# Effective marketing of mobile telecom services through brand personality: Empirical evidence from Greece

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore any relationship between brand personality and brand image in mobile telecom branded offerings. Furthermore, this paper explores brand image as an antecedent of both perceived quality and consumer behavior. A survey conducted using a "positivism" approach, in which 318 consumers participated through a face to face handing over. Sincerity, competence and sophistication proved to be dominant precursors of brand image. On the other hand, brand image suggests a basic aspect of perceived quality in intangible telecom branded offerings. Moreover, customer satisfaction concerns a mediating factor impacting the relationship between perceived quality and brand attachment. Thus, perceived quality does not guarantee brand attachment and customer satisfaction is the key to achieve that. Hence, fair pricing, low service access costs and consistent IMC are necessary tactics to build brand attachment. The latter, along with customer inertia lead to favorable WoM and customer loyalty. This project provides telecom brand managers with valuable know-how in order to design "out of the box" strategies and tactics.

**Keywords:** Marketing & Advertising, Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, brand

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Personality is considered to be a key factor for an individual to build strong relationships (Noftle and Shaver, 2006). Just as successful individuals attract and influence other persons, branded offerings should also be characterized by personality that appeals consumers in order to purchase them (Aaker et al., 2004; Pollalis et al. 2011). According to Sociologists' view "we are what we buy" (Sheth et al, 1991). In other words, sociologists suggest that products stigmatize personality and reference groups (current or preferred). From psychologists' perspective, individual personality traits such as extroversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to new experience are related to emotional intelligence and social success (Noftle and Shaver, 2006).

Extroversion, Conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness for instance are necessary traits for social success and are found more likely in persons with a great deal of emotional intelligence (Vakola et al., 2004). Neuroticism on the other hand is harmful in terms of social success and relationship development (Noftle and Shaver, 2006). In addition, openness to new experience is connected to innovative individuals; Conscientiousness is related to competency and Agreeableness to trust (Oreg, 2006). As a result, personality helps individuals to achieve social success, recognition, differentiation and deals with stress copying.

As for the brand management, differentiation is the key to building a strong brand. In times of offerings' abundance and market saturation, brand image consists of an imperative tool for successful positioning (Högström et al., 2015). However, service brand personality suggests the most important antecedent of brand image (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). In some other research, brand image was proven to be an antecedent of perceived quality (Krystallis and Chrysochou, 2014). According to Pollack (2008), perceived quality impacts customer satisfaction and brand preference.

In this paper, brand preference and consumer behaviour puzzle is completed through Brand Personality dimensions, image and perceived quality using an integrated model illustrating how successful service brands manage their personality. In the first research question, this paper explores Brand Image in light of brand personality. In the second research question, the current research tries

to find any relationship between Brand Image and Perceived Quality. In the paper's last research question, we try to link Consumer Behavior with Brand Attachment and Perceived Quality.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Brand Personality

One of the most important strategic issues for both marketing academics and professionals has been the differentiation of both product and service value propositions. In the last twenty years and especially during the ongoing economic downturn, markets are becoming saturated. As a result, firms should focus on retaining existing customers and increasing their lifetime value. As a matter of fact one of the hottest issues for brand managers is to find a way to increase brand equity (Keller, 1998; Pollalis, 2005; Pollalis et al. 2011). Brand personality suggests a tool for increasing brand appeal, attachment and attitudes towards a certain branded offering (Aaker et al., 2004). Thus, brand personality could bolster brand equity. Just like a person is characterized by an attractive, strong and consistent personality, brands could also increase their attractiveness by inspiring customers and exceeding their expectations (Beldona and Wysong, 2007).

Moreover, brands facilitate consumers to express themselves through consumption. A Rolex for instance, could possibly help a middle-aged professional to gain access on brand's traits such as elegance and competence. Accordingly, Levis or Marlboro could possibly provide students with ruggedness and excitement which these brands may instill. As a result, brand personality consists of the overall individual traits reflected on a brand (Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014). Advertising companies in the last twenty years have tried hard to build on brand personality by developing imaginary users (i.e. apple's imaginary user is a highly innovative person), personification (i.e. Marlboro in the past used the carefree cowboy) or by merely presenting products as real persons (i.e. Pillsbury gave dough identity through the image of a real person). These brand personality traits should be durable and give the opportunity to consumers to recognize them. Durability and visibility in terms of brand personality would further lead to brand attachment. For instance, Coca Cola is a cool, American and sincere brand. These characteristics have proven to be resistant in time

differentiating Coca Cola from its competitors (i.e. Pepsi is a young, excited and joyful brand and Dr Pepper is unconventional, unique and fun).

In addition, some researchers hypothesized that the congruence between brand personality and customer's personality impacts brand preference (Beldona and Wysong, 2007). Nevertheless, this empirical research developed several flaws because it was not based on a research instrument, which would reflect brand personality and the psychological mechanisms leading to brand preference (Geuens et al., 2009).

Although the personality traits of an individual and a brand may be similar, they significantly differ in terms of formation (Aaker, 1997). Perceptions related to the individual characteristics of the human personality can be based on behaviours, attitudes, values and demographics (Oreg, 2006). On the other hand, brand perceptions can be formed and influenced by direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand (Keller, 1998). Furthermore, user imaginary provides consumers with connotations about the brand personality itself (Louis & Lombart, 2010). User imaginary is a term to describe human characteristics associated to the typical user of the brand, firm's employees and product's fans. In addition, brand personality can be indirectly tied in with the brand through its features and product category (Keller, 1998). Brand name, logo, advertisement aesthetics, price and physical distribution channels are additional cues further indicating brand personality (Keller, 1993).

Several researchers stressed that brand personality includes demographic characteristics such as gender, age and class (Aaker, 1997; Freling and Forbes, 2005). The aforementioned demographics are also inferred by the ideal usage of the brand, company's employees  and supporters (Beldona and Wysong, 2007). For instance, Virginia Slims tend to be perceived by consumers as women's cigarettes due to the imaginary user, while Marlboro perceived as a male brand (Malär et al., 2011). Because of the fact that Apple's user imaginary is by far younger than that of IBM, Apple is considered to be older than IBM (Aaker, 1997). On the basis of pricing tactics, Mercedes is regarded as a higher class comparing to BMW (Bosnjak et al, 2007).

Professor Jennifer Aaker (1997) was the first to overcome the above difficulties by adjusting the "Big Five" personality scale developed by psychologists to explain human personality.

Specifically, Aaker (1997) combined a number of research scales (309 items) derived from psychology and previous academic as well as business qualitative research. The sample included 631 participants by simultaneously reflecting the actual U.S. demographics. Factor analysis and Varimax rotation method lead to the development of the final brand personality dimensions (Aaker, 1997). Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication as well as Ruggedness concern the fine brand personality traits, as identified in Figure 1.
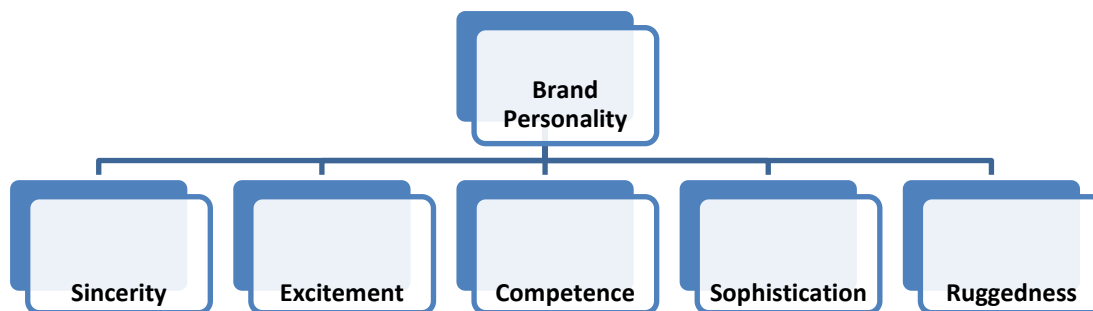


**Figure 1 – Brand Personality Traits**

Aaker's research inspired marketing academics to adjust and fit brand personality scale to various product categories and services. In sports marketing for instance, sports club personality could be divided into five dimensions. These are 1) competitiveness and ruggedness, 2) Prestige, 3) Morality, 4) Authenticity and 5) Reliability (Tsiotsou, 2012). Bosnjak et al. (2007) further explored brand personality in the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG's) product category. They stressed four personality dimensions such as 1) stimulus brand (thrilling, adventurous, boring brand), 2) conscientiousness (competence, age, and brand reliability), 3) Emotionality (cordial, emotional brand) and 4) Superficiality (selfish, arrogant and hypocritical brand).

Geuens et al. (2009) similarly explored the personality of various product and service brands. Their research indicated 5 dimensions of personality traits illustrated on Table 1 below.

| Dimensions | Items loaded |
|---|---|
| Responsibility | →Down to earth, consistent, Reliable |
| Energy | →Vigorous, Spiritual, Innovative brand |
| Aggressiveness | → Aggressive, Daredevil brand |
| Simplicity | →Everyday, plain brand |
| Sentimentalism | →Romantic, Emotional Brand |

**Table 1: Brand personality dimensions**

*Source: Geuens et al. (2009)*

## 2.2 Brand Image

Brand image concerns the stepping stone of building Brand Equity, which suggests the monetary value of the brand name as an intangible asset (Aaker, 1991). Professor Keller (1993) describes brand image as various types of associations to the brand as well as the favor, strength and uniqueness of these associations. The aforementioned connotations may not concern the product as an offering. Brand personality, imaginary user and usage imaginary are the three basic non- product features in accordance with the model developed by Keller (1998). Biel (1992) argued that imaginary user, is the key element to design brand image while Shimp (2010), clearly states that usage imaginary has a supplementary contribution to brand image. In the same study, Shimp (2010) illustrated that brand personality helps on attracting the "ideal" customer (or user imaginary or target group) and defines the usage imaginary via the unique value proposition that is formed via Integrated Marketing Communications.

Therefore, brand image can be defined as the intangible or the invisible attribute incorporated in the value offering (Fetscherin M. and Heinrich, 2015) and includes symbolic meanings which consumers associate with specific characteristics of the product or service (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Brand Image is also considered to be a unique presentation of a brand in the consumer's mind (Vijande et al, 2013), or a set of perceptions referring to a brand reflected through the associations with the brand (Keller, 1993). Therefore, the image can be alternatively defined as "... reasoned or emotional perceptions acquired by consumers for a specific brand" (Schmitt, 2012).

In addition, these connotations may concern perceptions about "hard" operational brand attitudes such as speed, low cost, ease of use, capacity (i.e. for industrial machinery). Brand image can supplementary include "soft" or emotional characteristics such as enthusiasm, trust, boredom, masculinity and innovativeness (Aaker & Biel, 1993; pp. 71-72). Apple brand may be associated with innovativeness and premium quality while IBM may be associated with efficiency (Schmitt, 2012). Thus, brand image provides a new arena for differentiation.

According to Das (2014), brand image impacts attitudes towards brand and moderates the relationship between perceived quality and customer loyalty. In other words, Brand Management not only should focus on building strong, clear and unique image. It should also be consistent to the values and culture of the firm and should stand the test of time (i.e. Coca Cola, Mercendes Benz, Toyota etc.) (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015).

Moreover, brand image regulates the intensity of the relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty (Homer, 2008; Pollalis, 2005). Particularly in shops or services that require advanced technologies for the development of sophisticated and personalized services, innovation and reliability are the most critical factors for the development of even greater loyalty (Zehir et al., 2011). As for the private banking and insurance products, reliability and trust are the most important elements of the image that impact customer loyalty and preference (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Furthermore, in recreation industry excitement, superior quality and value for money are the most important features in terms of brand preference (Howat and Assaker, 2013). As discussed earlier, user imaginary and usage imaginary impact image itself. For instance, in 4G mobile broadband services, the ideal user is busy, he or she wants to download data really fast and he/she is innovative. In banking services however, the ideal user is a family guy, who has solid values and does not want surprises in his or her life (Bosnjak et al, 2007).

Since brand image is considered to be influenced by brand personality, the current study explores how brand personality is reflected on mobile Telco's in terms of brand image and how brand image impacts Perceived Quality that could possibly work as an antecedent of consumer behavior. Regarding the relationship between personality and brand image, numerous qualitative and qualitative

research explored the impact of personality on brand quality perceptions (Homer, 2008) or how it reflects on trust (Zehir et al., 2011) and customer's identification (Louis & Lombart, 2010). Brand personality can further boost value for money perception, perceived innovation and reliability of the branded offering (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). In addition, brand sophistication constitutes a basic guide to perceived quality especially in services (Homer, 2008) and it also boosts innovation and excitement (Malär et al., 2011). Many automobile or motor bike companies, such as Alpha Romeo or Ducati, pay more attention on personality traits like elegance and competence. Additionally, sincerity proved to be an antecedent of brand image (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The latter personality trait is crucial for firms to support and reinforce the image of trust, reliability and high quality (Louis & Lombart, 2010). As a result, HSBC would like to put more emphasis on trust than a Tobacco firm like Phillip Morris (Louis & Lombart, 2010).

In conclusion, brand image suggests every reasonable or emotional perception acquired by consumers with regards to value offerings. However, it is imperative to note that in services such as mobile telephony, emotional perceptions could determine brand preference. The latter happens because search quality, which is the ability to determine quality prior to consumption, is very poor (Shimp, 2010). Therefore, it is very important for service providers, based on the desirable value offering, to build a picture of strong, clear and exclusive brand image through brand personality (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). This research is the first one exploring both desired image and personality in terms of consumer attitudes and behaviour (Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty, Brand attachment and WoM communication).

## 2.3 Perceived Quality

The term "Perceived Quality", which is widely used in services, *suggests every subjective judgement with regards to the actual performance of a value offering* (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Actual service performance is related to the attributes of services. According to Niros and Pollalis (2014), services need special marketing practices mainly due to i) intangibility, ii) perishability, iii) heterogeneity and iv) inseparability. As far as intangibility is concerned, consumers find it very difficult to evaluate quality even after they purchase a service (Credence Quality) (Frank et al, 2014). As a result,

recommendations made by experts or friends that were involved in the past in such buying problems are the most important buying information sources (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). Examples of such services consist of legal services, medical diagnoses and car repairs. In case some tangible aspects interfere, which is the case of restaurants, vacations and telecommunications, performance can be judged during consumption (Rushton and Carson, 1989). This is the case of the most service brands, which are referred to as services high in experience quality (Rushton and Carson, 1989). Experience management is very important in these cases to cover supplementary services other than the core service itself (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). These supplementary services may concern facilitating services (information, billing, order taking, and payment) and augmenting services (consultation, hospitality, exceptions and caretaking) (Homer, 2008). Service augmentation bolsters customer experience directly, since it augments service value. However, facilitating services are of equal importance, since they ensure company's interests and reinforce business processes (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). Figure 2 presents the flower of service with a perspective of improving customer experience.
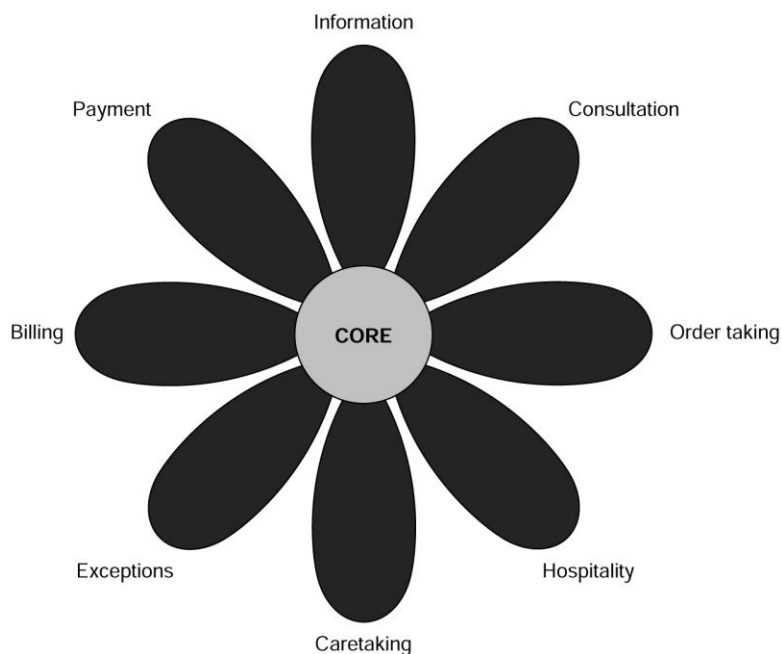
**Figure 2 – The flower of service: How to drive customer experience**

As far as "more tangible" value offerings are concerned, services represent only a small value of the total. Attributes are specific and measurable (e.g. speed, capacity etc), so does the performance

itself. In these cases (cars, houses, cell phones, laptops etc), these products are high in search

qualities, because customers are capable of assessing quality prior to consumption (Han and Hyun,

2015).

As far as perishability is concerned, service capacity cannot be stored for future use. This means

that service providers are not capable of stockpiling in order to generate inventories necessary in high

demand seasons (Lovelock et al., 2008). As a result, many quality problems especially in peak

seasons may occur (service delivery speed, traffic on queues and accessibility& network availability

problems in telecommunications). Moreover, perishability reflects the difficulty in eliminating

defective units before customer purchases a service. The latter difficulty relates to the inseparability,

since production and consumption occurs at the same moment, which is the "moment of truth"

(Zeithaml, et al., 2008). As a result, employees should know exactly how to respond to customers'

requests and problems in order to recover possible complaints or respond to their special demands for

customization (McCollough et al, 2000).

Last, but not least, Heterogeneity in services marketing regards to the service delivery system and

to the pattern it provides consumers with consistent service performance (Lovelock et al., 2008).

Providing consistent service it is not achievable all the time due to seasonality or technical problems

or when a new service brand is launched. The latter situations appear because it is reasonable to

expect absence of learning curves (McCollough et al, 2000).

Managerial implications for improving a service brand's Perceived Quality entangle service

augmentation with added value peripheral services (consultation, hospitality, exceptions etc.) or back-

office services (Information, Order keeping etc.) using sophisticated information systems (ERP's,

CRM's, WHM systems, Billing and Order taking systems etc.) in order to support front line

employees and deliver superior service performance (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). In addition, in any

contact or interaction spot, every service (including back-stage services) should be designed in flow

charts in order to standardise procedures and minimize errors and service delivery speed (Zeithaml, et

al., 2008). Sophisticated Management Information Systems (Data Mining, Warehouse systems) could

help on forecasting demand in order to reallocate resources in certain outlets, weekdays or seasons

(Niros & Pollalis, 2014). In addition, active service recovery procedures suggest a critical success

factor for affecting perceived quality (McCollough et al, 2000). Research has indicated that customers, whose complaints were successfully managed, developed better attitudes towards the service brand compared to customers without service recovery issues (Niros & Pollalis, 2014).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) developed one of the most widespread models of managing and affecting perceived quality labelled "ServQual" deriving from the abbreviation of SERVICE QUALITY. The aforementioned authors developed the scale of perceived quality that included five subscales: 1) Reliability, which is the ability of the service delivery system to providing consistent and accurate service, 2) Responsiveness, which concerns both the system's ability to provide flexibility in terms of customers' special needs and fast service recovery when a problem occurs, 3) Assurance, that is the confidence that a service delivery promotes safety and expected performance, 4) Empathy, which suggests a sense that the firm's employees are good listeners and strive to meet customer's expectations. Tangibles, which is the fifth dimension of service quality suggests every tangible assets involved in service improvement (e.g. facilities, machinery etc.).

## 2.4 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction suggests the total attitudes towards a brand or a certain manufacturer (Szymanski and Henard, 2001). Consumer attitudes may vary from very negative to very positive reflecting the overall experience referring to the brand (Lin Guo et al., 2009). According to the planned behaviour theory, attitudes are proven to explain overall intentions that mediate individual's actions and behaviours (Armitage and Conner, 2001). In marketing literature, customer satisfaction may vary from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied" using a single-item scale (Anderson, 1994). Customer satisfaction is considered to be a critical success factor in terms of retention and churn forecasting (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). Companies and large organizations have also incorporated Customer Satisfaction Indexes in their strategic plan in order to sustain or boost market share and sales (Han and Hyun, 2015).

Consumer behaviour also derives from negative or positive attitudes and brand satisfaction (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993). Since customer satisfaction is measured in post-purchase decision making process, it reflects the overall gap between actual and expected experience and performance

(Niros & Pollalis, 2014). In case the actual service performance is below expectations, the customer feels dissatisfied (disconfirmation). As soon as service delivery process meets or exceeds expectations, customers feel satisfied or thrilled (confirmation). As Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) stressed in their five-gap model, dissatisfaction (e.g. gap between expectations and service performance) is caused because of five gaps. Gap 1 occurs as soon as there is a difference between "what customers expect from the service brand" and "what management really knows about customer's expectations about the brand". Sometimes, managers are unable to communicate service quality specifications to front line employees (Gap 2). As for Gap 3, although service quality specifications are clear to employees they feel unable or reluctant to deliver service accordingly. This could be a sign of bad management practices, lack of training, or insufficient planning. Especially in services, marketing communications are imperative to manage customers' expectations. In many occasions, firms attract new customers out from competition by promising supreme performance or special benefits, which service brand is unable to offer in reality (see Gap 4 in Figure 3). Last but not least, Gap 5 occurs when Perceived Service or service performance or actual performance does not meet customer's expectations.
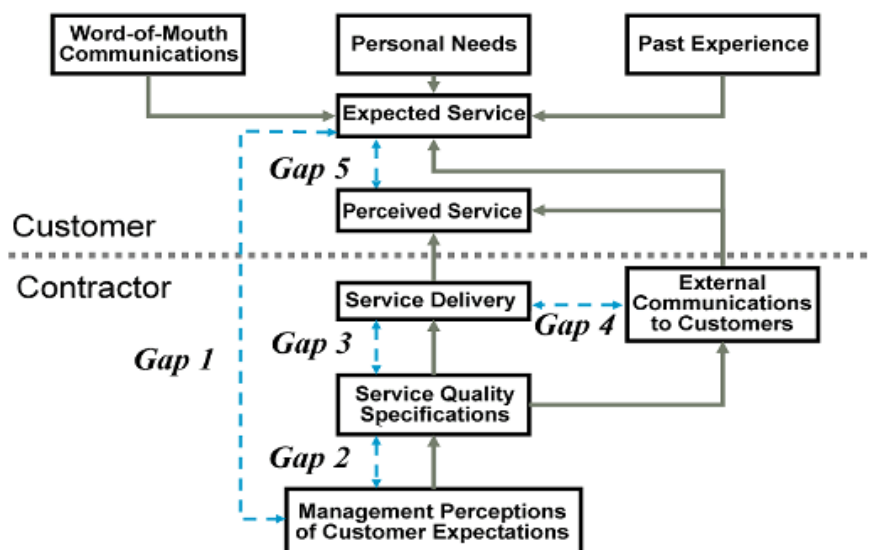


**Figure 3 – Managing Customer Satisfaction through Five Gap Model**

**2.5 Customer Loyalty and Brand Attachment**

Customer Loyalty comprises of a key performance indicator and it is necessary for a firm both to retain and increase its market share (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Especially in turbulent business environments, Customer Loyalty also leads to increased share of wallet, which means that loyal consumers are more likely to spend more for the service brand (Fullerton, 2003; Pollalis & Skourtis, 2011).

Comparing to the cost of retaining customer base, the cost of acquiring new customers is up to five times higher, because of marketing and promotion functionalities (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). As a result, successful brands succeed in retaining customers by utilizing promotion as a means to increase brand awareness and to reward consumers for their preference (Aaker & Biel, 1993).

Without the existence of a sufficient and satisfied mass of customers, it is quite possible that the efficiency of advertising is limited (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). Since promotion is a tool for affecting consumer perceptions and expectations, there is a great deal of danger for brands to dissatisfy customers in case brand's actual performance is poorer than the expected (Das, 2014). As a matter of fact, poor customer satisfaction negatively impacts customer relationships towards the brand by simultaneously affecting trust and commitment. Mistrust and low commitment encourage customers to develop brand switching and complaining behaviours (Louis & Lombart, 2010).

Furthermore, the fundamental difference between customer satisfaction and loyalty sources in the fact that satisfaction suggests the total sum of attitudes toward the brand, whereas "Customer Loyalty is the repeated consumer behaviour interpreted in cognitive or/ and an emotional preference in favor of a branded value offering" named also as brand attachment (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). Thus, customer satisfaction concerns every attitude and stance towards the brand, positive or negative, reflecting the quality of customer's experience. The aforementioned emotions and experience influence the widely known planned behaviour. According to this theory, behaviors and intentions are highly correlated to attitudes (Schmitt, 2012). Brand Loyalty can be distinguished in cognitive and emotional loyalty (Howat and Assaker, 2013). Cognitive loyalty occurs basically because of the fact that there is no better alternative brand choice and can be found in monopolistic or oligopolistic market structures (Gilliland and Bello, 2002). According to Gilliland and Bello (2002), the ideal Customer Loyalty

pattern is the one combining cognitive and emotional attributes. Brand attachment consists of the aforementioned emotional attributes. Cognitive Loyalty may also include preference related only to the augmented utility that a brand offering provides. The latter pattern of customer loyalty is being developed in high involvement products or in business to business markets (Fullerton, 2005). In business markets, cognitive loyalty pattern is more prominent due to the fact that business buyers are more rational and one can find detailed and strict buying procedures (Keller, 1998).

However, the emotional patterns of customer loyalty are the most important for marketing academics and practitioners (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). Brand Attachment is not very easy to be developed, because brand managers should fist establish a continuous and honest relationship between the brand and customer (Louis and Lombart, 2010). Thus, trust, attachment and commitment towards brand consist of the basic precursors of developing customer loyalty (Niros & Pollalis, 2014). Moreover, brand personality itself both influences and drives brand image facilitating the development of trust (Han and Hyun, 2015).

Last, but not least, customer loyalty is not only accounted for increased share of wallet and brand preference. According to East (2007), customer loyalty drives emotionally attached buyers to suggest the brand to their friends and colleagues. In marketing, positive direct references in favor of the brand concern a consumer behavior widely known as word of mouth communication (WoM) (East, 2007). WoM is critical for the rapid brand penetration and is being analyzed in the next paragraph.

## 2.6. WoM Communication

Word of mouth communication (WoM) suggests an informal form of communication between the firm and the potential buyer (Lim & Chung, 2011; Pollalis et al. 2011 ). According to Lim and Chung (2011), this kind of communication usually entails product and service evaluation, provided that consumers seek to gather information about alternative value offerings from other consumers who also encountered a buying problem. Martin and Lueg (2011) stressed that WoM concerns a cost free (both psychologically and physically) as well as a reliable way of transmitting information about products and services. As a result, WoM suggests a critical tool for marketers to communicate the

brand's value and is imperative to form consumer attitudes necessary for market penetration (Berger, 2014).

In addition, consumers tend to seek information from intimate persons, who are aware of various brands and are characterized by a great deal of product involvement (Greenacre et al., 2014). Persons like friends, colleagues and other opinion leaders are mainly used as sources of information necessary to minimize perceived risks related to a blurred picture of alternative solutions (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Thus, WoM considers a key performance indicator in terms of buying decisions, provided that it facilitates and filters the laborious Buying Decision Process (East, 2007; Pollalis, 2005; Pollalis & Skourtis, 2011).

## 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & HYPOTHESES' BUILDING

Brand Personality, Brand Image, Perceived Quality, Brand Attachment as well as Consumer Behaviour suggest the big five principal components of the conceptual framework in this paper. The big five brand personality traits as mentioned in the literature review incorporate 1) Sincerity, 2) Excitement, 3) Competence, 4) Sophistication and 5) Ruggedness. Factor Analysis (FA) proved that there are 2 more brand personality scales in Telco industry; Extroversion and Modern & Independent brand (see paragraph 6.1). Brand image is stressed to involve any coherence related to the branded value offering and it is considered as an outcome of brand personality. Brand image is thought to be a basic antecedent of Perceived Quality evaluations and customer satisfaction.

Brand Attachment scale on the other, which suggested by Louis and Lombart (2010), included a separate scale labeled as "Inertia" using the aforementioned method of FA in its application in the Telecommunications industry (see paragraph 6.1). Last, but not least, satisfaction predetermines Brand Attachment that leads to Consumer Behavior. The latter term involves Customer Loyalty and WoM as referred to in the Research Literature Review. Figure 4 illustrates the conceptual framework of the current research.
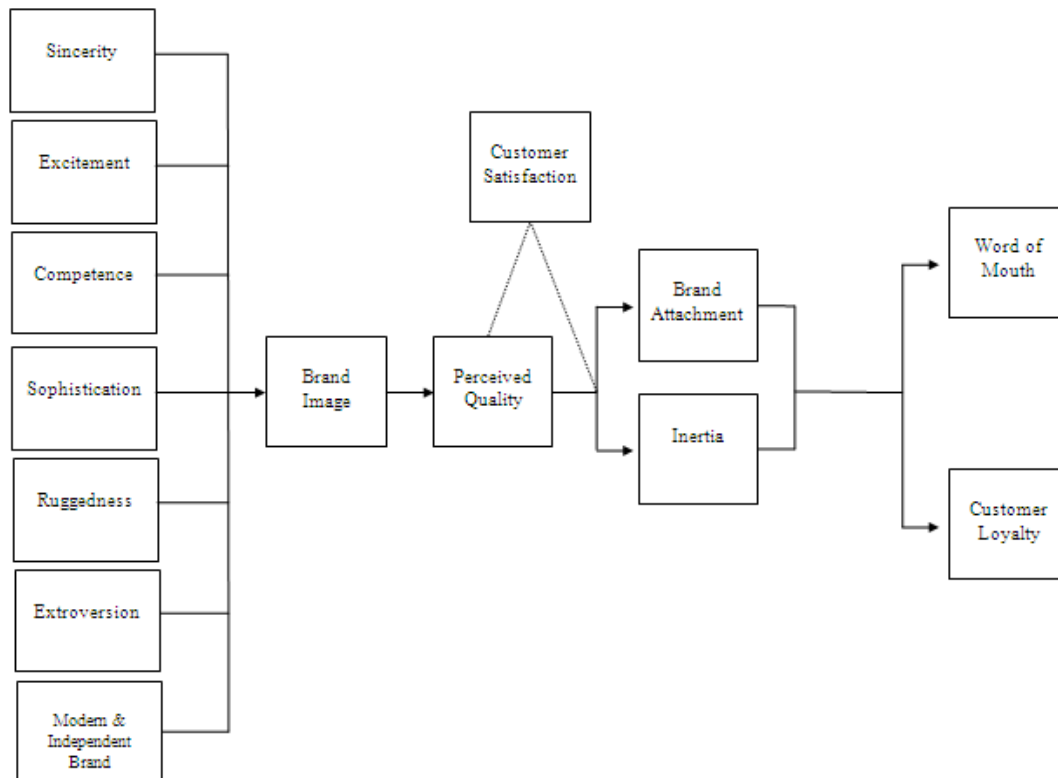
**Figure 4 – The proposed research Conceptual Framework**

According to Ismail and Spinelli (2012), Sincerity as a personality trait suggests a basic antecedent of forging both consumer's trust and positive attitudes towards service brands. Thus, it is *hypothesized that (H₁) sincerity positively influence brand image*.

In addition, Shimp (2010) and Tsiotsou (2012) stressed that Excitement creates positive connotations related to the uniqueness of the branded value offering. The latter is essential, because it drives customer experience and business excellence. As a result, the second Hypothesis include that *(H₂) the dimension of excitement is an antecedent that positively affects brand image*.

Furthermore, Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014), Bosnjak et al. (2007), Louis & Lombart (2010), Shimp (2010) and Tsiotsou (2012) quoted that competence is a critical success factor of building strong brands. Thus, it is hypothesized that *(H₃) the brand personality trait of competence is a key element that positively impacts brand image*.

As far as brand sophistication is concerned, Fetscherin and Heinrich (2015) noted that this trait is imperative for promoting brand image and differentiation. Thus, *(H₄) sophistication positively affects*

*brand image*. In addition, Tsiotsou (2012) stressed that ruggedness enhances brand perceptions related to sports clubs. As a result, *(H₅) ruggedness positively impacts brand image*. Furthermore, as Högström et al. (2015) explored, brand extroversion and modernity is crucial to improve customer experience and as a result to improve brand connotations. Thus, *(H₆) extroversion is positively correlated to brand image and (H₇) Modernity& Independence is a positive antecedent of brand image.*

As for brand image and its reflections on perceived quality, Alwi and Kitchen (2014)stressed that brand image especially in services helps consumers on developing positive perceptions about the service brand and vice versa. Thus, *(H₈) brand image is positively correlated to perceived quality.* In addition, according to Howat and Assaker (2013) there is a paradox in which positive perceptions about service quality don't necessarily lead to attachment towards the branded offering and customer loyalty. The aforementioned researchers indicated that this phenomenon is likely to happen in case customer satisfaction is poor due to poor customer experience. As a result, it is hypothesized that *(H₉) customer satisfaction positively mediates in the relationship between perceived quality and brand attachment and (H₁₀) customer satisfaction negatively mediates in the relationship between perceived quality and customer inertia.*

Last but not least, according to Malär et al. (2011) and Dawes (2014), brand attachment works as an antecedent of favorable consumer behavior and intentions. As a result *(H₁₁) brand attachment positively affects customer loyalty* and *(H₁₂) Inertia positively impacts customer loyalty. Also it is hypothesized that (H₁₃) brand attachment positively impacts word of mouth communication and (H₁₄) inertia positively influences word of mouth communication.*

## 5. METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Product

Mobile telecommunications services were chosen in the current research. Since telecommunications entail a great deal of intangibility, consumers find it very difficult to search for attributes in order to evaluate quality (low in search quality). Hence, brand personality in telecommunications might work

as a differentiation point for every business in this industry. Besides, conclusions in the mobile communications industry could be drawn to other industries with similar intangibility levels (pay TV industry, power supply industry etc.). In addition, both pre-paid as well as post-paid mobile services included in this research.

## 5.2 Method

Methodology suggests a critical success factor reassuring both better organizing and controlling of primary research data collection that is closely related to Hypotheses' acceptance or rejection. According to Parasuraman et al. (2007), many researchers develop several flaws during data collection process because of the fact that researchers don't have in mind some serious aspects. Some issues for instance concern the difficulty of approaching participants or accidentally acquiring non-probability sample (Saunders and Thornhill, 2003).

In this research, the quantitative data collection method preferred using structured questionnaire and conducting a Survey. Provided that brand personality, brand image and consumer behavior had been measured in the past by many researchers through various qualitative scales, qualitative method preferred as well (Beldona and Wysong, 2007) (Aaker, 1997). Moreover, this research is a confirmatory one because there have been lots of papers exploring separate marketing phenomena such as brand personality, image, quality and loyalty. A pre-sampling method also used by the researcher applying it to 20 participants in order to check it in terms of comprehension. The sample of the survey acquired using random sampling between the 1$^{st}$ of February and the 1$^{st}$ of March 2014 in Athens. With regards to the sample, 850 adult consumers requested to participate via a face to face handing over. 318 persons finally participated (response rate approximately 37%).

## 5.3 Research Instrument

The research instrument included four parts. In part A, there were statements describing brand personality as proposed by Aaker (1997) adjusted in the Greek reality and telco industry. Brand personality regarded five dimensions with the practice of 42 7-point Likert items (1= Not at all

descriptive to 7 = Extremely descriptive). Likert scale was preferable because it is easy and quick method. Moreover, it is quite helpful to use it in Factor Analysis.

In part B, there were Likert-based statements about brand image. These variables included soft and hard brand image attributes by using 10 adjusted Likert items as those suggested by Alwi and Kitchen (2014). With regards to Part C, consumer attitudes towards the brand were measured as well as the perceived quality of the service as proposed by Howat and Assaker (2013) using a 2 item scale.

As for Part D, which concerned brand attachment, Louis and Lombart (2010) suggested a brand attachment scale including 10 items that also used adjusted in this instrument. Last but not least, in Part E, Word of Mouth communication and Customer Loyalty were being measured. Regarding Customer Loyalty (Part E) the following 3 item scale suggested by Krystallis and Chrysochou (2014) also used:

1. I will extend my contract with this provider.

2. I will keep on preferring products/services of this provider.

3. In case an alternative provider offers me better conditions (Price, special offer etc.), I would still continue to find it difficult to switch this brand.

As for Word of Mouth communication, the 3-item WoM scale proposed by Greenacre et al. (2014) used measuring 1) word of mouth intention related to the brand, 2) word of mouth intention related to the firm.

## 6. FINDINGS

The final sample included 318 adults, roughly equaled with regards to the gender. Of the participants, 56 percent were female and 44 percent were male representing demographic status. Survey's customers also reflected on the regions' mobile market share.

### 6.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis & Reliability tests

Confirmatory Factor analysis indicated that in telecommunications industry there are 6 dimensions of personality, instead of 5. Just as Aaker (1997) indicated, there are the following reliable scales ascertained in the current research: 1) Sincerity (5 items loaded, Alpha Cronbach's reliability test = 0.93), 2) Ruggedness (4 items loaded, Alpha Cronbach's reliability test = 0.78), 3) Sophistication (7 items loaded Alpha Cronbach's reliability test = 0.90), 4) Excitement (5 items, Alpha Cronbach's reliability test = 0.84) and 5) Competence (9 items, Alpha Cronbach's reliability test = 0.93). However, there are 2 more dimensions of brand personality which are 6) Extroversion (6 items, Alpha Cronbach's reliability test = 0.83) and 7) modernity and independence (4 items, Alpha Cronbach's reliability test = 0.72). It is also underlined that all these scales are very reliable, which fact derives from the ranges of Alpha ranging from very good (0.72) to excellent reliability (0.93).

 With regards to the brand image scale, the 8-item scale proposed by Alwi and Kitchen (2014) proved to perfectly match with the telecommunications' brands. Besides, the Alpha Cronbach's reliability test value was quite excellent (A= 0.92). As for the brand attachment scale, which tested by Luis & Lombart (2010), the confirmatory factor analysis indicated there are 2 sub-scales. The first one is labelled as Brand Attachment (7 items loaded, Alpha Cronbach's Reliability test = 0.90) and the second Customer Inertia (3 items, Alpha Cronbach's = 0.90).

 Last but not least, Customer Loyalty scale proposed by Krystallis and Chrysochou (2014)  and WoM scale suggested by Greenacre et al. (2014), were all proven to be reliable in telecommunications as well. As for Customer Loyalty, every single item proposed by the aforementioned authors loaded in this factor and experienced a great deal of reliability (Alpha Cronbach's = 0.81). The three-item WoM scale was also excellent in terms of reliability (Alpha Cronbach's = 0.96). These analyses have led to the generation of new variables, drastically reducing their total number.


## 6.2 Descriptive Analysis

The final sample included 318 adults, roughly equaled with regards to the gender. Of the participants, 56 percent were female and 44 percent were male representing every age and educational group of Greece and volume market share. According to personality mean statistics (see Figure 5 and Table 2 below), participants declared moderate "Sincerity", "Ruggedness", "Sophistication" and

"Extroversion" (4.2, 3.5, 4.0 and 4.4 respectively) for their brands and somewhat high "Excitement",

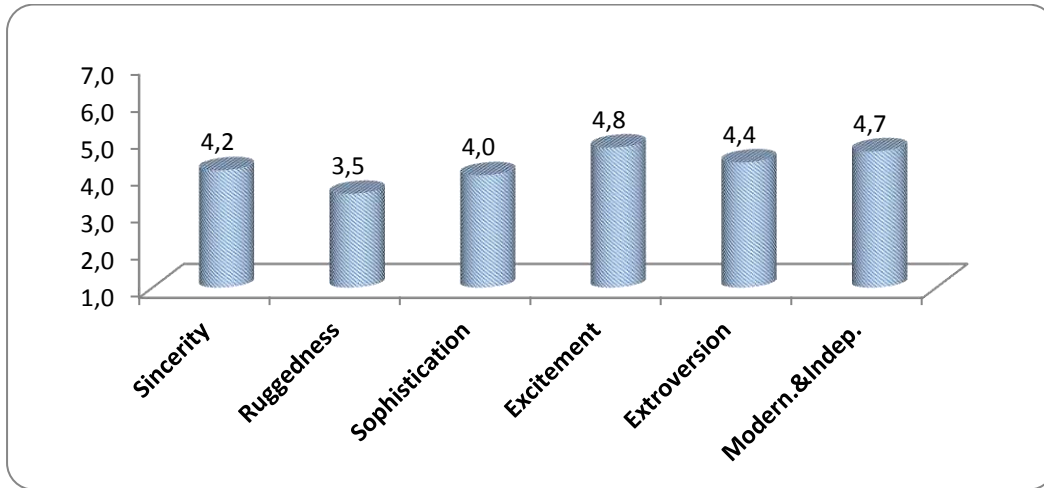"Modernity & Independency" (4.8 and 4.7 respectively).



**Figure 5 – Brand Personality Dimensions' Mean Statistics**

| Dimension | Count | Mean | S.D. | Range | Min. | Max. |
|-----------|-------|------|------|-------|------|------|
| Sincerity | 309 | 4.2 | 1.2 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 7.0 |
| Ruggedness | 307 | 3.5 | 1.2 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 7.0 |
| Sophistication | 305 | 4.0 | 1.1 | 6.1 | 0.1 | 6.3 |
| Excitement | 305 | 4.8 | 1.0 | 5.8 | 1.0 | 6.8 |
| Extroversion | 309 | 4.4 | 1.1 | 6.5 | 0.2 | 6.7 |
| Modern.& Independence | 305 | 4.7 | 1.0 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 7.0 |

**Table 2: Brand personality dimensions' Statistics**

As far as Brand Image, Quality and Customer Satisfaction are concerned (see Figure 6 and Table 3

below), participants declared somewhat high "Brand Image", "Perceived Quality", and "Customer

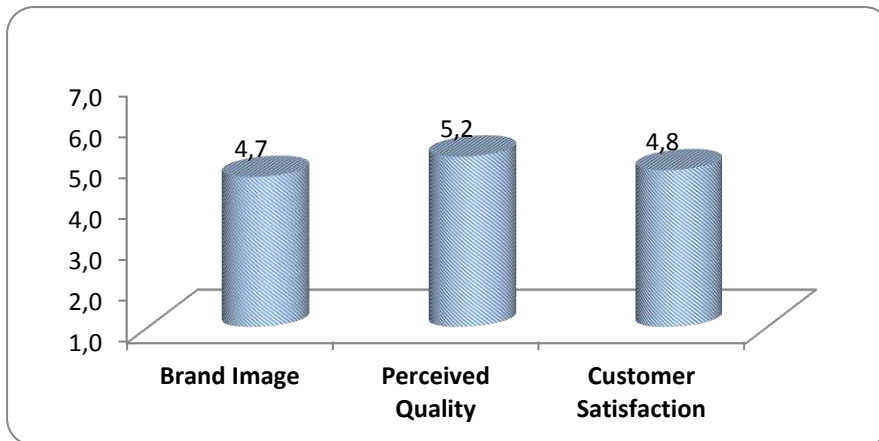Satisfaction" (4.7, 5.2 and 4.8 respectively) for their brands.

**Figure 6 – Brand Image, Perceived Quality and Cust. Satisfaction – Mean Statistics**

|  | Count | Mean | S.D. | Range | Min. | Max. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand Image | 318 | 4.7 | 1.1 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 7.0 |
| Perceived Quality | 318 | 5.2 | 1.2 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 7.0 |
| Customer Satisfaction | 302 | 4.8 | 1.4 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 7.0 |

**Table 3 – Brand Image, Perceived Quality and Cust. Satisfaction – Statistics**

Regarding Brand Attachment, Customer Inertia and consumer behavior (see Figure 7 and Table 4 below), participants declared moderate "Brand Attachment", "Customer Inertia", and "Customer Loyalty" (4.0, 3.4 and 4.4 respectively) and somewhat high "WoM" and "Customer Loyalty" (4.6 and 4.4 respectively) for their brands.
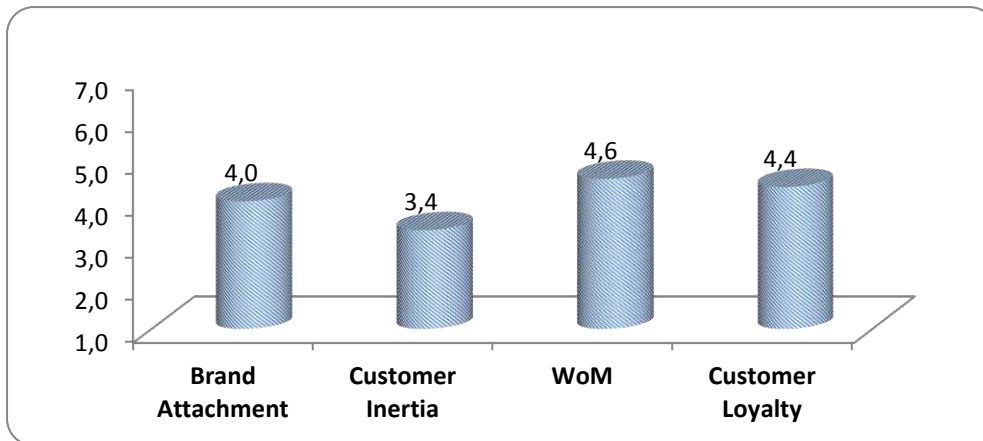
**Figure 7 – Brand Attachment, Cust. Inertia and Consumer Behavior – Mean Statistics**

|                  | Count | Mean | S.D. | Range | Min. | Max. |
|------------------|-------|------|------|-------|------|------|
| Brand Attachment | 307   | 4.0  | 1.1  | 5.7   | 1.0  | 6.7  |
| Customer Inertia | 308   | 3.4  | 1.6  | 6.0   | 1.0  | 7.0  |
| WoM              | 306   | 4.6  | 1.4  | 6.0   | 1.0  | 7.0  |
| Customer Loyalty | 308   | 4.4  | 1.3  | 6.0   | 1.0  | 7.0  |

**Table 4 – Brand Attachment, Cust. Inertia and Consumer Behavior**

Summarizing, mobile telecommunications' brand managers focus in personality dimensions like excitement, modernity & independency by simultaneously ignoring personality traits such as sincerity, ruggedness, sophistication and extroversion. As a result, brand attachment, inertia and customer loyalty are found to be moderate. Hypotheses' testing that follows is about to unveil alternative points to improve brand image.

**6.3 Hypotheses testing**

With regards to Hypotheses 1 to 7, Regression Analysis preferred in order to explore multiple and simultaneous effect of brand personality traits on Brand Image. Thus, dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, ruggedness, extroversion and brand modernity &

independence suggest all the independent variables of the forecast model. On the other hand, Brand Image suggested the dependent variable of the model. The $R^2$ of the aforementioned model is quite adequate (0.6590), since the significant independent variables explain the 65.90% of the total variability of the dependent variable (Brand Image).

Sincerity has the most important effect ($\beta = 0.338$, $p=0.00<\alpha=0.05$). In other words, *H1: sincerity positively influence brand image*, can be accepted. Note that beta coefficient is a measure of impact of the dependent variable on the independent variable. The positive sign shows positive impact and vise versa. In case sincerity value increases by 1 unit, brand image increases by 0.338 units. Moreover, sophistication positively influences brand image ($\beta = 0.292$, $p=0.00<\alpha=0.05$). As a result, *H4: the dimension of sophistication is a positive antecedent of brand image* is also acceptable. On the other hand, *H3: the brand personality trait of competence is a key element that positively impacts brand image* can also be accepted ($\beta = 0.299$, $p=0.00<\alpha=0.05$). Table 5 that follows briefly illustrates all the independent variables beta coefficients. Inference is shown in p values.

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLES | BETA | P |
|---|---|---|
| SINCERITY | 0.338 | **0.00** |
| EXCITEMENT | -0.130 | 0.53 |
| COMPETENCE | 0.299 | **0.00** |
| SOPHISTICATION | 0.292 | **0.00** |
| RUGGEDNESS | -0.100 | 0.89 |
| EXTROVERSION | -0.040 | 0.96 |
| MODERN & INDEPENDENT BRAND | -0.067 | 0.48 |

**Table 5: Brand personality dimensions' impact on Brand Image**

By referring to Table 5, it is remarkable that brand personality traits such as excitement, ruggedness, extroversion and modernity & independence have no impact at all in regression analysis inference. Thus, *H₂: excitement is antecedent positively affecting brand image*, *H₅: ruggedness positively impacts brand image*, *H₆: Extroversion positively impacts brand image* and *H₇: Modernity& Independence is a positive antecedent of brand image* should be rejected.

As far as Hypothesis 8 is concerned, simple regression analysis generated using Perceived Qality (PQ) as a dependent variable and Brand Image (BI) as an independent one. The findings indicated an R square measure of 0.37 and a significant positive impact of BI on PQ ($\beta = 0.68$, p=0.00<$\alpha$=0.05). Hence, *H₈: brand image is positively correlated to perceived quality* can be accepted (see Table's 6 regression analysis).

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLE | BETA | P |
|---|---|---|
| BRAND IMAGE | 0.68 | **0.00** |

**Table 6: Brand Image impact on Perceived Quality**

As for the mediation effect of Customer Satisfaction (CS) on the relationship between PQ and Brand Attachment (BA), mediation analysis test unveiled a significant mediation effect of CS on the latter relationship (z= 15.68> 1.96, thus p=0.00). Hence, *H₉: customer satisfaction positively mediates in the relationship between perceived quality and brand attachment*, is being accepted. Further mediation analysis, indicated that CS does not mediates in the relationship between PQ and Customer Inertia ($\beta$= 0.22, p>0.05). Therefore, *H₁₀: customer satisfaction negatively mediates in the relationship between perceived quality and customer inertia*, is rejected. Table 7 illustrates mediation analysis statistics on the following relationships.

| RELATIONSHIP | BETA | Z | P |
|---|---|---|---|
| PERC.QUALITY->BRAND ATTACHMENT | 0.63 | 15.68 | **0.00** |
| PERC.QUALITY->CUST. INERTIA | 0.22, NO SIG. | - | - |

**Table 7: Mediation Effect of Customer Satisfaction by relationship**

Last, but not least, BA and CI suggest basic precursors of consumer behaviour both in terms of Word of Mouth Communication (WoM) and Customer Loyalty (CL). Pearson Correlation analysis indicated strong positive correlation between BA and CL ($r = 0.70$, $p=0.00<\alpha=0.05$) and between BA and WoM ($r = 0.62$, $p=0.00<\alpha=0.05$). Therefore, "$H_{11}$: *brand attachment positively affects customer loyalty*" and "$H_{12}$: *Inertia positively impacts customer loyalty*" are acceptable hypotheses on a 5% confidence level. In addition, further analysis on the relationship between inertia and consumer behaviour revealed a weak to moderate correlation. CI is a moderate precursor of CL ($r = 0.52$, $p=0.00<\alpha=0.05$), whereas CI is a weak antecedent of WoM ($r = 0.33$, $p=0.04<0.05$). Hence, "$H_{13}$: *brand attachment positively impacts word of mouth communication*" and "$H_{14}$: *inertia positively influences word of mouth communication*" can be accepted. Table 8 below, suggests an inter-correlation matrix revealing the above-mentioned relationships.

| | *(1)* | *(2)* | *(3)* | *(4)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Brand Attachment (1)** | 1 | | | |
| **Customer Inertia (2)** | 0,45** | 1 | | |
| **WoM (3)** | 0,62** | 0,33* | 1 | |
| **Customer Loyalty (4)** | 0,70** | 0,52** | 0,67** | 1 |

*\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05*

**Table 8: Inter-correlation Matrix**

# 7. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Especially in turbulent business environments characterized by declining markets and over-fragmentation, service brands should enhance customer loyalty and word of mouth communication as means of consumer behaviour in order to survive and increase their market value. The question here is how to make consumers trust something intangible. Brand equity is the key strategy to affect consumer behaviour. Consistent and strong brand personality impacts brand image, since personality affects brand perceptions. Sincerity serves on improving trust in telecommunications. In addition, competence works as a tool for improving the image of a telecom brand, whereas sophistication reinforces innovativeness.

On the other hand, telecom brand managers should be aware of the fact that advertising is not the only key to shape or form brand's personality. Marketing communications managers sometimes exaggerate by raising consumer expectations without the capability of meeting these expectations through customer experience and service performance. Brand personality should be a continuous, persistent and hard effort by using Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). The latter tool is crucial in terms of building strong service brands, because IMC aims to align brand strategy with core capabilities and communication in every aspect of service delivery. First, Internal Marketing Orientation (IMO) is necessary to recruit, train, motivate and develop the proper employees needed to implement business strategy and endorse the company's organizational culture. In service firms, culture is the core capability to affect brand personality. Google's culture for instance is concentrated on innovation. Google also hires, motivates and develops the best talents from the best universities. As a result, Google could not have convinced its customers on its innovativeness only through advertising. HR practices and internal marketing is stressed to be vital to build strong brand image and performance. In addition, distribution channels or the style of the product itself further reinforce brand personality and image. These aspects greatly impact the service brand's perceived quality necessary to satisfy customers and reinforce brand attachment. Consumers characterised by a great deal of brand attachment find it very difficult to switch the brand, because they have developed trust towards the brand and feel emotionally involved. Consumers being attached to the brand are the best and the

cheapest salespersons, since they provide to other potential buyers with valuable, costless and trusted positive information necessary to entice trial and brand adoption.

In addition, this research encountered some limitations. First, survey was the basic data collection method. Although quantitative methods are strict and apt to statistical inference, they lack of basic qualitative figures. Emotions and observations in in-depth interviews could also be used in order to triangulate quantitative with qualitative data. Second, data collected only from mobile telecom customers. Any application of these findings in other regions or industries may be problematic.

Last, but not least, it would be interesting in a future research to explore brand image antecedents' for both Generation Y consumers in any sales channel type.

# 8. CONCLUSIONS

## 8.1 Brand Personality and Brand Image

Brand Personality consists of an imperative marketing tool for improving Brand Image. Brand Personality dimensions proved to be the best way to establish long-last relationship with the brand's customers and hence, to influence brand perceptions and connotations. However, the desired brand personality dimensions may be sensitive to the product, service or even culture. This research, which is focused on mobile telecommunications' industry, explored the basic dimensions of personality affecting brand image. The research findings unveiled Sincerity, Competence and Sophistication as basic brand image antecedents. These results are consistent to Tsiotsou (2012), Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014) and Fetscherin and Heinrich (2015). However, Excitement, Ruggedness and Extroversion did not drive brand image. These results are contrary to Högström et al. (2015).

## 8.2 Brand Image and Perceived Quality

In intangible offerings, in which quality assessment is difficult even after service delivery, consumer sometimes take into account some peripheral service quality figures (e.g. front line personnel's empathy, interaction, physical evidences and problem solving) rather than in the core product itself. Brand Image suggests a key performance indicator for many service providers, since it bolsters brand

liking and consequently brand equity. Hence, overall quality assessment is more favorable in high image service offerings. This research indicated that Brand Image affects Perceived Quality. This finding is consistent to Alwi and Kitchen (2014), Padgett & Allen (1997), Gurhan-Canli & Batra (2004) and inconsistent to Homer (2008).

## 8.3 Perceived Quality and Consumer Behavior

According to Pollalis et al. (2011), Howat and Assaker (2013), Perceived Quality works as a basic precursor of Consumer Behavior in service industries. This research is also aligned to the previous research, since Perceived Quality drives Brand Attachment, Inertia and consequently Customer Loyalty and Word of Mouth communication. However, customer satisfaction is a basic mediator leading to positive consumer behavior (e.g. favorable customer loyalty and positive WoM). This finding suggests that perceived quality is not enough to keep customers loyal. This is achieved through improved brand attachment that only satisfied customers develop. Customer Satisfaction in services is affected on pricing and other costs to consumers. Thus, service access costs and price may be imbalanced comparing to quality, leading to disconfirmation and dissatisfaction.

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