

SERVQUAL and Customer Engagement in Nigeria's Telecom Industry: Utilitarian versus Hedonism Perspectives

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Abstract

The telecommunication industry has been contributing to the GDP of Nigeria with services that cut across numerous sectors of Nigerian economic space. The sector faces numerous challenges; rising customer complaints on dropped calls, voice and data quality, and poor connectivity are raising concerns about service quality. The study examined the SERVQUAL and customer engagement among service providers in Nigeria's telecom industry with attention on the utilitarian value and hedonistic perspective. Face-to-face intercepts were adopted via non-probability sampling in data collection. 315 samples were validated as CB-SEM was utilized in the analysis of ten (10) hypothesized relationships. Service empathy and service tangibility were significant in predicting both utilitarian and hedonistic drives of customer engagement, while service responsiveness predicted only the utilitarian drive of customer engagement. Thus, the basic or functional needs are the major drivers in customer engagement in the telecommunication industry, with emotional connections and tangibility of services at the core of the functional and hedonistic needs. The study recommended that telecom service providers encourage training and re-training of their contact service personnel on empathetic connections during a service encounter as well as improve their responsiveness while creating positive tangible evidence that connects to the functional and emotional needs of telecom customers.

Key words: SERVQUAL, Customer engagement, Telecommunication, Utility, Hedonism

INTRODUCTION

The telecommunication industry is one of the economic drivers at the domestic level and the global level. The sector is notable for its role in fostering innovation and the enhancement of productivity (Oladele, 2024) across numerous sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education, and the financial sector. For instance, it provides supportive tools that promote diversification through human capacity enhancement and improving the knowledge economy (Danbatta, 2017). As a structural economic driver, the sector contributes about 9.19% to Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) (Balogun, 2026) and 6.4% of global GDP as at 2025 (Okamgba, 2026).

As a dominant force in Nigeria's information and communication technology (ICT) sector, with a significant 12.24% increase in the Q1 2026 GDP report revealing an expansion that is driven by increasing data consumption, enterprise connectivity, and deep embedment of digital services in Nigeria's economy, the sector boasts as a defensive pillar of Nigeria's economy given the expansion of telecom services (Balogun, 2026). These services are indicative of Nigerians' having an appetite for mobile data, video streaming, social media commerce, gaming, and digital banking, in addition to deepened integration between telecom operators and fintech services despite the prevailing challenges such as fiber vandalism and multiple taxation (Balogun, 2026). The challenges are taking their toll on service qualities.

Recently, the service qualities of the telecom industry have become a concern. As at Q1 2021, service-related complaints reached 3,019 from just four Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) channels (Adinde, 2021; Daniel & Ojobi, 2020). Consumer complaints are rising following ballooning data consumption in the midst of poor service quality, erratic network availability, poor voice calls, rapid data depletion, and poor internet connectivity (Adaramola, 2026). The Nigerian government is expressing strong concern across major telecom networks regarding poor call quality, data performance and coverage, poor network quality, dropped calls, and service disruptions despite the establishment of

conditions required for improved service delivery (Tunji, 2026).

The quality of telecom services is related to consumer behavior. For instance, Parasuraman et al. (1988) indicate SERVQUAL dimensions in assessing customer expectation and actual experience in a service encounter. Consequently, extant literature in Nigeria has often focused on customer perception (Osoteimehin et al. 2015), customer patronage (Udom, 2024), customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Palladan & Ahmad, 2019) and rarely on customer engagement, especially with regard to the utilitarian and hedonistic customer engagement. These traditional metrics majorly capture outcomes, whereas customer engagement reflects active, interactive, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral customer participation. Customer engagement is a vital aspect of service research that encompasses customer relationships and business success in the modern marketplace.

Barrett et al. (2024) note that research has paid limited attention to the relationship between service contexts and customer engagement, particularly in utilitarian settings. The concept of customer engagement in literature mostly involves the functional perspectives, such as the consumption of the service that is primarily outcome-oriented (Collier et al. 2014), and this is in contrast with hedonistic perspectives that dwell on pleasure. Services that are utilitarian can influence how customer engagement unfolds (Barrett et al. 2024), although in a meta-analysis of social media customer engagement, De Oliveira Santini et al. (2020) find hedonistic service effects to be approximately three times stronger than utilitarian effects. Whether this differential holds in a telecom context is key question motivating this study.

The hedonistic dimension connects with customers' desire for pleasure and fun, while the utilitarian dimension connects with outcome-oriented values, although both are different in the outcomes from service participation (Blinda et al. 2019). Their differences also border on the attachment of emotions to various extents (Wang & Jiang, 2019). Studies indicate that hedonistic and utilitarian features of services are not mutually exclusive because the services can be

highly dependent on the features (Huber et al. 2018). Evidence suggests that customer perception depends on the goal of consumption (Ding & Keh, 2016) and on instrumentality or functionality (Batra & Ahtola, 1991), pointing to different drivers of service engagement. For instance, some customers may be engaged in telecom services from the perspective of functional value such as network reliability, cost efficiency, and responsiveness or experiential value such as digital entertainment, value-added services, pleasure, and social media/lifestyle apps.

However, hedonistic and utilitarian customer engagement are correlated because customers often experience both emotional satisfaction and functional benefits simultaneously during service interactions, making the two forms of engagement conceptually related yet empirically distinguishable. This emerging reality is often omitted in research. A disconnect occurs when telecom service providers market one over the other. Consumers may not enjoy the hedonistic benefits at the expense of baseline utility. Customers will expect to receive reliable service and responsive customer support despite the desire for luxury, fun, and pleasure from telecom services. Consequently, while this remains a theory, the study seeks to examine the SERVQUAL dimensions within the context of utility and hedonistic customer engagement in the telecommunication sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1988) helps in the measurement of the gap between what a customer expects from a service and their actual perception of the delivered service. It evaluates service quality using core dimensions known as RATER: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness. While it is useful to businesses in diagnosing service failures, researchers have paired it with other theories grounded in core psychological theories like Kano's three-factor theory; behavioral theories like the stimulus-organism-response model; and cultural adaptation theories like Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. Kano's three-factor theory was adopted and aligned with Parasuraman et al.

(1988) SERVQUAL, given that it classifies service attributes into basic needs, performance needs, and excitement attributes, thereby covering the utilitarian and hedonistic aspects of this study and also connecting with SERVQUAL dimensions.

According to Kano et al. (1984), while the basic needs are the elementary requirements that make customers dissatisfied when they are absent; a direct and proportional relationship is posited with performance needs such that satisfaction increases with high performance; the excitement needs encompass unexpected features that make customers delighted when they are present in a service, although it does not cause dissatisfaction when it is not present. Lin et al. (2017) suggest an asymmetry and non-linear nature of customer satisfaction such that it enables firms to focus on improved service quality and customer engagement. According to Chukwuoyims et al. (2024), there are several benefits from satisfying a client, such as less time spent by a customer in a service encounter. Customer engagement is demonstrated in research to influence customer satisfaction (Sharma & Sharma, 2024). It is not only associated with post-consumption but also critical in pre- and post-purchase behavior (Gálvez-Ruiz et al. 2023), while its importance to businesses is highlighted by its ability to enable organizations to anticipate and satisfy customer needs at a profit. The engagement may be cognitive, affective, or behavioral, but it is essentially context-based (Sharma & Sharma, 2024).

Service reliability

Service reliability is an essential dimension of SERVQUAL that focuses on service consistency, accuracy, and dependability of a service provider to deliver promised services that are devoid of errors and delays (Parasuraman et al. 1988). It is important in fostering confidence and long-term customer relationships. When a service is reliable, it influences customer satisfaction and loyalty (Rizkina & Labo, 2022). In line with Kano's three-factor theory, it is the basic need of customers that acts as a hygiene factor to which customers expect to be accurate and dependable such that their presence prevents customer dissatisfaction. Extant literature indicates a positive effect on satisfaction (Susilo et al. 2025),

while hedonistic and utilitarian services produce different service participation outcomes (Blinda et al. 2019). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Service reliability is significantly related to utilitarian customer engagement

H2: Service reliability is significantly related to hedonistic customer engagement

Service assurance

This encompasses the competence, credibility, and ability of the service provider's personnel, including the capacity to transmit trust and confidence to customers (Parasuraman et al. 1988). Service assurance from a utilitarian perspective involves the mitigation of risk and uncertainties and encouraging promises that permit customers to effectively and efficiently attain service objectives. The hedonistic aspect involves assurances that deliver comfort, security, and positive emotional experiences. Also, it is a basic need and hygiene factor that customers expect to be accurate and may not generate excitement but will prevent dissatisfaction when it is present. Extant literature confirms a positive effect on customer satisfaction (Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2023). Theoretically, firms can strengthen functional and emotional aspects of customer engagement when there is a service assurance. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: Service assurance is significantly related to utilitarian customer engagement

H4: Service assurance is significantly related to hedonistic customer engagement

Service responsiveness

The concept of service responsiveness involves a service provider's ability to deliver timely service, in addition to the willingness to ensure customers' concerns are appropriately addressed (Parasuraman et al. 1988). In line with Kano's three-factor theory, it is a performance need given that it aligns to service speed and effectiveness and efficiency. When it is utilitarian, functional satisfaction is provided, like increased value and

efficient service, which can strengthen customers' behavioral and cognitive engagement. For instance, Ayed (2016) shows the positive influence of reliability on customer satisfaction and loyalty when service providers respond consistently to the customers' needs. The hedonic aspect focuses on emotional experiences, enjoyment, and quick responses that make customers feel valued and appreciated in a way that enhances their emotional connection to the brand. Studies such as Ononogbo and Odinakachukwu (2025) confirm the importance of responsiveness in quality service delivery, while Ibrahim and Abubakar (2023) show its effect on customer satisfaction. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H5: Service responsiveness is significantly related to utilitarian customer engagement

H6: Service responsiveness is significantly related to hedonistic customer engagement

Service empathy

This dimension of SERVQUAL emphasizes the importance of understanding and caring for the needs and emotions of the customers. Empathic services focus on individualized care (Susilo et al. 2025; Adah et al., 2025). The utilitarian perspective concentrates on improving problem resolution, mitigating the efforts invested by customers in a service encounter while enhancing how they perceive services. As an excitement factor, it provides personalized attention beyond customers' expectations. It calls for empathetic interactions that elicit pleasure and enjoyment. When customers experience a high level of empathy, long-term relationships can develop. According to Barrett et al. (2024), empathy is an important variable in engagement, especially in the functional and experiential aspects of service consumption. Studies such as Susilo et al. (2025) confirm a positive influence on user satisfaction. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H7: Service empathy is significantly related to utilitarian customer engagement

H8: Service empathy is significantly related to hedonistic customer engagement

Service tangibility

This is concerned with the physical elements in the delivery of services. It involves tools such as employee appearance and computers used in communication. They are tangible components such as equipment (Susilo et al. 2025), which can enhance how customers perceive service quality, including the utilitarian and hedonistic perspectives. Functional values and efficiency are enhanced by adopting a well-maintained facility and equipment while a hedonistic perspective encompasses the attractiveness of equipment and memorable experiences that elicit positive emotions (Barrett et al. 2024). As an excitement factor, it stimulates customers emotionally and enhances experiential value. Extant literature indicates a significant relationship between service tangibles and customer satisfaction

(Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2023). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H9: Service tangibility is significantly related to utilitarian customer engagement

H10: Service tangibility is significantly related to hedonistic customer engagement

Conceptual model

The conceptual model on Figure 1 indicates utilitarian customer engagement and hedonistic customer engagement as an outcome of the SERVQUAL dimensions (RATER). Service reliability, service assurance, service responsiveness, service empathy, and service tangibility are useful dimensions for measuring a company's service quality.

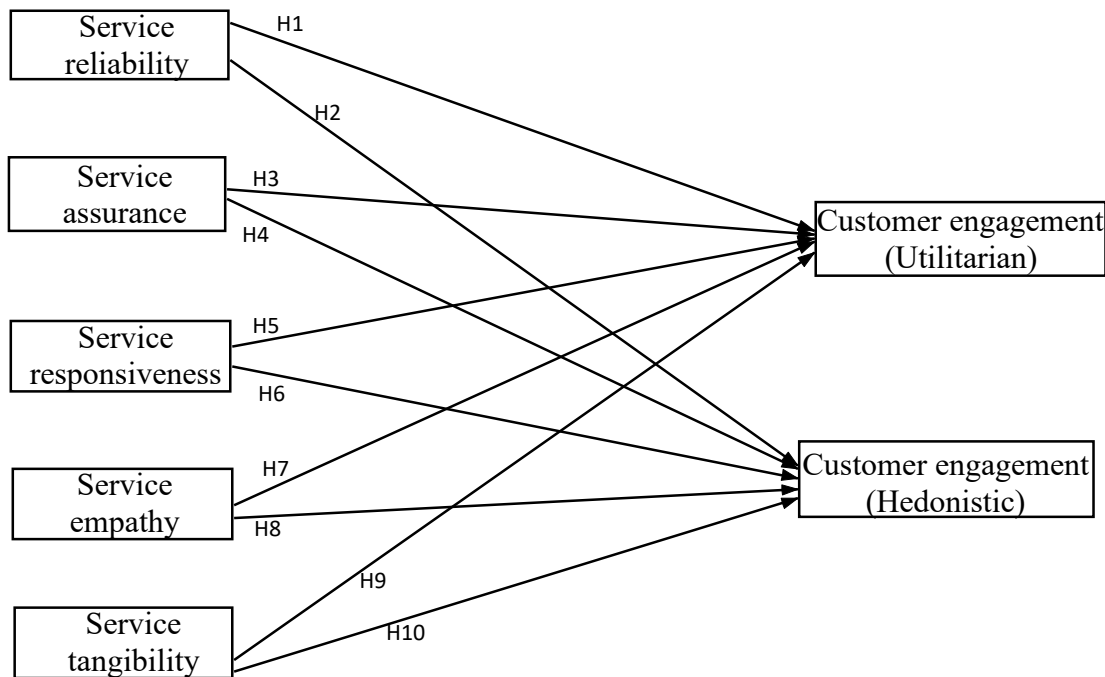


Figure 1: Conceptual model

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study was collected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique given the non-existence of a sampling frame. Specifically, the face-to-face technique was used by intercepting the respondents at different locations that include universities and

polytechnics, churches, residential areas, markets and commercial plazas, and financial locations like locations where PoS agents are densely populated. This approach and choice of locations permitted diverse demographics. The variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale on a structured questionnaire that comprised demographics and the SERVQUAL dimensions,

including hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of customer engagement. The variables were adopted and modified from Parasuraman et al. (1988) for the SERVQUAL dimensions and Barrett et al., (2024) for customer engagement (See appendix A).

The questionnaire consisted of 21 measurement items with scaling graduating from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data was analyzed using SPSS and AMOS 23 software. 384 persons were involved in the survey, although 315 respondents completed the survey, yielding an 82% response rate. The high response rate suggests strong respondent cooperation and enhances confidence in the representativeness and reliability of the study findings. The 18% non-response implies residual caution and potential selection bias remaining but also an improved representativeness and low risk of nonresponse bias. Out of the 315 samples, about 40% were within the age group of 35 – 44 years, 23% were within the age of 25 – 34 years, 18% were within 45 – 54 years, 11% were within the age range of 18 – 24 years, and 8% were within the age of 55 – 64 years. 53% were male and 47% female. The study included education classification, and the majority of the respondents, representing 34%, had postgraduate education; 31% were graduates; 24% had diplomas, while college certificate holders and first school leavers represented 9% and 2% of the sample.

RESULTS

The study considered the SERVQUAL dimensions and customer engagement in Nigeria's telecommunication industry with specific attention on the utilitarian and hedonistic perspectives. Covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) was used in the analysis. Out of the ten (10) hypothesized relationships, only five (5) paths were found to have a significant influence on customer engagement. With respect to the SEM analysis, the model supported strong parsimony given the strong explanations of the independent variables accounting for 98.4% utilitarian customer engagement and 93.8% hedonistic customer engagement.

The reliability of the scales was measured via Cronbach alpha using 0.6 (Malhotra, 1997; Oteh et al. 2021) and construct reliability using 0.7 (Hair et al. 2010; Oloveze et al. 2022). As indicated on Table 1, the references for Cronbach's alpha and construct reliability were met for each of the variables. The validity was assessed using the factor loadings ($\lambda \geq 0.6$) of the indicators as suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Oloveze et al. (2024), while the average variance extracted that exceeded the 0.5 threshold further justified the construct reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Oloveze et al. 2023).

Table 1: Reliability and validity assessment

Variables	Scale items	Factor loadings	Cronbach alpha	Construct reliability	Average variance extracted
Service reliability	SR1	.769	.70	.79	.56
	SR2	.731			
	SR3	.741			
Service assurance	SA1	.750	.71	.75	.50
	SA2	.709			
	SA3	.658			
Service responsiveness	SRE1	.781	.82	.82	.70
	SRE2	.890			
Service empathy	SE1	.668	.63	.70	.54
	SE2	.790			
Service tangibility	ST1	.925	.64	.71	.57
	ST2	.707			
Customer engagement (Utilitarian)	CEU1	.755	.75	.70	.54
	CEU2	.712			

Customer engagement (hedonism)	CEH1	.855	.80	.79	.66
	CEH2	.762			

In the case of sampling adequacy, the value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was used to measure the sampling adequacy. With KMO (.742), it is above the reference threshold of .500, thereby justifying sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test of sphericity value (3259.735; $p < .000$) confirms rejection of the null hypothesis of no variance and confirms the data meeting the assumptions for the analysis. The assessment of common method (CMB) bias for the investigation of artificial inflation or deflation of relationships between variables was executed using Herman's single-factor test, which involved loading all the construct's items into unrotated exploratory factor analysis (see appendix C). The one-factor test accounted for 33.89%, thereby indicating

CMB not to be a major threat given that the total reference threshold is 50%.

Testing the hypothesis and structural model

Covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) was used in the analysis. The structural model was assessed using R^2 , absolute fit measures, incremental fit measures, and parsimonious fit measures as indicated on Table 2. The values in the model indicate a reasonably good model given the references (Lai & Li, 2005). Also, the R^2 for the dependent variables on Table 2 were high (CEU = .984; CEH = .938), thereby revealing a strong explanation of variance in the dependent variables by the predictors in the model.

Table 2: Goodness-of-fit measures

Indicator	Reference	Value in the model
Chi-square - CMIN/df	≤ 5.0	3.713
Root means residual	≤ 0.08	0.066
Goodness-of-fit index	≥ 0.90	0.910
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index	≥ 0.80	0.840
Normed fit index	≥ 0.90	0.934
Relative fit index	≥ 0.90	0.898
Incremental fit index	≥ 0.90	0.951
Tucker-Lewis index	≥ 0.90	0.923
Comparative fit index	≥ 0.90	0.950
Standardized root mean residual	≤ 0.08	0.067
Root mean square error of approximation	≤ 0.08	0.079
R^2 Customer engagement (utilitarian) (CEU)		0.984
R^2 Customer engagement (Hedonism) (CEH)		0.938

The evaluation of the SEM was done via statistical significance of the structural loads using p-values (0.001–0.05). The results on Table 3 and Figure 2 confirm a significant relationship for only H5, H7, H8, H9, and H10. The effect of service responsiveness on customer engagement was confirmed through the customers' utilitarian reasons for engagement with a service provider (H5: $\beta = 0.945$; $p = 0.001$). Empirical evidence was also found for H7 and H8 from service empathy. Specifically, the importance of service empathy in customer engagement is demonstrated through the utilitarian values (H7:

$\beta = 0.339$; $p = 0.018$) and hedonism perspectives (H8: $\beta = 0.862$; $p = 0.026$) following their statistical significance. Regarding service tangibility, the empirical evidence that was found led to the acceptance of the effect of service tangibility on the utilitarian perspective of customer engagement (H9: $\beta = -0.190$; $p = 0.025$) and the hedonistic perspective of customer engagement (H10: $\beta = 1.832$; $p = 0.000$). By contrast, there is no empirical evidence to accept H1 and H2 from service reliability, H3 and H4 from service assurance, and H6 from service responsiveness.

Table 3: Hypothesized relationships

Hypothesis	Unstd. Estimates	Standard error	T	Sig.	Result
H1: SR→CEU	-.048	.042	-1.143	.253	Not supported
H2: SR→CEH	-.151	.107	-1.412	.158	Not supported
H3: SA→CEU	-.008	.042	-.196	.845	Not supported
H4: SA→CEH	-.099	.106	-.937	.349	Not supported
H5: SRE→CEU	.945	.022	42.536	.000	Supported
H6: SRE→CEH	-.037	.046	-.802	.422	Not supported
H7: SE→CEU	.339	.144	2.357	.018	Supported
H8: SE→CEH	.862	.386	2.233	.026	Supported
H9: ST→CEU	-.190	.085	-2.237	.025	Supported
H10: ST→CEH	1.832	.299	6.131	.000	Supported

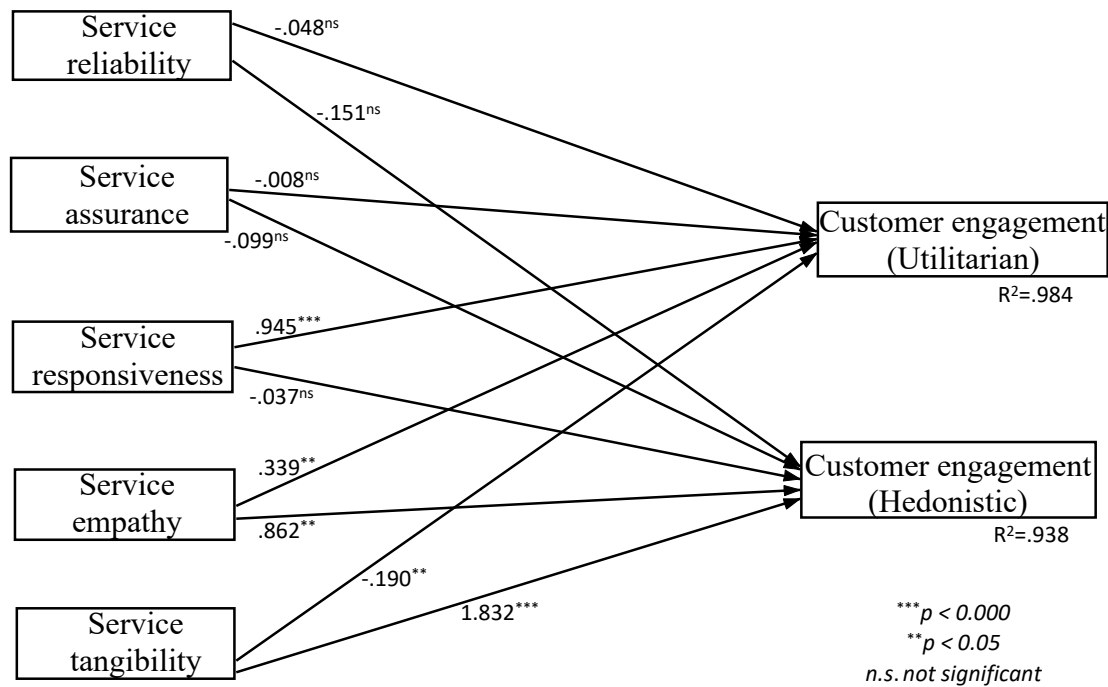


Figure 2: Result of conceptual model

Discussion

The study contributes to research in several ways such as the theoretical contributions and practical aspects. Prior studies on SERVQUAL dimensions have focused on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, patronage, and retention, largely ignoring customer engagement. In the few studies that do address customer engagement, utilitarian and hedonistic perspectives were evaluated using a systematic review (Barrett et al. 2024). To the best of the author's knowledge, no prior empirical study examined utilitarian and hedonistic customer engagement as dual outcome constructs in the Nigerian service context. Therefore, the study

built on existing studies on SERVQUAL as well as customer engagement by assessing a model that was validated with SERVQUAL dimensions as antecedents of utilitarian and hedonistic customer engagement. This study is one of the few studies that empirically evaluated customer engagement, first from a utilitarian and hedonistic perspective in the telecommunication industry and second as an outcome variable and not a predictor (see Barrett et al. 2024).

The non-significant paths from service reliability and assurance to customer engagement indicate that although customers expect reliable services and assurances as 'must-have' attributes in driving engagement, they do not differentiate

service providers or influence customers to engage given the similarity of the service offerings. The low differentiation in addition to the market saturation weakened the predictive power of the variables, given that customer switching is based on internet speed, price, and promotional offers. Further, highly automated customer interactions like self-service platforms reduce the influence of service assurance on engagement, implying that customers have less direct contact with service personnel.

Theoretically, the study showed that not all SERVQUAL dimensions are important in customer engagement, especially through the utilitarian and hedonistic perspective. First, service responsiveness was proven to empirically influence customer engagement's utilitarian perspective among the service providers in the telecommunication industry. Second, service empathy influenced both utilitarian and hedonistic customer engagement in the telecommunication industry. Third, service tangibility influenced utilitarian and hedonistic customer engagement in the telecommunication industry. These results align with extant literature such as Barrett et al. (2024), which reveals differences between utilitarian and hedonistic customer engagement, and Susilo et al. (2025), on SERVQUAL influencing user satisfaction and continuation behavior. Others such as Lukman and Indrawati (2026) highlight the important role of e-SERVQUAL dimensions in user satisfaction.

Therefore, the theoretical implication of service responsiveness indicates a positive effect on the utilitarian customer engagement. It buttresses increasing adjustments on service responsiveness in the telecommunication sector by the service providers, which will lead to a significant increase in the utilitarian customer engagement. In other words, quick response, prompt service, and willingness to help customers are significant in customers' engagement with a service provider during a service encounter. With respect to service empathy, a positive change will also influence a positive result in both utilitarian and hedonistic customer engagement. However, in theory, service empathy produces a higher effect on hedonistic customer engagement than utilitarian customer engagement. This aligns with De Oliveira Santini et al. (2020) on hedonistic

customer engagement in services being three times stronger than utilitarian customer engagement in consumption contexts while also supporting the argument of Barrett et al., (2024) on hedonistic customer engagement and utilitarian customer engagement being fundamentally different in effect in a service context.

With regard to service tangibility, both hedonistic customer engagement and utilitarian customer engagement are theoretically influenced by service tangibility, although with different results. An increase in service tangibility negatively influences utilitarian customer engagement. Although not expected, it supports the argument of Hellen and Gummerus (2013) on tangibility not always enhancing customer experience because of its dependence on how customers interpret service experience. Also, service elements that are poorly designed create customer irritation in utilitarian contexts, which can reduce functional evaluations (Demoulin & Willems, 2019). However, service tangibility positively influences hedonistic customer engagement. Therefore, in theory, service tangibility produces greater disengagement among customers who prioritize utility in the telecommunication sector but positive reactions from hedonistic customer engagement because of pleasurable experiences in a service encounter. This can lead to advocacy and participation in a service.

Practically, while the results of our model support Parasuraman et al. (1988) service quality dimensions and its usefulness in industries in assessing the gap between customer expectations and actual customer perception of the services received, the practical implication of service responsiveness on utilitarian customer engagement emphasizes the foundational importance of baseline needs of customers in the telecommunication industry. Service responsiveness is proven as a catalyst in this case, as it points to the need of telecommunication service providers to strictly focus on efficiency, functional results, and problem-solving such as tailor-made individualized solutions. It reflects customers' basic need for speed, accuracy, and completion of tasks in a service encounter (Widagda et al. 2024). This arises from the

reduction in cognitive effort and time spent (efficiency) by engaged customers.

Service empathy practically indicates that consumers' consumption needs from a telecommunication service provider are driven by the functional, goal-oriented, practical success of the service as well as the emotional, experiential, and sensory pleasure during a service encounter. The implication is that while service empathy enhances the utilitarian customer engagement by providing basic satisfaction, the hedonistic customer engagement is tripled in effect given the psychological comfort, experiential pleasure, and value-in-use enhancement. Therefore, it calls for a dual-track frontline training that promotes cognitive empathy for utility and affective empathy for hedonism. This is essential because customer engagement goes beyond customer satisfaction to generate long-term business results such as fostering brand advocacy and encouragement of co-creation.

The impact of service tangibility implies conversion of invisible services to functional success and emotional pleasure from tangible elements such that it impacts customer engagement's utilitarian and hedonistic value. It calls for the balancing of functional and sensory elements of service tangibles across the various channels of the service provider. However, the inverse relationship of service tangibility and utilitarian customer engagement implies the need to be cautious in designing service tangibility in the telecommunication sector to improve how customers experience services, given that it can backfire, especially when they lead to operational friction.

This suggests that customer engagement with tangible services are evaluated differently depending if it is driven by functional or experiential motives. For instance, efficiency and value for money drives utilitarian engagement but attractive service centers may not drive the functional expectations. Plausible reasons can arise from customers' access to telecommunications services through mobile applications that reduces their reliance on physical environment, and the digitalized sector making utilitarian customers to focus more on technological efficiency rather than physical facilities. Service tangibility's positive influence

on hedonic engagement explains the roles of service tangibility such as interactive digital displays and innovative productive demonstrations in eliciting emotional connection. Plausible explanation could be the nature of advanced technological stores and interactive service experiences enhancing prestige and customer's curiosity and emotions.

Utilitarian customer engagement reveals customers' focus on efficiency and speed, but disengagement can set in when service designs affect customers' experience, thereby leading to frustration. Therefore, it informs the need for service providers to not only audit their service tangibles but also modify them as well as create a balance between the tangibles and digital assets in order not to destroy the utilitarian value by improving the aesthetic/hedonistic values.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings show that SERVQUAL dimensions influence customer engagement differently in the telecommunication service sector. In using SEM analysis through CB-SEM, service responsiveness, service empathy, and service tangibility were significant predictors of customer engagement with different effects on utilitarian customer engagement and hedonistic customer engagement. While service empathy and service tangibility provide strong evidence of a significant relationship to hedonistic customer engagement, their effects on utilitarian customer engagement were comparably lesser. This suggests that investments in appealing service environments primarily create pleasurable and experiential value rather than improving customers' perceptions of functional efficiency. Excessive emphasis on tangible aspects may even divert attention from core service performance expected by utilitarian-oriented customers. Overall, the study concludes that telecommunication service providers should adopt a balanced service quality strategy by prioritizing responsiveness and empathy to strengthen both functional and emotional engagement while strategically leveraging tangibility to enhance customers' experiential value without compromising service efficiency. Theoretically, the findings extend service quality

literature by differentiating functional and emotional engagement pathways. Practically, managers should prioritize empathy, responsiveness, and targeted tangible improvements to maximize customer engagement. The study acknowledges some limitations like the use of non-probability sampling and the heavily educated sample bias that may not reflect the broader Nigerian subscriber base. The borderline collinearity from service empathy calls for caution, as it could account for the very high R^2 (see appendix C). Also, using Herman's single-factor test is criticized to be weaker for CMB tests. Future studies are suggested from the perspective of moderation and mediation analysis, especially from experience, gender, and education, given their established roles in moderating or mediating relationships in literature.

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