

Assessment of Service Marketing as a tool for Customers' Satisfaction in Service Industry in Ado-Ekiti Metropolis, Ekiti State, Nigeria

AKINRUWA Temitope Emmanuel*

IBOJO Bolanle Odunlami[†]

AWOLUSI Olawunmi Dele[‡]

[MSc], [Lecturer | Business Administration Department, Faculty of Management Sciences, Ekiti State University, Nigeria], [akinruwatea2013@gmail.com], [08060738696]

[†] [Corresponding Author], [MSc], [Lecturer | Business Administration Department, Faculty of Social & Management Sciences, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria], [odunibojo@gmail.com], [08032210145]

[‡] [PhD], [Lecturer | Business Administration Department, Faculty of Management Sciences, Ekiti State University, Nigeria], [awosco44@yahoo.com], [08066388654]

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to assess service marketing as a tool for customers' satisfaction in Ekiti State. Twenty service industries were used. Survey and descriptive research methods were used while structure questionnaire was administered on the customers. Convenient sampling technique was used to select the respondents and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was employed. The coefficient of determination (R-squared) indicated that 85% of the changes in customers' satisfaction were explained by the considered explanatory indicators' (i.e. product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical environment).Emanating from the findings, it was concluded that with the trend of competitive business environment in the state capital (Ado-Ekiti metropolis), management of service providers must key into the 7ps if they were to be relevant in the business. The study recommended that there is need for the service industries to adopt and improve on the provision of the 7ps for attaining optimal customers' satisfaction and thus, enhance other business performance metrics.

Keywords: Service, Satisfaction, product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical environment

1. INTRODUCTION

When a customer purchases services rarely can such a customer claims or acquires ownership on it. Hence, it can be advanced that services are experimental in nature and its consumption experience is the major output of service organization (Bitner, 1990, Hui, 1988 and Wirtz, 1994). Service providers should ensure that concerted efforts are geared towards managing the multitude of interaction that together will sum up to a positive consumption experience. Service, according to Kotler and Keller, (2009) can be described as any act of performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of something. This view was share with Institute of Customer Relationship Management (ICRM), (2012) who described service as an act, a process or performance hence, activities like medical treatment, banking, cleaning maintenance, barbing saloon, hairdressing and so on can be referred to as being typically service based. Consequently, service can be more widely described as economic activities that added value and provided benefit or satisfaction to the customer or the organization hence, this explained why there is need for serious minded organization to take its operational activities above the level of traditional function of handling complaint, answering questions, taking orders, dealing with queries to modern business activities

such as: after sale services, personalized service, on time delivery, quality service product, decent physical evidence, employees competencies and host of others.

Considering the complexity of service product and looking at it from the service characteristic “variability”, it shows that for a service provider to satisfying its customers, its service product must be from the customers oriented point of view as this will ensure the product acceptability at the same time enhance its survival, growth and profit margin. Service marketing formed the bedrock of the fundamental concepts of marketing and these over the years have evolved in accordance with the philosophy of customer orientation. In most of the service companies, the philosophy is manifested in terms of customers are kings while in banking industries customers are referred to the people who prepare food on the employees’ table. Therefore, the discovery of customers’ need is a very important tool in the hand of service providers in order to ensure preferred satisfaction. More so, service marketing tools in proxy can be termed to be widely known 4ps which recently has extended to 7ps i.e. product, price, promotion, place, people, process and physical evidence. ICRM (2012). The importance of these 7ps cannot be overlooked by service providers as it enables them to shape the nature of its offer to customers’ satisfactorily and the relevant of such company in the market depends

on how best it can effectively utilize the tools of 7ps.

Customers appreciate mostly when the services they buy made them feel special. Many scholars in the past had researched on how customers can be satisfied by service providers through service marketing but little or no effort was made to access service marketing that gives customers' satisfaction in Ekiti state, Ado-Ekiti in particular, where there is an increasing rate of service companies on daily basis and all are adopting different service marketing strategies to encourage more patronage and to satisfy their ever increasing customers. Therefore, the focus of the research study is to access service marketing as a tool for customers' satisfaction using 7ps.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer satisfaction according to Oliver, (1981) in Danesh, Nasab and Ling (2012) is described as the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding discomfited expectation is coupled with the consumers prior feeling about the consumption experience. While Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) cited in Danesh, *et al* (2012) argue that satisfaction is an overall customer attitude towards a service provider or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers expect and what they receive regarding the fulfillment of some need, goal or desire. The brain behind giving

separate consideration to service marketing centers on the existence in unique characteristics of service which according to Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1985) includes: intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability. Their study focus was on problems and strategies in service marketing. The finding shows that firms marketing to institutional customers differ, from firm marketing to end consumers in several important ways; it goes further to show that institutional firms seem to be more marketing oriented; they are more apt to contact customers after purchase to ensure satisfaction, choose carefully the personnel who interacts with customers and to regularly collect information about customers' needs. Their conclusion indicated that service marketing is accorded with recognition and accepted subset of marketing discipline.

The emergency of service marketing came to the fore in the 1980's when debate first commence as to whether marketing of services was significantly difference from that of products so that it can be classified as a separate discipline. 1980's actually saw a shift in this thinking as it grew important and emerged as a significant employer and contributor to the GDP, while academics and marketing practitioners began to look at the marketing of services in a new light. By mid 1990's, findings affirmed it that service marketing was firmly entrenched as a significant marketing tools that

gives rise to concept such as: relationship marketing, customer retention loyalty, customers' satisfaction and so on. The conclusion of the research study shows that there is mutually relationship between service marketing and customers' satisfaction Lovelock and Wirtz (2011)

Looking at the Bitner, (1990), Donovan and Rossiter, (1982) cited in Wirtz (1994) research work, the study was centered on: Customer satisfaction with services: Integrating recent perspective in services marketing with the traditional satisfaction model. Model that was originally developed in the context of environmental psychology has been applied to explaining consumer behaviour towards service environments. This model holds that effect, or the way people feel is the mediating variable between stimuli, cognitive processes and response behaviour. The purpose of the model is to examine the effect of environment on individuals' emotional state and response behaviour, the positive effect of the model gave it warmly acceptance and later adopted in service marketing. Findings show that satisfaction is an increasing function of the pleasure experienced during the service consumption process. It goes further that employer customer interaction equally affects customer satisfaction and that variability in service shows variance in service satisfaction. Here, emphasis was on creating decent environment.

Customer satisfaction according to Thakur, (2011) was defined the extent to which customers are happy with the products and services provided by a business. Thakurs' research paper was on customer satisfaction in companies like Argos and Cadburys. The findings show that there is high level of customer satisfaction when customers' needs are discovered through market research and by adopting service marketing tools. It goes further to identify some factors that lead to high level of customers' satisfaction to include: products and service that focused on high level of value for the money, giving personal attention to the needs of individual customers and after sales service. In conclusion, customers are in most cases appreciate the goods and services that after purchase make them feel special. Johnson and Fornell (1991) quoted in Gustafsson, Johnson and Roos (2005) defined customer satisfaction as a customer's overall evaluation of the performance of an offering to date. The overall satisfaction has a strong positive effect on customer loyalty intentions across a wide range of product and service categories. Their research study was center on the effect of customer satisfaction, relationship commitment dimension and triggers on customer retention. Findings suggest that when satisfaction is measured as an overall evaluation of performance, it indeed predicts churn. Churn is a model used by Gustafsson, *et al* (2005) to measure customer satisfaction, affective

commitment and calculative commitment. Conclusively, the analyses support the use of customer satisfaction, affective commitment and calculative commitment as separate predictors of churn.

According to Yazdanifard and Mercy (2011), customer satisfaction is defined in two ways: 1 as an outcome and 2 as a process. As an outcome, satisfying the end state resulting from the consumption experience and as a process, it is the perpetual evaluative and psychological process that contributes to satisfaction. They go further that the definition varies with regards to their level of simplicity such as: product satisfaction, satisfaction with the purchase decision experience, satisfaction with the performance attribute, satisfaction with the store or institution and satisfaction with pre-purchase experience. Yazdanifard, *et al* (2011) studies show the significant influence of environmental knowledge and consciousness on consumer environmental attitude hence, companies who communicate their green product in packaging, advertisement or manufacture process gain satisfied customers. Their research focus was on the impact of green marketing on customer satisfaction and environmental safety. The green marketing as indicated in the study includes: product, price, place and promotion. Findings show that the real sense of environmental protection and attractiveness are very crucial to customers' satisfaction and customers will

not only desire for such product but are willing to pay more for it. In conclusion, green marketing is a tool for protecting environment and marketing strategy.

Looking at customer satisfaction in banking, it can be reasonably agreed upon that customers' satisfaction and service marketing go hand in hand. How best service companies can use the tools of service marketing determine the satisfaction derive by their customers and where underlying products become commodity like, (customer satisfaction) will heavily depend on quality of its personnel and other factors (marketing mix) Thakur, (2011). Leeds (1992) in Thakur, (2011) advocated that increased use of service quality and professional behaviours (e.g formal greetings) improved customer satisfaction and reduced customer attrition. It further stated that keeping customers depends on number of factors such as: product choice, greater convenience and better prices. This is consistent with Yazdanifard, *et al* (2011) whose findings show that service quality is significantly and positively correlated with customers' satisfaction.

2.1 7Ps OF SERVICE MARKETING:

Product: According to (Kotler, (2003), product is anything that can be offered to the market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a need or want. This include: physical objects, place, persons, idea, services and so on.

Service provider must produce their product on the basis of customers' need with the right level of quality designing, packaging, brand name, features, sizes and value in order to meet those needs now and in the future which is nothing else than to satisfying their customers. Product was considered as one of the traditional means of service marketing mix which services companies can use as effective mean of delighting customer satisfactorily Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009). Service product can be group into two components such as: 1. core service which represents the core benefit and 2 secondary services, which represent both the tangible and augmented product levels. The latter can be best explained in terms way of delivery the service product Hirankitti, Mechinda and Manjing (2009) quoted in Muala, and Qurnch (2012). Because service product show case features like intangibility, inseparability, Heterogeneity, indivisibility and perishable in nature hence, service providers have devised a strategic means of solving the problems associated with the characteristics, this include but not limited to: stress tangible cues, engage in post purchase communications, create strong organizational image, use multisite locations, manage consumers, customize service, industrialise service use strategies to cope with fluctuating demand Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1985.

Price: Price is the element of the marketing mix that produces revenue while other element produce

costs Kotler *et al.*, (2009). Price is also referred to as the amount charged for a product or service, or the total values that consumers exchange for the benefits of having or using the product or service Kotler and Armstrong (2010). Consequent to the unique nature of service such as intangible, price becomes a germane signal that unfolded other information with regard to the service product Zeithaml, (1981). Customers' intention to repurchase from the service provider heavily depends as whether or not the customer has received value commensurate with the exchange value (money). Customers in most cases purchase product on the basis of price rather than other attributes, therefore, price can undoubtedly been considered as a tool of satisfying customers.

Place: Place is where customers buy a product, and a means of distributing to that place. The appropriate and convenient of the place for customers enhance their satisfaction as these reduce or minimise searching cost of a product. Customer surveys indicate that delivery performance is considered as important criteria for choosing supplier Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009). Place according to Kotler and Armstrong (2006) is defined as a set of interdependent organizations that caters for the process of making a product available to the end users. With the contemporary service marketing, place can be termed to be offline e.g shop, warehouse, location and online (e.g internet).

Promotion: Promotion is considering being one of the important factors in the marketing mix and has a key role in market success. It is used to create customers awareness of the products that the organisation is offering. The promotional mix is the aggregate of the different channels that can be used to communicate the promotional message to the customers; the channels that can be used are; advertising, direct marketing, public relations and publicity, personal selling, sponsorship and sales promotion (Rowley,1998). Communication through promotion according to (Lovelock and Wright 2002 and Muala, *et al* (2012) plays three vital roles such as: 1. It provides needed information and advice, 2. Persuades target customers of the merits of specific product and 3. encourages customers to take action at specific time. Therefore, effective use of well planned and structured promotional activities towards specific target market equally enhances customers' satisfaction.

People: These refer to service personnel that are involving in producing and delivery of the service product. It is an undisputable fact that whenever employees in an organization are in contact with customers definitely, it will make an indelible impression which is capable of having profound effect of positive or negative on customers' satisfaction. Hence, there is need for service provider to appropriately train and motivate their personnel with right attitude because the reputation

of the company image rests in peoples hand Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009). Consequent to the unique characteristic of service product 'inseparability' it shows that production and consumption go simultaneously. Service heavily depends on the ability of contact personnel to be able to deliver the services, service providers such as in the case of nurse, lawyer, barbing saloon and financial institutions are involved in the real time production of service. In a nut shell, service is a role play event.

Process: This can be described the procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the service is delivered. The process of giving a service and the behaviour of those who deliver are crucial to customers' satisfaction. Issues like waiting times, information given to customers and the readiness of personnel to help keep customers delight are very important issues in service delivery Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009). Therefore, the effectiveness way of making company process work directly or indirectly affects customers' satisfaction.

Physical Evidence: This refers to the environment in which the service and any tangible goods that facilitate the performance and communication of the service are delivered Muala, *et al* (2012). Service product i.e core service that is intangible can create tangible in the mind of customers through it physical environment which

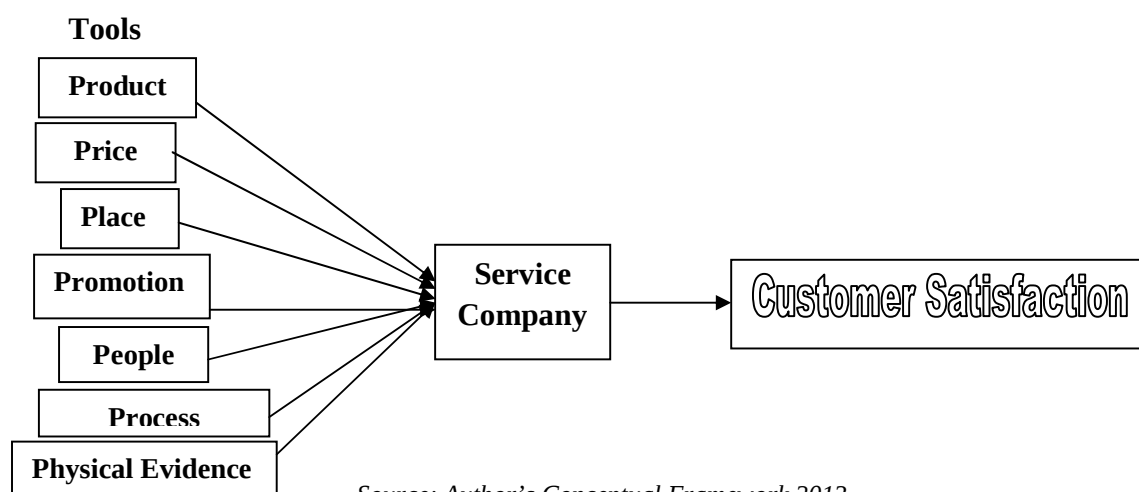
invariably can lead to customers satisfaction such as: clean, tidy and well decorated reception, attitude and appearance of personnel, ambience, background music, comfort of the seating and physical facility layout of the service, this is consistent with Yazdanifard *et al* (2011).

2.2 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H₀: service marketing tool does not affect customer satisfaction

H₁: service marketing tool affects customer satisfaction

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF SERVICE MARKETING TOOLS



Source: Author's Conceptual Framework 2013

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Survey and descriptive method design were used. 125 questionnaires were distributed out of which 120 questionnaires were found valid for analysis. Descriptive statistics involve the use of percentages. According to Kothari (1995) cited in Justus, *et al* (2011), descriptive design is concerned with describing, recording, analyzing and reporting conditions that exist or existed.

3.1 SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Since the population of majority of the service providers cannot be determined, researchers used convenient sampling techniques to choose 120 respondents from the population. Twenty service industries were used who had been in operation for the past 5-10 years in Ado-Ekiti Metropolis, the capital of Ekiti state, Nigeria. Such as: (Private Hospital, Restaurants, consultancy firm, Professional, Educational, Barbing saloon, Hairdressing Saloon, Car wash, Big rental services,

Communications industry, Hotels, Auto mechanic, Banks and other financial institutions). Since satisfaction is not a selective of customers, responses from any of the convenient sampling chosen customers who possibly had patronized between 1-5 years of each of the service providers is expected to serve as true representation of the whole. Hence, give room for sound opinion hypothesis contained in research instrument.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Product: Table 1 shows that when the product remains constant, the business performance still increases by 0.299 unit rate. This may be as a result of other service marketing tools. The slope of 0.138 depicts a positive relationship between production of quality product and firm performance. This implies that when there is an increase in product quality rate, it brings about an increase in firm performance. Contrary to this is the significant value of 0.000 less than 0.05 level of significant which show a significant relationship between quality product and performance. It can be deduced that irrespective of other service tools, firm should not compromise nor ignore the issue of quality product in its production because it is a means of delighting customers especially customers that have strong passion for quality.

Another service tool to be consider is **place**, this explained the location where service can be conveniently and readily available to the end users. From the regression table, value of 0.000 at 0.05 level of significant indicated that there is a significant relationship between the place and customer satisfaction.

Moreover, from table 1, One can deduce that using effective **promotion** creates customers awareness, it provides needed information and advice to customers, persuading target customers of the merits of specific product and encouraging customers to take action at specific time. The indicated result from the regression analysis show significant relationship with customer satisfaction with value of 0.000 at 0.05 level of significant.

Price from the regression table 1, shows that the slope of 0.056 values indicates a positive relationship between the price and performance of a firm. This implies that there are other service tools that enhance customers' satisfaction besides price. Price paid by customers in most cases act as a signal to reveal other information as regards to service product, hence, it becomes imperative for the management to be sensitive to the issue of pricing. High pricing repels customers away especially on non-necessity products. Affirming from the result 0.002 value which less than 0.05 level of significant

shows that there is a significant relationship between pricing and firm performance.

In addition to this are **people**. The demonstration of the result from table 1 shows that there is significant relationship between people and customers' satisfaction with the value of .000 at 0.05 level of significant thereby affirming the important position people (staff) occupy in an organization towards ensuring preferred customers' satisfaction.

Process generally can be described the procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the service is delivered. From table 1 with value of .000 at 0.05 level of significant clearly indicated that there is significant relationship between a means of goods delivery and satisfaction. The result goes further with slope of -.078 to show that if the mechanism of service delivery is faulty, it may lead to dissatisfaction.

Finally, on the table 1, is **physical environment** of the service provider with value of .029 at 0.05 level of significant which equally shows a reasonable significant relationship with customers' satisfaction. However, slope of -.053 depicts negative relationship between physical environment and customers' satisfaction. This implies that an increase in poor physical environment will bring dissatisfaction and this has implication on the business survival.

Looking at the model summary table 2, the value of R- square posits that 85.5% variations in the explanatory variable i.e (product, place, promotion, price, people, process and physical environment) obviously lead to customers' satisfaction.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion, It can be reasonably concluded that management of service provider in Ekiti state must look beyond the already known 4ps and embrace the 7ps of marketing tools in order to attain expected objective at the same time delight their customers.

5.2 Recommendation

In the contemporary competitive business environment in Ekiti State, it is an imperative that management of service provider must adopt and improve on the provision of the 7ps of marketing.

5.3 Implication of the Study

The implication of the study to the business' owner is that embracing the 7ps as tools for marketing indicate a green light of ensuring performance in the competitive business environment and to have edge over other competitors.

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APPENDIX
Coefficients(a)

Table 1

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t		Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	.299	.138		2.159	.033		
	PRODUCT	.138	.024	.289	5.838	.000		
	PLACE	.394	.020	.813	19.575	.000		
	PROMO	.331	.019	.679	17.816	.000		
	PRICE	.056	.017	.121	3.207	.002		
	PEOPLE	.093	.021	.196	4.486	.000		
	PROCESS	-.078	.020	-.160	-3.837	.000		
	PHYENVIRO	-.053	.024	-.111	-2.210	.029		

Source: Author's computation from SPSS output. a Dependent Variable: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION. P< 0.05

Table 2

Model Summary(b)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.925(a)	.855	.846	.12253	.855	94.236	7	112	.000	1.427

Source: Author's computation from SPSS output. a Predictors: (Constant), phyenviro, promo, price, place, process, people, product
b Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

APPENDIX

Respondents View

Table 3: My service provider gives quality product

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	10	8.3	8.3	8.3
Disagreed	25	20.8	20.8	29.1
Agreed	35	29.2	29.2	58.3
Strongly Agreed	50	41.7	41.7	100
Total	120	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

Looking from table 3, 41.7% and 29.2% indicate strongly agreed and agreed respectively. It shows that respondents' passion for quality product from there service providers. On the other hand, 20.8% and 8.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively shows that product quality alone may not be enough to satisfy customers. One can deduce from the table that customer passion for quality product and they enjoy it when they exchange their value with it

Table 4: The strategic location of my service provider gives satisfaction

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	10	8.3	8.3	8.3
Disagreed	20	16.7	16.7	25
Agreed	50	41.7	41.7	66.7
Strongly Agreed	40	33.3	33.3	100
Total	120	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

From table 4, it shows that 8.3% strongly disagreed, 16.7% disagreed, 41.7% agreed and 33.3% strongly agreed. It implies that when firm have a good location it bring satisfaction to customers.

Table 5: Promotional activities of my service providers pave way for easy access to information

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	5	4.2	4.2	4.2
Disagreed	20	16.7	16.7	20.9
Agreed	65	54.1	54.1	75
Strongly Agreed	30	25	25	100
Total	120	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 5 indicate 4.2% strongly disagreed, 16.7% disagreed, 54.1% agreed and 25% strongly agreed. It implies that respondents with 54.1% and 25% respectively were satisfied with the promotional activities of their service provider.

Table 6: Price paid to my service provider commensurate with the value receive

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	12	10	10	10
Disagreed	8	6.7	6.7	16.7
Agreed	73	60.8	60.8	77.5
Strongly Agreed	27	22.5	22.5	100
Total	120	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

From table 6 it shows that strongly disagreed is 10%, disagreed 6.7%, agreed 60.8% and strongly agreed 22.5%. One can deduce that customer derived satisfaction when what they paid is commensurate with the exchange value.

Table 7: The hospitality of my service provider gives me desirable comfort

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	15	12.5	12.5	12.5
Disagreed	20	16.6	16.6	29.1
Agreed	50	41.7	41.7	70.8
Strongly Agreed	35	29.2	29.2	100
Total	120	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 7 shows that strongly disagreed 12.5%, disagreed 16.6%, agreed 41.7% and strongly agreed 29.2%. This explain that the friendly attitude of the workforce enhance customers' satisfaction.

Table 8, The delivery process of my service provider gives satisfaction

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	16	13.3	13.3	13.3
Disagreed	11	9.2	9.2	22.5
Agreed	67	55.8	55.8	78.3
Strongly Agreed	26	21.7	21.7	100
Total	120	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 8 shows respondents of 13.3% strongly disagreed, 9.2% disagreed, 55.8% agreed and 21.7% strongly agreed. It implies that the effectiveness process of delivery enhance customers' satisfaction.

Table 9: The Physical environment of my service providers is attractive

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	10	8.3	8.3	8.3
Disagreed	5	4.2	4.2	12.5
Agreed	70	58.3	58.3	70.8
Strongly Agreed	35	29.2	29.2	100
Total	120	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

From table 9, strongly disagreed is 8.3%, disagreed 4.2%, agreed 58.3% and strongly disagreed 29.2%.

One can rightly said that the physical environment attractiveness gives customers' satisfaction.