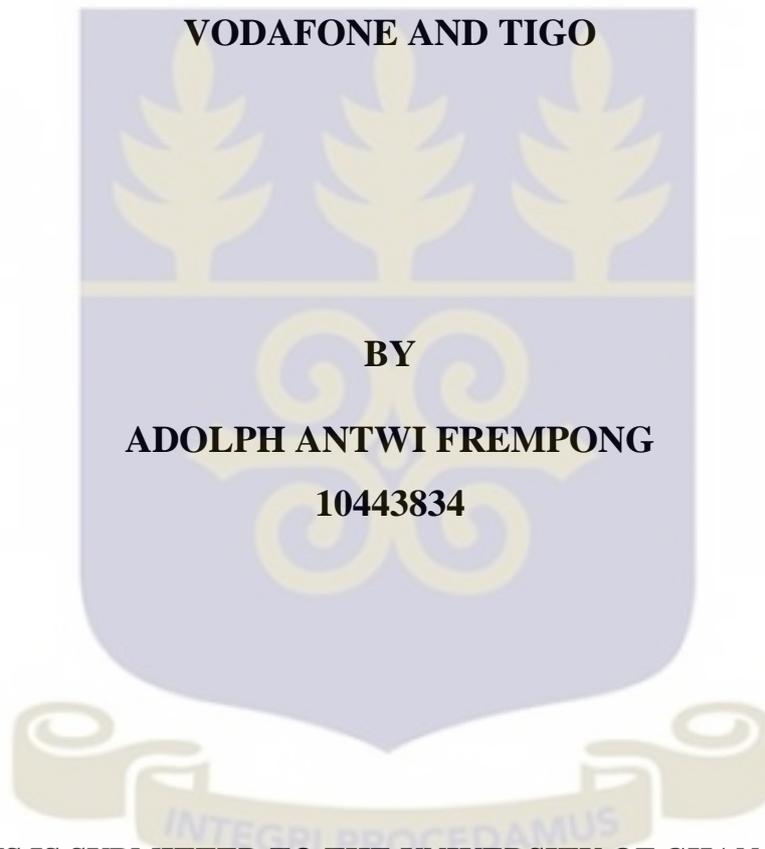


UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

**BRAND QUALITY PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES IN THE
TELECOMS INDUSTRY IN GHANA: INSIGHTS FROM MTN,
VODAFONE AND TIGO**



**BY
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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
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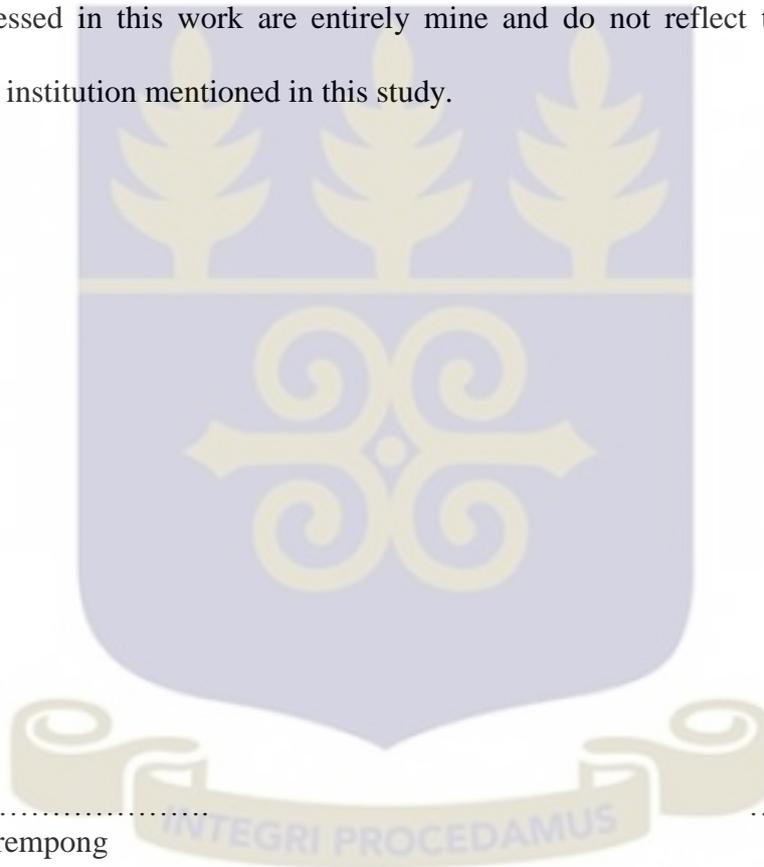
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Adolph Antwi Frempong, hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis, with the exception of references, was done entirely by me at the University of Ghana, Business School, Legon.

This work has never been presented either in whole or in part for any award of this institution or elsewhere.

The views expressed in this work are entirely mine and do not reflect the views of any organization and institution mentioned in this study.

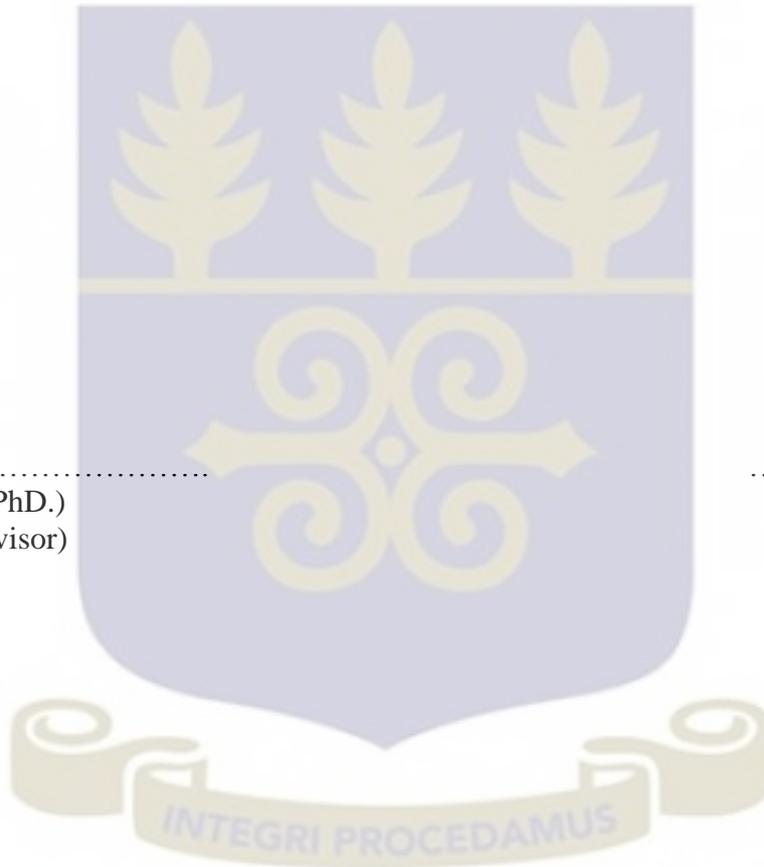


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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this work was duly supervised in accordance with procedures laid down by the University.



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Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty for His goodness and mercies. Secondly, this thesis is dedicated to my family, especially my mother Mrs. Charity Frempong. Thank you for never giving up on me. I love you mom.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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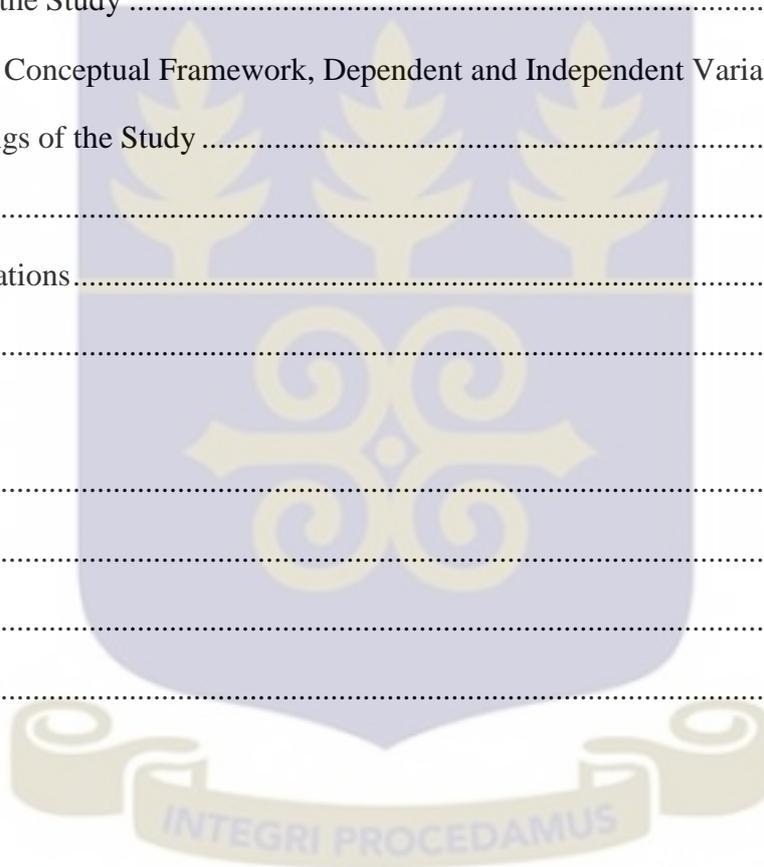
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ABSTRACT

Brands are a symbolic means of quality, and perceived quality of strong brands adds value to consumers' purchase evaluations. The focus of this study therefore is to determine some of the factors that influence customers' perceptions of quality, and how these perceptions affect their brand preference within the telecoms sector of Ghana. In this study, perception of quality is analyzed from both industry and customer perspectives, using the following determinants; brand awareness, technological infrastructure, customer care, communications and price.

Of the six telecommunications service providers in Ghana, the top three, in terms of market share, were sampled for the study; thus MTN, Vodafone and Tigo.

Using the Convenience sampling method, a sample size of 292 undergraduate students from the University of Ghana was used. Data was obtained with the aid of a structured questionnaire. The Purposive sampling method was also employed in selecting 3 respondents from the 3 telecoms service providers. Data was collected through interview sessions.

The study employed the mixed-method approach to data analysis. The study used regression to determine whether there were correlations between the determinants of quality perceptions (brand awareness, technological infrastructure, customer care, communication, and price) and brand preference. Quantitative analysis showed two determinants (customer care and price), out of five showing strong correlations to the dependent variable, contrary to industry perspective that indicated all five brand quality determinants as influencers of quality perceptions and preference. It was recommended that more attention be given to customer care and price; in relation to providing value for money, as actual service quality delivery will shape perception better than any factor or combination of factors.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This chapter is a precursor of the study and gives an insight into how the entire study is structured. The study attempts to assess brand quality perceptions and preferences in the telecommunications industry in Ghana, with focus on the activities of the three leading telecoms companies in the country. The chapter begins with a general overview of the important role brands play in shaping customers' perceptions of quality, and how these perceptions of quality affect consumers' preference for one brand over another. There's also problem statement and significance of the study. These two areas will seek to give reasons to justify why this research is important to academic literature, practice as well as policy direction, with the problem statement highlighting major gaps in the research area this study will attempt to address. Research objectives and research questions, as well as some assumptions are also designed to give direction and purpose to this study.

1.2 Overview of the Study

The current competitive global market place, on a daily basis, witnesses the birth of numerous products and services. The result of this is that consumers are receiving a growing amount of information making them more knowledgeable and therefore more demanding. Furthermore, since customers guarantee the growth and development of any organization, competition among firms are becoming fiercer, hence the need for firms to devise strategies for creating new and holding on to existing consumers (Vranesevic & Stancec, 2003).

In advanced economies and more developed competing markets, the results the company generates, and thus its development, growth and survival on the market is largely dependent on the business strategy it chooses to employ. The marketing and communications strategies adopted and employed by companies form an extremely important part in this process. In doing this, special attention must be devoted to building a stronger product or service brand (Vranesevic & Stancec, 2003)

Developing a strong brand identity is one of many strategies organizations can employ in ensuring that they stay on top of competition. Brands have the power to differentiate a product or service and set it apart from other competitive options, as well as to help motivate consumers in preferring a particular product or service to competing alternatives. According to Keller (2007), brands have the following roles for the consumer: identifying the origin of the product; defining the responsibility of the manufacturer; diminishing risk; diminishing the cost of searching for a product or service; a promise; guarantee or contract with the manufacturer; a symbolic means and sign of quality.

The last part of Keller's (2007) definition ". . . a symbolic means and sign of quality", strongly suggests that as part of what brands communicate to their consumers, the symbolism of quality delivery plays a vital role. In doing so, corporations seek to shape customers' perceptions regarding the quality assurance of their brands in relation to other alternatives within the same market place. Over the years, customers' perceptions of the quality of a service or product have been strongly determined by the strength and weight of a brand in a given industry. As a result, customers are more likely to patronize the products and services of a brand that is perceived to have a superior brand identity to that of other brands within the same industry, because stronger brands are perceived to deliver quality. Due to this

behavioral pattern, many organizations the world over, work tirelessly to build a stronger brand identity within the markets in which they operate. According to Nilson (2000) as cited in Alamro & Rowley (2011), the focus of successful brand management is to ensure that the brand becomes the preferred choice, and that products or services sold under the brand's umbrella are of value and are perceived as superior and of good quality to those of competitors. It is on the premise of these assumptions that this study will be conducted.

According to Vranesevic & Stancec (2003), the importance of the product or service brand can be seen primarily on its impact on consumers' choice and their loyalty through identifying and differentiating quality and origin, as well as creating additional value. They further go on to suggest that, in gaining new customers and maintaining existing ones, the value of the brand plays a pivotal role. According to them companies must design and implement their marketing activities in such a way that they enhance brand awareness and positively affect the creation of strong convictions in the consumers' consciousness. Vranesevic & Stancec (2003) further hypothesise that in making purchasing decisions, the brand is the most important criterion of choice, and not necessarily the physical characteristics of the product; consumers therefore evaluate the product or service, using the brand as "a sign of quality", when it does not have any special advantages, thus, compared to competitors' products or services in the sense of physical characteristics, and make purchasing decisions based on this; consumers have a more positive general attitude towards "pioneering" brands than towards the brands that follow it, and therefore gives them higher priority when making a purchase.

Perceived quality of strong brands adds value to consumers' purchase evaluations (Low & Lamb, 2000). According to Lindquist & Sirgy (2003), perceived quality can also be viewed

as a perpetual outcome generated from processing the product or service attributes that lead consumers to make decisions about the quality of the product.

It is therefore obvious from these preliminary observations that brands play an important role in consumers' evaluation of quality and preference, the basis on which this study is conducted.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

According to Aaker (1991), one of the basic characteristics of modern marketing is orientation on, and paying special attention to the creation of strong brands. The brand creates an image of the product or service in the consumer's mind which is often associated with quality, and so becomes the basic motive for the customer's choice of a particular product or service.

It is the position of this study that not only do brands communicate and create perceptions of quality in the minds of customers, but also influence their preference, especially in the event that there are other viable alternatives. A number of studies have been conducted that sought to establish the relationship between brands and customers' perceptions of product or service quality (Vranesevic & Stancec, 2003; Hinson, Owusu-Frimpong, & Dasah, 2011; Field, Bergiel, Giesen, & Fields, 2012), as a result of what the brand seeks to communicate. Other studies (Erdem, Swait & Valenzuela, 2006; Alamro & Rowley, 2011; Paulrajan & Rajkumar, 2011) have gone a step further by trying to establish the influence brands or service quality perceptions have on customer brand preference and the factors that influence a customer's preference for a particular brand.

The focus of this study however is not just to establish a correlation between brands and quality perceptions (Vranesevic & Stancec, 2003; Hinson et al., 2011), or brands and customers' preference (Alamro & Rowley, 2011), or quality perceptions and preference (Paulrajan & Rajkumar, 2011) alone, but to establish a seamless relationship among these three constructs, thus brands, quality perceptions, and brand preference. Apart from Erdem, Swait & Valenzuela (2006), who try to establish a correlation amongst these three constructs, all the other studies focused on just two aspects.

The research gaps identified from the research problem are therefore two-fold; methodological and contextual. Most of these studies (Vranesevic & Stancec, 2003; Hinson et al., 2011; Alamro & Rowley, 2011; Sanyal and Datta, 2011; Field et al., 2012) were quantitative in nature. This study will however employ a mixed methods approach. Reasons being that, this approach provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative research. It also offers a more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either qualitative or quantitative research can do on their own while helping answer questions that cannot be answered by either qualitative and quantitative approaches alone.

Secondly, of all the studies, only one, Hinson et al. (2011), was conducted in Ghana, and only one other, Paulrajan & Rajkumar (2011) was done in the telecoms sector. For this reason, this researcher believes that more studies are needed in this area to enhance the relatively scanty literature in the study area, as well as influence policy and practice.

1.4 Research Objectives

The specific objectives are:

- 1.4.1 To investigate how customers form quality perceptions about brands.
- 1.4.2 To analyze how intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of a brand influence customers' perceptions of quality.
- 1.4.3 To determine how these characteristics affect customers' preference for a particular brand.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1.5.1 What attributes of a brand do customers consider when forming quality perceptions?
- 1.5.2 Are there any notable characteristics of a brand that influence customers' perceptions of quality?
- 1.5.3 To what extent do these brand attributes inform a customer's decision and preference for a particular brand?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this work to both academic literature and practice cannot be over emphasized, considering the fact that most of the studies focused on only two aspects of the area, thus, either brands and quality perception, or brands and preference, or quality perceptions and preference. This study will therefore attempt to establish a seamless link among these three concept; brands, quality perceptions, and preference. In addition, not much has been done in the area of telecommunications, particularly in Ghana. Furthermore, most of these studies were of a quantitative nature, using analytical tools like ANOVA, Factor Analysis, Principal Component Analysis, and Multiple Regression.

As a consequence this study employed a mixed methods approach to establishing the relationship that exists between brands and perceptions of service quality held by the consumer and how these perceptions influence the customer's preference for a particular telecommunications brand. In this study, quality perceptions and preferences was also analyzed from an industrial perspective, to see how it corroborates results gathered from the customer perspective.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study was limited to the activities of three main telecommunications operators in Ghana, and particularly limited to their activities within the Greater Accra region. The three telecommunications operators were MTN, Vodafone, and Tigo; reason being that with a subscriber base of 14,207,778 (MTN), 7,159,556 (Vodafon), 4,264,078 (Tigo), these are the three leading operators in the industry (NCA, 2015) and thus, easy access to customers, and hence primary data. The target group under study was undergraduate students of the University of Ghana. This is because at their age, initial quality perceptions and value may likely be formed by factors such as word-of-mouth and advertising and media promotions, as well as price; variables this study seeks to test.

1.8 Research Assumptions

- 1.8.1 Factors of Brand Equity have a positive influence on consumers' perceptions of quality.
- 1.8.2 Perceptions of quality have a positive influence on customers' preference for a particular brand.
- 1.8.3 Expectations of quality may positively influence current and future purchase intentions.

1.9 Chapter Disposition

This thesis is structured to cover six different chapters.

Chapter one, which is the introductory chapter, provides background to this study. It attempts to justify the reasons for undertaking this study and its potential significance.

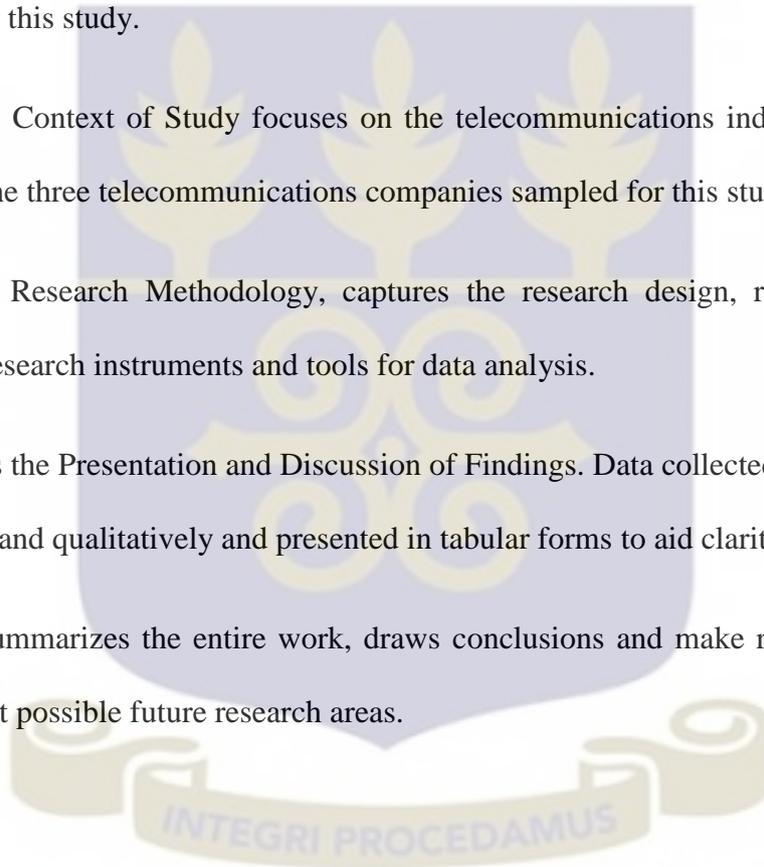
Chapter two, Literature Review; looks at similar scholarly works previously undertaken in this area. This chapter reviews previous studies in an attempt to develop a conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter three; Context of Study focuses on the telecommunications industry in Ghana and zooms in on the three telecommunications companies sampled for this study.

Chapter four; Research Methodology, captures the research design, research population, sample size, research instruments and tools for data analysis.

Chapter five is the Presentation and Discussion of Findings. Data collected was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively and presented in tabular forms to aid clarity and appreciation.

Chapter six summarizes the entire work, draws conclusions and make recommendations as well as suggest possible future research areas.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature in the study area in an attempt to build a foundation for the study and also to develop a conceptual framework on which findings will be based. The concept of branding is explained through some definitions and also from a historical perspective. Other dimensions of brand, like brand preference, brand equity and customer-based brand equity are also given some attention. Literature on service, thus, service quality and customer perceived service quality are also explained using Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry's (1988) service quality (SERVQUAL) model. There is also analyses of the effects of perceived quality on brand equity and preference, as well as a review of some empirical studies.

2.2 Brands and Branding Explained

In consumer marketing, brands often provide the primary points of differentiation between competitive offerings, and as such they can be critical to the success of companies (Wood, 2000). A brand has been defined as a noun, term, mark, symbol, design, or a combination of the above items to distinguish the products or services of the seller from those of others (Wood, 2000; Rowley, 2004; Kotler & Lane, 2006).

As cited in Keller (2007), the American Marketing Association also defines a brand as a “name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition”. Thus, according to the AMA definition, the key to creating a brand is to be able

to choose a name, logo, symbol, package, design, or other characteristics that identifies a product or service, and distinguishes it from others. These distinguishing features are termed brand elements. According to Keller (2007), the elements of a brand are all things serving to identify the brand in general as well as to differentiate it from other brands. This can be a logo-symbol-sign, a character, a slogan, a jingle, or the packaging.

The most obvious characteristic of a brand, from most definitions is the fact that it has elements that differentiate it, its products, services and ideas from other competing brands within the market.

According to (Kapferer, 2008), a successful brand must assume leadership for the product or service category to which it belongs. Brands must always bring innovation, make a difference, and be meaningful. A brand is not just a simple participant on a market; it creates and manages the market through a vision of what the product or service category should be. A brand is therefore more than a product, because it can have dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need (Keller, 2007). These differences may be rational and tangible, or more symbolic, emotional, and intangible.

Branding has been around for centuries as a means to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of others. The word “brand” is derived from the Old Norse word “brandr” which means “to burn” as brands were and still are the means by which owners of livestock mark their animals to identify them (Keller, 2007). Branding is now crucial in making a firm stand apart from the competition, and the most effective brands develop logos, images, slogans and positioning to best communicate the core values behind them.

2.3 A Historical Perspective of Brands and Branding

Despite its early roots, long history, and power, the concept of branding did not emerge as a central part of thinking in marketing until well into the twentieth century. Stern (2006) suggests that the term “brand” entered marketing in 1922, as a compound expression, thus, brand name, meaning a trade or proprietary name.

According to Bastos & Levy (2012), way before what is perceived in modern marketing as branding, the concept has over the years been viewed as both sign and symbol, marking as stigma, marking of the skin, as well as burning; which according to them, is perceived as the “core nature of branding”.

They suggest that branding starts as a sign, a way of denoting that an object is what it is and then becomes a form of naming something, for example a steer, a slave, a prisoner, a detergent. But immediately, denotation is not enough and connotations arise. Being named an animal, a slave, a prisoner, or a product are not merely denotative terms; they also imply other ideas. The brand on an animal or a person promptly becomes a symbol of ownership and reputation. Branding is usually done by using some kind of mark placed either directly on the object or indirectly on a label, for example, a slip, a flap, a patch, that is affixed to the object. In addition to signifying ownership and the status of the one branded, a mark might be a positive sign of distinction.

Marking has a long, familiar history and widespread connotation of inferiority and stigma. This negative view endures, often finding overt expression or existing as an undercurrent to social views of branding when it is criticized as baleful, insidious, and manipulative (Bastos & Levy 2012). The brander is often regarded as superior to the branded. For example, marked animals and slaves are dominated by their owners. Prisoners are depersonalized by being

identified with numbers. Servants are standardized and attributed the conforming meanings of their position by being dressed in uniforms.

Bastos & Levy (2012) again observe that marking of the skin has a deep root in understanding the purposes and meanings of branding as well as its notably positive aspects. Marking of the skin has a long history of serving various cosmetic, medicinal, social, psychological, political, and cultural purposes (Voo, 2010; Bastos & Levy, 2012).

Centuries ago, burning as the core nature of branding and identifying ownership was mainly seen in its application to animals and slaves. In 2700 BCE the Egyptians branded oxen with hieroglyphics. Likewise, the ancient Greeks and Romans marked livestock and slaves. Basic to the aggressive act of marking animals and slaves was the use of fire. Echoing these views, Moore & Reid (2008) write that evidence for the link between burning and branding is found in the Icelandic synonyms' "oom" and "brond", which mean "burning" or "fire." Traditionally, unacceptable figures were denounced and burned at the stake and effigies are burned in modern rituals (Kozinets & Sherry, 2004), as cited in Bastos & Levy (2012). In sum, the core idea of branding coming from fire carries intensity of meaning. It generates feelings of partisanship and opposition, of power and excitement. Because it announces identity and has the potential for beauty, devotion, and distinction, it draws conformity or arouses criticism and resistance against its domination.

The major developments influencing modern branding is derived from two fronts, thus theory and research, and its role in business. Butler (1914) is among the early studies. He was especially sensitive to branding as a source of conflict among manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers, who competed to position themselves as the dominant brand of consumer choice. In another early work, Cherington (1920) saw branding as a rising phenomenon effectuated by both salesmanship and advertising, and referred to its uses as "aggressive sales methods". He recognized the importance of advertising and the use of trademarks and labels,

and saw quality as an essential accompaniment to branding. He also noted that “the appeal to the public to buy by brand has become so general, as to be in many lines of merchandise the characteristic rather than the exceptional method of sale” (Cherington, 1920, p. 153). In 1927, Maynard, Weidler, & Beckman published *Principles of Marketing* with a fairly extensive chapter on “Brands and brand policies,” indicating the rising importance of the role of branding.

Despite the existence of these early works, theory and research lagged considerably. Narrow views on the concept of branding are present, for instance, in Converse (1927) and Brown (1925). In *Selling Policies*, Converse (1927, p. 396), a noted professor at the University of Illinois, asserts almost casually that “Consumer advertising of individual brands can be done only when the goods are identified or when the advertiser sells directly to the consumers”. In a similar, narrow tone, Edmund Brown (1925, p. 3) of the University of North Carolina defines marketing as “the process of transferring goods through commercial channels from producer to consumer.”

Over the years, the growth of the field of brand management and the common use of the term have disseminated the idea that everything and everyone has a brand image. In the applied arena, brands are now attached to commodities (Fredrix, 2010). Places also have brand images (McClay, 2010). Besides commodities and places, abstract and intangible entities such as political parties are also managed as a viable brands (Moore, 2010). While the early branding of people as slaves possessed negative connotations, its more recent connotations and purposes are positive and complex, and researchers like Aaker (1995) and Keller (2007) have developed theories to expand the frontiers of branding to both research and practice.

Interest in the concept of branding and its pervasive application has led to a growing body of contemporary research, which has led to theory. Overall, the branding literature tells us that

brands have become learning and communication devices through which we define and convey aspects of ourselves (Schulz & Stout, 2010), of our national identity (Dong & Tian, 2009), and of the groups we desire to be associated with and those we wish to be disassociated from (White & Dahl, 2007; Han, Nunes & Dreze, 2010).

2.4 Brand Preference

A marketer's main objective goes beyond a single sale to one customer. Usually the ultimate objective is to build a durable relationship between a specific brand and a particular customer group, to create a strong bond between brand and buyer. Whether it is between parent and child, friends, lovers, or consumer and brand, bonding is a process; not so much of war among rivals, but of courtship between suitor and beloved. Unlike a single seduction or conquest, the courtship process includes identifiable phases; introduction, familiarity, then preference, and finally, if successful, a loyalty that excludes relationships with rival suitors (Alreck & Settle, 1999; Nilson, 2000; Alamro & Rowley, 2011).

Consumers almost always approach the marketplace with a well-established set of tastes and preferences (Christopher, 1996; Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Chang & Ming, 2009).

Alreck & Settle (1999) have proposed six different modes for building brand preference.

According to them, consumer tastes and preferences for a product or brand might be built through one or more of six distinct modes:

1. Need association - The product or brand is linked to one's need through repeated association.
2. Mood association - The mood is attached to the product or brand through repeated association.

3. Subconscious motivation - Suggestive symbols are used to excite consumers' subconscious motives.
4. Behaviour modification - Consumers are conditioned to buy the brand by manipulating cues and rewards.
5. Cognitive processing - Perceptual and cognitive barriers are penetrated to create favourable attitudes.
6. Model emulation - Idealized social lifestyle models are presented for consumers to emulate.

These six modes are derived from the leading theories and perspectives on human learning that have evolved in the fields of psychology and social psychology. Need association and mood association are most closely linked to what is commonly called "classical conditioning" and the work of Pavlov and others of his ilk. Subconscious motivation is derived mainly from the work of Freud and his disciples while behaviour modification has its roots primarily in the behaviourist learning theories of Skinner and his followers. The cognitive processing mode leans heavily on the information processing models so thoroughly presented and studied by cognitive psychological theorists. Finally, model emulation finds its foundation in social psychology and sociology, specifically in theories of the socialization process, social influence, and social role playing and meeting the expectations of others.

They further suggest that although different consumers might build the same preference for a particular brand through different modes, certain modes are vastly more effective for a given type of product or service than for others.

2.5 Brand Equity

According to Bednarik (2005), brand equity may be considered as an expression of a brand's present market value and expected future potential in terms of its business utility. He further postulates that, beyond consumer's perception, brand equity is also largely dependent on the features of a particular market. While many definitions of brand equity exist, one of the most widely accepted definitions, put forward by Farquhar (1989) states that brand equity is the "added value" with which a given brand endows a product.

To date Aaker (1991) provides the most comprehensive definition of brand equity: A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that adds to or detracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to the firm's customers. According to him, the "brand equity construct" refers to the added value a brand name gives to a product or service.

Aaker (1991) was the first to establish the relationship between perceived quality and brand equity. He suggests that brand equity dimensions consist of mainly four factors, thus, brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand associations. A product or service perceived by consumers to be of high quality always tends to contribute to consumer satisfaction towards that product or service (Zeithaml, 2000).

Brand equity also empowers companies to negotiate lower costs of distribution, increased effectiveness in marketing communication, and expanded growth opportunities from brand extensions and licences (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

2.6 Customer-Based Brand Equity

Keller (1993) introduces another aspect to brand equity called customer-based brand equity. The implication of this aspect of brand equity presents an important challenge to management

as this is a conceptual representation of brand equity through the individual consumer's evaluations. Customer-based brand equity is defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. Keller goes on to suggest that customer-based brand equity involves consumers' reactions to an element of the marketing mix for the brand in comparison with their reactions to the same marketing mix element attributed to an unnamed version of the product (Keller, 2007). According to him customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer knows the brand well and holds some favourable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory.

2.7 Services; an Overview

Services differ from goods in many ways. The fundamental difference is intangibility, as services cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched in the same manner in which physical products can be sensed. As a result, services can only be experienced. Inseparability of production and consumption is another characteristic of services and involves the simultaneous production and consumption. In contrast, products are first produced then sold and later consumed. Heterogeneity is also a typical characteristic of services. The quality and essence of a service can vary from producer to producer, from consumer to consumer, and from situation to situation. That makes it more difficult to standardise. Another characteristic is perishability; this means that services cannot be saved or stored. So it is difficult to inventory, or synchronise supply and demand (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009)

Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler (2009), define services as deeds, processes and performances provided or coproduced by one entity or person for another entity or person. Hinson (2012) expands this definition to define service as an activity or series of activities of a more or less intangible nature, that normally takes place in interactions between the customer and the

service employee, or systems of the providers which are provided as solutions to customer needs and problems. The core service characteristics of intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability runs through every definition of service. To this end therefore, Onkvisit & Shaw (1989), propose that one of the ways to tangibilize the intangible nature of a service is to use an extrinsic cue like a brand. According to them, brands help to reduce consumers' purchase risk and optimise their cognitive processing abilities

2.8 Service Quality

Based on Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry's (1988) service quality (SERVQUAL) model, Gronroos (2001) proposes several criteria of good service quality, thus, technical and functional that integrates available studies and conceptual work:

1. Professionalism and skills mean that customers should realise that service provider, its employees, operational systems, and physical resources have the knowledge and skills to solve their problems in a professional way.
2. Attitudes and behaviour show a customer that the contact persons are concerned about them and are interested in solving their problems.
3. Accessibility and flexibility mean that the service provider is easy to reach and prepared to adjust to the demands of the customer in a flexible way.
4. Reliability and trustworthiness show that customers can rely on the service provider, its employees and systems.
5. Service recovery takes place as soon as something goes wrong or something unpredictable happens. The service provider will immediately and actively take action to control the situation and find an acceptable solution.

6. Servicescape describes the physical surrounding and other aspects of the environment to support a positive experience of the service process.
7. Reputation and credibility mean the service provider's business can be trusted and gives adequate value for money.

The SERVQUAL model is a focused evaluation that reflects the consumer's perceptions of specific dimensions of service; namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. In stark contrast to the quality of consumer goods, which can be measured objectively by tangible cues as durability and number of defects, service quality is an abstract and elusive construct because of its typical characteristics. In the absence of objective measures, an appropriate approach for assessing the quality of a service is to measure consumer's perceptions of quality. To this end therefore, the service blueprint is proposed by Zeithaml & Bitner (2000), thus, a picture or map that accurately portrays a service system so that the different people involved in providing it can understand and deal with it objectively, regardless of their roles or individual points of view. Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler (2009), also propose the Gaps Model of Service Quality to include the Knowledge Gap (gaps between customer expectations and management perceptions); Policy/Standard Gap (gaps between management perceptions of quality and service quality specifications); Delivery Gap (gaps between service specifications and service delivery); Communication Gap (gaps between service delivery and external communication, resulting from firms over-promising and under-delivering); and Service/Interpretation Gap (gaps between customer expectations and perceptions of service delivered).

2.9 Perceived Service Quality

According to Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler (2009), customers' perceptions of services, how they assess whether they have experienced quality service and whether they are satisfied, are

dynamic and may shift from time to time; from person to person, situation to situation, and from culture to culture. Quality is an elusive and indistinct construct. Currently, based on the vast resources available to consumers, expectations of quality are higher today more than ever before. To satisfy their customers, firms have no choice but to offer quality products and services. Quality has also become the benchmark for measurement to determine whether the claims made by firms are maintained. For companies offering good quality products and services, this often means differentiating from competitors. In other words, quality is understood as a competitive weapon (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985).

Zeithaml et al. (2009), define perceived quality as consumer's judgment about the "superiority or excellence" of the product or service. It is, therefore, based on consumers' subjective evaluations of product or service quality and not on managers' or experts' evaluations (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

2.10 The Effect of Perceived Quality on Brand Equity and Preference

Notwithstanding its potential importance, brand preference has received relatively limited attention, and the handful of studies have been conducted across time, sector, and place (Alamro & Rowley, 2011); and while there is some research that considers the antecedents to brand preference, most studies consider only one or two antecedents (e.g. Jamal & Good, 2001; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Ayanwale, Alimi & Ayanbimipe, 2005; Chang & Ming, 2009). The best brands managers can do, especially in dynamic markets in which brand loyalty is sometimes difficult to achieve, is to continually promote and re-vitalise brand preference.

According to Rust, Inman, Jia, & Zahorik (1999), it is not enough for a brand to continuously increase its overall quality; it must also reduce the risk of deviation from the performance

expectation. It has been suggested by Parasuraman et al. (1988) that perceived quality is similar to an individual's attitude; a view point which is also supported by Bitner (1990). To this end therefore Dodds, Monroe & Grewal (1991) conclude that perceived quality factors could be influenced by the attributes associated with the products (service) by the customers and an evaluation of these attributes. In the short-term, Bartikowski, Kamei & Chandon (2010) posit that, higher quality perceptions could lead to increased profits due to premium prices and in the long-term, to effective business growth, involving both market expansion and market share gains. It has also been suggested that apart from other allied relationships like advertising attitudes and brand awareness, as well as distribution intensity and brand awareness, there are positive relationships between perceived quality and brand loyalty or preference, and between brand awareness and perceived quality (Nguyen, Barrett & Miller, 2011).

According to Sanyal & Datta, (2011) quality perception is a two stage process in which consumers first choose the internal indicators of product quality known as quality cues. Quality cues, according to them are product or service characteristics that can be observed by consumers, without actual consumption or usage. It has also been suggested that a better understanding of the quality perception process requires knowledge of the cues used by the consumer in his alternative quality evaluation (Rigaux-Bricmont, 1982). From an information theoretic perspective, products or services themselves are thought to consist of different cues like price, brand name, taste, packaging, and colour. Each of which provides a basis for predicting product or service characteristics. According to Olson & Jacoby (1972), some of the cues are intrinsic to the product or service while others are extrinsic in nature. They suggest that extrinsic cues are product or service related characteristics that are apart from the physical product. They define intrinsic cues as product or service attributes which "cannot be

changed or experimentally manipulated without also changing the physical characteristics of the product itself’.

Previous research on the role of extrinsic cues in evaluating product or service quality has suggested that consumers depend on extrinsic cues more than intrinsic cues when they were operating without adequate information about intrinsic product or service attributes (Zeithaml, 1988) or unable to utilize the time to evaluate the intrinsic cues. In reality, intrinsic cues indicating quality are rather difficult for the consumers to evaluate.

Price, brand name, retailer reputation, and level of advertising are four major extrinsic cues frequently associated with perceived quality and value (Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991; Veale & Quester, 2009). In particular, the role of price in quality inference has been supported in numerous studies (Olson & Jacoby, 1972; Monroe, 1976; Erickson & Johansson, 1985; Lichtenstein, Bloch & Black, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991; Verma & Sen Gupta, 2004; Veale & Quester, 2009). Despite their lack of any significant influence on product or service quality, a number of extrinsic cues have been found to remarkably moderate consumer perceptions of product or service performance and quality; these include price, brand, retail outlet and country of origin (Veale & Quester, 2009; Bartikowski et al. 2010).

Service value attributes comprise service price and service quality. Several empirical studies (e.g. Nowlis & Simonson, 1997; Tse, 2001) provide evidence that price affects consumer choice of service. Generally, consumers are willing to pay higher prices for brands that they perceive to have high value and vice versa (Erdem et al., 2004). Price is an easy way to compare alternative services (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003; Grace & O’Cass, 2005). This is to say that, organizations should price their services based on their quality perception in the

consumer's mind. Thus, a negative influence on brand preference if high price is not coupled with high quality delivery. On the other hand, low price, usually, does not give the assurance and promise of good quality, but customers nonetheless may expect value; a compromise between price and quality. This logic can be presented as a reasonable pricing strategy. Authorities like Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard (2003) have empirically shown that service quality affects consumer brand preference. In addition, a number of authorities (Aaker, 1996; Zeithaml, 1991; Keller, 2003) deal with service quality as a main antecedent of the purchase decision and brand preference.

Advertising affects consumer attitudes towards brands by, among other things, informing them of the existence of the brand (Fill, 2006). The positive or negative degree of consumer response and its direction are influenced by the content of the advertising. Consequently, if an advertisement is evaluated positively by consumers, they will form a positive perception of the brand, and the higher the positive perception of the brand, the greater the likelihood of a brand being preferred (Ayanwale et al., 2005). In addition, advertising, even when it provides useful information, carries the disadvantage that the information does not come from a reliable source. Word-of-mouth and other uncontrolled communication, by contrast, has high credibility (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999). For this reason, word-of-mouth and unpaid publicity leads to brand preference (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Swanson and Kelley, 2001) and plausibly has a greater net overall effect on sales than advertising (Ennew, Banerjee & Li 2000).

2.11 Analysis of some Empirical Studies

According to Vranesevic & Stancec (2003), managers are beginning to realise that the uniqueness of their products and services no longer lie in their physical characteristics, but rather, what they represent. According to them, the answer to these threats lies in the brand orientation strategy adopted by companies and how these strategies are able to create perceptions of quality in the minds of their customers.

Vranesevic & Stancec (2003), investigated the effect of the brand on perceived quality of food products. Their study was aimed at examining the extent to which the consumer perceives the brand and how much it affected evaluation of the functional characteristics of the product, primarily product quality. They concluded that consumers do not value products based exclusively on their physical characteristics and that in the process of making a purchasing decision, consumers will first perceive the brand as a sign of quality, before other evaluation criteria were considered. They also established the fact that the brand has a direct effect on perceived quality.

Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela (2006), investigated the effects of brand credibility on consumer choice through perceived quality, perceived risk, and information costs saved across seven countries in Asia, Europe, and North and South America. They found out that brand credibility affected consumer choice in all the countries they studied. Although the paths through which credibility operated differed somewhat across countries, as a result of cultural differences, they found that the general framework of brand credibility effects was empirically robust across the countries they studied.

In their study on brands and service-quality perceptions, Hinson, Owusu-Frimpong, and Dasah (2011), investigates from the perspective of undergraduate students, service-quality

dispositions of bank brands operating in Ghana; in respect of customer service, thus, human interaction, service knowledge and bank infrastructure and technology. The findings established that, on all three service brand quality dimension (human interaction, service knowledge and bank infrastructure and technology), international bank brands scored higher than local bank brands in Ghana. They attributed this to factors such as the presence of services standards that must be rigidly adhered to; irrespective of the geographical context in which the bank is operating. Strict adherence to service standards fortifies a brand, which undoubtedly creates perception of quality in the minds of consumers.

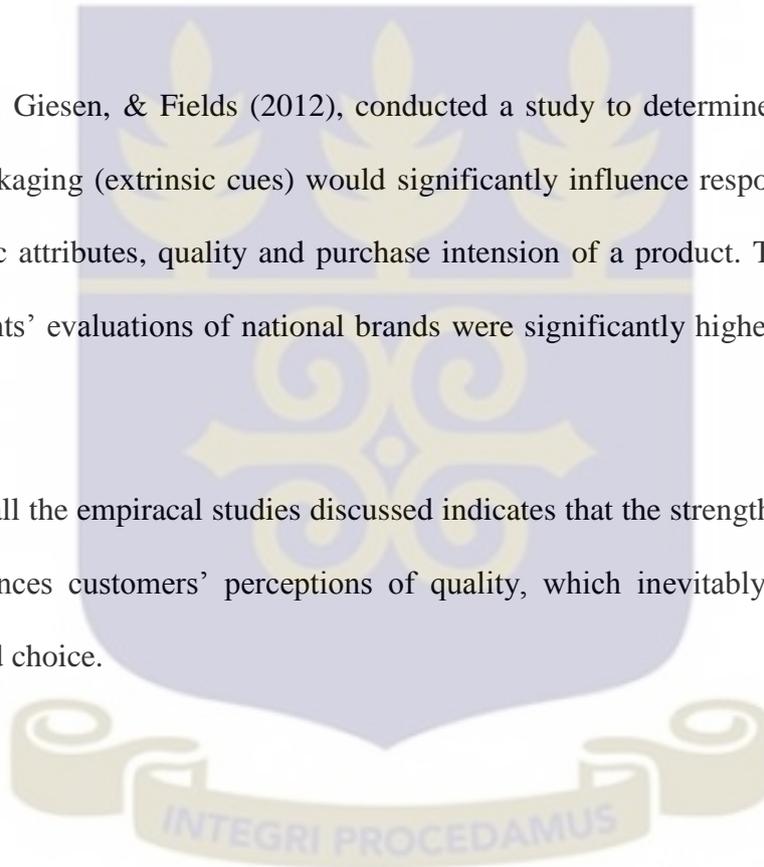
Alamro & Rowley (2011), conducted a study on the antecedents of brand preference for mobile telecommunications services. They concluded that controlled communications, thus, advertising, plays a vital role in developing brand preference. They however emphasise that attention to controlled communication is not sufficient, and that brand practitioners also need to influence uncontrolled communication, in the form of publicity and word-of-mouth, as these factors form a stronger basis for customers' preference for a brand. In addition, they suggest that the delivery of the brand promise plays a significant role in influencing brand preference. They also propose that factors such as price, perceived quality, and corporate status (corporate image and corporate reputation) are actively managed.

Sanyal & Datta's (2011), study was to establish the relationship between the qualities of generic drugs as perceived by physicians and brand equity of the branded generics and to examine physicians' perceptions when prescribing generic drugs for selective medical conditions in India. Their findings established that perceived quality of branded generics significantly, but indirectly, affected brand equity.

Paulrajan & Rajkumar (2011) conducted a study on service quality and customers preference of cellular mobile service providers. The study was undertaken to examine and understand consumers' perception choice in selecting cellular mobile telecommunication service providers. They conclude that in the telecommunications sector, price has significant positive impact on consumer perception choice in selecting telecommunication service provider. Their study also shows that product quality and availability has a significant impact on consumer perception choice in selecting a mobile telecommunication service provider.

Field, Bergiel, Giesen, & Fields (2012), conducted a study to determine whether the brand name and packaging (extrinsic cues) would significantly influence respondents' perceptions of the intrinsic attributes, quality and purchase intension of a product. Their study revealed that respondents' evaluations of national brands were significantly higher compared to store brands.

Results from all the empiracal studies discussed indicates that the strength and power a brand weilds, influences customers' perceptions of quality, which inevitably affects customers' eventual brand choice.



2.12 Conceptual Framework

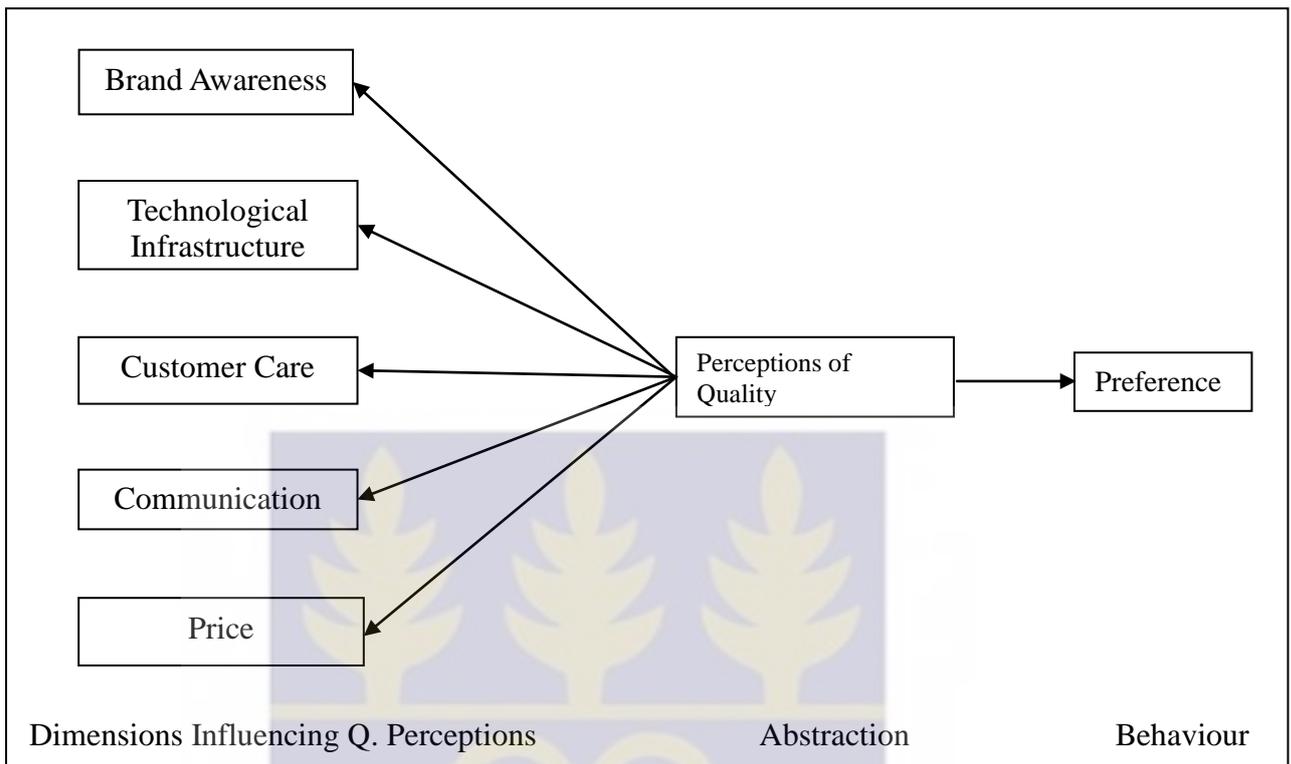


Figure 2.1 Influential Factors of Brand Quality Perceptions and Preference (Adapted from Paulrajan & Rajkumar, 2011)

The conceptual framework was adapted from Paulrajan & Rajkumar (2011), and was designed on the premise of the following assumptions:

- 2 Factors of Brand Equity have a positive influence on consumers' perceptions of quality
- 3 Perceptions of quality have a positive influence on customers' preference for a particular brand
- 4 Brand preference may positively influence current and future purchase intentions

This simple but elaborate framework depicts how customers are likely to form quality perceptions and preference based on certain basic characteristics common to all three telecommunications service providers captured in this study. The framework suggests that MTN, Vodafone, and Tigo carry out their operations using certain basic technological

infrastructure, are all expected to provide excellent customer service, must have a good communications strategy, as well as pricing mechanisms, albeit these may vary at different levels. The assumption is that, the service provider that performs better in the dimensions highlighted in the framework has the highest chance of being perceived as providing quality service, hence, most likely to be preferred to other alternative brands.

This framework is slightly different from that of Paulrajan & Rajkumar (2011). Their study captured all fifteen telecommunications service providers in India (even though this does not appear in their framework), as opposed to this study which focuses on the top three telecommunications service providers in Ghana. Again, whereas this framework considers Perceptions of Quality as its abstraction, the abstraction in their framework is Customer Satisfaction; and in this framework, unlike in theirs, the independent variables influence perceptions of quality, rather than satisfaction. Finally, in the study, preference has been operationalized to mean future purchase intentions, actual purchase, and loyalty. The variables influencing customers' perceptions of quality, thus, brand awareness, technological infrastructure, customer care, marketing communication, and price, have also been operationalized with the following constructs; Brand Awareness – brand name, brand strength, and brand choice; Technological Infrastructure – call quality, call drop rate, and geographical coverage; Customer Care – complaint redress, complaint resolution, and empathy; Marketing Communication – advertising, public relations, word-of-mouth; and Price – call rate, promotional offers, and product range.

The Economics of Information Theory was the theoretical foundation upon which the conceptual framework was adapted for this study. This theory classifies products into three categories according to how consumers evaluate the product. This classification was initially developed to help explain the notion that consumer information about quality often has

profound effects upon the market structure of consumer goods. Economists examined the role of information and its links to advertising and search (Stigler 1961; Nelson, 1970, 1974; Ekelund, Mixon & Ressler, 1995; Ayanwale et al., 2005) addressing the fact that advertising is frequently affected by consumer ignorance about quality differences among brands.

Stigler was the first to suggest this theory when he posited that in evaluating product quality, information about the product plays a vital role, hence the search quality. Extending Stigler's theory, Nelson defined two types of qualities that had distinct characteristics in terms of consumer evaluation processes. Search qualities, he suggested, are those that can be fully evaluated prior to purchase. For example, the style of a dress. Experience qualities, according to him, are those that must be first purchased and consumed before the consumer is able to make any informed evaluations about the quality of the product. The information theory was extended to help explain "information by way of experience". Nelson argued that in addition to consumer search process as defined by Stigler, the consumer can also determine the quality of a good by purchasing and using it, thus, experience. Among other predictions he argued that personal recommendations (word-of-mouth) would be relied upon more for the purchase of experience goods than search goods.

Darby & Karni in 1973 introduced credence goods to extend the information acquisition classification into a more precise taxonomy. Credence qualities, they proposed, are those that the consumer can never fully evaluate even after purchase and consumption, thus, those accepted on faith. According to them, credence qualities are "expensive to judge even after purchase". They claimed that when goods high in credence qualities are sold both branding and client relationships are used to help establish quality. In such situations, consumers can

never be sure about the extent of the good they actually need; sellers act as experts in determining the customers' requirements (Emons & Winand, 1997).

Zeithaml in 1981 introduced the three types of goods into marketing, via the service literature, as a theoretical framework to better conceptualize the proposed purchase evaluation differences between goods and services. Her classic piece placed goods and services on a continuum in which traditional consumer goods anchored one end of the spectrum (easy to evaluate) and pure services anchored the other end (difficult to evaluate). Goods, she proposed, have more search qualities while services exhibit more experience and credence qualities due to their unique characteristics - intangibility, non-standardization and inseparability. In 1999, Mitra classified the non-search ability of services, thus, the experience and credence attributes, as one of the five properties of intangibility.

Those services bearing more credence qualities are harder to judge while services high in experience are in the middle of the continuum in terms of evaluation difficulty. Because services tend to have more experience and credence qualities, consumers may employ different evaluation processes than those high in search qualities. As services become more difficult to evaluate, there tends to be more uncertainty (more risk). In general, the greater the degree of perceived risk in a pre-purchase context, the greater the consumer's propensity to seek information about goods and services (Murray 1991; Guseman 1981; Murray & Schlacter 1990). Search qualities, Zeithaml (1981) concluded, include attributes such as colour, style, price, fit and smell while experience qualities include taste, "wearability" and purchase satisfaction.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXT OF STUDY

3.1 Introduction

The study will be limited to the activities of three main telecommunications operators within the Greater Accra region. The three telecommunications operators are MTN, Vodafone, and Tigo; reason being that with a subscriber base of 14,207,778 (MTN), 7,159,556 (Vodafon), 4,264,078 (Tigo), these are the three leading operators in the industry (NCA, 2015) and thus, easy access to customers, and hence primary data. The target group under study will be undergraduate students of the University of Ghana. This is because at their age, initial quality perceptions may likely be formed by extrinsic factors like word-of-mouth and advertising and media promotions; two of the variables this study seeks to test.

3.2 Brief Industry Background

The history of telecommunications in Ghana can be traced back to 1881, pre-colonial Ghana (then the Gold Coast), when the first telegraph line was a ten mile link installation between the castle of the colony then governor in Cape Coast and Elmina (Allotey & Felix, 2000). In 1882, the first public telegraph line, stretching over a distance of 2.5 miles, was erected between Christiansburg and Accra. The extension of telegraph services to the middle and northern parts of Ghana into the territory of the Ashantis was carried out in 1886. In order to improve communications in the southern part of the country, the first manual telephone exchange (70 lines) was installed in Accra in 1892. Twelve years later, in 1904, a second manual exchange consisting of 13 lines was installed in Cape Coast. According to them Ghana's telecommunication infrastructure was laid down and expanded by the colonial administration mainly to facilitate the economic, social, and political administration of the colony. By 1930, the number of telephone exchange lines in Ghana had grown to 1,560,

linking the coastal region with the central and northern parts of the country. In 1953, the first automatic telephone exchange with 200 lines was installed in Accra to replace the manual one erected 63 years earlier. Three years later, in 1956, the trunk lines connecting Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, and Tamale were upgraded through the installation of a 48 and 12-channel VHF network.

Satellite communication was not an integral part of the Ghanaian communications system until the early 1980s. The construction of a satellite earth station at Kuntunase in the Eastern region of Ghana in 1981, and related communication reforms of the early 1990s marked a dramatic shift towards greater use of satellite communications technology over the next two decades (Boateng, 2000).

According to Osiakwan (2003), Ghana was one of the first African countries to consider the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector, all in a bid to attract investments and improve competition within the telecommunication sector. The sector was deregulated in 1994 when the government initiated the implementation of the Accelerated Development Programme (ADP), a five year programme for the restructuring of the communication industry. The ADP Programme ended in 2000 with the following achievements: teledensity increasing from 0.34 lines for 1000 inhabitants in 1994 to 1.16 lines in 2000; public phones per 1000 inhabitants increasing from 0.001 in 1994 to 0.16 in 2000; creation of the National Communications Authority (NCA) in 1996; liberalization of the telecommunication sector; and the partial privatization of Ghana Telecom with Government maintaining 70% share. These were achieved primarily as a result of the entrance of new telecommunication companies in the wake of the deregulation and privatization of the sector.

A number of telecom providers emerged with the liberalisation of the telecommunication sector. Notable among them were mobile phone operators, most of which were licensed

before the establishment of the NCA. Millicom Ghana Limited began its operations in 1992/93 with Mobitel as its network name. Celltel commenced its operations in 1995 with a network name “Celltel” which was later changed to “Kasapa”. Scancom also entered the market in the same year using a network name “Spacefon”. In 2001, Ghana Telecom introduced its mobile phone services under a network name “One Touch”, now Vodafone (Ahortor, 2003). Kasapa later changed to “Expresso”, while Spacefon, changed to “Spacefon Areeba”, and then to “Areeba”, and now “MTN”.

In 2010 two fixed-line companies and six mobile phone companies were authorized to operate in Ghana of which 5 were fully operational, with subscribers across the country. Currently, the telecommunication industry in Ghana is mainly private sector with seven major operators namely; MTN, Tigo, Vodafone, Airtel, Expresso, and Glo and the recently licensed Surflin, whose sole operation is strictly to provide data services for industrial and domestic purposes. With the exception of Surflin, that has the license to operate on the 4G platform, all the other operators provide a maximum of 3.5G services. The competitive nature of the industry today, presents implications for brand managers of telecommunication companies as far as creating perceptions of quality, and making the brand the preferred choice of customers are concerned.

3.3 Background of MTN (Ghana)

The network with the codes 024, 054 and 055, which is today known as MTN, begun operating in Ghana several years ago, under the brand name Spacefon, which was at the time managed by Scancom Ghana Limited.

Scancom entered the Ghanaian market in 1996 under the Spacefon brand and launched the first GSM service in Ghana and led the industry with innovative services, such as Caller ID,

SMS, Itemized Billing and Per Second Billing. These were as well complemented by superior customer service.

Over the years, the network has undergone several brand evolutions as a result of structural acquisitions and mergers; from Spacefon, to Spacefon Areeba, to Areeba and now MTN. MTN, the leading telecommunications company in the emerging markets of Africa and the Middle East, entered the Ghanaian market following the acquisition of Investcom in 2006.

Vision

To lead the delivery of a bold, new digital world to our customers

Mission

To make our customers lives a whole lot brighter

MTN is the market leader in the increasingly competitive mobile telecommunications industry in the country. It offers subscribers a maze of exciting options under Pay Monthly and Pay As You Go services, thus, post-paid and pre-paid services.

MTN's network coverage is extensive, covering all ten regional capitals and many rural and remote areas. MTN continues to invest heavily in infrastructure in an effort to expand its coverage across the country.

MTN for many years was the sponsor of the most-popular football fiesta on the continent – the African Cup of Nations, including CAN 2008, which was hosted in Ghana. It was also the sponsor of the World Cup tournament in 2010 which was staged in South Africa, where MTN is headquartered.

MTN was created in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1993 and has grown from a local to global mobile service company. Since its establishment in 1993, MTN has been alive to its

responsibilities in society. The MTN Foundation is a framework for initiatives that will ensure the company's pro-active participation in Corporate Social Responsibility projects wherever it operates. Key focus areas are education, health, economic empowerment, music, arts and culture.

MTN is committed to maximizing productivity and efficiency by delivering uniquely designed communication solutions. As the leading telecommunications company, MTN is focused on providing excellent telecommunications services across the African Continent.

MTN has a wide variety of network services as well as segments. These are specially designed for different consumer groups to enhance their mobile experience, while others add value to consumer subscription to the network. MTN understands that the best way to gain a competitive edge in a local market is to offer different product/service offerings to different consumer groups to suit people's life styles and economic situations while at the same time, allowing them to enjoy the best solutions and other offerings available.

Not only do they provide one of the most reliable voice and data network in the country but also has variety of services tailored to suit the consumer's specific needs, lifestyle and economic situations. These services are specially designed to enhance mobile experience and add value to subscription.

With MTN's 3.5G coverage, subscribers are able to connect in real time to family and friends with MTN Video Calling, get instant download with MTN Loaded and explore more with the fastest internet connection from MTN Mobile Broadband.

MTN Ghana Ltd. also provides telecommunications services in Africa and the Middle East. It offers leased line services; virtual private network over mobile services; last mile access;

internet and messaging solutions; hosted messaging and collaboration; and data centre solutions, including co-location hosting services. The company also provides security solutions, such as vehicle tracking; calling and messaging solutions, including MTN audio conference; directory services; and voice SMS, staying in touch, roaming, and mobile money services. It serves small and medium enterprises; mining, health and wellness, financial services, and manufacturing and production corporations; and government/public institutions.

3.4 Background of Vodafone (Ghana)

Vodafone Ghana, formerly Ghana Telecom, is the national telecommunications company of Ghana. In 2006, it had around 400,000 customers for fixed and mobile telephony and Internet services.

On July 3, 2008, the sale of the company for \$900 million to Vodafone group was announced. After the transaction closed, Vodafone had a 70% stake in the company, while Ghana government retained a 30% stake. On April 16, 2009, the company was rebranded as Vodafone Ghana.

Vodafone Group Plc has since the beginning of the millennium made significant in-roads in Africa and currently, apart from Ghana, operates in Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique. It has significant presence in Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and the United States through the company's subsidiary undertakings, joint ventures, associated undertakings and investments.

Vodafone Group has more than 315 million customers, excluding paging customers, calculated on a proportionate basis in accordance with its percentage interest in these ventures. Operational in 31 countries, the company is ranked among the top 10 global companies by market capitalization.

Vodafone has a unique portfolio of products and services, providing its customers with high speed access to the internet, mobile services and fixed lines.

The company applies the latest industry technology and is keen on building the most versatile network. They go the extra mile to ensure that services on customers' mobile handset enable them to go out and conduct their business or have fun in the most enjoyable and relaxing manner.

The company has a deep sense of social responsibility. They do this through responsible employee volunteerism, providing access to communication in deprived communities and investing hundreds of thousands of Ghana cedis through the Vodafone Ghana Foundation in social causes.

Excellent customer care is one of their strengths and they pride themselves in being the only telecommunications company in Ghana with as many customer service points - situated to meet customers at the point of their need.

Mission

Our goal is to be the communications leader in the increasingly connected world. We aim to provide the kind of innovative and responsive service for which the Vodafone Group is recognised worldwide.

The company was established after World War II as a wing of the then Post and Telecommunications Corporation. In order for the company to function as a commercially viable entity, it was split into two autonomous divisions by the government of Ghana; Ghana Postal Services and Ghana Telecom.

Ghana Telecom was subsequently privatized to G-Com Ltd. The consequence of this was that it was contracted to Telenor Management Partners (TMP) of Norway to manage. A Ghanaian management team then took over the affairs prior to Vodafone's acquisition.

3.5 Background of Tigo

Millicom International Cellular (MIC) S.A., operators of Tigo, is a leading international developer and operator of cellular telephone services worldwide primarily in emerging markets operating across Latin America and Africa.

The company provides affordable, widely accessible and readily available cellular telephony services to more than 30 million customers in fourteen emerging markets in these continents. The success of Tigo is based on the triple 'A' business model which stands for Affordability, Accessibility and Availability. This guarantees that their subscribers experience the best services at the most affordable rates throughout the 10 regions of Ghana and beyond.

Vision

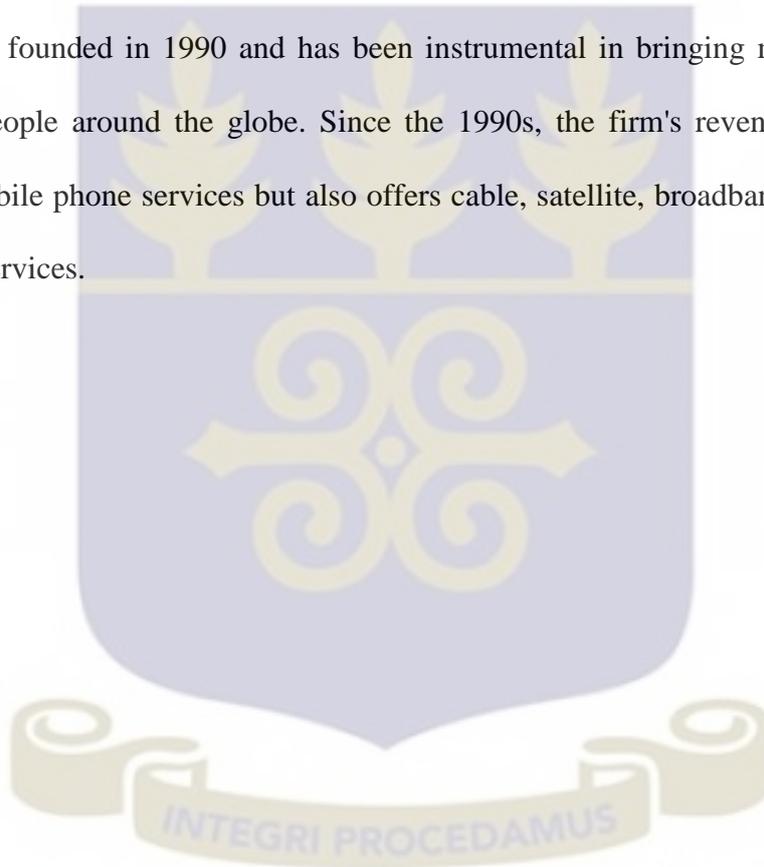
To provide people in emerging markets the freedom to access today's world. To make this happen we create 'A world where mobile services are affordable, accessible and available everywhere and to all'.

Mission

To provide services for people who want to stay in touch, to belong to communities and to be informed and entertained, enabling them to express their emotions and enhance their lives. We deliver the 3 A's, Affordability, Accessibility and Availability; providing affordable services, good coverage and ease of purchase AND use. We focus on consistently meeting and exceeding customer's expectations and developing an inspirational brand.

Tigo is one of six leading mobile service providers competing in Ghana. It numbers over four million customers; more than 17 per cent of market share. Mobile penetration is estimated at 81.2 per cent (NCA 2015). Tigo Ghana's mobile financial services team has won notable recognition and awards for products and deployment.

Millicom is an international telecommunications and media company. It offers a range of digital services to over 56 million customers primarily under the Tigo brand in fourteen markets in Africa and Latin America. Its online partnerships are active in 41 markets. Millicom was founded in 1990 and has been instrumental in bringing mobile telephony to millions of people around the globe. Since the 1990s, the firm's revenue has been driven mainly by mobile phone services but also offers cable, satellite, broadband, e-commerce and other media services.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this section, the study focuses on the research approach adopted, and goes on to highlight the population for the study, sample and sampling procedure. This section also describes the methods, techniques and research instruments employed for collecting and analysing data. According to Yin (2003), a research methodology defines what the activity of research is, how to proceed, how to measure progress, and what constitutes success. Malholtra & Birks (2007) also describe research methodology as the procedural framework within which a research is conducted.

4.2 Research Approach

The main research approaches known to researchers are the Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed-Methods approach (Boateng, 2014). The prudent use of any of these approaches is largely dependent on the nature of the study, as well as the philosophy of the researcher. According to Boateng (2014), quantitative (structured) research seeks to determine the extent of a problem or the existence of a relationship between aspects of a phenomenon by quantifying the variation. Quantitative research often seeks to test to support or disprove a proposed relationship between two or more aspects of the phenomenon. Quantitative research is structured because it starts with specific hypotheses or questions derived from theory or previous research and uses objective instruments like fixed choice questionnaires to collect data from selected sample. Results are presented using statistics and inferences made to the population. Throughout this process, the researcher is viewed as being independent from subjects involved in the research.

Qualitative research tends to explore the meanings, attitudes, values, beliefs people associate with a phenomenon in order to establish a better understanding, rather than to test to support or disprove a relationship. This approach is useful for describing the nature or variation of a problem, issue, situation, or phenomenon. Qualitative research is arguably unstructured, as it starts with general research problems and not by formulating hypotheses. It uses relatively unstructured instruments like interviews and observations. Data is collected from a small purposive sample which may or may not be representative of the larger population. Results are presented mainly or exclusively in words. It is more about explanation, and de-emphasizing generalizations to the population. Throughout the process, the researcher is aware of his/her own orientations, biases or experiences and personal interaction with subjects or the context of the study. This approach allows flexibility in all activities of the research process (Boateng, 2014).

Mixed-methods approach tends to combine the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research (Boateng, 2014). Some studies require the researcher to combine both approaches. According to Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann & Hanson (2003) mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.

This study employed the mixed-methods approach as this approach provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative research. It also offers a more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either qualitative or

quantitative research can do on their own while helping answer questions that cannot be answered by qualitative and quantitative approaches alone.

4.3 Research Design

Research design may broadly be classified into Exploratory and Conclusive. The primary objective of exploratory research is to provide insight into, and an understanding of, the problem confronting the researcher (Malhotra, 2007). Exploratory research is used in cases where one must define the problem more precisely, identify relevant courses of action, or gain additional insight into a phenomenon. The sample selected to generate maximum insight, is small and non-representative. The findings of exploratory research should be regarded as tentative or as input to further research. Typically, such research is followed by further exploratory or conclusive research. According to Malhotra (2007), conclusive research on the other hand is typically more formal and structured than exploratory research. It is based on large, representative samples, and the data obtained are subjected to quantitative analysis. The findings from this type of research are considered to be conclusive in nature in that, they are used as inputs into managerial decision making. Conclusive research design may be either descriptive or causal, and descriptive research design may be either cross-sectional or longitudinal.

This study therefore employed the exploratory research design, using a survey of respondents. This design was adopted because the study sought to provide further insight into how customers form quality perceptions and preference for a particular brand. Furthermore, the sample size for this study was non-representative of the entire population, and as such, this research design was deemed more appropriate.

4.4 Research Population

Population is defined as the entire group under study as specified by the objectives of the research project (Burns & Bush, 2000). For the purpose of this study, the population will be limited to customers of telecommunications providers within the boundaries of the University of Ghana, and this will capture only customers of MTN, Vodafon and Tigo. This is because these firms are the three leading mobile service providers in the country, and as such getting access to their customers will be relatively easy. The researcher will not be part of the population under study; the researcher will only administer the data collection instruments.

4.5 Sample Size

According to Burns & Bush (2000), a sample is a subset of the population which is representative of the entire population. A sample size of 300 undergraduate students of the University of Ghana will be conveniently selected for the study. A sample size of 300 was used because this study is not purely quantitative, and thus the focus of this study is not to generalize findings. As a result, an appropriate representation of research population is not a requirement. Again, in the face of time and budgetary constraints, a smaller sample size is more desirable. The study focuses on undergraduate students because at their age, value and quality perceptions may be formed through advertising and word-of-mouth communication, as well as price; which are integral concepts of this study. To augment primary data, interview sessions will be scheduled with brand managers from each of these service providers.

4.6 Sampling Technique

The study employed non-probability sampling methods. The researcher used Purposive Sampling method, otherwise called the Judgmental Sampling, and Convenience Sampling method. The purposive sampling method allows the researcher to deliberately select respondents with knowledge and experience in the subject under study, and who are likely to give accurate and question-specific responses to research questions. The Purposive sampling technique will be used in selecting brand managers, while the Convenience sampling method will be used to select student respondents. The main reasons for choosing the Purposive and Convenience sampling methods is basically because of time and budgetary constraints. Another reason for choosing these non-probability sampling techniques is that the focus of this study is not to make generalizations of the research findings, but rather to provide insight and to explain why customers form certain perceptions and take certain decisions.

4.7 Data and Data Collection Instruments

According to Aaker, Kumar, & Day, (1998), primary data refers to “original data” whilst secondary data refers to data that were collected by persons or agencies for purposes other than solving the problem at hand. In conducting this study, both primary and secondary data sources will be used.

Primary data sources included information that was gathered from the field through interviews and interactions with customers, brands managers, as well as other stakeholders in the field. Secondary data sources included information gathered from annual reports and periodicals from the three service providers as well as from industry regulators like the National Communications Authority, and the Ghana Telecommunications Chamber.

The main data collection instrument this study employed in gathering information from student respondents was the questionnaire. This research instrument was used because it is convenient and quick, and also deemed as one of the most suitable ways to collect reliable information from respondents. The questionnaire was made up of both open and close ended questions. All 300 questionnaires were self-administered. An interview guide was as well designed to collect data from brands managers.

There was a pre-testing of research instrument before all 300 questionnaires were distributed to selected sample. This exercise was important because it allowed the researcher to refine the research instrument, as it gave the researcher insights into what questions worked well, what questions sounded strange, what questions could be eliminated and what questions needed to be added. It also gave a clue as to whether the survey was too long, and whether respondents understood research questions and showed interest in participating in the survey.

4.8 Qualitative Study

The qualitative aspect of this study shall apply the purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique allows the researcher to intentionally select respondents for the study. These respondents are selected based on their possession of certain information vital to the success of the research. Respondents selected using this technique were Corporate Communications managers and Brands managers of the various telecommunications companies captured in this study. These managers are individuals who possess a wealth of information and knowledge concerning the issue under study and hence can provide information that is sufficient to what is being investigated.

The qualitative data was collected with the aid of an interview guide. The interview guide contained questions that were mostly open ended in nature. This afforded respondents ample

room and the convenience to provide enough information regarding the study being undertaken. The questions in the interview guide were intended to solicit information regarding how these telecommunications companies have projected their brand as a quality alternative to influence customer perceptions, and how these perceptions have further influenced customer preference for the brand.

4.9 Quantitative Study

The quantitative aspect of this study employed the convenience sampling technique. This is a non-probability sampling technique where respondents are selected based on willingness and availability or the relative ease of access to the researcher. One major reason for using this technique was its ease in ensuring that a sufficient sample size for a quantitative study was met. Secondly, considering the infinite nature of the population under consideration for this study, it is practically impossible to consider probability sampling techniques such as Simple Random Sampling or a Systematic Sampling. The population for the quantitative part of this study comprised of all undergraduate students of the University of Ghana.

Quantitative data was collected with the aid of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section comprised of the biographic attributes of respondents in terms of gender, age groupings as well as academic level and programme. The second and third sections posed questions on brand quality perceptions and preference. The questionnaire was made up of both open and close ended questions. It also employed a five-point Likert scale in collecting some of these responses. The questionnaires were self-administered by the researcher.

4.10 Analysis Procedures

The data collected from the field were brought together for analysis. Since this is a mixed methods research, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were required.

4.10.1 Qualitative Analysis

This qualitative analysis was done to ensure that sense was made out of the textual data that was collected with the help of the interview guide. There was a three-stage approach to the analysis of data. The first step of the analysis was the organisation of the data that has been collected. This stage also involved a thorough review of the data. This was done in order to get a general impression of the issues being discussed by participants. In addition, it provided a general impression concerning the depth and the credibility as well as the usefulness of the information provided with respect to brand quality perceptions and preference within the telecommunications sector of Ghana.

The second stage of the qualitative analysis was the discussion of information gathered from the various telecommunication companies. Discussions were made with reference to literature reviewed in the second chapter of this study.

The third and final step involved the interpretation of the data with reference to the findings that have been identified in the quantitative analysis. This was done to ensure whether brand quality attributes projected by organizations were the same attributes that shaped customers' perception of quality, and subsequently brand preference.

4.10.2 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative aspect of the data was analysed using multiple regression analysis. Basically, regression analysis is a statistical tool for the investigation of relationships between variables. Usually, the researcher seeks to establish the causal effect of one variable on the other; for example, the effect of a price increase upon demand, or specifically in the context of this study, the effect of perceived quality on brand preference.

Multiple regression on the other hand, is a technique that allows additional factors to enter the analysis separately so that the effect of each can be estimated. It is valuable for quantifying the impact of various simultaneous influences upon a single dependent variable. Further, because of omitted variables bias with simple regression, multiple regression is often essential even when the researcher is only interested in the effects of one of the independent variables. Multiple regression analysis is in fact capable of dealing with an arbitrarily large number of explanatory variables.

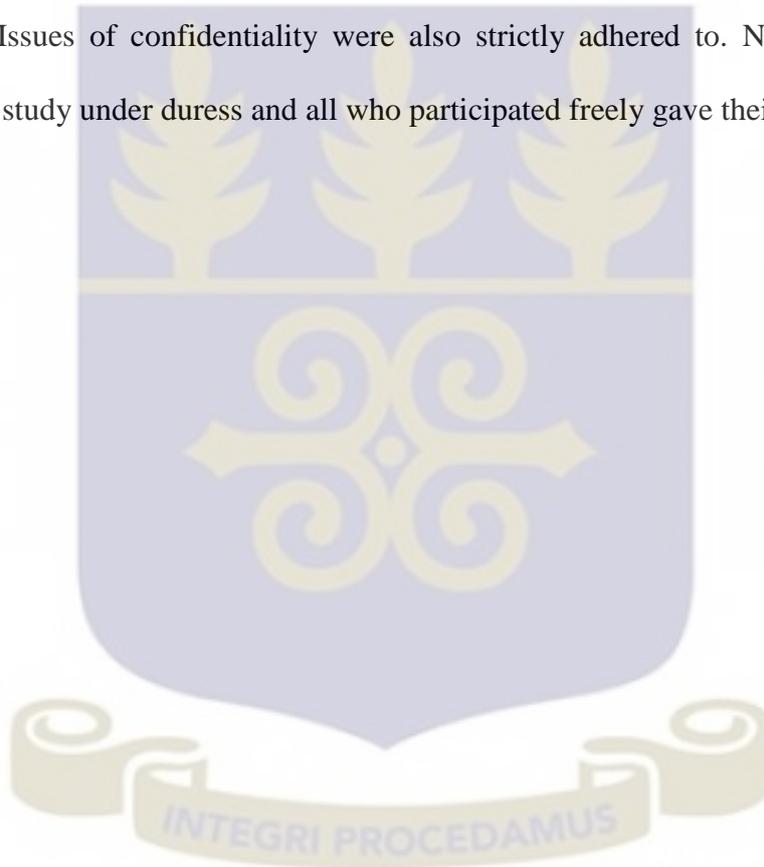
To explore such issues, the researcher collects data on the underlying variables of interest and employs regression to estimate the quantitative effect of each of the causal variables upon the variable that they affect. Furthermore the researcher assesses the “statistical significance” of the estimated relationships, that is, the degree of confidence that the true relationship is close to the estimated relationship.

Unlike correlation that seeks to establish relationships between two variables, multiple regression has been noted for assessing cause and effect of variables and assessing degree of associations between these variables.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

This research complied with principles which aimed at protecting the dignity and privacy of every individual involved in responding to the questionnaire including those who provided personal or commercially valuable information about themselves, others or their organizations.

Before an individual became a subject of this research, they were notified of the purpose of the research. Issues of confidentiality were also strictly adhered to. No person became a subject of this study under duress and all who participated freely gave their consent.



CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the study presents an analysis the data that was collected for the research. Empirical data collected through self-administered questionnaires, as well as interviews with both customers and Corporate Communications managers of MTN, Vodafone and Tigo are presented. The main purpose of this study was to assess the dimensions through which customers form their perceptions of quality about a particular telecommunications brand, and how these perceptions influence their preferences. Chapters prior to this, have sought to provide a basis and justification for this study. In doing this, comprehensive literature has been reviewed in the area of branding, service quality and perceptions of quality, as well as brand preference. Furthermore, there has been a clearly spelt out methodology by which this study will be conducted.

This chapter therefore provides an insight into the analysis of data including data screening and cleaning, demographic profile of respondents, reliability of the various scale items and a multiple regression analysis which was performed to examine the significance of the relationship existing among variables. Since the study employed a mixed method approach, this chapter first presents the analysis of quantitative data collected through the administration of questionnaires. The second part presents analysis of qualitative data collected with the aid of an interview guide. While the last part attempted to assess whether there were any commonalities between both the qualitative and the quantitative data. The final part of this chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to literature to see how they answer research questions posed at the beginning stages of this study.

5.2 Preliminary Data Screening and Cleaning

One of the most important activities prior to data analysis is checking the data set for errors (Pallant, 2003). He further states that this activity is necessary because in entering the data, errors are easily made, which eventually affects the overall results of the analysis. According to him, the data screening process consists of three major steps:

- Step 1: Checking for errors – First and foremost, the researcher is required to check each variable to ensure that some are not out of range (that is, those that fall outside of the range of possible scores).
- Step 2: Finding the error in the data file – The second step in this process according to him is the need to find where in the data set any such error occurred.
- Step 3: Correcting the errors in the data file - Finally, it is essential the researcher corrects the error from source, thus, in the data file.

For this study therefore, a thorough data screening process was performed on each of the entries for scores that may be out of range, missing or even wrongly inputted and these were duly resolved. Out of the 300 questionnaires that were distributed, 292 were deemed valid, and hence analysed. Of the remaining 8, three were never returned, and five had unfilled portions, hence was deemed unfit for the analysis.

5.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondents for the study were profiled according to sex, age, level of education, academic programme, and respondents' preferred network. It must therefore be noted that, of the six mobile telecommunications companies in Ghana, only three were sampled for the study; MTN, Vodafone and Tigo. Reason being that in terms of market share, these

telecommunications companies ranked in the top three respectively, and as such getting access to customers was relatively easy.

Of the 292 responses that were analysed, 173 respondents, representing 59.2% were male while 199 respondents, representing 40.8 were female. In terms of their age distribution, majority fell between the ages of 21 – 23 (143), representing 49.0% of the total sample size. 31.8% were between the ages of 24 – 27, while 56, accounting for 19.2% of the total sample size fell between the ages of 18 – 20.

With regard to the educational level of respondents, all 292 fell between level 100 and level 400 since the sample population for the study was undergraduate students of the University of Ghana. 108 respondents, representing 37.0% were level 300 students. 72 respondents, accounting for 24.7% were level 200 students, while 70 students, who accounted for 24.0% were level 400 students. The least represented group were level 100 students (42), who represented 14.4% of respondents that entered the analysis.

For academic programme, majority of the respondents sampled were from business disciplines; 50 respondents, representing 17.1% were Accounting students, 49 respondents, representing 16.8% were Marketing students, while 40, representing 13.7% were studying Human Resource Management. Political Science students were 32, representing 11.0%; 22 Psychology students, representing 7.5%; 17 Banking and Finance students, representing 5.8%; 16 Information Studies students, representing 5.5%; 13 Sociology students, representing 4.5%; and 11 Economics students, representing 3.8%. The remainder, who had a representation of less than 10 respondents were Engineering and Medicine with 7 respondents respectively; Agriculture, Archaeology, and Statistics had 4 respondents respectively; Computer Science had 3 respondents; Actuarial Science, Family and Consumer Science, French and Linguistics, and Geography, had 2 respondents respectively; while Chemistry,

English and French, Law, Nutrition and Food Science, and Physics, had single respondents respectively.

Finally, as reflected in the market share statistics of the NCA (2015), 130 respondents, accounting for 44.5% were users of MTN network, 109 respondents, representing 37.3% were Vodafone users, and 53 respondents, representing 18.2% were Tigo customers.

Table 5.1: Profile of Respondents

Profile	Measurement	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Sex</i>	Male	173	59.2
	Female	199	40.8
	Total	292	100
<i>Age</i>	18 – 20	56	19.2
	21 – 23	143	49.0
	24 -27	93	31.8
	Total	292	100
<i>Level</i>	100	42	14.4
	200	72	24.7
	300	108	37.0
	400	70	24.0
	Total	292	100
<i>Programme</i>	Accounting	50	17.1
	Actuarial Science	2	.7
	Agriculture	4	1.4
	Archaeology	4	1.4
	Banking and Finance	17	5.8
	Chemistry	1	.3
	Computer Science	3	1.0

	Economics	11	3.8
	Engineering	7	2.4
	English and French	1	.3
	Family and Consumer Science	2	.7
	French and Linguistics	2	.7
	Geography	2	.7
	Human Resource Management	40	13.7
	Information Studies	16	5.5
	Law	1	.3
	Marketing	49	16.8
	Medicine	7	2.4
	Nutrition and Food Science	1	.3
	Physics	1	.3
	Political Science	32	11.0
	Psychology	22	7.5
	Sociology	13	4.5
	Statistics	4	1.4
	Total	292	100
<i>Preferred Network</i>	MTN	130	44.5
	Vodafone	109	37.3
	Tigo	53	18.2
	Total	292	100

5.4 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Basically, the application of factor analysis in this study was an attempt to establish relationships among the variables contributing to the factors identified from the literature review. For Data Reduction, the principal components method of extraction begins by finding a linear combination of variables accounting for as much variation in the original variables as

possible. It then finds another component that accounts for as much of the remaining variation as possible and is uncorrelated with the previous component. It follows through in this pattern until there are as many components as original variables. Usually, some few components will account for most of the variation, and these components can be used in place of the original variables (Costello & Osborne, 2005).

In the study framework, the variables measuring the construct, thus, Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, Customer Care, Communication, and Price, were factor analyzed. Before running the exploratory factor analysis, the Bartlett test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-square= 2.391, df. 231, sig. 0.000) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (Value of .791) confirmed that there was significant correlation among the variables and thus, a strong basis for the application of exploratory factor analysis.

Only 6 variables whose Eigen values were equal to or greater than 1 were selected (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). In addition, variables with loadings of at least 0.5 and factors with a reliability threshold of 0.6 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2010) were selected for the analysis. In the initial exploration, all the twenty-two (22) variables were factor analyzed in an attempt to identify latent variables explaining the respondents' views on each of the factors, identify the relationship between different latent variables, identify the smallest possible number of variables that measures the constructs to simplify the proposed framework, as well as explaining the inter-correlations among observed variables. The variables measuring the factors were found to explain altogether a satisfactory 62.811% of the total variance.

5.4.1 Varimax Rotation and Reliability of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The twenty-two (22) variables were later rotated using the Varimax rotation as the extraction method. The results revealed that twenty (20) variables loaded perfectly onto six factors (with one being the dependent variable); an indication that two (two) of the initial variables failed to meet the rotation criteria. Out of the remaining twenty (20) variables, factor one had 5 variables, with all 5 relating to Brand Preference (dependent variable); factor two had 3 variables of which all related to Brand Awareness; factor three had 3 variables, and again all related to price; factor four had 4 variables with 3 of the variables relating to Communication, while 1 related to Technological Infrastructure; factor five had 3 variables, 2 related to Customer Care, while 1 related to Technological Infrastructure. Finally factor six had 2 items of which all related to Technological Infrastructure.

The results of the rotation have been displayed in table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: Rotated Component Matrix

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
I will continually remain loyal to my network and patronize other services under their umbrella	.862					
I will recommend my current telecoms provider to family and friends	.846					
My network provides services as expected	.821					
I will continue patronizing the services of my current service provider	.815					
My network delivers value as promised	.799					
A brand name influences my perception of quality		.899				
The strength of an organization's brand influences my choice (preference)		.891				
My choice of a telecoms provider is based on perceived quality		.865				
I prefer my service provider because of their generous promotional offers			.799			
I prefer my telecoms provider because of their affordable call rates			.682			
I prefer my telecoms provider because of their innumerable product/service range			.665			
My perception of quality and preference is largely based on recommendations from friends and family					.773	

My perception of quality and preference is informed by advertisements of the brand	.686
My perception of quality and preference is influenced by the tact with which corporate communication is handled	.562
Call drop rate tells a lot about the quality of technological infrastructure of a telecoms provider	.534
The speed with which complaints are resolved reflects the business orientation of a service provider, hence my perception of quality delivery	.817
I prefer my current telecoms provider because when i call to lodge complaints of a more technical nature, it is forwarded to the appropriate team for redress	.760
I am always assured of instant connectivity whenever i make a call	.563
The geographical coverage of a network influences my preference	.844
The quality of voice calls influences my perception of quality	.800

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

5.4.2 Reliability of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Re-Specification of Factors

According to Malhotra & Birks (20007), reliability simply refers to the extent to which measurement reproduces consistent results particularly if the process of measurement is to be repeated. Pallant (2003) confirms this position by positing that the essence of reliability is to check the scales used for analysis and ensure that all items that make up the scale "hang together", thus, are internally consistent. In this study therefore, the most commonly used indicator of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was used to check the reliability of the scales. Both Pallant (2003) and Hair et al. (2010) agree that ideally, this value should be greater than 0.7 for managerial decisions although a threshold level of 0.6 could be used in exploratory research.

The internal reliability of the five factors was analyzed through Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Only factors that meet the minimum value of 0.6 as postulated by (Hair et. al., 2010) were accepted; and for this study, all five factors met the required minimum value of 0.6. Also, in order to test the value of the variables that loaded onto the factors, item-to total correlation was set above 0.3 (Parasuraman et. al, 1988). As a result, the factors were re-specified to

determine their conceptual fitness based on these two basic rules. Thus in all, twenty out of the original twenty-two variables became valid for exploratory factor analysis. The results are presented in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3: Reliability of Scales

	Loadings	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1 – Brand Preference		5	.900
I will continually remain loyal to my network and patronize other services under their umbrella	.862		
I will recommend my current telecoms provider to family and friends	.846		
My network provides services as expected	.821		
I will continue patronizing the services of my current service provider	.815		
My network delivers value as promised	.799		
Factor 2 – Brand Awareness		3	.862
A brand name influences my perception of quality	.899		
The strength of an organization's brand influences my choice (preference)	.891		
My choice of a telecoms provider is based on perceived quality	.865		
Factor 3 – Price		3	.728
I prefer my service provider because of their generous promotional offers	.799		
I prefer my telecoms provider because of their affordable call rates	.682		
I prefer my telecoms provider because of their innumerable product/service range	.665		
Factor 4 – Marketing Communication		3	.646
My perception of quality and preference is largely based on recommendations from friends and family	.773		
My perception of quality and preference is informed by advertisements of the brand	.686		
My perception of quality and preference is influenced by the tact with which corporate communication is handled	.562		
Factor 5 – Customer Care		2	.708
The speed with which complaints are resolved reflects the business orientation of a service provider, hence my perception of quality delivery	.817		
I prefer my current telecoms provider because when i call to lodge complaints of a more technical nature, it is forwarded to the appropriate team for redress	.760		
Factor 6 – Technological infrastructure		4	.615
Call drop rate tells a lot about the quality of technological infrastructure of a telecoms provider	.534		
I am always assured of instant connectivity whenever i make a call	.563		
The geographical coverage of a network influences my preference	.844		
The quality of voice calls influences my perception of quality	.800		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

5.4.3 Reliability of the dependent variable

The reliability of the scales used for the dependent variable were also assessed and found to be appropriate. All five variables had high loadings and loaded perfectly on the dependent variable with a very excellent Cronbach's alpha of .900. This is an indication that the statements used for the dependent variable form a complete structure in describing customers' preference for a particular telecommunications brand. A summary of the results are presented in table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4 – Reliability of scales for dependent variable

	Loadings	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1 – Brand Preference		5	.900
I will continually remain loyal to my network and patronize other services under their umbrella	.862		
I will recommend my current telecoms provider to family and friends	.846		
My network provides services as expected	.821		
I will continue patronizing the services of my current service provider	.815		
My network delivers value as promised	.799		

From the Cronbach's alpha coefficient results obtained, it is clear that all the scales for the independent variables as well as those for the dependent variable exceeded the acceptable minimum required value of 0.6, and thus provides a firm basis for multiple regression analysis.

5.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

In order to assess the propositions made in this study, a multiple regression analysis was performed. This was done to test and validate the assumptions and research questions posed for this study. Results from the multiple regression were used to analyse the relationship between customers' perceptions of brand quality and preference. This was done to extract the independent variables that can better explain the dependent variable. In this study, Brand

Preference was the dependent variable while the independent variables Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, Customer Care, Communication, and Price. Table 5.5 below presents a summary of the multiple regression least squares results for the dependent and independent variables.

Table 5.5: Multiple Regression analysis results

	S.E	β	t	Sig.
(Constant) ^a	.362		7.858	.000
Awareness	.053	.020	.351	.726
Technology	.060	.042	.710	.479
Customer Care	.046	.171	2.852	.005
Communication	.057	.013	.208	.836
Price	.056	.221	3.368	.001
R	.618		S.E of estimate	.69787
R-Square	.490		F-statistics	60.20
Adj. R-Square	.470		Prob. (F-stats.)	.000

Dependent variable: Preference

The results from the regression indicate that there is a strong and significant reliability between variables used for the model to represent customer brand preference ($F = 60.20$, Prob.F-stats < 0.05). Some research scholars (such as Costello & Osborn, 2005; Field, 2005 and Hair et al., 2010) argue that the model reaches statistical significance if the Sig $< .05$. In the present study the Sig = .000 of the F-statistics depicts that the model is statistically significant. The R-Square value in the model summary depicts the degree of variance in the dependent variable which is explained by the model (including the independent variables). From the table, it can be found that R Square value = .490. This expressed in the form of percentage, it means that, Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, Customer Care, Communication, and Price, explain 49.0% of the variance in customers' brand preference, an important indication of the relevance of the model. The adjusted R-Squared is .470 and this

according to Hair, Bush & Ortinau (2006) is good for exploratory studies which test any phenomenon without any theoretically established scales.

On the individual results, Price was found to have the greatest influence on the brand preference of respondents sampled for the study ($\beta = 0.221$, $t = 3.368$, $p = 0.001$, < 0.05). Implying that customers of telecommunications companies in Ghana consider to a large extent the price element of a brand before deciding which one to patronize. The second contributor to customers' brand preference as per results of this study was Customer Care ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 2.852$, $p = 0.005$, < 0.05). Also implying that customers of telecommunications companies in Ghana highly consider the human interaction element of a brand before forming quality perceptions, and subsequently, preferring one brand to the other. Although the remaining three factors; Brand Awareness ($\beta = 0.020$, $t = 0.351$, $p = 0.726$, > 0.05), Technological Infrastructure ($\beta = 0.042$, $t = 0.710$, $p = 0.479$, > 0.05), and Communication ($\beta = 0.013$, $t = 0.208$, $p = 0.836$, > 0.05), had positive relationships (judging from their beta values), their P-values of above 0.05 indicates that these variables were not significant. This implies that per results obtained from the current study, two of the five determinants of quality perceptions were found to influence customers' brand preference, whereas the remaining three failed to meet statistical significance.

5.6 Extracts from Qualitative Data

For a mixed-method research, both quantitative and qualitative data are required. For this study, qualitative data was collected with the aid of an interview guide. Corporate Communications managers of the three telecommunications companies captured in this study were interviewed. This was important because the study sought to also assess whether there were any commonalities between the elements of a brand that influences customers' perceptions of quality and what the organization projects about itself in terms of

communicating their brand quality proposition. The next three sections will present insights from MTN, Vodafone, and Tigo. After which a comparison is made with the quantitative data to check whether there were any commonalities.

5.6.1 Insights from MTN

According to MTN, their brand inspires. One of the pillars of MTN's organizational culture is a "Can Do" spirit that all employees are expected to live by. This "Can Do" spirit has been extended to include the customer in the sense that, the brand inspires the customer to aspire to greater heights in all aspects of life. Over the years there's been a deliberate effort to get the customer aligned to the philosophies of the MTN brand. This has been done using various touch points with which the organization communicates with its customers. This philosophy also reflects in the vision and mission of MTN, thus, Vision: Leading a bold new digital world; and Mission: Making our customers lives a whole lot brighter. This extends to mean that the MTN brand is an enabler and a facilitator in the lives of its customers, in ensuring that it influences various aspects of the customers' lives by: 1. Adding value to the customer's life. 2. Making it seemingly easier for the customer to do things. 3. Assuring the customer there is an alternative and a better way to communicate, digitally or otherwise. The very essence of the MTN brand is to make the customer have a certain sense of self-belief, and in their ability to achieve great things.

The MTN brand has been positioned to represent value for money, confidence and assurance, as well as inspirational; a brand that is able to energize customers for them to do what they want to do.

This has been done through a multi-faceted approach; above the line, below the line, through the line, endorsements, as well as brand activations. A 360-degree approach, using every

touch point where the customer is able to interact with the brand in reinforcing the brand promise is employed to enhance awareness and patronage.

Using 3 key strategic platforms, thus, music, football, and lifestyle, the brand has succeeded in executing this 360-degree approach.

1. Music (brand expressed across all musical touch points, Ghana Music Awards, Ghana Meets Naija, celebrity endorsements; Samini, Okyeame Kwame, MTN Hit Maker, MTN play; content portal, including music)
2. Football (club sponsorship; Accra Hearts of Oak, King Faisal, and Kotoko, sponsorship of football tournaments; MTN FA Cup, African Cup and World Cup, football celebrity endorsements; Stephen Appiah, Michael Essien)
3. Lifestyle (Sponsorship of cultural festivals, Golf sponsorship creating business networks, business breakfasts). Going forward, the focus will be on the youth, since they are going to be the cornerstone and new generation of users to carry the network into the future. The emergence of millennials and social media platforms have made the communication with customers through social network inevitable.

Beyond these 3 key strategic platforms, MTN further employs social marketing, as well as PR, events, and sponsorship in communicating its brand quality proposition.

- Social Marketing (Corporate Social Responsibility); MTN Foundation (Health, Education, Economic Empowerment). Yellow Care (Employee Volunteerism – painting schools, providing laptops, providing incubators in hospitals etc.)
- Public Relations and Events Organizations and Sponsorships (a brand people aspire to be a part of)

NB: building a strong brand identity allows an organization to charge a premium price.

Constant activities are undertaken through market research to ensure that the right insights are gathered to make the customers life “a whole lot brighter”.

1. Adding value to the customer’s life.
2. Making it seemingly easier for the customer to do things.
3. Assuring the customer there is an alternative and a better way to do it.

A typical example of leading a bold new digital world, adding value to the customer’s life and making it a whole lot brighter is the introduction of Mobile Money (digital wallet) which is helping customers in both the formal and informal sector to facilitate money transfer and carry out transactions without physically handling cash. Mobile Money is more convenient, saves time, bridges the gap between the bank and the non-bank sector, and brings financial services to people who would have otherwise shied away from the banks. The benefits of this enterprise is that new businesses, both online and brick-and-mortar are springing up to take advantage of this initiative, and to shape the evolution of the digital space.

Again through market research, and in line with the mission of MTN, some of its services have been inspired by inputs and suggestions from customers. A typical example is the “Pay for me” service; this allows a customer to make calls without bearing any cost, allowing the recipient of the call to bear all the cost, once he/she agrees to do so. Adding value, bridging gaps.

MTN uses all customer touch points from frontline to back office activities to ensure that a well-orchestrated and consistent message is always communicated to the customer. Through the call center and service centers, the brand ensures that its frontline members are

knowledgeable about products and services, empathize with customers in the event of service failure, and also ensure that customer complaints are resolved in good time.

The brand believes that at the very least, the customer wants to initiate and make calls successfully, even though there may be technical challenges. It is for this reason that the brand makes promises and is expected to deliver on those promises. The customer expects value for money and is not ready to take excuses. In terms of voice quality, data, and digital money transfer services, MTN perceives its brand as the best, hence the reason the brand has about 50% of the country's population using its products and services. Quality is also measured through different touch points through which the customer interacts with the brand; like customer service experience, events, etc. Quality service is not just an activity but a whole bouquet of activities put together and provided. Interactions at every touch point impact perception, even word-of-mouth from family and friends, could create either a negative or positive perception about the brand. As a result, MTN places emphasis on moment of truth activities to ensure that a positive perception is created.

Brand management has a bigger role to play. There have been instances where service delivery has been very poor but the extent of work done on the brand is able to favourably shape public opinion about the brand, in inspiring confidence and trust, and an ability to deliver quality. Beyond this, the customer care person at the frontline is skilled enough to allay any fears the customer may have.

Through market research, constant monitoring of the industry etc. Beyond trying to ensure that technical challenges are minimized to the barest minimum, an organization's ability to manage a challenge is equally very important.

Voice clarity, quality network, best coverage area, and minimal disruptions on the network (as much as possible) are other ways through which the brand communicates quality, and for this reason MTN has since the inception of its operations in Ghana, invested heavily in the very best industry technology.

The company constantly communicate the message that MTN is an aspirational brand. For this reason, customers prefer the network because they feel proud to be associated with the brand. Constantly communicating the fact that the brand is bigger than any challenge and that benefits far outweigh any known brand challenge. Enforcing the brand experience at every touch point in ensuring that the customer prefers the MTN brand to other alternatives.

Fundamentally the essence of a strong brand is to allow charge a premium price. Nonetheless MTN is charging way below the equity the brand has built over the years. This is in an effort to enable the customer understand that he/she is getting value for money.

Advertising gives the brand the platform to articulate what it represents, and to strategically position itself in the evoked set of the customer, creating positive perceptions, and top-of-mind awareness. Advertising helps shape the conversation process.

The use of social media is not only helping influence word-of-mouth, but also reinforce the brand promise and be in tune with time. A move from brand communication to brand conversation; eliciting the involvement of customers in the decision-making process.

5.6.2 Insights from Vodafone

In line with its mission statement, Vodafone Ghana wants to be the communications leader in the increasingly connected world. The company intends doing this by providing innovative,

responsive and customer oriented services for which the Vodafone Group is globally known for.

In ensuring that Vodafone Ghana delivers on its mission statement, the company has invested immensely in technology and applies the latest industry technology in serving its over 6 million customers. The brand is keen on building the most versatile network, in ensuring that customer are able to connect wherever they find themselves within the boundaries of Ghana. The Vodafone brand goes the extra mile to ensure that services on customers' mobile handset enable them to go out and conduct their business or have fun in the most enjoyable and relaxing manner.

Beyond ensuring that the company provides the widest network coverage, the brand also represent value for money. Vodafone has a unique portfolio of products and services, providing its customers with high speed access to the internet, mobile services and fixed lines. In line with providing quality service and ensuring that customers get value for money, the brand introduced Vodafone X. This is a service that enables customers to subscribe to a monthly call plan that also includes sms and data packages. In doing this, the brand gives customers the confidence and assurance that, even with the least expense, he or she is provided with value for money.

In making sure the Vodafone brand becomes a house hold name, the company is engaged in a myriad of programmes. Vodafone has provided sponsorship for many programmes in Ghana. Notable among these programmes is the Vodafone Ghana Music Awards. Beyond providing sponsorship in the areas of entertainment, leisure and sports, the company also has a deep sense of social responsibility. They do this through responsible employee volunteerism, providing access to communication in deprived communities and investing hundreds of thousands of Ghana cedis through the Vodafone Ghana Foundation in social

causes. The brand engages in these activities to ensure that they contribute to the quality of life of its customers, and by so doing, becoming the preferred brand in the telecoms sector of Ghana.

Customer interactions and moment of truth encounters are also platforms the brand takes advantage of in ensuring that it presents itself as the most viable alternative in the telecoms sector in Ghana. Excellent customer care is one of their strengths and they pride themselves in being the only telecommunications company in Ghana with as many customer service points - situated to meet customers at the point of their need. This is because the brand believes that providing quality service does not only come in the form of call quality or affordable pricing, but also a chunk of this perception is created by the human factor that represents the face of the Vodafone brand.

With regards to communications and making sure that the brand gets its message across to its numerous current and potential customers, Vodafone employs as many communications channels as necessary. This includes mainstream advertisement on TV and radio, as well as print. Press briefings and any other media interaction is also viewed as an opportunity to carry their messages across. In this era of technology, the brand further ensures that it takes advantage of social media in interacting with its customers, as social network platforms provides an excellent opportunity to collect customer feedback; a necessary instrument in providing quality service that meet the exact needs of customers.

5.6.3 Insights from Tigo

The Tigo brand is an inspirational brand that focuses on consistently meeting and exceeding customer's expectations. The brands main mission is to provide services for people who want to stay in touch, to belong to communities and to be informed and entertained, enabling them

to express their emotions and enhance their lives. The brand does this by employing an approach called the 3 A's, Affordability, Accessibility and Availability; providing affordable services, good coverage and ease of purchase and use. In view of this therefore, the Tigo brand believes that quality is undoubtedly linked with affordability in terms of pricing, accessibility in terms of good technological infrastructure, and availability through communication and excellent customer care.

The company provides affordable, widely accessible and readily available cellular telephony services to its numerous subscribers across the country. This is reflected in Tigo Smart Pack; a call plan that includes making calls, accessing data and sending SMS at a much reduced price. In this fast moving technology era, quality data service is also a prerequisite to providing excellent service, and this the reason Tigo has invested in state of the art technology in ensuring the customer gets value for money.

The success of Tigo is based on the triple 'A' business model which stands for Affordability, Accessibility and Availability. This guarantees that their subscribers experience the best services at the most affordable rates throughout the 10 regions of Ghana and beyond.

Tigo Ghana's mobile financial services team, the team responsible for Tigo cash, has won notable recognition and awards for products and deployment. This is evident of the fact that, providing quality service is a total package that goes beyond providing just the basics.

The brand employs various avenues in communicating its message of quality and affordability to its customers. Social media has been very instrumental in this regard, aside the traditional modes of mass communication, which the brand has also utilized immensely since it started operating in the country. Beyond using traditional and modern media to communicate its brand quality proposition, Tigo is also endeavours to sponsor several programmes and events on the local scene, all in an attempt to increase its brand awareness

among customers. Notable among these sponsorships is the recently held, “Ghana meets Naija”; an annual musical concerts that brings the most sought after artistes from Ghana and Nigeria under one roof.

The people factor plays a major role in communicating a brand’s quality proposition. As a result, Tigo invests hundreds of thousands of Ghana cedis in ensuring that the best people are recruited, trained and motivated enough to provide knowledgeable and excellent quality service at various customer touch points.

5.7 Discussion of Findings

This section will attempt to assess how the findings of both qualitative and quantitative data analysis addresses the research objectives and answer research questions posed at the beginning stages of this study. First and foremost the discussion begins with comparing information gathered from interviewing the three main telecommunication companies captured in this work to assess how their brand quality propositions reflects constructs and factors presented in the conceptual framework of the study. This will be done to establish commonalities amongst perspectives presented by the three telecommunication companies, as well as perspectives from customers’ point of view. This is done to ensure whether organizations and their customers perceive quality by using the same dimensions, and also to know which dimensions of brand quality appears to be more important to the customer.

The framework presents Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, Customer Care, Communication, and Price as dimensions that influence customers’ perception of brand quality, and hence a preference for one brand to the another. In the qualitative data, it appears as though these five dimensions are factors that are seriously considered by all three telecommunication companies in putting forward their brand quality propositions.

In an attempt to increase brand awareness, all three telecommunication companies seem to be engaged in almost the same activities just to endure that they occupy the evoked set of the customer's mind. In the area of sponsorship and entertainment, MTN has in the past been the main sponsor of the annual Ghana Music Awards, which is currently being sponsored by Vodafone. Tigo is as well the current sponsor of Ghana meets Naija, which was formerly sponsored by MTN; an annual musical concert that seeks to pitch Ghanaian artists against their compatriots from Nigeria. Other platforms these three telecommunication companies have used in an attempt to increase their brand awareness include the sponsorship of football tournaments and other sports disciplines, as well as traditional cultural festivals. Other non-entertainment, non-sports areas they have used in increasing their brand awareness is through social causes which they carry out through corporate social responsibility programmes. Examples are the MTN Foundation, and the Vodafone Ghana Foundation. They all argue that, contributing to improve the lives of their current and prospective customers goes a long way in influencing the customer's perception about the brand.

With regards to providing quality service, thus, quality voice calls, all three telecommunication companies agreed that reliable technological infrastructure was important. According to Vodafone, the brand is keen on building the most versatile network, in ensuring that customers are able to connect wherever they find themselves within the boundaries of Ghana. This is evident in the huge sums the company invests in the latest industry technologies. MTN agrees that even though there may be occasional technical challenges, the customers' main reason for choosing a telecommunication network is the ease and clarity that is expected to come with voice calls, an appreciable geographical coverage, and minimum disruptions on the network as possible. For this reason, MTN believes that in influencing customers' perception of quality and preference, provision of quality service is important, and

as such the presence of reliable technological infrastructure is inevitable. Tigo on the other hand believes Accessibility, which is part of its 3A approach only becomes possible with reliable and state of the art industry technology.

Form the conceptual framework of this study, the “human face” of the brand, which is customer care, also plays a vital role in shaping customers’ perception of preference and quality, and this is supported by evidence from the qualitative data. From MTN’s perspective, beyond trying to ensure that technical challenges are minimized to the barest minimum, an organization’s ability to manage a challenge is equally very important. As a result the, in ensuring that a well-orchestrated and consistent message is always communicated to the customer, the brand employs all customer touch points from frontline to back office activities. Through the call center and service centers, the brand ensures that its frontline members are knowledgeable about products and services, as well as show empathy in the event of service failure. It is also the duty of customer care ensuring that customer complaints are resolved in good time. For Vodafone, customer care is considered an organizational strength, evidenced in the fact that they are the telecommunications company with the most customer service points situated at vantage points for easy accessibility to the customer. The brand uses every moment of truth encounter to present itself as the most viable alternative in the telecoms sector in Ghana, hence the importance placed on customer care. In line with this belief, Tigo believes the human factor is very vital in communicating the quality proposition of the brand. The brand invests lots of resources in ensuring that the best people are recruited, trained and motivated enough to provide knowledgeable and excellent quality service at various customer touch points.

Communication plays a key role in ensuring that customers become aware of the company’s brand quality proposition. All three telecoms companies were of the view that in order to

shape customers' perceptions regarding the quality proposition of their brands, the organizations need to tell their own stories; and these stories needed to be told in ways that shape the customer's perception towards a certain direction. For this reason, all three telecommunication companies employ traditional modes of mass communication like advertisements on TV and radio, as well as newspaper advert. To be effective, other below-the-line promotional tactics are employed. Beyond these traditional modes of mass communication, the brands also employ social media in an attempt to interact with customers. Unlike the traditional mass media channels of communication, social media is more interactive, and provides a unique platform for organizations to collect immediate feedback; and in the words of MTN, "a move from brand communication to brand conversation. They also believe social media allows them to influence word-of-mouth communication, which inevitably affects customers' perceptions of quality and preference.

In forming quality perceptions and making a choice between one brand and other alternative brands, the customer considers getting value for money, hence the importance of price in the framework. To the three telecoms companies therefore, providing value goes beyond just affordable price cum quality service. In the 3As approach of Tigo for instance, affordability is one of the constructs in that framework, indicating that Tigo competes on price and as such price forms part of the brands quality proposition. This the brand demonstrates through affordable customer packages like Tigo Smart Pack. This package allows customers to make calls, send sms, and access data at an affordable price. From Vodafone's perspective as well, price can't be extricated from any quality dimension, and for them, the customer must get value for money. This is evident in a call plan called Vodafone X. Vodafone X allows customers to pay a relatively power price for a package that includes voice calls to both Vodafone and non-Vodafone numbers, SMS to both Vodafone and non-Vodafone numbers,

as well as a data package, for a 30-day period. According to Vodafone, in the past year, Vodafone X has become one of its major brand quality propositions, as they argue that with this package, the customer gets value for money than any other alternative brand on the market. MTN is not left out in this thinking as the brand also believes price is an important factor influencing quality perceptions. In line with this thinking, MTN has designed a package called “Pay for me”. This package allows customers with no airtime to successfully make calls, while the recipient bears the cost of the call once he or she agrees to take such call. The brand believes this is another way of providing value to the customer. Even though Tigo believes affordability is a benchmark for providing value for money, all three telecoms companies agree a strong value proposition encompasses more than just price. MTN Money and Tigo Cash are examples of such proposition. However this study has been quiet on this since it is not the focus of this work.

From the quantitative analysis, results from the regression analysis indicate that there is a strong and significant reliability between variables used for the model to represent customer brand preference ($F = 60.20$, Prob.F-stats < 0.05). With regards to the independent variables, Price was found to have the greatest influence on the quality perception and brand preference of respondents sampled for the study ($\beta = 0.221$, $t = 3.368$, $p = 0.001$, < 0.05). This result implies that customers of telecommunications companies in Ghana consider to a large extent, the price element of a brand before deciding which one to patronize. Customer Care came in as the second major contributor to customers’ brand preference as per results of this study ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 2.852$, $p = 0.005$, < 0.05). Also implying that customers of telecommunications companies in Ghana highly consider the human interaction element of a brand before forming quality perceptions, and subsequently, preferring one brand to the other. With these results, there are clear consistencies with facts presented from the industry perspective. Per results

from the quantitative analysis, Brand Awareness ($\beta = 0.020$, $t = 0.351$, $p = 0.726$, > 0.05), Technological Infrastructure ($\beta = 0.042$, $t = 0.710$, $p = 0.479$, > 0.05), and Communication ($\beta = 0.013$, $t = 0.208$, $p = 0.836$, > 0.05), however did not show strong correlations to the constructs being measured. This implies that from the results of the quantitative analysis, two of the five determinants of quality perception were found to influence customers' brand preference, whereas the remaining three failed to meet statistical significance. Qualitatively however, all five determinants of quality perceptions were found to influence customer brand choice.

The study had the following research objectives:

1. To investigate how customers form quality perceptions about brands
2. To analyze how intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of a brand influence customers' perceptions of quality
3. To determine how these characteristics affect customers' preference for a particular brand

And of these objective, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What attributes of a brand do customers consider when forming quality perceptions?
2. Are there any notable characteristics of a brand that influence customers' perceptions of quality?
3. To what extent do these brand attributes inform a customer's decision and preference for a particular brand?

In the framework on which this study was conducted, five intrinsic and extrinsic brand characteristics were positioned as major influencers of quality perception. These characteristics formed part of the framework as a result of interactions with players in the industry as well as customers of telecommunication service providers, with strong foundation in literature. These characteristics are Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure,

Customer Care, Communication, and Price. In forming quality perceptions, customers assess how widely acclaimed a brand name is; the clarity of voice calls as well as the difficulty or ease with which calls are connected; the empathy, speed, willingness with which customer service people carry out their duties; means through which the brand communicates or interacts with them; and as to whether they get value for money for services paid for. From both the qualitative and quantitative analysis, this study has been able to establish the fact that customers to a very large extent, form quality perception about a brand using these intrinsic and extrinsic brand characteristics as notable cues. The high Cronbach alpha values obtained by all five quality dimensions in the reliability test is evidence that there was a strong correlation with quality perception. Even though the strength of the relationship varies from one dimension to the other, all five brand quality dimensions showed strong correlation with quality perception. Insights gathered from industry also support results from quantitative data analysis.

With regards to how these brand characteristics affect customers' preference for a particular brand, the significant role of these brand dimensions varied immensely. With a p-value of 0.001, which is less than the accepted 0.05, Price was found to have the most influence on customers' preference for a brand. This may imply that the Ghanaian customer, above all things, desires to get value for money. This was followed by Customer Care; with a p-value of 0.005 (less than the accepted 0.05). The implication of this is that the human factor within the telecoms service environment plays an integral role in customer brand choice.

Even though statistically, in the context of this study Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, and Communication, do not significantly influence the customer's choice of a brand, these have been found to be significant in other studies, hence the need to perhaps look at them again using different research approach and statistical tools.

Nguyen et al. (2011), posit that there are positive relationships between perceived quality and brand loyalty, between brand awareness and perceived quality, apart from other allied relationships like advertising attitudes and brand awareness, and distribution intensity and brand awareness in emerging markets. Several authorities have found brand awareness, brand image, and consumer attributes to be major antecedents of consumer brand preference (Berry, 2000; Keller, 2003; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Grace and O’Cass, 2005). Veale & Quester (2009), also suggest that extrinsic cues like price, brand, retail outlet and country of origin have been found to influence consumer perceptions of product performance and quality.



CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

From the beginning chapters of this work, through to the previous chapter, this study has sought to establish a seamless relationship between brands, quality perceptions and brand preference. The previous chapter presented empirical results on how some dimensions of a brand influences customers' perceptions of quality, and also how these perceptions of quality affects the consumer's brand choice. The concluded chapter of this study summarizes the entire work, draw conclusions based on analyses from the previous chapter, as well as make recommendations for future research, policy and practice.

6.2 Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess customers brand quality perceptions and preference in the telecommunications industry in Ghana. The position of this study has been that the importance of the product or service brand can be seen primarily on its impact on consumers' choice and their loyalty through identifying and differentiating quality and origin, as well as creating additional value, and that in making a purchasing decision, customer's evaluations of brand quality plays a significant role. Low & Lamb (2000), have suggested that perceived quality of strong brands adds value to consumers' purchase evaluations. Also according to Lindquist & Sirgy (2003), perceived quality can also be viewed as a perpetual outcome generated from processing the product or service attributes that lead consumers to make decisions about the quality of the product.

Furthermore, the study's position was that in making purchasing decisions, the brand is the most important criterion of choice, and not necessarily the physical characteristics of the product; consumers therefore evaluate the product or service, using the brand as "a sign of quality", especially when it does not have any special advantages, compared to competitors' products or services in the sense of physical characteristics. This position is supported by Nilson (2000), who suggests that the focus of successful brand management is to ensure that the brand becomes the preferred choice, and that products or services sold under the brand's umbrella are of value and are perceived as superior and of good quality to those of competitors.

To provide a strong theoretical underpinning for this study, literature was reviewed along the following lines: brands, customer perceptions of quality, brand preference, brand equity, and customer-based brand equity. From literature, 5 dimensions were identified as possible influencers of quality perception in the telecommunications sector. These dimensions were brand awareness, technological infrastructure, customer care, communication, and price. It was the position of this study that these dimensions will not only influence customers' evaluation of brand quality, but also have an effect on their brand choice.

From the literature review, a conceptual framework was thus adapted from Paulrajan & Rajkumar (2011), who have conducted a similar study, in the telecommunications sector of India. Of the six telecommunication operators in Ghana, this study focused on only three, thus, MTN, Vodafon, and Tigo. Reason being that, with a subscriber base of 14,207,778 (MTN), 7,159,556 (Vodafon), 4,264,078 (Tigo), these are the three leading telecoms operators in the industry (NCA, 2015) and thus, easy access to customers, and hence primary data.

In terms of research approach, the study employed the mixed-methods approach as this approach provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative research. It also offers a more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either qualitative or quantitative research can do on their own while helping answer questions that cannot be answered by qualitative and quantitative approaches alone.

The study employed the exploratory research design, using a survey of respondents. This design was adopted because the study sought to provide further insight into how customers form quality perceptions and preference for a particular brand. Furthermore, the sample size for this study was non-representative of the entire population, and as such, this research design was deemed more appropriate.

The population for the study were undergraduate students of the University of Ghana. 300 respondents were sampled for the study using Convenience sampling method. The main data collection instruments were questionnaires and interview. All 300 questionnaires were self-administered. The questionnaires were designed by the researcher, based on the conceptual framework and objectives of the study. Out of the 300 questionnaires that were distributed, 292 were deemed valid, and hence analysed. The Purposive sampling method was also employed in selecting 3 respondents (brands managers) from the 3 telecoms service providers, of which interview sessions were scheduled to collect qualitative data.

A profiling of respondents was done to know the gender distribution, age distribution, programme offered, and educational level of respondents. The profiling also revealed that majority of respondents surveyed for this study were MTN subscribers, followed by Vodafone, and then Tigo; as is reflected in the national statistics (NCA, 2015). Of the 292

responses that were analysed, 173 respondents, representing 59.2% were male while 199 respondents, representing 40.8 were female.

Furthermore, the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression. This was premised on the fact that quantitative data analysis techniques enable numerical representation and manipulation of observations/data for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomenon which reflects the observations/data. A number of studies on customer brand preference (Holt, 2006; Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik 2010) have employed same statistical technique in their data analysis. The analysis was done with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to generate tabular and numerical results for the model.

6.3 Summary on Conceptual Framework, Dependent and Independent Variables

Initially, using multiple regression analysis, the research model was tested and proven to be statistically significant (F-statistics 60.20, Prob. (F-stats.) .000) and a decent 90% explanation for the variance in brand preference. The brand quality dimensions; awareness, technological infrastructure, customer care, communication, and price, were the independent variables in the conceptual framework. Preliminary considerations made to test the internal consistencies of these scales revealed Cronbach's alpha values of above 60% for both dependent and independent variables; an indication that they were highly reliable for the analysis.

The high Cronbach alpha values obtained by all five quality dimensions in the reliability test, as well as their relatively high beta values is testament to the fact that there were strong correlations with quality perception. Even though the strength of the relationship varies from one dimension to the other, all five brand quality dimensions showed strong correlation with

quality perception. However, of the five quality dimensions, price and customer care were found to have significant influence on customers' brand preference in the telecoms sector of Ghana, with p-values of 0.001 and 0.005 respectively, thus, less than the acceptable 0.05. Awareness, technological infrastructure and communication, with a p-value of greater than 0.05 were not found to significantly influence customer brand preference in the telecommunications industry in Ghana. Qualitative data obtained from industry however suggests that all five quality dimensions not only influence customer's perceptions of quality, but also have a major role to play in the eventual brand choice.

6.4 Major Findings of the Study

The study sought to answer the following research questions, which were formed out of the objectives for the study

4. What attributes of a brand do customers consider when forming quality perceptions?
5. Are there any notable characteristics of a brand that influence customers' perceptions of quality?
6. To what extent do these brand attributes inform a customer's decision and preference for a particular brand?

The framework adapted for the study positioned five intrinsic and extrinsic brand characteristics as primary influencers of quality perception. After extensive literature review as well as interactions with stakeholders of the telecommunications industry in Ghana, Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, Customer Care, Communication, and Price, were decided upon as the primary influencers of quality perceptions and preference, hence their inclusion in the conceptual framework. It was the position of this researcher that in forming quality perceptions, customers assess how widely acclaimed a brand name is; the clarity of voice calls as well as the difficulty or ease with which calls are connected; the empathy,

speed, willingness with which customer service people carry out their duties; means through which the brand communicates or interacts with them; and as to whether they get value for money for services paid for. The current study has been able to establish, from both qualitative and quantitative analysis that customers, to a very large extent, form quality perception about a brand using these intrinsic and extrinsic brand characteristics as notable signals. The high Cronbach alpha values obtained by all five quality dimensions in the reliability test attests to the fact that there were strong correlations with quality perception. Insights gathered from industry also support results from quantitative data analysis.

With regards to how these brand characteristics affect customers' preference for a particular brand, the significant role of these brand dimensions varied immensely. With a p-value of 0.001, which is less than the accepted 0.05, Price was found to have the most influence on customers' preference for a brand. This may imply that the Ghanaian customer, above all things, desires to get value for money. This was followed by Customer Care; with a p-value of 0.005 (less than the accepted 0.05). The implication of this is that the human factor within the telecoms service environment plays an integral role in customer brand choice.

Even though statistically, in the context of this study Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, and Communication, do not significantly influences the customer's choice of a brand, these have been found to be significant in other studies, hence the need to perhaps look at them again using different a research approach and statistical tools.

Nguyen et al. (2011), posit that there are positive relationships between perceived quality and brand loyalty, between brand awareness and perceived quality, apart from other allied relationships like advertising attitudes and brand awareness, and distribution intensity and brand awareness in emerging markets. Several authorities have found brand awareness, brand image, and consumer attributes to be major antecedents of consumer brand preference (Berry,

2000; Keller, 2003; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Grace & O’Cass, 2005). Veale & Quester (2009), also suggest that extrinsic cues like price, brand, retail outlet and country of origin have been found to influence consumer perceptions of product performance and quality.

6.5 Conclusion

In almost every industry the world over, customers’ perceptions of the quality of a service or product have been strongly determined by the strength of a brand. As a result, customers are more likely to patronize the products and services of a brand that is perceived to have a superior brand identity to that of other brands within the same industry, because stronger brands are perceived to deliver quality. Due to this behavioral pattern, many organizations the world over, work tirelessly to build a stronger brand identity within the markets in which they operate.

The focus of this study therefore was to determine, as well as analyse some of the factors that influence customers’ perceptions of quality, and how these perceptions affect their brand preference within the telecoms sector of Ghana. The main purpose of the study was to assess the dimensions through which customers form their perceptions of quality about a particular telecommunications brand, and how these perceptions influence their preferences.

The conceptual framework for the study presented Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, Customer Care, Communication, and Price as dimensions that influence customers’ perception of brand quality, and hence a preference for one brand to the another. A mixed method approach was employed for this study and as such analysis of data collected was both qualitative and quantitative. From both the qualitative and quantitative analyses, this

study has been able to establish the fact that customers to a very large extent, consider these quality dimensions as vital cues in forming quality perception about a brand. The high Cronbach alpha values obtained by all five quality dimensions in the reliability test indicates the fact that there were strong correlations with quality perception. Insights gathered from industry also supported results from quantitative data analysis. Results however varied with regards to how these quality dimensions affected customer brand preference. Quantitatively, of the five quality dimensions, only two, thus, price and customer care significantly influenced customer brand preference. Brand Awareness, Technological Infrastructure, and Communication, according to this study, did not significantly influence the customer's choice of a brand, even though these have been proven to be very significant influencers in other studies.

It is therefore the position of this study that, regardless of the findings, brand managers and brand strategists in the telecoms sector of Ghana pay particular attention to building stronger corporate, product/service brands; taking into account all the brand quality dimensions highlighted in this study. This has become important as these brand quality dimensions have been found to have significant influence on customers' perceptions of quality and preference in various studies, and in different industries.

6.6 Recommendations

In as much as organizations would like to increase brand awareness and communication in an attempt to shape customers' perception, more attention must be given to customer care and providing value for money, as actual service quality will shape perception better than anything else. Findings from this study have revealed that the customer is more concerned with getting value for money, as well as getting excellent customer care. In this regard, it is

recommended that service providers pay attention to the quality of service provided, and also develop skills to better manage “moment of truth” encounters.

In the area of communication, even though traditional advertising is still important, a more interactive platform like social media (where feedback is almost immediate), must also be given prominence. Today’s customer will like to be engaged, and have a role to play in the ultimate product or service that comes to the market. Hence it is recommended that brands that wish to stand out and become the preferred choice of customers move from just brand communication, to “brand conversation”.

Future studies must consider looking at other areas like data, and mobile money services. And for studies that may attempt to explore the same topic within the same context, it is recommended that other research approaches or statistical techniques be employed to either confirm or disproving the findings of this study. This is because, even though brand awareness, technological infrastructure, and communication were not found to have significance impart on customer brand preference, these factors have been influential in other studies, within other geographical contexts. Beyond confirming and disproving findings of this study, future scholarly work will contribute to the growing literature in this area of study.

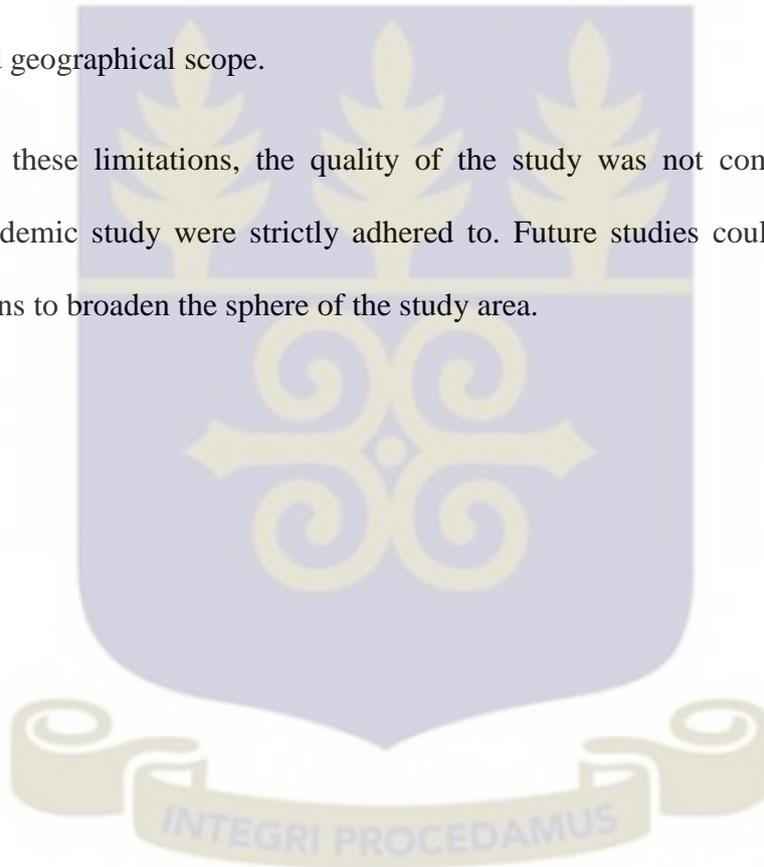
6.7 Limitations

One of the major limitations of the study was geographical. In the light of the fact that the telecommunications companies in Ghana have nationwide operations, a wider scope would have been preferable. This would have ensured more representation, throwing into perspective other influencing factors of brand preference which might not have been captured in the current study.

Closely linked to the geographical scope is the sample for the study. Considering the fact that there are six telecommunications service operators in Ghana, with over 20 million subscribers, capturing all six telecoms operators for the study with a much larger and a more representative sample size would have allowed for a better generalization of research findings.

Time and budgetary constraints were major challenges that confronted this study, as good financial support and time would have allowed the researcher to consider a much wider contextual and geographical scope.

Regardless of these limitations, the quality of the study was not compromised, as rules governing academic study were strictly adhered to. Future studies could therefore address these limitations to broaden the sphere of the study area.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was designed by a final year, MPhil. student of University of Ghana Business School as part of an academic exercise to collect data for final Thesis. Topic: Brand Quality Perceptions and Preference in the Telecoms Industry in Ghana: Insights form MTN, Vodafone and Tigo. Please you are assured that any data provided will be used for academic purposes only and also treated with utmost confidentiality.

Please tick boxes as applicable and fill out spaces where necessary.

Section A: Biographic Data

1. Sex: Male [] Female []
2. Age: 18 – 20 [] 21 – 23 [] 24 – 27 []
3. Level: 100 [] 200 [] 300 [] 400 []
4. Programme:
5. Which of the following brands is your preferred telecoms service provider?
MTN [] Vodafone [] Tigo []
6. Which of these brands would you actually use, or recommend to others?
MTN [] Vodafone [] Tigo []

Section B: Perception of Quality and Brand Preference

On a scale of 1 – 5, please indicate your agreement or disagreement to the following statements by ticking the appropriate box. Where (1) represents (Strongly Disagree); (2 – Disagree); (3 – Undecided); (4 – Agree); and (5 - Strongly Agree).

No	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
	Brand Awareness Influence					
7	A brand name influences my perception of quality					
8	My choice of a telecoms provider is based on perceived quality					
9	My choice of a telecoms service provider is based on expected quality					
10	The strength of an organization's brand influences my choice (preference)					
	Technological Infrastructure					
11	The geographical coverage of a network influences my preference					
12	The quality of voice calls influences my perception of quality					
13	Call drop rates tells a lot about the quality of technological infrastructure of a telecoms provider					
14	I am always assured of instant connectivity whenever I make a call					
	Customer Care					
15	I prefer my current telecoms provider because when I call to lodge complaints of a more technical nature, it is forwarded to the appropriate team for redress					
16	The speed with which complaints are resolved reflects the business orientation of a service provider, hence my perception of quality delivery					
17	My network provider shows empathy when I call to lodge a complaint					
	Marketing Communication					
18	My perception of quality and preference is informed by advertisements of the brand					

19	My perception of quality and preference is influenced by the tact with which corporate communication is handled					
20	My perception of quality and preference is largely based on recommendations from friends and family					
	Price					
21	I prefer my telecoms provider because of their affordable call rates					
22	I prefer my service provider because of their generous promotional offers					
23	I prefer my telecoms provider because of their innumerable product/service range					
	Brand Preference					
24	My network provides services as expected					
25	My network delivers value as promised					
26	I will continue patronizing my current service provider					
27	I will recommend my current telecoms provider to family and friends					
28	I will continually remain loyal to my network and patronize other services under their umbrella					



Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide was designed by a final year, MPhil. student of University of Ghana Business School as part of an academic exercise to collect data for final Thesis. Topic: Brand Quality Perceptions and Preference in the Telecoms Industry in Ghana: Insights form MTN, Vodafone and Tigo. Please you are assured that any data provided will be used for academic purposes only and also treated with utmost confidentiality.

1. What does your brand represent?
2. What is your brand proposition?
3. What brand identity has your organization projected over the years?
4. How has this been done?
5. How or with what approach have you managed to maintain consistency in your brand communications?
6. In comparison to other brands, will you say your brand has projected an image of quality in the minds of consumers?
7. If YES, how was it done?
8. Do you think your current and potential customers perceive your brand as providing quality service in relation to other brands?
9. If YES, how do you know this?
10. Will you say customers prefer your brand as a result of this perception?
11. What elements of your brand have you positioned to communicate that message of “quality”?
12. How have you managed your customer care to ensure that it projects that image of “quality” in the minds of your current and potential customers?

13. In your corporate communications, what elements of your brand have you consistently projected to create the image of “quality” in the minds of consumers?
14. Has pricing played any role in projecting this image; if YES, how?
15. To extent has advertising contributed to this?

