

## **Educational Status and Service Quality as Determinants of University- Community Preference for GSM Service Providers in Ondo State**

**Modupe Oluwatoyin Olowe**

Business Education Department, College of Education,  
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti,  
Ekiti State

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**ABSTRACT:** *Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) operation has grown very rapidly in the country. The popular network providers in Nigeria are MTN, Globacom (Glo), Airtel and Etisalat now 9mobile. The study investigated the strength of educational status and service quality as determinants of university-community preference for GSM service providers in Ondo State, Nigeria. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. The study was restricted to undergraduate students, teaching and non-teaching staff of Federal and State Universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 38,631 undergraduate students, teaching and non-teaching staff of the four universities who were subscribers to the different service providers in Ondo State, Nigeria. Ten per cent of the population was sampled, research instrument was used to collect information for the study. The scales were tested for reliability using Guttman split-half method with r-value of 0.859, Three thousand, eight hundred and sixty-five copies of the instrument were distributed, three thousand, six hundred and seventy-one copies were found to be properly filled and used for analysis. The research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistic. The strength of educational status was found significant. In the study, customers with SSCE as highest educational qualification (students) have the highest preference for network service provide. Quality of service was found to significantly preference for MTN as network service provider in Ondo State. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that the network providers should train and retrain their staff on how to rendered satisfactory services to their customers. The university community should endeavor to subscribe to the network that have high quality in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of its members*

**KEYWORDS:** educational status, service quality, network providers and preference

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## INTRODUCTION

The operation of Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) has become a fiercely competitive industry among service providers since the inception of the GSM revolution in August 2001. The prominent telecommunications companies in Nigeria are MTN, Globacom (Glo), Airtel, and Etisalat, formerly known as 9mobile. These providers engage in fierce competition to secure consumer loyalty, which is determined by user preferences. According to the Webster Dictionary, the term "preference" refers to the state of having the ability or opportunity to make a choice. It refers to a profound preference for one thing over another. Alternatively, the term "preference" can be understood as an evaluative judgement that indicates one's like or disliking of an object. This is the often used definition in the field of psychology (Scherer, 2005).

Educational status refers to the level of education and expertise acquired in a specific field or occupation. Education has become a commonly used measure of socio-economic standing. Education is highly prioritised at all levels due to the recognition by education stakeholders that it serves as the fundamental tool for economic growth and technical improvement in society (Okeniyi, 2014). There exists a correlation between the act of making choices and one's level of educational attainment. Choice is the deliberate action of selecting something, and it also refers to the entitlement, authority, or chance to make a selection. The choice of network provider should be based on an individual's educational status in order to maximise the benefits derived from it.

The level of service quality is an additional consideration that impacts the choice of a network provider. Service quality is often defined as the degree of satisfaction and the level of guaranteed service received. Lyndsay (2009) states that high-quality customer service fosters client loyalty, while poor customer service leads to customer attrition, resulting in the loss of their social network connections. Service quality refers to the comprehensive evaluation of a network's performance as perceived by its users. It involves comparing the users' expectations with the actual performance of the network. Typically, clients assess the quality of service based on their expectations. If the actual service provided is lower than what they anticipated, customers would feel disappointed. In view of the foregoing, the study examined the educational status and quality of service as discriminant of university community preference for GSM service providers in Ondo State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective for the study was to examine the educational status and service quality as discriminant of university community preference for GSM service providers. Specifically, the study determined the;

1. Strength of educational status as discriminant of university-community preference for GSM service provider.
2. Strength of service quality as discriminant of university-community preference for GSM service provider.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised and answered to guide the study:

1. What is the strength of educational status as discriminant of university-community preference for GSM service provider?
2. What is the strength of service quality as discriminant of university-community preference for GSM service providers?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The study is based on Choice Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Psychiatrist William Glasser invented Choice Theory in 1998. According to the view, our motivation stems from an ongoing pursuit to fulfil our wants. Choice Theory posits that individuals possess inherent agency and the ability to exert influence over their life, whereas Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theoretical framework introduced by Abraham Maslow in 1943. According to Maslow's theory, an individual's primary needs must be fulfilled before they develop a strong desire or drive for secondary or higher level wants. Each individual possesses the ability and inclination to ascend the hierarchical ladder towards achieving self-actualization.

### ***Concept of Educational Status***

Education, in its broadest meaning, is the process of transmitting the information, skills, values, beliefs, and habits of a community from one generation to the next through methods such as storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and research. Education is the act of enabling learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and habits (Wikipedia, 2016). Education may also encompass the informal transfer of such knowledge from one individual to another. Education often occurs with the assistance of others, but individuals can also engage in self-education. Education is typically categorised into distinct phases, including preschool, primary school, secondary school, and subsequently college, university, or apprenticeship. Education can occur in either formal or informal environments. Education will remain a top priority in the country's development agenda. Modern educational practices will be progressively employed and further enhanced at all levels of the school system.

Education is a catalyst for behavioural transformation and is considered one of the most effective means for promoting social change, economic growth, and prosperity within a nation. Furthermore, education has a significant impact on individual preferences. Consumers possess

the entitlement to exercise their discretion and favour one specific product above others. Preference refers to a stronger inclination or fondness for one option compared to others.

### ***Concept of Service Quality***

The provision of high-quality customer service has emerged as a crucial determinant of a company's success. If a company fails to deliver satisfactory service to its customers, there is a high probability that the consumers will cease using the firm's products or services. Furthermore, they may also spread negative word-of-mouth about the subpar service they had. According to Brandy and Cronin (2001), customers develop their service expectations from various sources, including past experiences, word of mouth, and advertising. According to James (2016), consumer preference is the act of evaluating and prioritising goods and services based on the level of utility they provide. Service quality refers to the evaluation of how well a business meets client expectations in terms of performance. A business that has excellent service quality is able to satisfy customer needs while still maintaining competitiveness in the market. Enhanced service quality has the potential to enhance economic competitiveness. The correlation between consumer preference and service quality is such that when the service provided to the consumer is excellent and of superior quality, the consumer will consistently favour the product above others and engage in repeat purchases, as well as refer other consumers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a descriptive research survey. The population for this study consisted of the undergraduate students, academics staff and non-teaching staff of universities in Ondo State who were subscribers to each of the various popular service providers in Ondo State, Nigeria. The popular network providers in Nigeria are: MTN, Globacom (Glo), Airtel and Etisalat (now 9mobile). The four universities have 34,246 students, 1,642 academic staff and 2,743 non-teaching staff totaling 38,631. (Source: Registries and Admission Offices of the Universities in Ondo State, 2023). Random sampling technique was used to select the sample, the sample for this study are three thousand, and eight hundred and sixty-five (3,865) respondents, i.e. 10 per cent of the population.

A questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability was done by administering the instrument in University of Nsukka, Ikere Campus, Ekiti State, the data collected was analysed using Gultman Split-half method and a r-value of 0.859 was obtained indicating that the instrument is reliable for the study.

The researcher sought permission from Heads of Department before collecting data. The researcher and two trained research assistants administered the instrument. The instrument was given personally to the network subscribers in the study area. After filling the instrument,

completed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved from the respondents, 3,863 copies of the instrument were distributed, only 3,671 copies were found to be properly filled and used for analysis. The data generated for research questions was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive data are presented through mean, standard deviation and percentage.

## RESULTS

This section presents the results of findings.

**Research Question 1:** What is the strength of educational status as discriminant of university community preference for GSM service provider?

In analyzing research question 1, responses according to educational status into preferred network were computed. To determine the strength at which educational status serve as discriminant of university-community preference for GSM service provider, the respondents were categorized into “high” and “low” strength. In the questionnaire, “High strength” was determined by adding the standard deviation to the mean ( $2.87 + 0.49 = 3.36$ ) of respondents’ under educational status and “Low strength” was determined by subtracting standard deviation from the mean response ( $2.87 - 0.49 = 2.38$ ). The value of mean response on educational status was 2.87. The strength at which educational status serves as discriminants of university-community preference for GSM service provider is presented in Tables 1 and 2

**Table 1: Cross Tabulation Between Educational Status and Preferred Network**  
**Preferred Network Total**

		MTN	GLO	Airtel	Etisalat	(9 mobile)
Educational Status	Ph. D	1	3	32	3	39
	Master’s Degree	3	5	101	1	110
	Bachelor’s Degree	4	1	117	106	228
	HND	2	45	2	2	51
	SSCE	2098	921	221	3	3243
Total	2108	975	473	115	3671	

Table 1 revealed that customers with SSCE have highest educational qualification and they have the highest preference for MTN network service provider.

**Table 2: Summary of Educational Status as Discriminant of University Community Preference for GSM Service Provider**

Level	Frequency and Percentage
High	3524 (95.9%)
Low	147 (4.1%)
Total	3671 (100%)

**Source: Field Survey, 2023**

Table 2 revealed that 95.9% of the respondents who indicated SSCE as their highest educational status have high strength of preference for GSM service provider by university- community.

**Research Question 2:** What is the strength of Service Quality as discriminant of university community preference for GSM service provider?

**Table 3: Summary of Strength of Service Quality as Discriminant of University****Community Preference for GSM Service Provider**

Strength of Quality of Service	Mean	Rank
Tangibles	3.13	<b>4th</b>
Reliability	2.54	<b>5th</b>
Responsiveness	3.28	<b>1st</b>
Assurance	3.28	<b>1st</b>
Empathy	3.28	<b>1st</b>
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.08</b>	<b>High</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2023**

Table 3 presents the strength of Service Quality as a determinant of University community preference for GSM service provider. The grand mean values of respondents on tangible (3.13), reliability (2.54), responsiveness (3.28), assurance (3.28) and empathy (3.28) services of GSM service provider are greater than 2.50. These indicated that many of the respondents agreed that the upgrading of the equipment is done regularly and the customers are informed. It revealed that the strength of Service Quality as discriminant of university community preference for GSM service provider in terms of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are very high with grand mean of 3.08. This implies that customers' preference for GSM service provider is based on the strength of Service Quality.

**DISCUSSION**

The strength of educational status was found significant as discriminant to university community preference for GSM service providers in Ondo State. The discriminant function

correctly classifies about 30.3 percent for educational Status. In the study, customers with SSCE as highest educational qualification (students) have the highest preference for MTN network service provide. The study indicated that 95.9 % of the respondents supported that educational status has high strength in determining university-community preference for GSM service provider. According to Robert, Pamela and Michael (2015) on the study carried out on Social Class Determinants of leisure activity. One of the results is, education is the best single socioeconomic determinant of leisure choices.

Quality of service was found to significantly discriminate university-community preference for MTN as network service provider in Ondo State, to support this, the respondents asserted that: the upgrading of the equipment is done regularly and the customers are well informed; the facilities used are visually appealing, like Know Your Customer (KYC) machine used for SIM registration and network provider mass looks attractive; customers do not experience difficulty during internet connection and cut off network during calls; they do not dial more than once to get through to the receiver; there are accurate charges on call, internet and email services rendered by network service provider; when customers' complaints on any dissatisfaction in operation, the network provider sends re-assurance messages to customers and make correction immediately. The strength of quality of service as discriminant of university community preference for GSM service provider in terms of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are very high, this is an indication that customers' preference for MTN as GSM service provider is based on the strength of quality of service. The strength of the customer service function is a strong influence on a long-term market success (Robert, 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that educational status and service quality are significant in determining university community preference for GSM service providers in Ondo State. Among these four factors, quality of service contributes more to the reason for preference for MTN service provider.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made in the study.

1. The University management should have preference to the network service that have high service quality because of free flow of network that will assist the payment of school fees, course registration, payment of salaries and other financial transactions in the school environment.
2. The students, teaching and non-teaching staff should be connected to the right network provider because they have more things to do on net (like their research work, uploading of students results and other activities that needs connection with net) than making calls.

3. The service quality which include fast internet services, cheap data bundle, wide coverage, efficient data management, low call tariff, stable network etc. for other networks such as Etisalat (9-mobile), Airtel and GLO should be improved to allow them gain high numbers of users.
4. The GSM service provider should do training and retraining for their staff, this would be of benefit to their subscribers. Also MTN that is at the top of preference level should endeavor to improve on their present performance.

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