Int. j. adv. multidisc. res. stud. 2026; 6(1):1025-1034

Received: 29-11-2025
Accepted: 09-01-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Assessing the Effectiveness of Customer Feedback on Customer Service Quality: A Case Study of Airtel

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Abstract

This study assesses the effectiveness of customer feedback systems at Airtel Zambia, focusing on their role on customer service quality. Grounded in Market Orientation Theory (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) and the Resource, Based View (Barney, 1991) [2], the research examines how Airtel collects, analyzes, and integrates customer insights. Using a mixed, method approach, data were gathered from 25 customers and 25 Airtel employees in Lusaka. Findings reveal that while Airtel employs multiple feedback channels, including SMS, USSD, social media, and service centers, weak integration, poor responsiveness, and limited real, time analytics constrain effectiveness. Results highlight the importance of institutionalizing feedback processes, strengthening inter, departmental communication, and investing in digital tools to enhance responsiveness and innovation. The study contributes to literature on customer, centric strategies in emerging markets and provides practical insights for telecom operators navigating competitive environments.

Keywords: Customer Feedback, Customer Service Quality, Airtel Zambia, Telecommunications, Customer, Centric Innovation

1. Introduction

1.1 *Overview*

Customer feedback has become an essential tool for businesses aiming to remain competitive and relevant in rapidly evolving markets. This chapter introduces the study by outlining the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, significance, scope, and definitions of key concepts.

1.2 Background

In today's global business environment, customer feedback is a strategic resource for enhancing customer service quality (Chen *et al*., 2021). Developed markets use predictive analytics and AI,powered tools to align offerings with consumer needs (Forrester Research, 2022; Statista, 2023) [7, 18].

In Africa, telecoms adopt mobile, based surveys and CRM systems to drive retention. Safaricom uses consumer feedback to customize mobile money solutions (GSMA, 2023; Mutinda & Ochieng, 2022) [9, 15]. In Zambia, Airtel leverages call center logs, SMS, social media, and app analytics to capture feedback (Nyamubarwa & Muwandi, 2022; ZICTA, 2022 [20]). However, gaps persist between expectations and actual experiences, with persistent complaints on network reliability, pricing, and service (Mwansa, 2020; Airtel CSR, 2023).

Rising smartphone penetration and digital literacy increase opportunities for inclusive service delivery, but underutilization of feedback remains a challenge. Airtel's feedback mechanisms exist but are not consistently analyzed or linked to strategic initiatives, creating a feedback–decision gap. This study therefore assesses the effectiveness of Airtel Zambia's feedback systems in shaping customer service quality.

1.3 Problem Statement

Although Airtel Zambia collects customer feedback via call centers, SMS, social media, and apps, mechanisms are often underutilized. Data is inconsistently analyzed and weakly aligned with business goals (Mwansa, 2020; ZICTA, 2022 [20]). This disconnect risks misaligned offerings, poor responsiveness, and lost opportunities. The study seeks to assess how effectively

Airtel integrates feedback into customer service quality.

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

To assess the effectiveness of customer feedback on customer service quality.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To determine the tools and channels Airtel Zambia uses to collect customer feedback.
2. To examine how effectively customer feedback is utilized in customer service quality.
3. To ascertain the limitations Airtel Zambia faces in collecting.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What tools does Airtel Zambia use to collect customer feedback?
2. How effective is Airtel Zambia in using customer feedback for customer service quality?
3. What limitations does Airtel Zambia face in leveraging customer feedback?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study applies Market Orientation Theory (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990), which stresses generating, disseminating, and responding to customer intelligence. It is complemented by the Resource, Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991) [2], which positions customer feedback as a strategic resource, valuable, rare, inimitable, and non, substitutable.

Together, these frameworks explain that effective customer service quality requires both customer, focused orientation and organizational capacity to translate feedback into innovation (Homburg *et al*., 2010 [11]; Liu, 2017). For Airtel Zambia, this means feedback systems (SMS, apps, social media) must connect directly with internal customer service quality processes to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

1.7 Significance of the Study

1. For Airtel Zambia: Provides actionable insights to strengthen feedback mechanisms, support innovation, and enhance customer satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2016) [12].
2. For policymakers (ZICTA): Offers evidence for frameworks that promote customer, driven innovation (Boulton, 2015).
3. For academics: Contributes to limited literature on feedback systems in emerging markets (Tse & Wilton, 2019).
4. For customers: Improved responsiveness and better, designed services can enhance satisfaction, trust, and loyalty (Oliver, 2014) [16].

1.8 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Airtel Zambia's feedback systems in Lusaka, where customer density, socio, economic diversity, and higher digital engagement provide a strategic environment. Data covers 2020–2024, capturing shifts driven by COVID,19, increased mobile money, and intensified competition (Mwansa, 2020; ZICTA, 2022 [20]).

It examines two stakeholder groups:

1. Customers in Lusaka, to assess perceptions of feedback effectiveness.
2. Airtel employees in customer service quality and customer service, to evaluate internal processes (Kangwa, 2023; Mahmoud, 2018 [13]).

This dual perspective allows exploration of both feedback expression and organizational response.

1.9 Operational Definitions of Concepts

1. Customer Feedback: Qualitative and quantitative data on customer experiences and perceptions; essential for innovation (Homburg *et al*., 2010) [11]. Do not use the word "essentially" to mean "approximately" or "effectively."
2. Customer service quality: The process of designing, testing, and refining products to meet evolving needs (Ulrich & Eppinger, 2015).
3. Effectiveness: The extent to which feedback is translated into product improvements, satisfaction, and competitiveness (Liu, 2017).
4. Customer, Centricity: An approach that places customers at the heart of decisions, ensuring offerings align with their needs (Shah *et al*., 2006).
5. Feedback Loop: A continuous cycle of collecting, analyzing, acting on, and reengaging customers with outcomes (Kim, 2012).
6. Customer Satisfaction: The extent to which customer expectations are met or exceeded, driving loyalty and growth (Oliver, 2014) [16].

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents a structured review of the literature on customer feedback and its integration into customer service quality. Drawing from global, regional, and Zambian contexts, the review highlights insights that frame this study, focusing on Airtel Zambia.

2.2 Tools and Channels for Collecting Customer Feedback

The Customer feedback collection has become data, driven and technologically advanced. Multinational companies employ multichannel systems such as AI, powered chatbots, surveys, mobile notifications, and CRM dashboards (Chen *et al*., 2012; Forrester, 2022). Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft embed feedback at every customer touchpoint (Statista, 2023) [18]. These tools capture both quantitative and qualitative input, strengthening innovation (Ulwick, 2005).

Platforms like Zendesk, Salesforce, and SurveyMonkey automate classification and routing, while NLP enables sentiment analysis (Chong *et al*., 2017). Real, time systems improve retention and innovation cycles (Harvard Business Review, 2022) [10].

In Sub, Saharan Africa, telecoms use call centers, IVR, SMS, WhatsApp, and apps, but challenges include low broadband, high costs, and limited integration (GSMA, 2023; Tshabalala & Moyo, 2021) [9, 19]. Safaricom applies USSD and social media monitoring (Mutinda & Ochieng, 2022) [15], while MTN Nigeria employs AI, powered chatbots (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2021).

In Zambia, Airtel uses call centers, SMS/USSD, social media, My Airtel App, and walk, in centers (ZICTA, 2022) [20]. However, social media feedback is under, analyzed (Mwansa, 2020), reports remain manually processed (Kangwa, 2023), and systems lack integration. CSR reports cite absence of real, time analytics and consolidated

platforms (Airtel Zambia CSR, 2023). These weaknesses delay responses and limit innovation.

2.3 Utilization of Customer Feedback in Customer service quality and Market

Globally, customer feedback is central to product innovation and targeting. Apple and Verizon integrate structured feedback throughout product lifecycles, while Tesla uses AI, driven forums and remote diagnostics (PwC, 2023) [17]. Firms tie feedback to KPIs such as NPS and CSAT (Forrester, 2022).

In Africa, Safaricom and MTN apply real, time dashboards and customer value management systems to guide dynamic offers (GSMA, 2022) [9]. Yet many operators confine feedback to customer service, missing strategic opportunities (Tshabalala & Moyo, 2021) [19].

For Airtel Zambia, complaints on data bundles, mobile money, and network coverage persist (ZICTA, 2022) [20]. Feedback is often reactive, addressed after escalation on social media (Mwansa, 2020). Lack of dedicated insights units, weak analytics, and siloed teams delay action (Kangwa, 2023). CSR reports cite underfunding and shortage of skilled analysts. As a result, Airtel innovations remain generalized and disconnected from customer needs, unlike competitors such as MTN.

2.4 Limitations in Collecting and Applying Customer Feedback

Globally, firms face overload of data, feedback fatigue, tool fragmentation, delays, and regulatory barriers (PwC, 2023 [17]; McKinsey, 2022). Sub, Saharan operators encounter digital exclusion, reliance on SMS/USSD, language diversity, and weak system interoperability (GSMA, 2022) [9].

Airtel Zambia reflects these constraints. Rural users face digital literacy barriers and poor networks (ZICTA, 2022 [20]; Mwansa, 2020). Organizationally, Airtel lacks centralized dashboards, cross, department integration, and timely responses (Kangwa, 2023). Decision, making remains centralized at Airtel Africa HQ, limiting local responsiveness.

Scholars highlight outdated systems, poor infrastructure, and communication failures as barriers (Mahmoud, 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2016) [13, 12]. These align with Airtel's weak feedback loop, where customer input rarely translates into timely innovations.

2.5 Critique of Literature

The literature highlights customer feedback as a strategic resource (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Homburg *et al*., 2010) [12, 11]. However, many studies assume seamless integration, overlooking delays, fragmentation, and selective use (McKinsey, 2022).

Global studies focus on technology, AI, big data, analytics (Chong *et al*., 2016 [3]; Zeng & Glaister, 2018), while neglecting organizational culture, leadership, and communication factors (Nguyen & Simkin, 2017). Most research comes from developed economies, while Africa faces affordability and literacy constraints (Gillwald & Mothobi, 2018).

Customer perspectives are underrepresented. The feedback–action gap undermines trust when customers do not see results from their input (Nguyen & Simkin, 2017; Parasuraman *et al*., 1988). In Zambia, repeated complaints without resolution reflect this gap.

Thus, while feedback is recognized as strategic, literature underestimates emerging market realities and the importance of visible communication loops.

Key gaps in the literature include:

1. Contextual gap: Most studies are based in advanced economies (Chong *et al*., 2016) [3].
2. Perception gap: Research emphasizes organizational views, neglecting customer perceptions (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Homburg *et al*., 2010) [12, 11].
3. Feedback–action gap: Weak communication loops reduce customer trust (Harvard Business Review, 2022) [10].
4. Sector, specific gap: Limited focus on African telecoms, particularly Airtel Zambia.

This study addresses these gaps by contextualizing feedback systems within Zambia's telecom sector and evaluating both customer and employee perspectives.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct the study on customer feedback in customer service quality at Airtel Zambia. It describes the research design, target population, sampling, data collection, analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design, which observes and documents phenomena as they occur naturally (Kothari, 2004). This design answers "what" and "how" questions regarding feedback use, capturing both qualitative and quantitative insights for a holistic understanding (Creswell, 2014) [4].

3.3 Target Population

The study focuses on two groups:

1. Airtel Zambia customers in Lusaka, who provide first, hand feedback on services.
2. Airtel employees in customer service and customer service quality, responsible for collecting and applying feedback.

Lusaka was selected as Airtel's operational hub, with a diverse customer base and higher engagement in both digital and non, digital channels (ZICTA, 2024).

3.4 Sampling Technique

1. Customers: simple random sampling, ensuring equal selection chances (Saunders *et al*., 2019).
2. Employees: purposive sampling, focusing on those with direct exposure to customer feedback (Etikan *et al*., 2016).

3.5 Sample Size

A total of 50 respondents:

1. 25 customers (randomly selected to represent data, money, and voice service users).
2. 25 employees (purposively selected from customer service and customer service quality).

This modest size balanced depth with feasibility (Creswell, 2014) [4].

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Structured questionnaires: for quantitative customer data.

1. Semi, structured interviews: with employees for internal insights.
2. Focus group discussions (6–8 customers): exploring ease, usefulness, and satisfaction with feedback channels.

Using multiple tools ensured measurable trends and context, rich narratives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.7 Data Analysis

1. Quantitative data: descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages).
2. Qualitative data: thematic analysis, transcription, coding, and organization into major themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.8 Triangulation of Data

Triangulation combined questionnaires, interviews, and FGDs to improve validity and reliability (Flick, 2018 [6]; Denzin, 1978). Quantitative patterns were corroborated with qualitative insights, strengthening internal validity and ensuring a holistic perspective (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.9 Limitations of the Study

Sampling Limitations

1. Customer sample may be skewed toward younger, tech, savvy users, excluding older or rural groups (GSMA, 2023) [9].
2. Employee sample excluded some departments, limiting comprehensiveness.

Limited Data Sources

1. Reliance on self, reported data risks response bias (Saunders *et al*., 2019).
2. Document review covered only available materials.

Time and Resource Constraints

1. Limited time reduced respondent numbers and depth of exploration.
2. Customers with poor internet access may be underrepresented.

External Factors

1. Changes in Airtel operations or market conditions during the study may have influenced results.
2. Economic and competitive shifts in Zambia's telecom sector could affect feedback behavior.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

1. Informed Consent
   All participants received clear study information and provided consent (Resnik, 2020).
2. Voluntary Participation
   Participation was voluntary, with no effect on employment or services.
3. Anonymity and Confidentiality
   Identifiers were avoided, and all data stored securely. No individual responses were revealed.
4. Avoidance of Harm
   Surveys avoided offensive or invasive content.
5. Ethical Clearance
   Approval was obtained from the university Ethics Committee and Airtel Zambia management.
6. Data Integrity
   All findings were reported honestly and transparently, aligned with global ethics frameworks such as the Belmont Report (National Commission, 1979).

4. Presentation of Research Findings and Discussion of Results

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents findings according to the study objectives. It covers demographics of respondents, results on each objective, and discussion in relation to literature. Authors and Affiliations.

Background Characteristics of Respondents

Gender

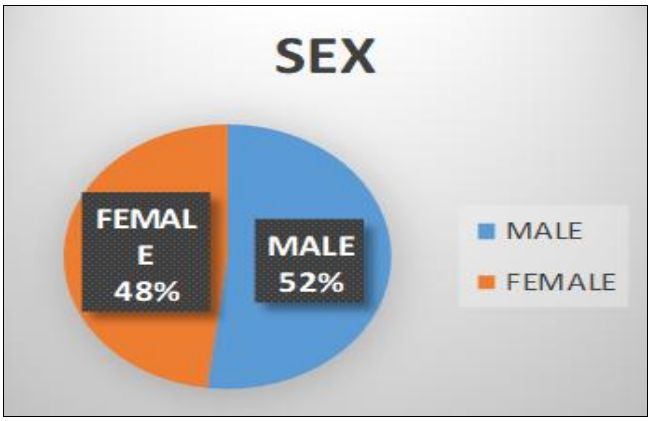

Fig 1: Gender of respondents

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Category	Female	Male	Total
Telecom Customer	11	14	25
Airtel Employee	12	13	25

Sample: 25 customers (14 male, 11 female); 25 employees (13 male, 12 female). Slight male skew.

Age

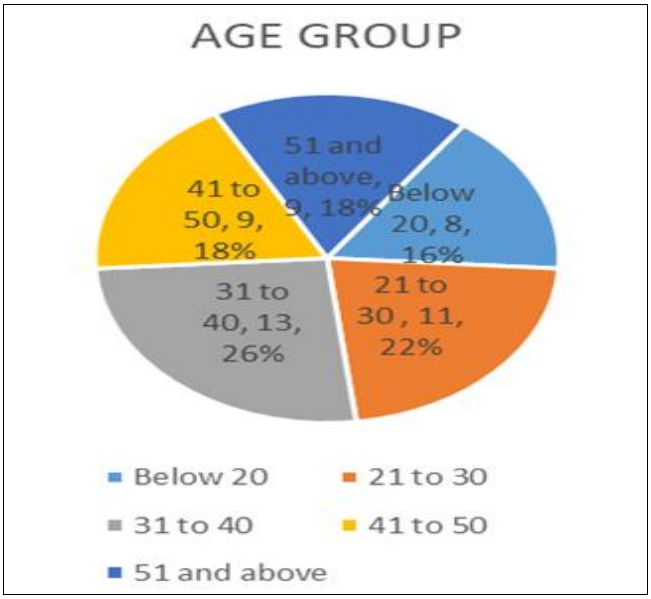

Fig 2: Age group of respondents

Table 2: Age Group of Respondents

Category	Age Group				
	Below 20	21,30	31,40	41,50	Above 51
Telecom Customer	5	7	8	4	1
Airtel Employee	3	4	5	5	8

Customers clustered in 21-40; employees spread into 41+.

Education level

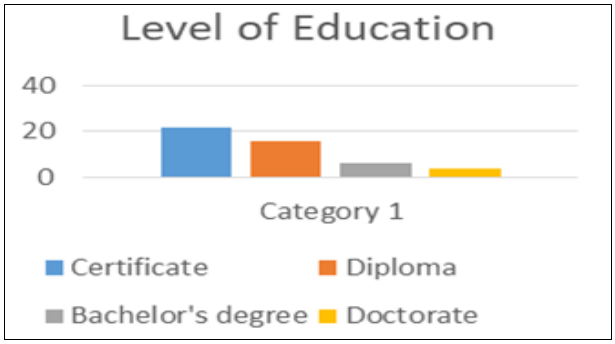

Fig 3: Level of Education of respondents

Table 3: Educational Level

Category	Education Level				
	Gr. 12	Cert.	Dip.	B.A/B.S/BSc	PhD
Telecom Customer	0	12	9	2	1
Airtel Employee	0	10	7	4	3

Most respondents held Grade 12, certificates, diplomas, or degrees, reflecting high literacy.

Respondent Category

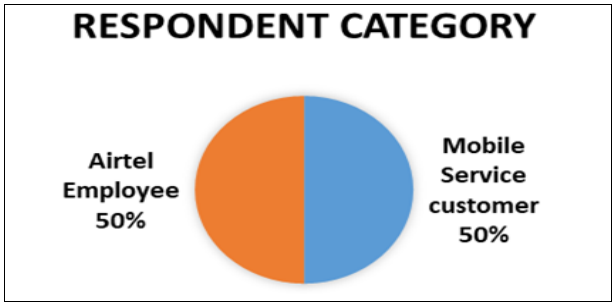

Fig 4: Respondents Category 1

Both customers and employees included, enabling dual perspectives.

Airtel Customer Status

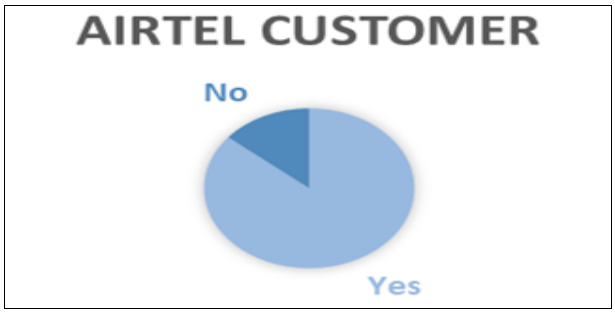

Fig 5: Respondent Category 2

Table 4: Respondent Category

Category	Yes	No
Telecoms customer	20	5
Airtel employee	23	2

20/25 customers and 23/25 employees confirmed as Airtel users.

Summary

The demographics show a literate, youthful customer base using both low, data (USSD/SMS) and digital (app/social media) feedback channels.

Objective One: Customer Feedback Channels

Feedback Channels

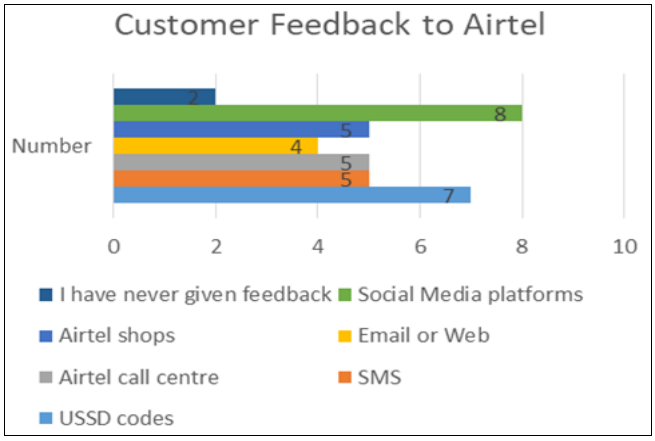

Fig 6: Customer feedback channel

SMS (32%) and USSD (24%) dominated; call centers (20%), social media (16%), and shops (8%) followed.

Feedback Encouragement

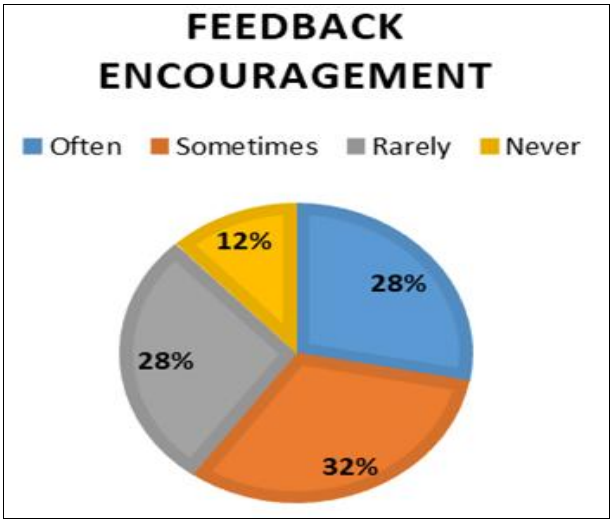

Fig 7: Feedback encouragement

Over one, third viewed channels as inconvenient, discouraging participation.

Effective Channels

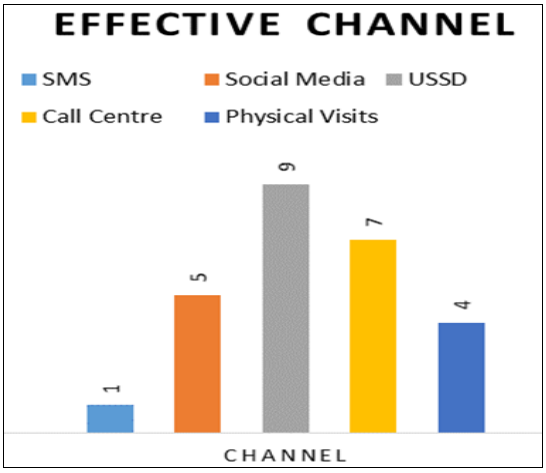

Fig 8: Effective channel

Convenience and affordability drove SMS/USSD use; call centers criticized for delays; social media noted for poor replies.

Convenient Platforms

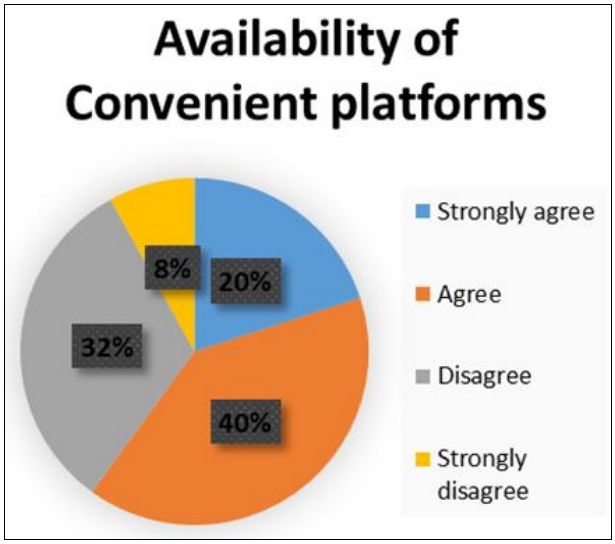

Fig 9: Availability of convient plantforms

Customer quotes emphasized USSD/SMS affordability: *"I use USSD because I don't always have data."* Call center inefficiency cited: *"I am kept waiting too long."*

Personnel Perspectives

Methods: call centers (all 20), plus SMS, USSD, app, social media, shops.

Dominant channels: call centers (60%), social media/app (40%).

Quotes: "Customers feel more comfortable speaking directly"; "Facebook and the app are instant."

What methods does Airtel Zambia use to collect feedback from customers?

1. Retail shop suggestion boxes (mentioned by R1, R3, R5, R7, R9, R11, R13, R15, R17, R19)
2. USSD surveys (R1, R3, R5, R7, R9, R11, R13, R15, R17, R19)
3. Call centers (R1, R2, R4, R6, R8, R10, R12, R14, R16, R18, R20)
4. SMS surveys (R2, R4, R6, R8, R10, R12, R14, R16, R18, R20)
5. Airtel App (R2, R4, R6, R8, R10, R12, R14, R16, R18, R20)
6. Social media (Facebook/Twitter) (R2, R4, R6, R8, R10, R12, R14, R16, R18, R20)

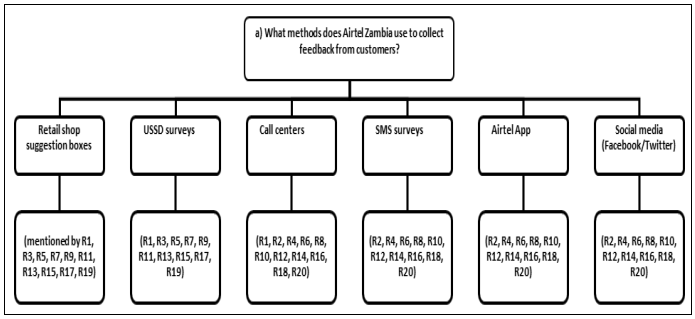

Fig 10: Feedback collection channel

Which channels are most used and why?

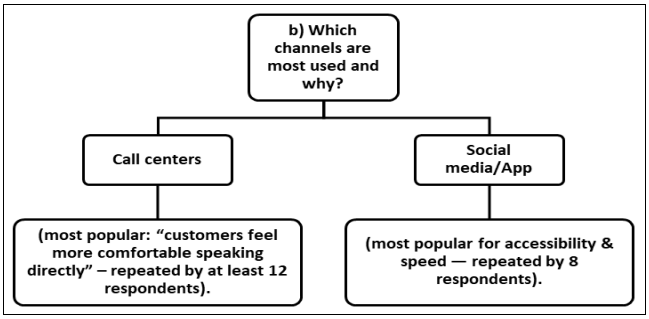

Fig 11: Most used channel

Summary

Airtel has a multi, channel strategy, but effectiveness depends on responsiveness, not just availability (Kotler & Keller, 2016) [12].

Objective Two: Feedback and Customer service quality

Influence on Products

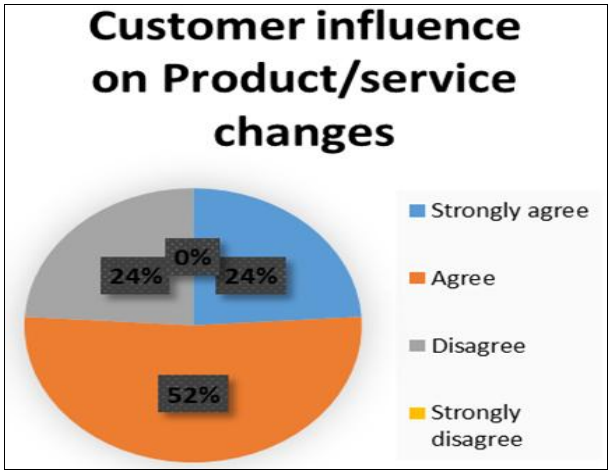

Fig 12: Cutomer influenc on product/service change

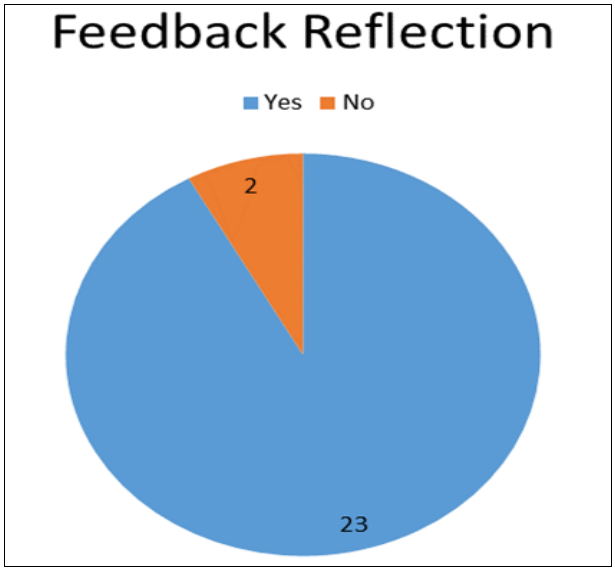

Fig 13: Feedback reflection

Only 36% believed their feedback influenced changes; 52% noticed improvements (e.g., bundles, Airtel Money upgrades).

Service Improvements

Customers acknowledged cheaper night bundles and improved Airtel Money services.

Transparency

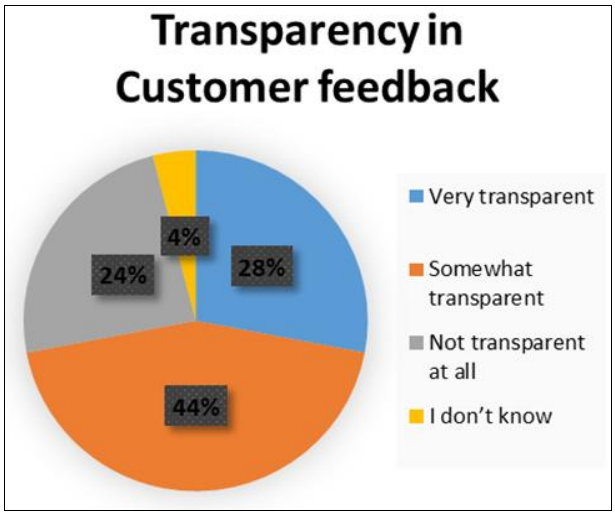

Fig 14: Transparency in Customer feedback

Gap noted between customer perception and actual changes. Quotes:

1. Customer: "I give feedback, but I don't see any changes that come from what I said."
2. Staff: "Customer feedback helps us adjust bundles, improve network, and develop loyalty promotions."

Personnel Perspectives

How does feedback influence development?

1. Adjusting data bundles (all 20 respondents mentioned this).
2. Improving network quality (majority).
3. Designing loyalty promotions (majority).

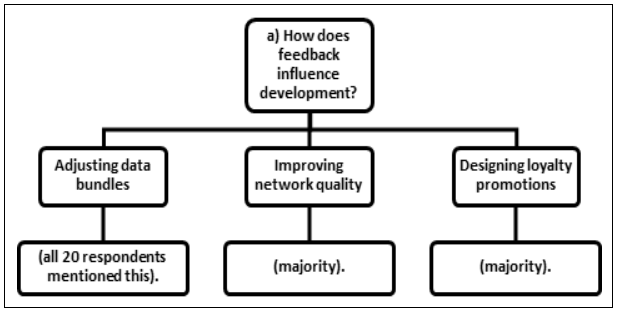

Fig 15: Feedback influence

Examples of feedback → service changes

1. Cheaper night bundles → Airtel Night Owl (10 respondents).
2. Detailed data usage reports on app (10 respondents).

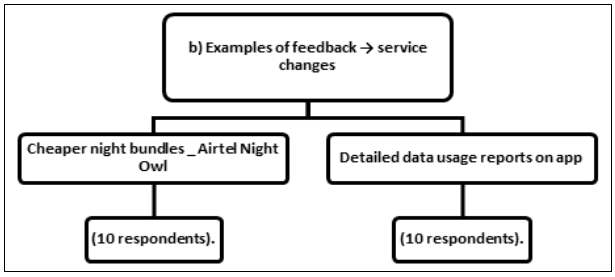

Fig 16: Feedback service change

Examples: Night Owl bundles and data usage reports, both staff, cited as feedback, driven changes.

Summary

There is a feedback–action perception gap: staff recognize feedback's role, but customers rarely see attribution (Nguyen & Simkin, 2017).

Objective Three: Limitations of Feedback Systems

Limitations Identified

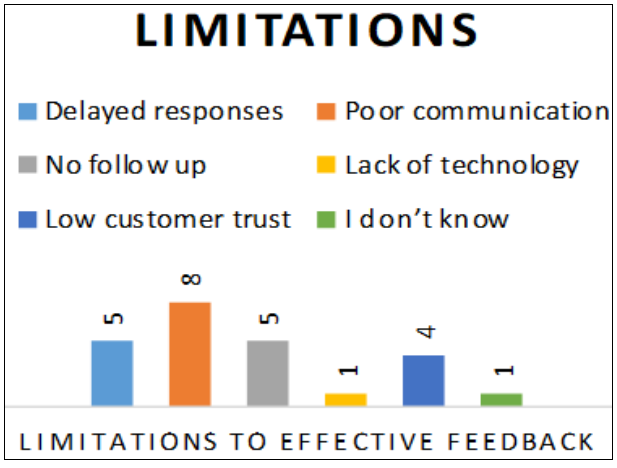

Fig 17: Limitations

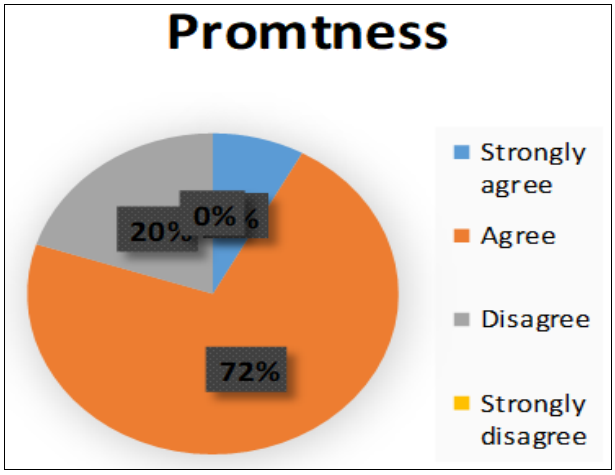

Fig 18: Promptness

Outdated systems (28%), delays (24%), poor follow, up (20%), low trust (16%).

Customer Experiences

Quotes: *"Feedback does not go through"*; *"It took weeks to get a response."*

Personnel Perspectives

Limitations in Collecting & Applying Feedback

a) Challenges
1. Vague or emotional feedback (10 respondents).
2. High feedback volume (10 respondents).

b) Barriers
1. Organizational bureaucracy (10 respondents).
2. Outdated technology systems (10 respondents).

c) Handling negative feedback
1. Categorized into urgent vs. non, urgent (all respondents gave this answer).

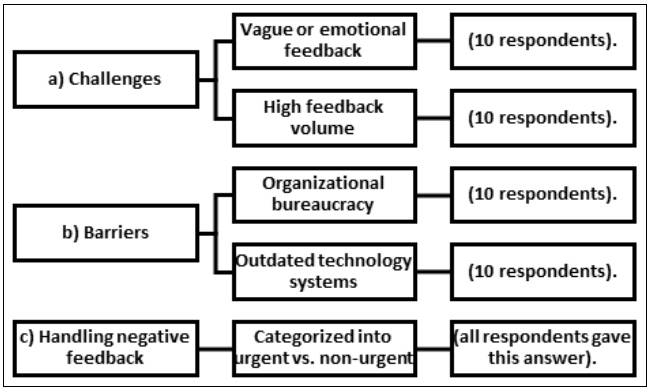

Fig 19: Limitations in collecting and applying feedback

1. Barriers: vague feedback, high volumes, bureaucracy, outdated systems.
2. Handling negative feedback: urgent vs. non, urgent categorization (all respondents).

Summary

Constraints are operational (systems, bureaucracy, capacity), consistent with African telecom studies (Mahmoud, 2018 [13]; McKinsey, 2022).

Discussion of Findings

Discussions of findings based on Demographic profile

The study sample (n=50) included 25 customers and 25 Airtel employees. Gender was slightly male, skewed among customers (14M; 11F) and balanced among employees (13M; 12F). Customers were mostly 21–40 years old, and most held Grade 12 or higher, indicating literacy and ability to use both low, data and app, based feedback channels. These demographics allow triangulation across USSD/SMS and digital channels in later analyses.

Interpretation & implication for findings

The young, literate sample explains why both digital (app/social media) and low, data (USSD/SMS) channels appear: younger/literate users adopt apps/social media while rural/low, data users rely on USSD/SMS. This mix enables robust triangulation (Kotler & Keller, 2016; GSMA, 2020) [12, 9].

Discussions of findings based on Objective One

Quantitatively, SMS (32%) and USSD (24%) dominated feedback channels; call centers, social media, and physical visits were less used (Figure 6). Qualitative data shows customers value affordability and offline access: "I use USSD because I don't always have data, and it works even in rural areas." Call centers and social media were criticized for long waits and poor replies. This supports literature that availability must match responsiveness (Kotler & Keller, 2016 [12]; Forrester, 2022).

Key themes (customers + personnel)
1. Affordability & offline function: USSD/SMS used due to no data requirement
2. Voice remains culturally important: Preference for speaking to agents.
3. Digital immediacy: App/social media praised for speed by younger users.
4. Channel availability ≠ effectiveness: Availability exists, but follow, up inconsistent.

Analysis

SMS/USSD dominance reflects access realities; call centers offer human interaction but long waits and poor follow, up make 36% of users find channels inconvenient (Gillwald & Mothobi, 2018; Forrester, 2022). Channel performance, not just presence, matters (Kotler & Keller, 2016) [12].

Discussions of findings based on Objective Two

Only 36% believe feedback influences customer service quality, yet 52% noted improvements (cheaper night bundles, Airtel Money gains) (Figure 13–12). Qualitative data shows a perception gap: some link changes to feedback; others report not seeing outcomes: "I give feedback, but I don't see any changes that come from what I said." Lack of communication undermines strategic utility (Nguyen & Simkin, 2017; Homburg *et al*., 2010 [11]).

Key themes (customers + personnel)
1. Visible product changes: Night Owl bundles, data usage reports.

2. Perception/attribution gap: Customers unaware of feedback influence.
3. Internal recognition vs external awareness: Staff see feedback impact; customers often do not.

Analysis

Feedback–action perception gap shows that without explicit communication, customer trust and engagement remain under, leveraged (Homburg *et al*., 2010 [11]; Nguyen & Simkin, 2017; Shah, Rust & Parasuraman, 2006).

Discussions of findings based on Objective Three

Quantitative data shows outdated systems (28%), delayed responses (24%), and poor follow, up (20%) as main limitations (Figure 17). Qualitative data confirms: feedback sometimes "does not go through", responses are slow, and follow, up is absent. These align with African telecom studies where technological and organizational hurdles impede feedback, to, product translation (Mahmoud, 2018 [13]; McKinsey, 2022; Parasuraman *et al*., 1988).

Key themes (customers + personnel)

1. High volume + capacity constraints: Large feedback volume slows analysis.
2. Categorization practice: Urgent vs non, urgent classification exists, but timeliness not guaranteed.
3. The Technological bottlenecks: Feedback sometimes fails; systems not integrated.
4. Organizational inertia: Bureaucracy delays feedback use.

Analysis

Constraints are operational and technical, not motivational. Findings align with African telecom literature: outdated infrastructure and weak analytics limit feedback, to, product cycles; delays and poor follow, up undermine effectiveness (Mahmoud, 2018 [13]; McKinsey, 2022; Parasuraman *et al*., 1988).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents the study's overall conclusions and practical recommendations based on Chapter Four. The study assessed the effectiveness of customer feedback in customer service quality at Airtel Zambia, examining feedback channels, its influence on customer service quality, and limitations in collecting and applying feedback

5.2 Conclusion

Airtel Zambia uses multiple feedback channels: SMS, USSD, call centers, social media, mobile apps, and physical outlets. SMS and USSD are most used due to affordability and offline access; call centers remain important for voice interaction (Gillwald & Mothobi, 2018). Challenges like long waits, unresponsiveness, and inconsistent follow, up reduce effectiveness (Kotler & Keller, 2016 [12]; Forrester, 2022).

A feedback–action perception gap was observed: employees believe feedback shapes product decisions, but only a third of customers perceive direct influence. Nevertheless, many noticed improvements such as cheaper bundles and Airtel Money upgrades, though without linking them to their input. This reflects limited communication of how feedback informs product/service changes (Nguyen & Simkin, 2017; Homburg *et al*., 2010 [11]).

Key limitations include outdated systems, bureaucratic delays, high feedback volumes, vague input, and low transparency. These reduce responsiveness, erode trust, and limit feedback's strategic value (Mahmoud, 2018 [13]; McKinsey & Company, 2022 [14]; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

Overall, Airtel has invested in feedback mechanisms and feedback does influence customer service quality. However, inadequate communication, weak processing systems, and poor follow, up diminish effectiveness, confirming that feedback is a strategic resource only if the loop is closed (Barney, 1991 [2]; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

6. Recommendations

Close the Feedback Loop:

Implement a structured "You Said – We Did" strategy via SMS, social media, and app notifications to show customers how feedback drives changes, increasing trust and engagement (Nguyen & Simkin, 2017).

Upgrade Feedback Management Systems:

Invest in modern CRM and analytics platforms to centralize feedback, automate sorting, and prioritize urgent issues for faster response (Chong *et al*., 2016; McKinsey & Company, 2022) [3, 14].

Reduce Bureaucratic Bottlenecks:

Streamline processes by empowering frontline staff to resolve recurring issues and develop clear service, level agreements (SLAs) for feedback response (Kotler & Keller, 2016) [12].

Enhance Responsiveness and Follow, Up:

Provide timely responses and follow, ups to complaints or suggestions to demonstrate accountability and improve perceptions of responsiveness (Parasuraman *et al*., 1988).

Strengthen Customer Education:

Educate customers on available feedback channels and guide them to provide clear, actionable input (Gillwald & Mothobi, 2018).

Integrate Customer Co,Creation:

Engage selected customers in pilot testing of products and services to validate changes and enhance ownership of innovations (Shah, Rust, & Parasuraman, 2006).

Expand Rural Accessibility:

Ensure low, data channels like USSD remain affordable, reliable, and user, friendly while expanding coverage to underserved areas (GSMA, 2020) [9].

Implementing these recommendations can improve feedback efficiency, service delivery, customer trust, and competitiveness.

Implications for Policy and Future Research

1. Policy Implications:

Zambian telecom regulators (e.g., ZICTA) should mandate transparency in how companies use feedback, requiring public reports on feedback, driven changes. Strengthening consumer protection ensures customers are informed about how their input shapes products.

2. Implications for Future Research:

Future studies should use larger, multi, province samples to capture regional differences in feedback experiences. Comparative research across Airtel, MTN, and Zamtel can reveal industry best practices. Further studies could explore digital tools (AI chatbots, big data analytics) for efficient feedback processing in African telecoms.

7. Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, lecturers, and the staff at Airtel Zambia for their support and guidance during this research. Special thanks to my classmates and everyone who contributed to the success of this project.

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