



The Influence of Business and Non-Business Factors on Customer Retention in Telecommunication Industry in Guinea-Conakry: The Mediating Effect of Brand Image

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Abstract

Retaining existing customers and attracting new ones is a necessity for the telecommunication industry to succeed; it can lead to greater financial returns and encourage research development in producing new marketable products. Due to an intensely competitive market, numerous service providers experience a decline in their customer base annually. Thus, this research aims to ascertain the impact of brand image as a mediating factor in the link between customer retention and network quality, pricing, promotion, customer service, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Guinea-Conakry. The research used a quantitative data approach in which primary data were collected from undergraduate students who used mobile phones connected to various network providers in Guinea. The research questionnaire received responses from 383 people in total. With the SmartPLS program, data analysis was done. The outcomes indicated that promotion, customer service, price, and CSR substantially influenced customer retention, while network quality showed an insignificant impact. The findings also revealed that network quality, customer service, and promotion significantly positively influenced brand image. However, price and CSR, on the other hand, presented an insignificant influence on brand image. Additionally, the findings showed that brand image has a substantial impact on customer retention. Finally, the outcomes showed that promotion, customer service, and network quality have an indirect and significant positive influence on customer retention via a brand image as the mediating variable. Meanwhile, price and CSR through brand image demonstrated an insignificant impact on customer retention. The study will enhance a cordial relationship between the network providers and their customers as a consequence it will pave the way for further strategic development in the telecommunication sector.

Keywords: Network Quality, Customer Service, CSR, Brand Image, Customer Retention

Introduction

Telecommunications is crucial to current socioeconomic growth. In addition to resolving issues with geographic distance, the development of telecommunications technologies has also addressed issues with traditional communication technology, which is costly and time-consuming (Goh et al., 2020). The telecommunications industry plays a crucial role in the economic development of all countries. The global telecommunications is constantly evolving with technological advancements. In today's competitive environment, service providers must to focus on customer retention. The telecom sector is currently facing challenges from both domestic and international competition. Increasing the number of service providers may lead to a decline in new customers. Therefore, businesses are prioritizing customer satisfaction and implementing strategies to ensure customer retention. As a result, customer retention is closely linked to the success and future growth of companies (Danish et al., 2015).

The telecommunications sector in Guinea-Conakry is currently in the process of growth, with three main companies vying for customers nationwide. Factors such as pricing, promotion, network coverage, and customer service are likely crucial aspects of customer retention in this industry. However, Orange Guinea stands out as the top mobile network operator in Guinea, holding a market share of approximately 60%. It is affiliated with the Orange Group, a prominent international telecommunications corporation. Following closely behind is MTN Areeba, the second-largest telecommunications provider in Guinea, with a market share of about 30%. Lastly,



Cellcom is the third significant mobile network operator in Guinea, although it has a smaller market share compared to Orange and MTN. Cellcom is a Guinean company that specializes in providing mobile communication services (BuddeComm, 2024).

Furthermore, business factors like customer service, network quality, price, and promotion are elements of customer retention strategies for telecommunications businesses. Therefore, by offering competitive prices, ensuring a high standard of network quality, providing exceptional customer service, and implementing engaging promotional activities, companies can effectively improve customer satisfaction and loyalty and establish long-term relations with customer retention (Rane et al., 2023). Conversely, non-business factors such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) also have a significant impact on customer retention within the telecommunications business. By fostering trust to enhance reputation by aligning customer preferences in risk mitigation and implementing corporate social responsibility initiatives, companies that are better able to retain customers will achieve long-term success in the marketplace (Afiuc et al., 2021).

Numerous researchers have emphasized the importance of customer retention through their efforts. The most valuable asset for businesses is a loyal customer, and establishing long-term relationships with customers is beneficial due to the profitability it brings. In addition, studies have shown that higher customer retention leads to increased products, making it advantageous for businesses to cultivate lasting relationships with their current customers (Qadri & Khan, 2014; Rahman & Chowdhury, 2022; Pasape, 2022). Studies have been shown to explore the rationale behind customer retention, by focusing on the key factors influencing consumer behavior, perception, and loyalty toward telecommunication products or services (Dassanayake & Herath, 2017; Banik & Sinha, 2020). Some researchers have examined the direct impact of network quality, pricing, promotions, customer service, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on brand image. There are limited researches that examine the connection between network quality, price, customer service, promotion, CSR, and customer retention through brand image. Also, only a few of them investigated the effects of brand image as a mediator.

The results of this research will have substantial implications for business/marketing professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders. Firstly, insights related to managing mobile networks in Guinea will highlight the importance of customer retention as a source of long-term competitive advantage, prompting organizations to incorporate it into their strategic toolkit for the mobile industry. The study will offer guidance on areas for improvement to those already implementing customer retention strategies, to enhance their competitive advantage. Secondly, the study will help policymakers distinguish between dominance and sustainable competitive advantage, thereby preventing monopolistic practices among mobile operators in Guinea-Conakry. Lastly, stakeholders will benefit from valuable information to provide constructive feedback for enhancing service delivery by mobile network operators in Guinea-Conakry.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study involve determining the correlation between network quality, price, customer service, and promotion on customer retention. Additionally, the correlation between the network quality, price, customer services, promotion, CSR, and customer retention on brand image, as well as the relationship of those factors on customer retention with the mediating effect of brand image were equally examined.

Literature Review

Factors Influence Customer Retention

In the telecommunications industry, network quality plays a crucial role in GSM communication. It is considered a key element in determining the competitive edge of telecommunications companies by influencing customer retention. Consequently, poor network quality significantly hampers customer fulfillment, leading to a decline in customer retention (Demir et al., 2021). According to Thaichon et al. (2014) stated that network quality in the mobile service sector encompasses the strength and quality of the network signal, error frequency, coverage, as well as downloads and upload speeds. In this context, some previous research posits that network quality is an essential factor connected to customer retention. Dassanayake and Herath (2017) asserts that there is a positive correlation between network quality and customer retention, a notion further reinforced by Ochang and Irving (2016).

Price represents an agreement between both parties involved in the sale and purchase of goods or services. Furthermore, the price can be seen as a personal sacrifice or what customers give in exchange for a product (Havidz & Mahaputra, 2020). It is crucial to implement appropriate and reasonable pricing strategies to effectively retain customers and ensure high levels of satisfaction (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2022). Numerous researchers have also found that offering lower or reasonable prices is an effective strategy for customer retention, which aligns with the studies, conducted by Qadri and Khan (2014); Rahman and Chowdhury (2022); Yasir et al. (2022) and Dassanayake and Herath (2017).

The promotional activities of the company's marketing mix aim to inform the public or consumers about the products or services offered. These promotional activities also involve communication between companies and customers (Richardo et al., 2020). Gulliando and Shihab (2019) describe promotion as a range of activities conducted by companies to communicate the advantages of their products and convince target customers to make a purchase. Additionally, Richardo et al. (2020) emphasize that promotion is a crucial component of marketing that focuses on persuasively communicating marketing programs to target customers and facilitating exchange transactions between companies and consumers. Consequently, some authors argue that promotion plays a significant role in customer retention. A study conducted by Yabani et al. (2017) revealed that sales promotion can retain customers by offering sales promotional incentives and its substantial influence on customer retention, a notion further supported by Ofosu-Boateng (2020) and Othman et al. (2021).

Customer service is an essential aspect of mobile service, providing mobile phone network operators with the ability to effectively and promptly address customer complaints. It also ensures that customers are well-informed about the completion of services and are willing to respond to customer requests. Additionally, good customer service enhances loyalty and retention (Asiegbu et al., 2015). According to Nwakanma et al. (2018), customer service encompasses all the assistance and support that network suppliers offer to clients directly or indirectly, before, during, and after purchase, to create an unforgettable customer experience. Agbonifoh and Ogbeide (2022) describe customer service as a series of actions that include complaint handling mechanisms, ease of reporting complaints, and prompt complaint simplicity in filing complaints, and friendly interactions during the complaint reporting process. Numerous studies have provided evidence that delivering excellent customer service greatly boosts customer satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately resulting in higher rates of customer retention. Hossain et al. (2017) conducted a study on customer retention in the telecommunications services in Bangladesh. The empirical analysis



yielded several of interesting findings. Particularly, the study identified customer service as a significant factor that influences customer satisfaction, with satisfaction being a crucial determinant of long-term customer retention.

Corporate social responsibility has been thoroughly analyzed and linked to the performance of businesses. In management and marketing literature, the definition of CSR has been established as a company's commitment to utilizing discretionary business practices and corporate resources to promote the well-being of society and stakeholders. This encompasses various practices such as charitable contributions, fair treatment of employees, and environmentally friendly production policies (Van Doorn et al., 2017). The influence of CSR on customer retention is significant and beneficial, especially in the telecommunications industry. Some studies have provided evidence of the positive outcomes resulting from CSR initiatives in terms of customer retention. Research conducted by Afiuc et al. (2021) their study discovered that there is a positive association between corporate social responsibility and customer retention.

The hypotheses outlined above are as follows:

H1: Network quality has a positive association with customer retention.

H2: Price has a positive association with customer retention.

H3: Promotion has a positive association with customer retention.

H4: Customer service has a positive association with customer retention.

H5: CSR has a positive association with customer retention.

Factors Influence Brand Image

The relationship between a service provider's network quality and its brand image in the telecommunications industry has been widely studied in the academic literature. While it is commonly believed that there is a positive association between these two elements. For example, the study conducted by Gerpott et al. (2001) delved into the association between network quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty within the German mobile telecommunications sector. The results of their research demonstrated that superior network quality significantly contributes to increased customer satisfaction, ultimately resulting in a favorable effect on brand image.

It is essential to consider pricing before making a purchasing decision. Therefore, pricing plays a significant role in marketing for both customers and sellers. The success of products is determined by their pricing (Hasmiati et al., 2020). Several scholars have confirmed the correlation between price and brand image. For instance, a study conducted by Havidz and Mahaputra (2020) examined the variables that impact brand perception and buying choices, specifically price perception and promotional strategies. Their findings revealed that there is a positive association between price and brand image.

The operations of a company are interconnected, involving the production of goods or services, with promotion being a crucial aspect. The marketing mix of the company encompasses promotional efforts aimed at informing customers about the products or services available. Numerous scholarly investigations have explored the correlation between promotional activities and brand image, uncovering that effective promotion can significantly enhance brand image. The findings align with prior research conducted by Havidz and Mahaputra (2020), who concur that promotion has a positive relationship on brand image. This viewpoint was further supported by Desideria and Wardana (2020), who examined the significance of integrating marketing tactics to build and sustain strong brands. The results indicated that promotions exert a favorable and significant impact on the brand image. This suggests that well-executed promotional tactics can improve consumers' perception of a product and establish

a positive impression. The research emphasized that cohesive and strategically coordinated promotional initiatives enhance the brand image by establishing strong, positive, distinctive connections in the minds of consumers.

Previous studies consistently emphasize the substantial impact that customer service exerts on a company's brand image, especially within the telecommunications sector. Research by Hartline and Jones (1996) conducted a study on how employee performance impacts perceived service quality and brand image. Their findings indicated a direct correlation between employee performance in customer service roles and customers' perceptions of the brand, ultimately improving the brand image.

The concept of CSR has been consistently highlighted in academic research. Tingchi Liu et al. (2014) emphasized that CSR initiatives related to the environment, society, and stakeholders can enhance brand image among Chinese consumers. Similarly, the development of CSR practices can lead to an enhancement in the company's brand image, underscoring the significant contribution of CSR perceptions to brand image (Martínez et al., 2014). Lee and Lee (2018) conducted research on the correlation between CSR and brand image in the mobile telecommunications sector and found that CSR activities have a notable positive influence on brand image. This outcome was further reinforced by Singh et al. (2008), who emphasized the significant impact of CSR areas on brand image. The hypotheses outlined above are as follows:

H6: Network quality has a positive relationship with the brand image.

H7: Price has a positive relationship with brand image.

H8: Promotion has a positive relationship with brand image.

H9: Customer service has a positive relationship with brand image.

H10: CSR has a positive relationship with brand image.

Brand Image and Customer Retention

According to Puspita et al. (2022), the telecommunication industry sector describes a brand as a name, term, sign, design, symbol, or combination that distinguishes the services or goods of one vendor or group of vendors from competitors. Another definition by Wijaya et al. (2020) describes the brand image as the beliefs and perceptions held by clients, as reflected in their relations stored in memory. However, Customer retention plays an essential part in determining the success or failure of the telecommunication service sector. It focuses on fostering strong business relationships between service providers and customers (Bhatti et al., 2016). According to Pasape (2022), preserving customer retention is an invaluable asset for companies aiming to establish a competitive advantage and flourish in a fiercely competitive market. Moreover, Ricadonna et al. (2021) and Qadri and Khan (2014) have provided support for the correlation between brand image and customer retention in the telecom sector. Their research findings strongly indicate a positive link between brand image and customer retention. These outcomes are consistent with earlier studies conducted by Rahman and Chowdhury (2022) who shares the same viewpoint. The hypotheses outlined above are as follows:

H11: Brand image has a positive association with customer retention.

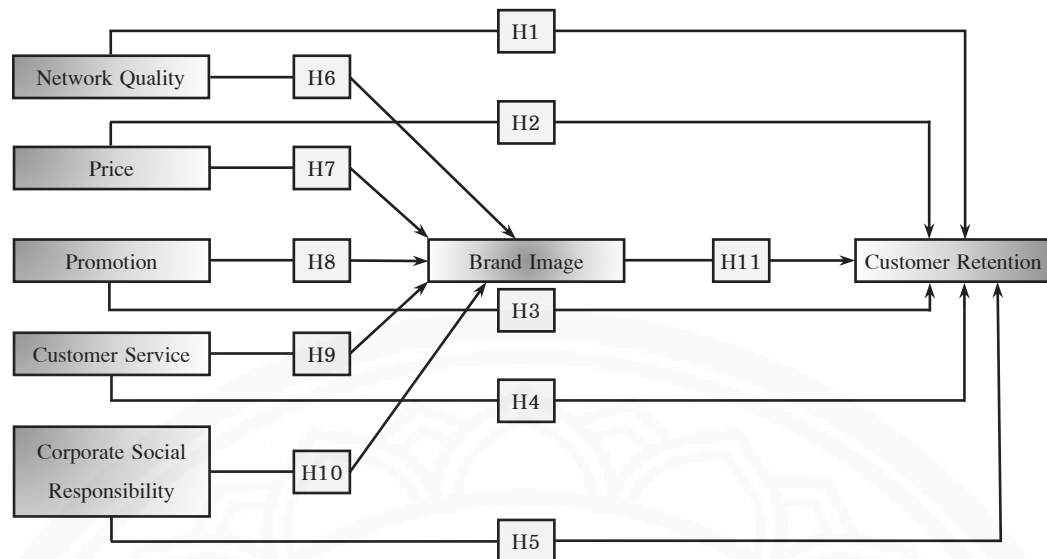


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework.

Research Methodology

Research Design, Population, and Sampling

In this particular study, both descriptive and correlational research designs were employed. A descriptive study focuses on determining the extent of the difference between two variables. The data collected in a descriptive study is quantitative and can be used to test hypotheses. Additionally, in correlation design, as described by Creswell (2015), in correlational research designs; researchers utilize the correlation statistical test to assess the level of connection between variables or sets of scores. Furthermore, the research has employed a quantitative method of data collection by gathering primary data from customers (students) who use mobile telecommunication in Guinea Conakry, in line with the study's objective. The conceptual framework of the study includes seven variables: network quality, price, promotion, customer service, corporate social responsibility, brand image, and customer retention.

Bachelor students use this technology in their daily communication activities. The survey was conducted among subscribers of mobile operators such as Orange Guinea, MTN Areeba, and Cellcom Guinea. The target groups of the study were students of the Julius Nyerere University of Kankan, Guinea-Conakry, a public university in the historic city of Kankan. The study area was chosen because most researchers underestimated the inland study, as few studies have been conducted in this area. Respondents are randomly selected and use mobile telecommunications services in Guinea-Conakry.

The information regarding the total population of the respondents was obtained from the registry department of the university. A sample size of 383 university students was used in this study, which was calculated from the total population of 8,572 students studying at the university following the method of Yamane (1967). The respondents were met randomly at their lecture halls, library, cafeteria, and other social venues.

The research utilized a cross-sectional survey to gather the opinions of the target population. A research-designed questionnaire was employed for data collection to meet the study's objectives. Convenience sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, was utilized, where data was gathered from an available group of respondents.

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized in the research. Primary data was collected through questionnaires, while secondary data was obtained through literature reviews, annual reports, and articles.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducted a study in Guinea-Conakry to evaluate the satisfaction and engagement of individual customers (students) with telecommunications service providers. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used, which included a brief description of the study's purpose and significance, as a data collection tool. The questionnaire consisted of 38 statements categorized under different constructs, and respondents were required to choose the most appropriate answers from a predetermined list. The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographic variables, while the second part addressed questions related to mobile telecommunication service providers, and the last part addressed questions related to the recommendation. To ensure the validity of the research instrument, three experts in the field assessed the questionnaires for content validity. Their feedback was used to make adjustments, such as removing irrelevant questions and simplifying complex terminology. To test the understandability of the questionnaire, a sample of thirty randomly selected students was allowed to fill it out. This was done to ensure that the respondents could easily comprehend and respond to the questions. Additionally, the questionnaire was translated into French by bilingual academics to cater to the respondents' better understanding, as English is not the instructional language in Guinea-Conakry. The translated version was compared to the original text to ensure that the original information was preserved.

The reliability of the data is determined by its consistency and stability. Cronbach's alpha was employed to measure the reliability and reflect the internal consistency of the research. The Cronbach's alpha values for all seven constructs in the study are offered in Table 1. These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Cavana et al., 2001), indicating strong internal consistency and reliability in achieving the research objectives.

Table 1 Cronbach Alpha Reliability Statistics

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha
Network Quality	0.933
Price	0.950
Promotion	0.946
Customer Service	0.971
CSR	0.943
Brand Image	0.934
Customer Retention	0.975

The lowest alpha value is observed for network quality at 0.933, followed by brand image at 0.934, corporate social responsibility at 0.943, promotion at 0.946, price at 0.950, customer service at 0.971, and customer retention with the highest alpha of 0.975. It is worth noting that all items within each variable in the questionnaire demonstrate good reliability, as all Cronbach alpha values exceed the minimum recommended value of 0.60 (Cronbach, 1951).

The data was examined utilizing the SmartPLS software algorithm for Partial Least Squares Structural Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the data and accomplish the research objectives. PLS-SEM is suitable for estimating statistical models as it offers greater robustness compared to other SEM estimations, thereby reducing bias for researchers (Hair et al., 2017). Given the conceptual model, PLS-SEM was utilized as it is the most suitable method for estimating a model with a mediating variable.



Measurement

A questionnaire was designed to gather information on the respondents' profiles and research constructs before the data collection. The initial part of the survey concentrated on demographic characteristics like age, gender, level of studies (year), current mobile network service provider, and duration. Moreover, the second part involved items that were used to measure various concepts. These items were sourced from previous literature and modified to suit the context of this particular study. Specifically, network quality was assessed using six items as described by Njoroge (2016) and Kiilu (2013). Price was gauged using seven items adapted from Qadri and Khan (2014) and Owiye (2012), while promotion was evaluated using five items originally developed by Jere (2013). Similarly, a five-item scale from Njoroge (2016) was used to measure customer service. The scale for corporate social responsibility was also adapted as documented by Njoroge (2016). To assess brand image, five items were adopted from Yeboah-Asiamah et al. (2016) and Qadri and Khan (2014). Finally, customer retention was assessed using five items adapted from Qadri and Khan (2014), and recommendations. All these items were rated on a 5-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Results

The demographics of mobile phone subscribers in Guinea-Conakry, the respondents were predominantly male (52.22%) between the ages of 26 and 30 (41.51%). In addition, students in their third year represent the highest number of respondents at (38.91%). Most respondents currently use the network provider Orange Guinea, which is estimated to cover 70.76% of the total population. Furthermore, MTN Areeba users are the second-highest group of respondents (16.97%). The lowest proportion of respondents is Cellcom users (12.27%). Additionally, 66.06% of all respondents have used their mobile network for 6 to 9 years. In the same vein, 20.37% have used their mobile network for 2 to 5 years. Of the total number of respondents, 56.14% and 32.64%, respectively, have used either MTN Areeba or Cellcom in the past.

Table 2 The Hypothesis Testing Results of the Direct Effects

Hypothesis				Result
Direct Effect				
H1:	Network Quality	→	Customer Retention	Reject
H2:	Price	→	Customer Retention	Support
H3:	Promotion	→	Customer Retention	Support
H4:	Customer Service	→	Customer Retention	Support
H5:	CSR	→	Customer Retention	Support
H6:	Network Quality	→	Brand Image	Support
H7:	Price	→	Brand Image	Reject
H8:	Promotion	→	Brand Image	Support
H9:	Customer Service	→	Brand Image	Support
H10:	CSR	→	Brand Image	Reject
H11:	Brand Image	→	Customer Retention	Support

Source: SmartPLS Software Administered by the Author.

Tables 2 and 3 show the outcome of the direct effect among the variables. Hypotheses H1, H7, and H10 examine the effect between network quality and customer retention (0.073, $p > 0.05$), price and brand image (0.095, $p > 0.05$), and CSR and brand image (0.096, $p > 0.05$) respectively. The findings were rejected, which

showed there was no significant association between network quality and customer retention, between price and brand image, and likewise between CSR and brand image. In contrast, hypotheses H2 and H4 were supported. This showed that a lower significant correlation exists between price and customer retention (0.134^* , $P < 0.05$), and between customer service and customer retention (0.133^* , $P < 0.05$). There was a medium-significant connection exhibited between network quality and brand image (0.152^{**} , $P < 0.01$) and also between promotion and customer retention (0.164^{**} , $P < 0.01$). At the same time, a highly significant positive association was obtained in the relationships with CSR and customer retention (0.232^{***} , $P < 0.001$), customer service and brand image (0.424^{***} , $P < 0.001$), promotion and brand image (0.182^{***} , $P < 0.001$), and brand image and customer retention (0.200^{***} , $P < 0.001$).

Table 3 Results of the Hypothesis Testing

	BI			CR		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Network Quality	0.152**	–	0.152*	.073	0.072*	0.15*
Price	0.095	–	0.095	.134*	0.045	0.18
Promotion	0.182***	–	0.182*	.164**	0.087*	0.25*
Customer Service	0.424***	–	0.424*	.133*	0.202*	0.34*
CSR	0.096	–	0.096	.232***	0.046	0.028
Brand Image				.200***		0.478*
R2		.433			.382	

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

DE = Direct Effect; IE = Indirect Effect; TE = Total Effect (DE + IE)

The results in Tables 3 showed the indirect effect of brand image as a mediating variable on the correlation between network quality and customer retention (indirect effect = 0.03, $p < 0.05$). In addition, there is a correlation between promotion and customer retention (indirect effect = 0.019, $p < 0.05$) and a link between customer service and customer retention (indirect effect = 0.085, $p < 0.05$). All of the above relationships were statistically significant. Furthermore, the findings showed the influence of brand image as a mediating variable on the correlation between price and customer retention (indirect effect = 0.019, $p > 0.05$) and CSR and customer retention (indirect effect = 0.019, $p > 0.05$). These relationships were not substantial and were therefore rejected.

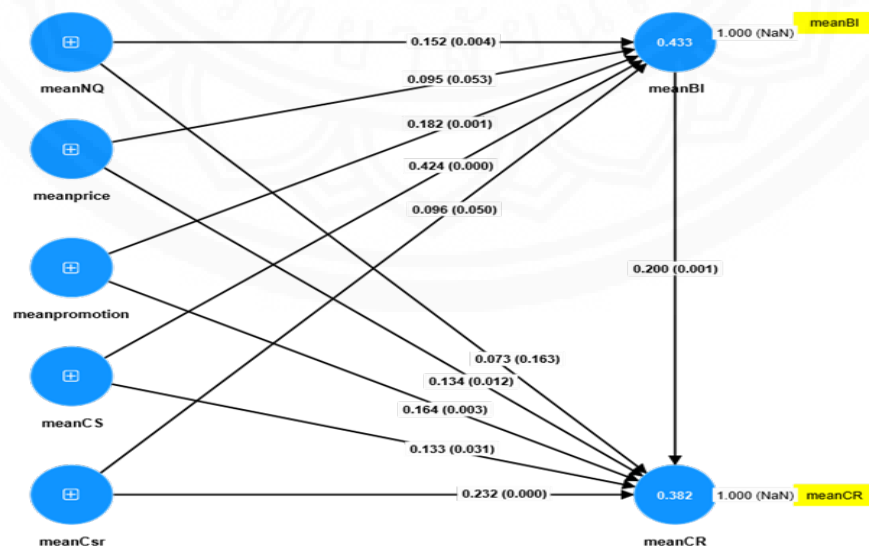


Figure 2 PLS-SEM Models.



Discussion

The results of the tests for Hypothesis 1 show no significant and positive influence between network quality and customer retention. The findings of this research are consistent with studies by Ahmadi et al. (2012) who claim that network quality has no substantial influence on customer retention. Similarly, Zeithaml et al. (1996) explored the behavioral outcomes of service quality, encompassing network quality, across different sectors, such as telecommunications. They also analyzed its influence on customer retention. Their findings revealed that although excellent network quality enhances customer satisfaction, it does not necessarily ensure customer retention if other elements of service provision, like customer service, do not align with expectations. In contrast, multiple studies have consistently proven the direct and substantial influence of network quality on customer retention. A recent research conducted by Dassanayake and Herath (2017) delved into the elements that impact customer retention in the mobile telecommunications industry. The outcomes revealed that there is a positive association between network quality and customer retention. Similarly, Kubat (1991) and Ochang and Irving (2016) also analyzed the telecommunications industry's global system for mobile communications; the outcomes indicated that network quality has a positive effect on customer retention. This scholarly literature strongly backs the idea that network quality plays a vital role in customer retention in the telecommunications sector. By consistently providing dependable and high-performing network quality, service providers can maintain their customers. In this regard, since every customer is interested in good quality products and services, so, network quality is responsible for the entire existence of the telecommunication business. Therefore, if the network is poor it will completely or badly damage the whole sector, the bond of connection between network service quality and the customers is inseparable.

The result of testing Hypothesis 2 shows that price positively and significantly influences customer retention. Yasir et al. (2022) conducted a study that investigated the influence of service quality, perceived brand value, and price fairness on customer retention. The results indicated that price played a fundamental role in influencing customer retention positively. This finding aligns with the results of Rahman and Chowdhury (2022), who also found a positive correlation between price and customer retention in their study. This idea is further supported by the research of Dassanayake and Herath (2017) and Othman et al. (2021). This academic literature presents compelling empirical proof of the correlation between price and customer retention in the telecommunications sector. Through the provision of competitive and value-based pricing, service providers can to cultivate customer satisfaction, loyalty, and enduring customer retention. Conversely, Peng and Wang (2006) argued that consumers usually change their customary suppliers of services due to monetary concerns, especially when they feel that they have to pay more for their purchases. Additionally, Mulyana (2021) found that price does not have a substantial influence on purchasing decisions. In summary, the retention of customers highly depends on service price, the cheaper the quality of services, the higher the rate of retaining customers.

The test outcomes of Hypothesis 3 prove that promotion substantially and positively influences customer retention. These outcomes align with previous studies by Yabani et al. (2017); Ofosu-Boateng (2020) and Othman et al. (2021). Furthermore, studies by Andrei et al. (2013) and Sagala et al. (2014) focused on retail sales promotion and highlighted its substantial influence on purchase decisions and customer retention. However, the study presents contradictory results on the influence of promotion compared to previous research. Tsao et al. (2009) argue that the effects of promotional schemes and keeping customers using their products are of less significance. Employing new ways that can attract and keep customers using the network would be vital, like Markov brand switching. Additionally, Kim (2019) revealed the perspective of the significance of other factors

in addition to promotions when it comes to customer retention, factors such as service quality, network coverage, and customer service, without these factors, promotions alone may not be enough to retain customers. Promotions may attract new customers or encourage existing customers to switch providers, rather than directly impacting their decision to stay with a particular company. Nevertheless, this study agrees with the notion that maintaining customers is the most important aspect of telecommunication business as the main factor for its success. Therefore, having a well-strategized sales plan and advertisement to attract more customers is as essential as the business itself.

The findings from the tests for Hypothesis 4 indicate that customer service substantially and positively influences customer retention. The correlation between two variables has been extensively documented in academic research. Some research has shown the significant impact that customer service has on building customer loyalty and retention. Hossain et al. (2017) carried out an investigation on customer retention within telecommunications services in Bangladesh. The findings from the empirical examination revealed several intriguing observations. Notably, customer service was identified as a significant factor influencing customer satisfaction, while satisfaction was determined to be a crucial factor affecting long-term customer retention. Similarly, Bolton (1998) examined the impact of service quality and customer satisfaction on customer retention and loyalty. The findings showed that exceptional customer service plays a crucial role in enhancing customer retention and loyalty. Conversely, Reinartz et al. (2005) conducted research on customer retention drivers and concluded that customer service quality is crucial for customer satisfaction. Furthermore, they noted that the effect of customer service on customer retention can differ based on factors like pricing strategies, product quality, and competitive offerings. In this respect, this study can conclude that customer service is pivotal in maintaining existing customers and attracting new ones to use their service. This is due to how the customer service department can satisfactorily attend to their customers.

The test results of Hypothesis 5 prove that CSR substantially and positively influences customer retention. A study by Afiuc et al. (2021) analyzed the impact of CSR on customer retention. The findings revealed that CSR had a significant positive influence on customer retention. Similarly, research by Boutmaghzoute and Moustaghfir (2021) explored the connection between SCR initiatives and employee retention. Their outcomes revealed that there is a link between CSR and customer retention. Moreover, these views all point to the existence of CSR and customer retention as well as their attachment to a particular cellular service network. In contrast, in their investigation of the mobile phone industry in Pakistan, Ali et al. (2010) did not find any connection between awareness of social corporate responsibility and consumers' purchasing plans for mobile phone products. In short, the traditional belief in the significance of CSR as a factor of customer retention is not always accurate.

The results of the tests on Hypothesis 6 suggest that network quality substantially and positively influences brand image. In their study, Gerpott et al. (2001) explored the correlation among network quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in the German mobile telecommunications industry. Their results revealed that exceptional network quality plays a decisive role in enhancing customer satisfaction, consequently leading to a positive effect on the brand image. Similarly, in their research, Kim et al. (2004) examined how network quality impacts customer loyalty in the Korean telecommunications industry. Their findings revealed that superior network quality plays a decisive role in shaping customers' positive perceptions of the brand, ultimately strengthening the brand's image and cultivating customer loyalty. Conversely, some studies have suggested that there might be a lack of direct relationship between the two variables. It has been contended that although network quality plays a fundamental role in customer satisfaction, it does not always have a significant impact on brand image. This could be attributed to factors like strong brand loyalty, marketing strategies, or other brand characteristics that overshadow the



influence of network quality. A noteworthy study conducted by Lai et al. (2009) in the Chinese telecom industry was established through the combination of quality, value, image, and satisfaction. Their outcomes revealed that network quality did not have a significant direct impact on brand image. Instead, it indirectly influenced brand image through perceived value and customer satisfaction. In short, this study offers empirical proof indicating that while network quality is essential for overall customer satisfaction, it may not always have a direct and significant effect on brand image. The above different views show the success of telecommunication depends largely on individual customers and the decisions they make in the context of their own experiences and satisfaction with using a particular network.

The test results of Hypothesis 7 indicate no substantial influence between price and brand image. In this regard, the research could conclude that bachelor's students have no particular preferences, either in terms of image or price. This is due to their dependence on their parents' financial support. They just ensure smooth communication and can switch networks as needed, especially when consuming entertainment and creating content. Likewise, for the majority of student respondents, geographical location, sociocultural affiliation, and peer influence do not suggest sticking to a particular network; they prefer a network that can fulfill their needs at a specific time. While the impact of price on brand image is often emphasized, scholarly literature recognizes that the correlation between price and brand image may not always be straightforwardly positive. Some studies have suggested that there may be no direct correlation between two variables, particularly in situations where factors like brand reputation, product quality, and marketing tactics hold greater influence. Aaker and Keller's (1990) research, for example, delved into customer perceptions of brand extensions and discovered that price did not significantly affect brand image. Instead, the study proposes that consumers' perceptions of brand image are more strongly shaped by the perceived quality and compatibility of the brand extension, rather than the price itself. In short, this research demonstrates that although price plays a fundamental role in marketing tactics and customer decision-making, it does not necessarily exert a direct and substantial influence on brand image, especially when considering other factors like quality. On the contrary, a study conducted by Havidz and Mahaputra (2020) examined the effect of brand image on customer purchasing decisions, price perception, and promotion at Universitas Mercu Buana, Jakarta, Indonesia. Their study found that price has a correlation and influences the brand image. In conclusion, Service providers can improve their brand's perceived value and cultivate a positive brand image by implementing competitive pricing strategies that align with customers' expectations. Customers who viewed the prices as fair and in line with their perceived value of the service were more inclined to have a positive perception of the brand.

The results of the tests on Hypothesis 8 suggest that promotion has a substantial impact on brand image. The importance of promotional activities in shaping a company's brand image, particularly in the telecommunications industry is consistently highlighted in academic literature. Havidz and Mahaputra (2020) conducted a survey that further supported the significant influence of promotion on brand image. Their results indicated a correlation between promotion and its impact on brand image. Desideria and Wardana (2020) further reinforced this perspective by exploring the importance of incorporating marketing communications to develop and maintain robust brands. The findings revealed that promotions have a positive and substantial influence on brand image. This implies that effective promotion strategies can enhance consumers' perception of a product and create a favorable impression. In contrast, numerous researchers have discovered that repetitive promotional activities to advertise products based on price or discount could lead to undesired effects on the business or the brand itself, especially when they cannot

be sustained. In turn, it could discourage customers and even lead to a loss of confidence in the business (Kalwani & Yim, 1992; Raghubir & Corfman, 1999; Low & Mohr, 2000).

In summary, a customer's confidence in a business determines its success and longevity, if all the tools and methods applied in any promotional undertakings are appropriate, it will have a huge impact on the views of the customers towards the business and their desire to continue dealing or interacting with it.

The test results of Hypothesis 9 suggest that customer service has a substantial influence on brand image. Some authors have found a connection between two variables. This aligns with the conclusions drawn by Hartline and Jones (1996) showed research to examine the influence of employee performance on customers' perception of service quality and brand image. The results of their study revealed a clear link between the performance of employees in customer service positions and customers' overall perception of the brand, leading to an enhancement in the brand image. Conversely, Dean's (2004) study found that any form of service failure in companies and the unwillingness to take responsibility for fixing them can cause customers to lose interest and abandon the company, and all of its brands are seen as irresponsible and unreliable. Therefore, service failure has an unfavorable effect on the business's brand image. In summary, a company's success depends on its image and the way it serves its customers. If customers' needs are met, the company will prosper and its image will be valued by the public. On the other hand, if the company's brand is not attractive to the public due to service deficiencies, both the image and the company itself will not succeed.

The results of the tests on Hypothesis 10 indicate that CSR has no significant and positive influence on brand image. A study by Wai Lai (2019), the results of their study revealed CSR's influence and impact are not long-lasting from a financial perspective and how it portrays corporate image to customers and their satisfaction. The result of this research is consistent with previous investigations carried out by Del-Castillo-Feito et al. (2019) who share the same viewpoint. In essence, CSR and brand image solely depend on how versatile public relations work to give a true and convincing image and performance of the business in terms of the services it provides to its customers. On the contrary, research revealed by Martínez et al. (2014), the results indicated that by implementing CSR initiatives, the company's brand image can be enhanced, underscoring the significance of CSR perceptions in molding the brand image. Similarly, the research indicated by Singh et al. (2008) found that performance in specific CSR domains had a beneficial impact on brand image in both the UK and Spain. In addition, this finding aligns with the existing literature and research by Lee and Lee (2018), their results indicated that CSR has a positive influence on brand image. Further, differences in results may be due to cultural, marketing, and geographic issues.

The findings from tests on Hypothesis 11 suggest that brand image has a substantially impacts customer retention. A recent study presented by Ricadonna et al. (2021) examined the effect of trust and brand image on customer retention, among customers of Sharia commercial Banks. The results revealed that there is a positive link between brand image and customer retention. In the same way, Qadri and Khan (2014) also reinforces the idea that brand image significantly influences customer retention. Additionally, some researchers confirmed the link between brand image and customer retention, which aligns with the results of earlier studies conducted by Rahman and Chowdhury (2022) and Puspaningrum (2020) who shares the same viewpoint. On the contrary, the study by Veloutsou (2015) opines that brand image hasn't substantially affected customer retention or loyalty to any particular network or service provider. The variation in the results could potentially be attributed to cultural, market,



and geographical factors. In effect, this shows that customers are not attracted to brand image at any meaningful level, rather, they are attracted to what the network offers.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Telecommunications business in Guinea plays a significant role in the telecom sector among undergraduate students. This research was conducted at the public university in Kankan (Guinea) to assess the impact of graduate students on maintaining the sector's prosperity. The results of this research explore that the key factors for customer retention were strongly supported by the efficiency of customer service and the promotion of brand image, CSR, and brand image to customer retention. The satisfaction of customer service in promoting the company's brand image will result in undergraduate students having an attractive and appealing impression of their products or services. Meanwhile, between CSR and brand image don't show any correlation in Guinea's telecommunications industry among university students who can continue to use the same network or switch to other networks. On the other hand, brand image mediates the association between customer service and customer retention and has a higher relationship compared to other variables like network quality through brand image and customer retention, and promotion through brand image and customer retention. Likewise, the indirect influences of the mediating variable on brand image don't show any relationship between price and brand image or CSR and customer retention.

The study's contributions could be beneficial to the management of Guinea's mobile telecom networks by identifying the key factors that impact customer retention, thereby enhancing service quality, increasing customer loyalty, and ultimately boosting the company's revenue. Policymakers can apply the findings to clarify the distinction between dominance and persistent competitive advantage. This could help them in designing policies that could not favor just one operator over another but could be equal across the mobile telecommunication industry in Guinea Conakry. The study outcome can also help the ministry of information and communications technology in Guinea Conakry to achieve some goals, such as improving the reliability and efficiency of communication services. Moreover, the national communication authority could tap from the research findings to facilitate high-quality services to consumers and operators, to ensure a high level of efficiency was met to satisfy the needs of the consumers. Additionally, different parties including investors, staff members, shareholders, and consumer groups could be guided to offer valuable recommendations for enhancing service supply to consumers in Guinea Conakry.

Despite the valuable contribution our study provides, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The research focuses exclusively on consumers in Kankan Guinea-Conakry while excluding other provinces. Additionally, this research solely concentrates on a limited number of primary factors, namely network quality, price, promotion, customer service, and corporate social responsibility, which are associated with brand image and customer retention. It is worth noting that there may be other variables (such as corporate reputation, brand loyalty, customer purchasing intentions, and trust) that influence the correlation among variables.

Future studies on this topic should broaden the scope to include other provinces, such as Kindia, Faranah, Mamou, and regions of Guinea-Conakry. Therefore, future researchers could explore additional variables related to brand image and customer retention when studying the utilization of mobile telecommunications services, for a more comprehensive approach.

Finally, according to the findings of this study, it is recommended that network service providers prioritize enhancing network quality and interconnection among the network services. They should also adopt emerging technologies such as 4G and 5G. In addition, researchers suggested network service providers should invest in



comprehensive training of their customer service representatives to enhance their responsiveness and problem-solving abilities.

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