effective information disclosure:

1. **Early Disclosure:**
   Information should be shared proactively ideally before key decisions are made so stakeholders are well-informed and able to contribute meaningfully. For instance, telecommunications companies should clearly communicate plan charges and service changes in advance, enabling users to make informed choices. Early disclosure enhances transparency and demonstrates a commitment to participatory decision-making.

2. **Objective and Honest Information:**
   Disclosure must reflect a realistic and truthful account of situations. This means avoiding the temptation to exaggerate benefits (such as employment opportunities) or downplay drawbacks (like service disruptions or increased costs). Providing factual estimates even when uncertain strengthens credibility and trust. In essence, firms should "tell it like it is."

3. **Disclosure that Supports Consultation:**
   Information sharing should not be isolated from stakeholder engagement. Instead, it should be strategically designed to inform and support meaningful consultations. For example, details about project benefits, risks, and trade-offs should be disclosed well before consultation processes begin. This ensures stakeholders have adequate time to reflect and make informed contributions, rather than reacting to unfamiliar information under pressure.

4. **Meaningful and Understandable Information**

   Information should be tailored to the audience's language, literacy level, cultural context, and technical understanding. This may require providing materials in local languages, simplifying technical jargon, or using multiple formats (e.g., visual aids, oral presentations, or infographics) to ensure clarity across diverse stakeholder groups. The ultimate goal is to enable people to make informed judgments about how organizational decisions affect them.

5. **Ensuring Accessibility:**
   Accessibility is not only about where the information is placed but also about how easily it can be understood and used. Information should be made available through channels familiar and convenient to the target audience—whether online platforms, community centers, public notice boards, or printed materials. Regulatory disclosure is not sufficient unless it is also understandable and practically accessible to its intended recipients.

These principles underscore that transparency is not simply about the volume of information released, but about the **quality**, **timing**, **relevance**, and **usability** of the information shared. In stakeholder-rich environments such as telecommunications, finance, or public services adhering to these principles is essential for cultivating trust and long-term loyalty.

Network Clarity, Accuracy, Trust, and Perception in Telecommunications

Clarity refers to how clearly and understandably information from a sender is perceived by the receiver. According to Oliver (2019), network issues can degrade clarity regardless of which VoIP or telecommunication platform is used. When choosing a telecom provider, many people prioritize coverage and service quality. Unlimited data plans are especially attractive, but providers that deliver strong coverage, reliable speed, and good customer service across *all* plans (not just unlimited ones) tend to fare better. The perception of "best coverage, reliability, and speed" drives customer preference.

In Nigeria, intense competition among telecom operators has made **network clarity** a critical determinant of customer satisfaction (Alabar & Gbande, 2017). Quality of service and customer satisfaction are essential not only for retaining existing users but also for attracting new ones. Satisfied customers enhance a company's reputation and often lead to more stable, less volatile customer bases. As Zeithaml (2000), Manusamy et al. (2010), Nimako (2012), and Rust & Oliver (1994) observe, high service quality tends to translate into higher profits, larger market share, and cost efficiencies. Because retaining current customers usually costs less than acquiring new ones, many telecom companies are focusing more on delighting and keeping customers than simply increasing subscriber numbers.

Accuracy is the perception that the information a sender provides is as correct as possible, given the relationship between sender and receiver. Accuracy matters because transparency loses meaning if the information is intentionally misleading or biased (Walumbwa, 2011). That said, "accuracy" does *not* demand absolute perfection, which is often impossible for complex systems (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Rather, it requires that claims be qualified and honest about their degree of certainty.

Researchers like Vorauer & Claude (1998) and Granados (2006) have emphasized accuracy as fundamental to transparency. Akhigbe & Martin (2006) warn that inaccurate disclosures can seriously undermine transparency and may lead to corporate scandals.

Service Trust centers on the belief that a provider is reliable, honest, and acts with integrity. Horsager (2018) notes that while the importance of trust is hard to quantify, the cost of losing it can be monumental: broken relationships, lost customers, damaged reputations. Joe (2015) argues that in business, trust and strong relationships are often more valuable than immediate profits though they take much longer to build, and can be lost in an instant. Trust is built through consistent small actions and genuine character, both in internal operations and in customer dealings.

Perception and Attribution

Perception is how individuals interpret the world around them based on both what they see and how they process it. **Attribution** refers to the explanations people make for what they perceive: why things happen, who is responsible, etc. In business, both play a critical role: companies work to influence how they are perceived, often aiming to shape the attributions customers or other stakeholders make about them.

Perceptions are built on three interacting components (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler & Weick, 1970):

1. **The Perceiver** – One's past experiences, needs, emotions, expectations. For example, emotions like anger or happiness can distort how we interpret remarks from others.
2. **The Target** – The object or person being perceived. Ambiguity in the target often leads to varied interpretations.
3. **The Situation** – The context in which perception occurs. External conditions social, environmental, temporal frame how we understand or misinterpret cues.

Common Biases in Perception

Because perception is rarely perfectly objective, several biases affect how we form impressions:

i. **Primacy and Recency Effects**: What we notice first (primacy) or most recently (recency) tends to carry disproportionate weight in forming impressions.
ii. **Central Traits**: Some traits are more "central" or salient depending on the perceiver's interest or context; these traits dominate how the perceiver organizes their impressions.

Attribution: Understanding Causes and Motives Behind Behavior

Attribution refers to the cognitive process through which individuals explain the causes behind others' actions. In organizational settings, this process is essential, as decisions about rewards or sanctions often stem from assumptions regarding why someone acted a certain way. Broadly, two types of attributions are made:

i. Dispositional attributions assign behavior to internal traits such as intelligence, personality, or motivation. For example, describing an employee as lazy or diligent implies a dispositional cause.
ii. Situational attributions, on the other hand, attribute behavior to external circumstances like environment, luck, or external pressure suggesting the individual had limited control over their actions.

Cues Influencing Attribution Judgments

Attribution is shaped by three key informational cues: consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness.

1. **Consistency Cues**
This involves how regularly an individual behaves in a specific way over time. High consistency leads to dispositional attributions, where behavior is

seen as reflective of true intent. For example, a professor who consistently holds office hours may be seen as genuinely student-oriented. In contrast, inconsistent behavior prompts observers to consider situational explanations such as fluctuating workload or external demands.

2. **Consensus Cues**
   Consensus refers to how a person's actions compare to those of others in the same situation. Low consensus behavior when someone acts differently from others—is typically attributed to personal traits, especially when the action has potential negative consequences. For example, if a job applicant makes critical remarks about big business during an interview at a corporation, their honesty is viewed as genuine, since it's risky and uncommon behavior.

3. **Distinctiveness Cues**
   These cues assess whether an individual behaves similarly across different contexts. If someone behaves the same way in various situations, the behavior is considered non-distinctive, reinforcing a dispositional attribution. For instance, an employee performing well across multiple jobs is perceived as capable. Conversely, behavior unique to one situation is viewed as situational.

Classifying Attributions: Internal vs. External and Stable vs. Unstable

Attribution theory classifies the perceived causes of events along two key dimensions: locus of causality (internal vs. external) and stability (stable vs. unstable). These dimensions help explain how individuals interpret outcomes, particularly in decision-making and behavioral responses.

1. Internal vs. External:
   This dimension refers to whether the cause of an event is attributed to personal factors (internal) or situational factors (external). Internal causes originate within the individual, such as traits, abilities, or efforts, while external causes are derived from the environment, such as other people, luck, or task conditions.

2. Stable vs. Unstable:
   This classification indicates whether the cause is perceived as consistent over time (stable) or temporary and subject to change (unstable).

When combined, these two dimensions produce four categories of attribution:

i. Internal-Stable (e.g., ability):
   The individual believes a consistent personal trait or skill caused the outcome.

ii. Internal-Unstable (e.g., mood, effort):
   The cause is internal but fluctuates over time, such as a person's emotional state or the level of effort put into a task.

iii. External-Stable (e.g., task difficulty):
   The cause lies in the external environment and is perceived as constant, such as the inherent difficulty of a task.

iv. External-Unstable (e.g., luck, chance):
   The cause is both external and variable, such as random events or unforeseen circumstances.

Understanding these attribution types is essential for analyzing how consumers form judgments about products, services, and brands based on their experiences.

Common Attribution Biases

Despite efforts to be objective, attribution processes are prone to cognitive biases. These biases influence how we interpret others' behavior, often leading to inaccurate conclusions:

1. **Fundamental Attribution Error**
   This occurs when people overestimate personal traits and underestimate situational factors when explaining others' actions. For example, assuming a banker is inherently conservative without considering their professional role can lead to inaccurate judgments.

2. **Actor Observer Effect**
   While observers attribute others' behavior to internal traits, actors themselves tend to explain their own behavior through external circumstances. For example, a person may justify being late due to traffic, whereas an observer might view them as irresponsible.

3. **Self-Serving Bias**
   People often credit themselves for successes and deflect blame for failures. A marketing executive might attribute a successful product launch to her skills, but if the product fails, she may blame poor research data. This bias allows individuals to preserve self-esteem, even at the cost of objectivity.

Perception, Attribution, and Organizational Behavior

Perception the process by which individuals interpret sensory input—is fundamental to how employees and customers understand organizational actions. According to Kotler and Keller (2007), perception involves selecting, organizing, and interpreting information to make sense of the environment. Different people may perceive the same event in vastly different ways based on their values, expectations, and prior experiences.

Attribution and perception play a dual role in shaping organizational behavior and external image. Internally, they affect team dynamics, leadership credibility, and employee motivation. Externally, they influence how customers judge a company's values, competence, and transparency.

Customer Attribution and Transparency Perception

Transparency within organizations is increasingly seen as a key factor influencing customer trust, perception, and purchasing behavior. As Grenville (2019) explains, transparency builds the foundation for trust, which fosters long-term loyalty an essential ingredient in turning products from mere commodities into irreplaceable services.

Customers often assess transparency through the lens of attribution trying to determine whether a company is being honest, manipulative, ethical, or opportunistic. Galan (2018) argues that instead of spending heavily on marketing, businesses should focus on authenticity delivering on promises and letting satisfied customers act as brand advocates.

The perception of transparency, when positive, not only enhances reputation but can reduce skepticism, increase customer retention, and improve word-of-mouth referrals. This reinforces the idea that building genuine, honest relationships with customers is more effective than over-relying on promotional campaigns.

Attribution and perception are powerful psychological mechanisms that shape how individuals evaluate behavior both internally within an organization and externally by its customers. While businesses may not have full control over how people perceive them, they can influence those perceptions through consistency, transparency, and ethical behavior. By understanding how people assign meaning to actions and outcomes, organizations can better navigate the complex landscape of human judgment, build trust, and foster long-term success.

Relationship between customer Perception and Attribution

Perception and attribution are integral parts of the daily interaction between customers and products or services. Customer perception refers to the mental process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets stimuli to form a meaningful impression of a brand or product. This cognitive process influences how consumers evaluate and relate to a brand, largely determining their purchase behavior and loyalty.

Perception typically unfolds in three stages: exposure, attention, and interpretation. During this process, customers rely on personal biases, expectations, and needs to interpret information received through product visuals, promotional content, user feedback, and personal experience. This leads to the development of a mental image of the brand, which ultimately influences judgment and decision-making.

Complementing this is the concept of attribution, which refers to the process by which customers assign causes to observed events, particularly product or service outcomes. According to Pyszczynski and Greenberg (1981), attributional processing is primarily triggered when expectations are not met this mismatch compels the individual to search for an explanation. Early attribution theory, rooted in cognitive psychology, considered attribution a logical process based on available information about an individual's actions (Kelley, 1967). Heider (1958) categorized attributions into two types:

1. External attribution, where causes are assigned to situational or environmental factors, and
2. Internal attribution, where the behavior is attributed to personal traits or dispositions.

Dimensions of Attribution

Two key dimensions further elaborate the attribution process:

1. Stability
   This dimension concerns whether a problem is viewed as a one-time occurrence or likely to recur. For example, consumers tend to be less dissatisfied when a service failure is attributed to a particular employee, as opposed to the organization itself (Bitner, 1990). The rationale is that employee behavior is perceived as more variable and less enduring, whereas organizational behavior is seen as stable and more likely to repeat.
2. Locus of Control
   This aligns with the traditional dispositional vs. situational attribution dichotomy. In consumer behavior, outcomes may be attributed internally (e.g., to the consumer's own decisions) or externally (e.g., to a retailer, manufacturer, or other external agents).

Information Disclosure and Attribution Perception

Both employees and customers increasingly prefer organizations that proactively share information about goals, strategic direction, product plans, and operations. Consumers today are more informed, demanding clarity on what they buy and how it's produced. According to Ya-Hsin et al. (2014), organizational success in innovation and responsiveness is contingent upon how well it utilizes its two main assets—information and people across all levels.

Consumer purchase decisions begin with awareness of a product category and its associated brands. While full brand recall is not necessary, the consumer must recognize enough distinguishing features to make an informed decision. As a result, companies invest heavily in brand awareness, using promotional efforts to maintain visibility. Sustained brand awareness can provide a long-term competitive edge and contribute to brand equity and customer loyalty (Wikipedia, 2018).

Network Clarity and Attribution in Telecommunications

Zucan (2016) suggests that organizational transparency, especially through digital communities, fosters deeper customer engagement and a more customer-focused brand culture. When a company is transparent, it humanizes the brand, helping customers feel more connected and personally invested.

Armstrong (2019) highlights that the primary factors influencing consumer choice in telecommunications are network coverage and quality of service. With data now central to daily life, customers increasingly prioritize unlimited data plans. However, attributes such as speed, reliability, and customer service remain vital, regardless of plan type.

Telecom companies are in fierce competition, and every customer interaction creates a perception. First impressions, built in mere seconds based on existing emotions, memories, and experiences, can shape long-term loyalty. In Nigeria, leading GSM operators like MTN, Glo, Airtel, and Etisalat have been subject to persistent criticism regarding service quality. Despite recurring failures, these firms continue to compete for consumer trust illustrating that every impression counts in a saturated market.

Call/Data Accuracy and Customer Attributive Perception

According to Hannon (2018), trust and loyalty are invaluable in the customer-brand relationship. When businesses fail to communicate transparently particularly during service failures it often results in erosion of trust and eventual customer loss.

Adeyemi (2015) underscores that dissatisfied customers often disengage from brands entirely. For example, Mrs. Treasure Uchegbu, a business operator, expressed that poor internet connectivity significantly hampered her business operations. Customers, forced to wait for hours due to network issues, often abandon transactions, leading her to switch service providers. Such incidents highlight how recurring service failures prompt negative attributions, making customers more likely to shift allegiance.

Service Trust and Attribution Perception

Transparency is a foundational element of trust. It not only attracts new customers but also reinforces loyalty among existing ones. Cision (2017) notes that consumers are increasingly inclined to switch to brands that prioritize transparency. When brands are open and honest, they signal respect for the consumer, laying the groundwork for long-term relationships.

Trust, once broken, can be extremely difficult to restore. It often takes years to build and seconds to lose. In business, a lack of trust increases operational costs—decreasing employee morale, disrupting teamwork, and impeding sales. Leaders and brands alike must recognize that trust is not just an ethical asset but also a strategic necessity.

The interplay between perception and attribution fundamentally shapes consumer behavior, influencing how products and services are received and evaluated. Customers rely on internal cognitive frameworks formed through exposure, experiences, and expectations—to interpret service encounters. When these expectations are unmet, attribution theory helps explain how consumers assign blame or credit.

In today's transparent, information-driven marketplace, companies must pay close attention to how they are perceived and ensure that every customer interaction reinforces trust, clarity, and consistency. Doing so not only strengthens consumer relationships but also builds brand resilience and competitive advantage in increasingly volatile markets.

Empirical Review

Kemebaradikumo (2019) investigated the impact of organizational transparency on misattribution perceptions among Airtel subscribers in the Port Harcourt Metropolis. The research adopted a descriptive design and randomly sampled 386 network users from various service providers operating within the area. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires, addressing three research questions and testing corresponding hypotheses. Both descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential analysis (Pearson Product Moment Correlation at a 0.05 significance level) were applied.

The study's results revealed that providing high-quality network services plays a significant role in reducing negative or inaccurate perceptions about Airtel Nigeria PLC. Additionally, the research highlighted the importance of cultivating a reputable brand and ensuring consistency in service delivery as key factors in reshaping customers' biased views. Consequently, the study recommended that telecom operators emphasize transparency, maintain superior service quality, and strengthen their brand image to enhance customer loyalty.

Bobby and Robert (2016) investigated consumer attributions within the context of consumer behavior. The researchers emphasized the necessity of understanding the social context in which consumer decisions are made. Participants were presented with hypothetical purchase scenarios, after which they made personality-based attributions about the consumers in those scenarios. The study manipulated four key variables: product type (based on conspicuousness and necessity), degree of consumer choice, product desirability, and whether the purchase occurred in a public or private setting. Results showed that participants' attributions were significantly influenced by all four variables, underscoring the complex interplay between social cues and consumer interpretation.

In a separate study, Tevi (2013) explored the effect of multiple rebranding efforts on customer loyalty in the Nigerian mobile telecommunications industry, focusing on Airtel. The research utilized a survey method with cluster sampling and analyzed data using Pearson Chi-Square at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that communication is essential in transferring brand equity. Despite multiple rebranding efforts, consumers' attitudes towards telecom brands were not significantly affected. The study concluded that Nigerian consumers are largely indifferent to branding or that telecommunications firms may be ineffective in executing branding strategies.

Alabar, Ode, and Gbande (2017) examined the impact of service quality and customer satisfaction in Nigeria's mobile telecom sector. A sample of 532 subscribers was drawn using a simple random sampling technique across all six geopolitical zones. Proportional representation was ensured for each service provider. Data collection was done through close-ended questionnaires measured on a 5-point Likert scale, and analysis was carried out using SPSS Version 20. The study established positive relationships between service quality (particularly SERVQUAL's reliability dimension) and customer satisfaction, as well as between customer satisfaction and switching intentions. The findings suggest that while service quality and customer satisfaction are distinct, they are highly interrelated. The study recommended that telecom companies should continue to comply with regulatory frameworks (especially those set by the Nigerian Communications Commission) and invest in service quality as a strategy for customer retention.

Rizwan et al. (2015) explored determinants of customer retention in Pakistan's telecom sector. A total of 300 usable responses were collected via self-administered questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. The study found that customer satisfaction, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, corporate image, customer loyalty, and switching costs all had significant positive impacts on customer retention. The study recommended that companies enhance their customer care systems to ensure timely resolution of issues, offer free services such as GPRS or promotional minutes to improve retention, and invest in strong signal infrastructure. It also highlighted the importance of communication in building long-term customer relationships.

Opele, Afolabi, and Onifade (2018) studied GSM service provider preference and customer satisfaction among tertiary institution students in Lagos State. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed to 300 students from three institutions. Simple random sampling was used across faculties and departments. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression via SPSS. Results indicated a significant relationship between most service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction, except for the empathy dimension, which did not influence student satisfaction. The study emphasized the need for GSM providers to demonstrate greater empathy in service delivery to improve long-term engagement.

Ambille (2019) investigated the effect of organizational transparency on sales performance at MTN Nigeria PLC in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a descriptive design and selected 121 senior sales managers using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection was done via questionnaires, and results were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation at a 0.05 significance level. Findings showed that customer trust and perceived honesty significantly enhanced sales performance, while improved communication systems had an even greater impact. The study recommended that managers prioritize transparency, trust-building, and efficient communication to sustain customer interest and drive sales performance.

Despite the breadth of research on customer perception and behavior in the telecom industry, gaps remain in the literature. Specifically, few studies have comprehensively addressed the influence of information disclosure, network clarity, call/data accuracy, and service trust on attribution perception among subscribers in South-South Nigeria. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how customer-based transparency affects attribution perception within this regional context.

Appraisal of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature underscores the growing importance of transparency in building strong, competitive brands. As consumers gain greater access to information, they become more empowered in their decision-making processes. This shift compels businesses to either embrace transparency or risk alienating increasingly discerning customers. Transparency fosters trust, which is foundational to building lasting customer relationships and brand loyalty. In the absence of loyalty, a company's products risk being viewed as mere commodities, easily substituted by competitors.

In the realm of organizational behavior, perception significantly shapes individual actions, especially in high-pressure or service-driven environments. How customers and employees perceive a company can directly influence performance outcomes, creativity, and commitment levels. Attribution, on the other hand, helps explain how individuals assign causes to events, especially service failures or unexpected outcomes. This dual process perception and attribution plays a pivotal role in customer satisfaction and retention.

The current study is underpinned by three theoretical frameworks:

1. Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory (1958) the core theory for this research. Heider posited that individuals act as "naïve scientists," constantly attempting to rationalize the causes behind behavior, attributing it either to internal (dispositional) or external (situational) factors.
2. Integrative Theory of Patronage Preference and Behavior (Sheth, 1982) which helps explain consumer brand preference and loyalty in patronage contexts.
3. Emotion and Misattribution Theory (Schachter & Singer, 1964) which explores how individuals may misattribute emotional arousal to the wrong sources, thereby affecting judgments and decision-making.

The reviewed empirical studies reinforce the centrality of service quality, brand communication, consumer trust, and organizational transparency in shaping customer loyalty and brand perceptions. However, the literature reveals a gap in research that specifically explores the interplay between transparency and attribution perception among telecom subscribers in the South-South region of Nigeria, particularly in relation to brands like MTN.

This study therefore aims to address this gap by investigating how customer-centered transparency strategies such as consistent service quality, clear communication, and accurate data services affect the attribution perceptions of telecom subscribers in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior within the evolving Nigerian telecommunications landscape.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey is concerned with assessing and establishing the existing conditions or status quo of a phenomenon at a particular point in time, presenting facts as they are without manipulation or alteration. As noted by Maduabum (1997, cited in Charles-Davies, 2016), a descriptive survey "concerns itself with ascertaining and establishing the status-quo, facts or pieces of information at the time of the research and presenting such facts as they are."

Similarly, Nworgu (1991, cited in Oputa, 2016) defines descriptive surveys as studies that aim to collect data on and describe, in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features, and factual aspects of a given population. This research design is appropriate for the present study, as it seeks to obtain objective data on customer-based transparency and attribution perception among telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria, with the goal of analyzing trends, relationships, and patterns without influencing the responses of the participants.

It also extends to the analysis, connectivity, and interpretation to reach the conclusions on which to build the proposed scenario, so that it increases the stock of knowledge on the subject. Both primary and secondary data will be utilized in order to achieve the objective of the study. This design is seen to be the most suitable because the study investigates the influence of customer based transparency and attribution perception of telecommunication industry in south-south Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises of all telecom subscribers in the south-south region. However, the target population includes the 14,170,534 telecom subscribers from Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River and Delta State that subscribe to MTN, GLO, AIRTEL and 9 Mobile. See appendix B for population distribution of telecom subscribers in the six states that make up south-south, Nigeria.

Population Distribution of MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile Subscribers in the three States of South-South Nigeria

S/N	STATES IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA	TELECOM COMPANY	SUBSCRIPTION BASE
1	RIVERS	MTN	1927041
		GLOBACOM	1108722
		AIRTEL	1193705
		9MOBILE	400507
		TOTAL	**4629975**
2	BAYELSA	MTN	486121
		GLOBACOM	410652
		AIRTEL	306475
		9MOBILE	55801
		TOTAL	**1259049**
3	CROSS RIVER	MTN	898818
		GLOBACOM	593051
		AIRTEL	758064
		9MOBILE	251971
		TOTAL	**2501904**
4	DELTA	MTN	2230269
		GLOBACOM	1630022
		AIRTEL	1615772
		9MOBILE	261770
		TOTAL	**5737833**
	GRAND TOTAL		**14,170,534**

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: 2nd Quarter, 2019

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Ezejelue and Ogwo, as cited in Nworlu (2008), noted that there is no universally agreed-upon rule for determining the appropriate sample size for research. Some scholars suggest using 10% of the population, while others argue that the sample size should be based on the intended use of the study's findings and the desired precision level. In this study, the researcher employed a simple random sampling method to select four states from the six that constitute the South-South region of Nigeria. From each selected state, 384 subscribers of major telecom providers MTN, GLO, AIRTEL, and 9mobile were randomly chosen to participate in the research. The sample size determination followed the guidelines established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which recommend a sample size of 384 for populations of 1,000,000 or more (see Appendix C for details).

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary data collection tool for this study was a structured questionnaire, designed to facilitate empirical analysis and support meaningful conclusions and recommendations. The instrument, titled Customer-Based Transparency and Attributive Perception of Telecom Subscribers Questionnaire (CBTAPTSQ), consists of 32 close-ended items. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Very High Extent (5) to Very Low Extent (1). A criterion mean of 3.00 was established as the benchmark: responses scoring 3.00 or higher were accepted, while those below 3.00 were rejected.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was carefully constructed to align with the study's objectives, research questions, and hypotheses.

To ensure content validity, two lecturers from the Marketing Department reviewed the instrument for relevance, coverage, clarity, and language appropriateness. Their feedback was incorporated, and the revised questionnaire was further reviewed and validated by the researcher's supervisor.

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability was assessed using the test-retest method to evaluate the stability of the instrument. A pilot sample of 60 active network subscribers from the South-South region excluded from the main study was selected randomly. The questionnaire was administered twice to the same group, with a two-week interval between administrations. Scores from both sessions were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.76, indicating acceptable consistency.

Administration of the Instrument

The questionnaires were distributed directly to respondents by the researcher and three research assistants. Clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire were provided, and completed copies were collected immediately to prevent loss or misplacement.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations to address the four research questions. To test the hypotheses and determine the significance of relationships between independent and dependent variables, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed at a 0.05 significance level.

PPMC is represented by the formula:

$$r = \frac{N\Sigma XY - (\Sigma X)(\Sigma Y)}{\sqrt{[N\Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2][N\Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2]}}$$

Where,

r	=	Pearson or correlation coefficient
√	=	is the square root
ΣX	=	the sum of the scores in X-distribution
ΣY	=	the sum of the scores in Y-distribution
ΣXY	=	the sum of the products of paired X and Y-scores.
ΣX^2	=	the sum of the squared scores in the X-distribution
ΣY^2	=	the sum of the squared scores in the Y-distribution
N	=	the number of paired X and Y scores.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Out of 384 copies of the questionnaire administered to respondents, 364 copies were successfully retrieved and used for the analysis. Representing 95% return rate.

Research Question 1

To what extent do information disclosures relate to customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria?

Table 2: Computation of Responses on the Influence of Information Disclosures on Customers Attributive Perception of the Telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria. (N= 364).

S/N	INFORMATION DISCLOSURE AND CUSTOMERS' ATTRIBUTIVE PERCEPTION	MTN Rmk $\bar{x}_1$ SD₁ n=91	GLO Rmk $\bar{x}_2$ SD₂ n=91	AIRTEL Rmk $\bar{x}_3$ SD₃ n=91	9 MOBILE Rmk $\bar{x}_4$ SD₄ n=91	$\bar{x}_{1/4}$ Rmks
1	I believe that the main telecom industry have done much in the area of information disclosure sufficient to earn customers' confidence and loyalty.	3.61 0.62 ME	3.16 0.42 ME	3.33 0.52 ME	3.19 0.48 ME	3.32 ME
2	My choice of a particular mobile network is informed by my unhindered access to information on product and services	4.22 0.81 HE	4.11 0.66 HE	4.71,0.86VHE	4.28 0.69 HE	4.33 HE

3	My choice mobile network is always trying to ensure that customers are not sub-charged	3.06 0.41 ME	2.81 0.71 LE	3.02 0.63 ME	2.88 0.61 LE	2.90 ME
4	Customers are always notified on details of their call rate and data usage	3.89 0.91 ME	3.91 0.74 ME	3.11 0. 67 ME	3.22 0.53 ME	3.53 ME
	Grand mean	**3.70 ME**	**3.50 ME**	**3.54 ME**	**3.39 ME**	**3.52 ME**

Source: Field survey, 2025

Analysis in table 1, revealed customer based transparency in terms of information disclosure pattern of network of service providers (NSP) in south-south Nigeria. Findings show that information disclosure by this (NSP) is to a moderate extent. The weighted mean of the various telecom subscribers indicate 3.70, 3.50, 3.54, and 3.39 for MTN, GLO, Airtel and 9 mobile respectively. The analysis shows that MTN was highly rated by the subscribers followed by Airtel, GLO and 9 mobile in that other.

Research Question 2

To what extent do network clarity relate to customers' attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria?

Table 3: Computation of Responses on the Influence of Network Clarity on Customers' Attributive Perception of the Telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria (N= 364).

S/N	NETWORK CLARITY AND CUSTOMERS' ATTRIBUTIVE PERCEPTION	MTN Rmk $\bar{x}_1$ SD₁ n=91	GLO Rmk $\bar{x}_2$ SD₂ n=91	AIRTEL Rmk $\bar{x}_3$ SD₃ n=91	9 MOBILE Rmk $\bar{x}_4$ SD₄ n=91	$\bar{x}_{1/4}$ Rmks
5	My choice telecom service providers have very strong network signals across south-south Nigeria	4.21 0.88 HE	3.09 0.61 ME	3.83 0.72 ME	3.14 0.49 ME	3.57 ME
6	The rate of network failure and drop calls have been minimized drastically	4.29 0.81 ME	3.41 0.69 ME	4.10 0.41HE	3.56 0.74 ME	3.84 ME
7	Issues concerning calls not reachable and frequent call interruption are no longer an observed phenomenon	4.58 0.89 VHE	3.22 0.81 ME	4.18 0.91 HE	3.11 0.84 ME	3.77 ME
8	Customer centricity is a major priority for the telecom industry in south-south Nigeria	3.28 0.74 ME	3.20 0.71 ME	3.42 0.61 ME	3.20 0.71 ME	3.28 ME
	Grand mean	**4.07 HE**	**3.23 ME**	**3.88 ME**	**3.25 ME**	**3.62 ME**

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 2, showed customers' based transparency on the various (NSP) in south-south Nigeria in terms of providing wider network coverage, stronger network signal/clarity. Findings show a grand mean of 3.62 which indicate customers' perceived transparency in the area of network signal/clarity to a moderate extent. The analysis further show a weighted mean of (4.07) for MTN, (3.23) for GLO, (3.88) for Airtel and (3.62) for 9 mobile. Consequently, customer perceived transparency on NTN operations in south-south Nigeria in the area of network clarity is to a high extent with GLO, Airtel and 9 mobile recording moderate extent in the region.

Research Question 3

To what extent do data/call accuracy relate to customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria?

Table 4: Computation of Responses on the Influence of Data/Call Accuracy on Customers Attributive Perception of the Telecommunication Subscribers in South-South Nigeria. (N= 364).

S/N	DATA/CALL ACCURACY AND CUSTOMERS' ATTRIBUTIVE PERCEPTION	MTN Rmk $\bar{x}_1$ SD_1 n=91	GLO Rmk $\bar{x}_2$ SD_2 n=91	AIRTEL Rmk $\bar{x}_3$ SD_3 n=91	9 MOBILE Rmk $\bar{x}_4$ SD_4 n=91	$\bar{x}_{1/4}$ Rmks
9	Charges made on data and calls are as accurate as advertised	3.64 0.78 HE	3.66 0.69 ME	3.56 0.82 ME	3.52 0.79 ME	3.60 ME
10	Refunds are made on inappropriate deductions and charges made on calls and data subscription	2.52 0.43 LE	1.89 0.76 VLE	2.00 0.80 LE	2.19 051 LE	2.15 LE
11	Huge data subscription but limited data access is no longer a regular occurrence	3.55 0.68 ME	1.72 0.91 VLE	2.98 0.75 LE	2.44 0.73 LE	2.67 LE
12	Unused data are usually rolled over at the next subscription.	2.92 0.86 LE	1.58 0.61 VLE	2.51 0.44 LE	2.44 0.73 LE	2.36 LE
	Grand mean	**3.16 ME**	**2.21 LE**	**2.76 LE**	**2.65 LE**	**2.70 LE**

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 3, showed computation responses on the influence of customers' based transparency and attributive perception of telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria. The analysis show that data/call accuracy as provided by the 4 main NSP including MTN, GLO, Airtel and 9 mobile is to low extent. A further analysis of the response pattern in the region show a weighted mean of 3.16, 2.21, 2.76, and 2.70 for MTN, GLO, Airtel and 9 mobile respectively. MTN subscribers in the region seem to be more satisfied as seen in the mean rating of 3.16 which indicate moderate extent followed by Airtel 2.76, 9 mobile 2.70 and GLO 2.21 which indicate low extent since the means are below the criterion mean of 3.00.

Research Question 4

To what extent does service trust relate to customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria?

Table 5: Computation of Responses on the Influence of service trust on Customers Attributive Perception of the Telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria. (N= 364).

S/N	SERVICE TRUST AND CUSTOMERS' ATTRIBUTIVE PERCEPTION	MTN Rmk $\bar{x}_1$ SD_1 n=91	GLO Rmk $\bar{x}_2$ SD_2 n=91	AIRTEL Rmk $\bar{x}_3$ SD_3 n=91	9 MOBILE Rmk $\bar{x}_4$ SD_4 n=91	$\bar{x}_{1/4}$ Rmks
13	I trust my telecom service providers because customers complains and challenges are addressed and rectified immediately	4.68 0.88 HE	2.81 0.61 ME	3.52 0.72 ME	3.04 0.49 ME	3.51 ME
14	I rely on my choice mobile network because of the consistency in network and data bundle package they provide	4.53 0.69 VHE	1.89 0.73 VLE	3.09 0.66 ME	2.11 0.51 LE	3.11 ME
15	The mobile network service, I'm using currently is reliable and dependable	4.55 0.61 VHE	2.49 0.74 LE	3.21 0.77 ME	2.82 0.91 LE	3.27 ME

16	The customer service unit are very much alert in terms of rendering prompt service and resolving services failure issues	4.82 084 VHE	2.81 0.72 ME	3.21 0.97 ME	2.69 0.81 LE	3.36 ME
	Grand mean	**4.65 VHE**	**2.5 LE**	**3.26 ME**	**2.67 LE**	**3.31 ME**

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 4, showed computation responses on the influence of customers' based transparency and attributive perception of telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria with dimension on service trust. Findings revealed that customers trust on the services of the various network service providers in south-south Nigeria is to a moderate extent. However, MTN is leading with weighted mean reported as 4.65 which clearly reveal that customers' based transparency on MTN network services is to a very high extent even Airtel network recorded moderate while GLO and 9 mobile recorded low extent.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between information disclosures and customers attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

Table 6: Computation of Relationship between Information Disclosures and Customers Attributive Perception of the Telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria.

Variables	∑X ∑Y	∑X² ∑Y²	DF ∑XY	r-cal	r-crit	Dec
Customer Based Transparency	1122	364981	362 245129	0.76	0.1946	Reject
Attribution Perception	990	220762				

p >0.05 *significant N = **364**

In Table 6, the computed correlation coefficient (r) is 0.76, which exceeds the critical r-value of 0.1946. This indicates that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, as the calculated r is greater than the critical threshold. Consequently, the null hypothesis (Ho1) is rejected. It can therefore be concluded that there is a significant relationship between information disclosure and customers' attributive perception among telecommunication subscribers in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between network clarity and customers' attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

Table 7: Computation of Relationship between Network Clarity and Customers' Attributive Perception of the Telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria

Variables	∑X ∑Y	∑X² ∑Y²	DF ∑XY	r-cal	r-crit	Dec
Customer Based Transparency	1184	366400	362 266008	0.93	0.1946	Reject
Attribution Perception	990	220762				

p >0.05 *significant N = **364**

In Table 6, the computed correlation coefficient (r) is 0.76, which surpasses the critical value of 0.1946. This suggests a statistically significant relationship at the 0.05 level, as the calculated r exceeds the critical threshold. As a result, the null hypothesis (Ho1) is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is a significant relationship between information disclosure and customers' attributive perception among telecommunication subscribers in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between data/call accuracy and customers' attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

Table 8: Computation of Relationship between Data/Call Accuracy and Attributive Perception of Telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria.

Variables	∑X ∑Y	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	DF	∑XY	r-cal	r-crit	Dec
Customer Based Transparency	850	162186	362	169071	0.89	0.1946	Reject
Attribution Perception	990	220762					

p >0.05 *significant N = **364**

Table 8 presents a calculated correlation coefficient (r) of 0.89, which is greater than the critical r-value of 0.1946. This indicates that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, as the calculated r exceeds the critical threshold. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho3) is rejected. It can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between data/call accuracy and customers' attributive perception among telecommunication subscribers in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Hypothesis 4

There is no significant relationship between service trust and attributive perception of the telecommunication subscribers in south-south Nigeria.

Table 9: Computation of relationship between Service Trust and Attributive Perception of the Telecommunication Subscribers in South-South Nigeria.

Variables	∑X ∑Y	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	DF	∑XY	r-cal	r-crit	Dec
Customer Based Transparency	1055	305445	362	221186	0.85	0.1946	Reject
Attribution Perception	990	220762					

p >0.05 *significant N = **364**

Table 9 shows that the calculated correlation coefficient (r) is 0.85, which exceeds the critical r-value of 0.1946. This result indicates a statistically significant relationship at the 0.05 level, as the calculated r is greater than the critical value. Consequently, the null hypothesis (Ho4) is rejected. It can therefore be concluded that there is a significant relationship between service trust and customers' attributive perception among telecommunication subscribers in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

Based on the data analysis, the following findings emerged:

i. The impact of information disclosure on the attributive perception of telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria is to a moderate extent.

ii. The impact of network clarity on customers' attributive perception is to a high extent.

iii. The impact of data/call accuracy on customers' attributive perception is to a low extent.

iv. The impact of service trust on customers' attributive perception is to a moderate extent.

v. There is a significant relationship between information disclosure and the attributive perception of telecommunication subscribers in South-South Nigeria.

vi. There is a significant relationship between network clarity and customers' attributive perception.

vii. There is a significant relationship between data/call accuracy and attributive perception.

viii. There is a significant relationship between service trust and attributive perception of telecommunication subscribers in the region.

Discussion of Findings

Information Disclosure and Attributive Perception

Findings from Table 1 reveal that the grand mean of 3.52 (above the criterion mean of 3.00) indicates that respondents perceive information disclosure by telecommunication firms to a moderate extent. Additionally, the strong positive correlation confirms a significant relationship between information disclosure and customers' attributive perception.

This finding aligns with Charles (2018), who emphasized that both employees and customers are more likely to engage with organizations that proactively share information about company goals, strategic direction, and product development. Similarly, Ya-Hsin et al. (2014) assert that organizational success in responsiveness, innovation, and productivity hinges on leveraging key assets information and people regardless of location.

Bushman (2004) also supports this view, stating that organizations embracing transparency and openness are more likely to earn trust and loyalty. He argues that being honest and even vulnerable fosters a human connection with stakeholders, creating more trustworthy and relatable brands.

Network Clarity and Attributive Perception

Findings from Table 2 indicate a grand mean of 3.62, suggesting that customers perceive a moderate level of network clarity from telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria. The correlation analysis shows a strong positive relationship between network clarity and attributive perception.

This is consistent with Nimako (2012), who noted that customer satisfaction and high-quality service delivery are critical in the competitive telecommunications sector. He acknowledged the role of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) in pushing firms toward improved service quality. Alabar and Gbande (2017) also highlighted that, although the industry has experienced tremendous growth since liberalization in 2000, this growth is not solely due to customer satisfaction but also driven by significant investments and infrastructure expansion. They further noted that poor network clarity remains a major challenge.

Data/Call Accuracy and Attributive Perception

Table 3 reveals that all item means and the grand mean exceed the 3.00 criterion, indicating that data/call accuracy is moderately perceived by customers. A strong positive correlation further supports the existence of a significant relationship between accuracy and customers' attributive perception.

However, this finding contrasts with Adeyemi (2015), who reported that unreliable internet access negatively affects business operations, leading to customer dissatisfaction. According to Vorauer and Claude (1998), and Granados (2006), accuracy is a core component of corporate transparency, and inaccuracies can diminish trust and lead to reputational damage.

Nevertheless, Armstrong (2019) supports the present findings by emphasizing that transparency combined with accuracy fosters customer trust and strengthens brand loyalty. He notes that customers are increasingly drawn to companies offering reliable and generous data plans, viewing these as indicators of trustworthy service. Akhigbe and Martin (2006) further reinforce this view, proposing that transparency is shaped by three key elements: disclosure, clarity, and accuracy. They argue that information is perceived as transparent when it is relevant, understandable, and reliable each contributing to stakeholder confidence.

Findings from Table 4 reveal the mean, weighted mean, and grand mean ratings of service trust and customers' attributive perception of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria. The data show that customers' trust in the services of the four major telecom providers in the region is generally to a moderate extent. However, MTN stands out, with a weighted mean score of 4.65, indicating a very high level of customer trust and perceived transparency in its services.

This finding aligns with the study by Woweffec (2018), which identified MTN Nigeria Plc as the clear market leader in terms of network coverage, revenue generation, and subscriber base.

This market position has been largely attributed to MTN's effective marketing strategies and consistent expansion of its service coverage across towns and cities.

Additionally, the findings support the assertion by Eisingerich and Bell (2008), who identified a positive relationship between trust and transparency. Cision (2017) further emphasizes that consumers are more likely to switch to brands that demonstrate greater transparency, highlighting that internal and external transparency can enhance engagement and trust among both customers and employees. This reflects a growing consumer preference for brands that prioritize honesty and authenticity over perfection.

Grenville (2019) also reinforces this position by stating that transparency lays the foundation for trust, which is essential for building lasting customer relationships. Without trust, brand loyalty is difficult to achieve, and products risk becoming mere commodities that can be easily substituted. However, as Galan (2018) cautions, poor service delivery can quickly erode customer trust and loyalty, especially in a market where customer expectations are high. Therefore, service providers must not only strive to meet these expectations but also communicate their efforts effectively to maintain trust.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of data and the discussion of findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Information Disclosure: The impact of information disclosure on customers' attributive perception of the telecommunication industry in South-South Nigeria is moderate.
2. Network Clarity: The impact of network clarity on customers' attributive perception is to a high extent.
3. Data/Call Accuracy: The impact of data and call accuracy on customers' attributive perception is to a low extent.
4. Service Trust: The impact of service trust on customers' attributive perception is moderate.
5. Information Disclosure Relationship: There is a significant relationship between information disclosure and customers' attributive perception of telecommunication firms in South-South Nigeria.
6. Network Clarity Relationship: There is a significant relationship between network clarity and customers' attributive perception.
7. Data/Call Accuracy Relationship: There is a significant relationship between data/call accuracy and customers' attributive perception.
8. Service Trust Relationship: There is a significant relationship between service trust and customers' attributive perception of telecommunication firms in the region.

Recommendations

Therefore, based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made.

1. The study therefore recommends that transparency towards customer should be given priority by network service providers (NSP) especially in the in area of information disclosure in order to positively influence customer attribution perception towards their brand.
2. The study also recommends that network service providers (NSP) should seek to upgrade their facilities so as to provide adequate network coverage and clarity in the Niger Delta region and beyond. This will help retain and increase their subscription base as subscribers will likely switch to a brand that is more transparent in providing the desired services.
3. Since providing accurate data/call rate to customers is a pivotal component of transparency, there is therefore need for network service providers (NSP) in the region to ensure that customers are charged exactly the amount they used and equally make details of customers' charges available to them to access.
4. It is a known fact that the combination of transparency and trust humanize brands and makes customers feel like they have a personal connection with a brand. It is imperative therefore for brands to consistently provide services that customers can rely on and do business with.

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