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## Gauging Customer Expectation Over Mobile Cellular Services In Malaysia

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the consumer experience of telecommunications service quality in Malaysia. Malaysia's penetration rate has gone over 100 percent, meaning that each person in Malaysia has at least one account registered with the telecommunications provider. Telecommunications industry competition is becoming fierce as there is a limited market available to share among the industry players. This study used a quantitative approach, using a questionnaire to collect data through random sampling. One hundred and fifty available respondents received, using SEM-PLS analysis. Results indicate that customers are more concerned with service quality and trust than brand image and price. Brand image and price did not impact consumer loyalty. One of the critical factors is that the facilities and packages

provided are approximately the same price ranges for almost similar coverage areas. The service provider will use the outcome for their ongoing long-term plan.

**Keywords:** Telecommunication; Trust, Brand Image; Customer Satisfaction; Service Quality.

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DOI: <http://10.22059/jitm.2021.83115>

Document Type: Research Paper

University of Tehran, Faculty of Management

SUBMITTED: January 12, 2021

REVISED: March 25, 2021

PUBLISHED: August 31, 2021

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## Introduction

Telecommunications is important for individuals, organizations, and business. The telecommunications industry has become a common industry as the chosen telecommunications service provider needs at least one SIM card for internet data and text and make phone calls worldwide. The telecommunications industry remained the largest industry today, considering its role in facilitating everyone's life. (Minarti & Segoro, 2014). This industry is continuously innovative in every aspect of how consumers can interact with each other, forms of mobile devices, and different services. (Giovanis et al., 2014). Technology, competitors, consumers, and devices are continuously and rapidly changing.

In this digital era, a mobile phone is an indispensable device for everyone. Electronic devices today are more innovative than before in giving a better and more comfortable life for users. Mobile phones and tablets' capabilities have expanded with telecommunications service providers (Phong et al., 2018). The role of a telecommunications service provider is to improve communication for customers. There are wireless and wired communications that provide the domestic and global exchange of network information electronically. Telecommunications service providers offer internet data and services to text and make phone calls according to their customers' needs and demands (Abd-elrahman et al., 2019). For a business that implements an online system for its products and services, telecommunications service contributes to its business growth (Hapsari et al., 2016). In Malaysia, numerous telecommunications service providers compete to gain more customers to use their telecommunications service. Some of Malaysia's most prominent telecommunications service providers are Celcom, Digi, Maxis, and Unifi (Al-mutawkkil et al., 2009). These telecommunications service providers provide the same services with different coverage quality, price range, and customer benefit.

Telecommunications services can boost customer relations and related services. Customers bring significant prospects and are valuable assets for an organization or a company to generate revenues and profits (Abd-elrahman et al., 2019). The communication relations between telecommunications service providers and their existing and prospective customers can strengthen their brand image and customer trust. Hence, telecommunications service providers have to make sure that their customers are well-treated and handled to gain customer satisfaction

(Phong et al., 2018). The customer service department manages telecommunications service providers' relationships with their customers, where convenient and reliable telecommunications service must always be available for instant customer satisfaction (Shamsudin, Yazid, et al., 2020). The ability to connect with others through the Internet is essential for customers of the telecommunications service providers.

In this era, having access to telecommunications service saves time and cost. Telecommunications service allows people to interact without distance barriers using a computer, laptop, or any mobile device through any social media app (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, or WeChat). These social media apps provide an interactive platform for their users to receive voice notes and make video calls similar to face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, telecommunication tools have changed how a business interacts with customers (Abd-elrahman et al., 2019). Customers can connect with the business operators using this technology with the selected telecommunications service provider's help and even have face-to-face interactions to share their concerns. Using this platform, an organization can benefit by having loyal customers and good public relations, as customers would provide positive reviews. An excellent telecommunications service provider is linked to higher customer satisfaction, attracting more prospective customers to invest.

## Literature Review

### Customer Satisfaction

As customers prefer to make deals that offer good services and other benefits, customer satisfaction has become the most crucial aspect acknowledged by all businesses, companies, or organizations today (Moghavvemi et al., 2018). Customers' needs must always be prioritized as their business goal to gain competitive advantages through positive customer reviews of the products or services and good customer relations. Businesses should prioritize the essential elements of their management policies (Lau et al., 2019). Most organizations would pursue the basic principle of "customers come first" in developing their business according to the characteristics of the targeted community. Moreover, organizations should contribute to better individual lifestyles and community growth by offering the best service.

Therefore, businesses should focus on the relationship between finance, operation, and marketing to create brand loyalty with their customers, instead of opting for the conventional business style (Nguyen et al., 2018). Businesses should consider and generate exclusive relations with their customers to gain a loyal customer base and promote electronic word of mouth (EWOM) that contribute to the expansion of their online business. Businesses can also opt for referral marketing to attract more relevant customers, gain profits, and cover the business costs, such as offering discounts, rewards, or other special offers to the existing customers to bring in new customers (Shamsudin, Nayan, et al., 2020b).

In this modern era, making use of the online market platform and advertising are important for businesses to promote their products and services, as everyone can access the Internet to search for the products and services in terms of price, promotion, and others (Eberle et al., 2016). One of the business strategies to maintain customer satisfaction involves expanding the business to gain more customers and increase awareness through social media platforms. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are some of the most used platforms. Businesses can advertise their business and establish their brand in social media by creating and sharing content of their products and services (Lau et al., 2019). Although this approach may reduce profits in the form of advertisement cost, it is actually profitable in the long run, as gaining more customers can lead to more sales. With higher production and lower average cost, these businesses can gain more profits. Through social media, businesses potentially have consistent sales from the first day of their social media use. Furthermore, many businesses today actively use social media as a platform to communicate with their existing and potential customers. Positive customer satisfaction would raise brand image that create brand identity and positive brand association (Moghavvemi et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, the quality of advertising can be measured through customer satisfaction. Advertising plays a significant role in introducing new products or services to the market and convincing customers to purchase the advertised products or services (Lau et al., 2019). A recent business strategy is to advertise on the world's largest professional network, LinkedIn (LinkedIn ads). The steps include creating a campaign (by the manager account), determining business objectives in terms of creating brand awareness among the social business community, and launching of the campaign to the targeted audience (Yussoff & Nayan, 2020). This drives awareness and leads in the world's most viewed professional newsfeed that contribute substantial impact on the business performance.

Finally, by taking care of customer satisfaction, businesses can maximise their effort to maintain and improve the quality of their products and services by introducing some special changes to their facility on the usage of the products or services to make them different from their competitors (Ahmed et al., 2017; Yilmaz et al., 2018). They can also focus on expanding their reach to the global market and not limiting themselves to the local market only. This also allows them to explore new market for their products or services, while retaining the existing market. In terms of business expansion, organisations can study their customer behaviour according to their religion, race, and location because customers are more likely to apply their cultural and religious backgrounds in their daily lifestyle (Hasim et al., 2020). Satisfied customer also plays an important role in widening the market of the products and services by convincing potential customers in rural areas to take notice of new products or services.

### **Service Quality**

Service quality is related to the perception of customers on the efficiency of how a product or

service is delivered with respect to the expectations of customers. High service quality reflects a business that meets or exceeds the expectations of customers when they use the product or service (Hasim et al., 2019). Generally, service quality can be observed through customer feedback of the product or service received and the delivery system used for the business operation that includes shipping or transport services (Ruzanna et al., 2020). Through customer feedback, organisations can identify satisfied customers and potential customers as well as the improvements required to provide better products or services.

For better customer experience, organisations that apply activities of selling and buying must provide easy accessibility for customers to acquire the products or services, such as convenient order and booking services (Shamsudin, Nayan, et al., 2020c). Organisations can make use of the customer relationship management (CRM) system that involves easier access and management of highly important data when they take orders and bookings from customers through phone or online platform, including social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or website). This approach also saves time and cost for customers. When organisations are adequately focused on the service quality of their products or services, their business performance and opportunities can be maximised—for examples, by upselling (encourage customers to purchase a higher priced product or service) and cross-selling (encourage customers to purchase related or receive complementary product or service).

## **Trust**

Trust is very important in business when customers are aware of the products or services offered and potential customers become more familiar with the products or services. Loyal customers can easily recognise the brand or company (Lindberg-Repo & Grönroos, 1999). There are many ways to achieve customer trust. Advertising is an effective way to gain more customers. Through advertising, customers gain the impression of good product and service quality, which prompt them to purchase. The broadcast media is a popular advertising platform that offers creative opportunities and can reach a wide range of audience. Television and radio are two examples of traditional broadcast media that have been long used for advertising purpose.

Besides that, organisations establish their own customer service centre to assist their customers who encounter any problems and to provide effective solutions based on the history records with these customers (Shamsudin, Rasol, et al., 2020). Less time is wasted as they do not need to undergo the entire process of gathering data from customers during the service resolution process. In addition, service and sales employees in the customer service department are responsible to enhance communication with customers (Shamsudin, Ramle, et al., 2020). They can gather the profile of their customers in terms of their purchase history and notes of how to improve the services provided to improve customer relationship and communication efficiency (Zhao et al., 2019). The customer service department has specific programmes that allow their business operation to have an efficient schedule automated by follow-up communication with the

customers (through phone calls or emails). After all, customers should feel secured and comfortable with the business or company at this stage through the customer service department, which eventually lead to customer trust.

### **Brand Image**

The biggest advantage of having a brand image is that it helps to create strong customer awareness of the products and services offered in terms of price, promotion, and others. It is not easy to create a brand without the influence of customers (Shamsudin, Hassan, et al., 2020; Shamsudin & Hassim, 2020). For that, the use of advertising is the key to create long-lasting brand image, acquire customer loyalty, introduce a new product or service in the market, and persuade potential customers to purchase a product or service (Liu et al., 2017). Through brand image, customers would know about the products and services offered. Organisations continuously make effort to maintain and improve the quality of their products and services by upgrading the products and services for competitive advantages. In order to gain a positive, strong brand image, it is necessary for an organisation to take measures on product strategy, such as product design (e.g. product packaging) and company logo, and design strategy, such as customised or standardisation in upgrading their current method (Hafez, 2018). Through design strategy, organisations can take measure to provide products and services that are customised for their customers who demand rich and unique features and cannot be copied by competitors (e.g. copyright, trademark, and patent).

### **Price**

Price refers to the amount that a customer must pay to obtain a product or service. In order to determine the best price, organisations must take into account the possible discounts available for customers, allowances, payment period, and credit terms (Hassan et al., 2020; Shamsudin, Nayan, et al., 2020a). Pricing is an important marketing factor given its influence on the profit gained; getting the right price can bring sufficient profit. Meanwhile, when it comes to the third-party business operators like shopping malls, supermarkets, or hypermarkets, there should be a product pricing control, where all customers, regardless of their income level, are provided the best and affordable price (Shamsudin, Azmi, et al., 2020). In the case of cross-selling, free products are offered to customers based on their previous purchase. Meanwhile, upselling involves offering premium products of the same product line to customers (Konuk, 2015). With the recent technology (e.g. CRM system), both approaches can be effectively achieved based on the available data, which can increase sales productivity. As a result, a highly targeted list of previous customers can be generated for the business operation and campaign.

### **Methodology**

This study aimed to assess the influence of service quality, brand image, trust, and price on customer satisfaction among mobile telecommunications service customers in Malaysia. For that,

an online survey link was developed using Google forms and distributed via Facebook and WhatsApp. The survey involved more than 150 randomly selected Malaysian customers of age 13 years and above across the country. They were required to indicate the level of their satisfaction towards their current telecommunications service provider. The developed questionnaire consists of two parts: (1) Part A focuses on the demographic information of respondents, which include gender, age, education level, income level, type of brand for the mobile telecommunications service provider, and many more; (2) Part B consists of dependent and independent variables, which are customer satisfaction, service quality, brand image, trust, and price. For the survey, a five-point Likert scale was applied with the endpoints of "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (5). This scale was selected because it was deemed easier for the respondents to understand and select the option that best reflects their opinion for each question.

## Results and Discussion

### Analysis of the Research Model with the Method *Partial Least Square* (PLS)

This study uses the PLS analysis technique with the SmartPLS Program. From the results of data processing, PLS evaluating the structural equation model can do analysis. In this evaluation, there are two basic evaluations. *First*, evaluating the measurement model (*outer model*) to find out the validity and reliability of indicators that measure latent variables; the instrument validity and reliability test criteria in this study refer to *discriminant validity*, *convergent validity*, and *composite reliability*. *Second*, assess the *inner model* or *structural model* to see the relationship between constructs, the significance value and the *R-square* of the research model. Testing *Inner model* in PLS analysis is done through *bootstrap resampling*.

### Evaluation of the Measurement Model

Evaluation of the measurement model or the outer model is to determine the measurement scales and construct used in the hypothesized model is reliable and valid. It is an important stage to determine that the indicators and construct associated in the study is fits for full scales analyses that on the structure model assessment is in line with the data and theory underpinned. Following the standard adopted assessment for this stage of outer model is to carry out by assessing the internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

### Discriminant Validity

Table 1 show that the value of *average variance extracted* (AVE) is more than 0.5. According to Hair, Sarstedt, & Ringle (2017) the *average variance extracted* (AVE) of each latent construct should 0.5 or higher. All constructs showed a satisfactory which explained more than 50% of variances of its items that ranges from 0.603 to 0.796.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

No	Construct	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
1	Brand Image	0.719
2	Customer Satisfaction	0.725
3	Price	0.796
4	Service Quality	0.603
5	Trust	0.753

The discriminant validity was calculated based on Fornell and Larcker (1981), in which the square root of average variance extracted ( $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ ) for a particular construct should be higher than the correlation of the subject construct with any other construct in the model. The result on Fornell and Larcker showed that the square root of AVE of each latent variable criterion whereby the average variance shared between each construct and its measures should be greater than the variance shared between the construct and other constructs.

### Convergent Validity

*Convergent validity* measures the validity of an indicator as a measure of construct, which can be seen from *outer loading*. From the value *outer loading*, it can also be interpreted as the contribution of each indicator to the latent variable. *Outer loading* of an indicator with the highest value means that the indicator is the strongest measure of the latent variable in question. More clearly follows the results of the analysis and evaluation of measurement models for each research variable. The result presented in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Outer Loading Each Indicator

	Brand Image	Customer Satisfaction	Price	Service Quality	Trust
<b>BI1</b>	0.835				
<b>BI10</b>	0.785				
<b>BI11</b>	0.802				
<b>BI12</b>	0.854				
<b>BI13</b>	0.899				
<b>BI14</b>	0.873				
<b>BI15</b>	0.861				
<b>BI16</b>	0.857				
<b>BI17</b>	0.888				
<b>BI18</b>	0.867				
<b>BI19</b>	0.882				
<b>BI2</b>	0.823				
<b>BI20</b>	0.871				
<b>BI3</b>	0.841				
<b>BI4</b>	0.816				
<b>BI5</b>	0.857				
<b>BI6</b>	0.860				
<b>BI7</b>	0.815				
<b>BI18</b>	0.828				



<b>BI19</b>	0.838				
<b>CS1</b>		0.798			
<b>CS2</b>		0.849			
<b>CS3</b>		0.838			
<b>CS4</b>		0.834			
<b>CS5</b>		0.871			
<b>CS6</b>		0.881			
<b>CS7</b>		0.889			
<b>PR1</b>			0.885		
<b>PR2</b>			0.887		
<b>PR3</b>			0.891		
<b>PR4</b>			0.906		
<b>SQ1</b>				0.694	
<b>SQ10</b>				0.822	
<b>SQ11</b>				0.791	
<b>SQ12</b>				0.870	
<b>SQ13</b>				0.782	
<b>SQ14</b>				0.821	
<b>SQ15</b>				0.667	
<b>SQ16</b>				0.738	
<b>SQ17</b>				0.738	
<b>SQ18</b>				0.793	
<b>SQ19</b>				0.822	
<b>SQ2</b>				0.788	
<b>SQ20</b>				0.766	
<b>SQ21</b>				0.795	
<b>SQ22</b>				0.731	
<b>SQ3</b>				0.693	
<b>SQ4</b>				0.755	
<b>SQ5</b>				0.804	
<b>SQ6</b>				0.767	
<b>SQ7</b>				0.785	
<b>SQ8</b>				0.815	
<b>SQ9</b>				0.818	
<b>TR1</b>					0.890
<b>TR2</b>					0.869
<b>TR3</b>					0.854
<b>TR4</b>					0.844
<b>TR5</b>					0.880

All indicators in each variable have value *outer loading* above 0.60, which means that the indicators are valid and able to measure latent variables.

### Composite Reliability

*Composite reliability* tests the value *reliability* between the indicators of the construct that constitutes it. The higher values of composite reliability indicate the higher level of reliability, which it's varies between 0 and 1. Results are *composite reliability* said to be good, if the value is above 0.70. Test results of *composite reliability* the measurement model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Composite Reliability of Constructs

No.	Construct	Composite Reliability
1	Brand Image	0.981
2	Customer Satisfaction	0.949
3	Price	0.940
4	Service Quality	0.971
5	Trust	0.938

Based on the test results in Table 3 obtained the value of composite *reliability* of all variables above 0.70. The values of the composite reliability in this study ranged from 0.940 to 0.981. The values in between 0.7 to 0.9 can be regarded as satisfactory, all the construct in this study considered acceptable.

**Testing Of Inner Models and Research Hypotheses**

The following Figure 1 showed the result of direct hypotheses. The result supported two hypotheses out of four. Brand image and price have direct effect on customer satisfaction, on the other hand, service quality and trust don't have direct effect on customer satisfaction.

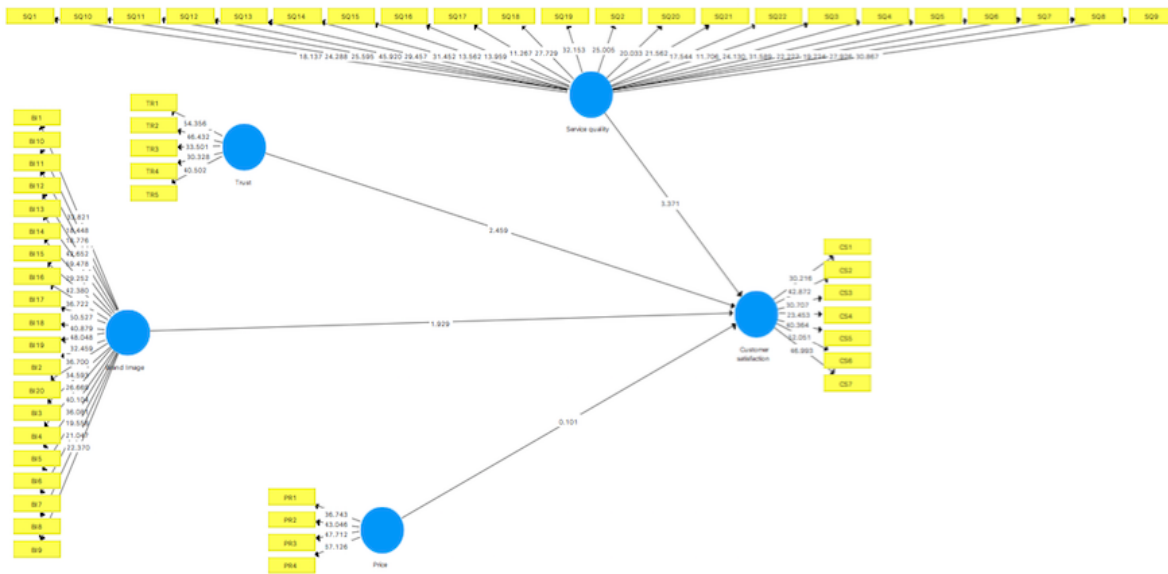


Figure 1. Direct Hypotheses results.

Table 4. Assessment of relationship

Relationship	Original sample (β)	T -Statistics	P-Values	Decision
Brand Image -> Customer Satisfaction	0.202	1.929	0.054	Not Supported
Price -> Customer Satisfaction	0.008	0.101	0.920	Not Supported

Service Quality -> Customer Satisfaction	0.403	3.371	0.001	Supported
Trust -> Customer Satisfaction	0.266	2.459	0.014	Supported

Table 4 explains the assessment of relationship between brand image, price, service quality, trust and customer satisfaction. The value of path coefficient for brand image to customer satisfaction was  $\beta$  0.202, which is considered as medium magnitude identification. According to Cohen (1988) indicates the magnitude of the path coefficient as small (0.02), medium (0.15) and large (0.35). The result of t-value and p-value shows that the relationship between brand image and customer satisfaction are not significant because the value of t-value is 1.929 and p-value is 0.054 which less than cutoff of 1.96 and p-value that is more than 0.05.

The value of path coefficient for price to customer satisfaction was  $\beta$  0.008, which is considered as small magnitude. The result of t-value and p-value shows that the relationship between price and customer satisfaction are not significant because the value of t-value is 0.101 and p-value is 0.920.

For service quality to customer satisfaction the path coefficient value was  $\beta$  0.403, which is considered as large magnitude. The result of t-value and p-value shows that the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction are significant because the value of t-value is 3.371 and p-value is 0.001. The result shows significant and supported because the t-value more than 1.96 and p-value of less than 0.05.

The result of relationship between trust and customer satisfaction showed that the relationship is significant. The path coefficient value for trust and customer satisfaction was  $\beta$  0.266 that is considered as medium magnitude. The result of t-value and p-value shows that the relationship between trust and customer satisfaction are significant because the value of t-value is 2.459 and p-value is 0.014. The result shows significant and supported because the t-value more than 1.96 and p-value of less than 0.05.

From that result, this had confirmed that the relationship between brand image, and price towards customer satisfaction is not significant and not supported while relationship between service quality and trust towards customer satisfaction is significant and supported.

## Conclusion

The results show that only service quality and trust positively related to customer satisfaction. The other two dimensions which are brand image and price were not significantly towards customer satisfaction. Mobile customers in Malaysia is actually have more bargaining power at this moment since there is more than 4 major cellular providers that actively in providing services. The competition has led to a more a less fair price among their services. As such, price could no longer being a major concern among customer because all service providers are competing to provide the best services and the prices offered is basically at par between one to

another.

At this moment, all service providers have a very strong brand positioning in Malaysia. Each of them trying hard to win the customer choice through many creative advertisements and attractive packaging. Most of them have been established their services more than 10 years and as such there could be no issues in terms of branding. Customer is more concerns about the service quality rather than the brand image. Service quality have been reported as positively towards customer satisfaction. Indirectly it means that service provider must not take for granted of their prominent branding and long establishment as a factor to attract customer to retain in their services. Most of customer stay longer in the lifecycle because of trust. The trust is so important that may blocked the competitor from pinching them through any acquisition campaign. Based on the results, service provider should take notes on the customer expectations and requirements in order to lead and sustain in the industry.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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**Bibliographic information of this paper for citing:**

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Mohamad Yazid, M.F.; Ishak, M.F.; Abd Razak, A.; Mohd Ali, A.; Abdul Manaf, S. (2021). Gauging Customer Expectation over Mobile Cellular Services in Malaysia. *Journal of Information Technology Management*, 13(3), 82-98.

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