

Marketing Strategies in Mobile Companies

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University College of Business, Tirana Tirana, June 2021

Abstract

The marketing strategies of the service provided by mobile phones for telephone calls, internet, messages and services provided in mobile telephony are the object of this study. SERVQUAL model, which is suitable for measuring the quality of services, studies the mobile telephony market in Albania. In this study the mobile services market and the marketing strategies used therein are analyzed. A comparative analysis has also been made between the different service delivery strategies among the existing operators in Albania.

The study includes a representative sample in Albania and tries to describe an overview of the quality of mobile telephony services and consumer satisfaction related to the degree of realization of these services. Through the study can be seen the differences that operators have from each other in the assessment and perception of the customer. Through the instrument built to measure the quality of services and the effectiveness of marketing strategies adopted by mobile companies in Albania in the years 2016-2017, light has been shed on the strategies adopted and how much these have been translated into service and satisfaction of the respective clients of the actors in Albanian market.

Seen from the consumer, this paper puts a special emphasis on mixed marketing, with price at the top in terms of importance, given that market demand in this industry is very elastic, very price sensitive, but also very informed about prices, offer and quality of services of the respective company as well as competition.

The findings of this paper show that although the services of companies are similar to each other, there are significant differences in specific aspects of the different strategies applied by mobile companies. It is emphasized by the findings that the specifics of the service sold in this market make the offer very homogeneous and difficult to differentiate in the long run, but that can have a major impact on market share or in certain areas in the short term.

Keywords: Marketing Strategies, Mobile Operators, Servqual, Services Measurement, Albania

JEL Classification: L96, M31, D83.

1. Introduction

This paper uses Servqual model for measuring the services' quality. The service in this case being marketing strategies of mobile operators in Albania. The main data for the study were collected with the structured questionnaire of the respondents. The researchers directly surveyed by administering the questionnaire. The questions were distributed to different samples and different groups, in terms of age, sex, income, education and more. Diversification that has been done according to the areas where the mobile phone is used, in urban or suburban areas. This distribution and diversification of the interviewee was done in order for the sample to be as representative as possible for the average Albanian user.

The citizens of Albania who use mobile phone companies are the population considered for this study. Within this population, the non-random sampling technique was used, through which a sample of approximately 1300 interviewees was studied. Some criteria are taken for each respondent that serve as demographic or case control variables. The first criterion used is the Settlement, where the whole population is divided into three layers, respectively urban, semi-urban and rural or according to the terminology of the questionnaire: City, Commune, Village.

The second criterion is age, where the division is made into age groups which in similar studies are representative and differ in their habits of buying and using mobile phones in different ways, for example a teenager uses more mobile phones in the data area whether voice or internet for social networks, we cannot say the same for a third age that in this study are the group over 65 years. Also, during the sampling, care was taken to have representatives from both genders, age groups and other variables such as employment status divided into groups and family income segments per month. All these criteria constitute the variables on the basis of which the statistical analysis will be performed.

In order to obtain the consistency of the scales and the measuring instrument the consistency analysis was done using Cronbach of Alpha.

chart1-Summary Cronbach's Alpha

Case Processing Summary				Reliability Statistics		
		N	%	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Cases	Valid	582	45.0			
	Excluded	711	55.0			
	Total	1293	100.0			

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Source: Author

The value found in this study of 0.978 implies an acceptable and qualitatively very reliable level of measurement scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated for all multiplied scales and the alpha values obtained were above 0.9. This ensures that the reliability of the questionnaire is within an acceptable level. Validity is the ability of a measuring instrument to measure what it is designed to measure. The validity of the questionnaire was assessed in the mini pilot study and appropriate corrections were made in the questionnaire according to the case and the problems encountered.

1.1 Hypothesis

The hypotheses formulated for the study are:

1. There are significant differences between product differentiation strategies between mobile telecom service providers.
2. There are important differences regarding the pricing strategies of different mobile phone providers.
3. There are significant differences between promotion strategies among mobile service providers.

1.2 Review of Marketing Strategies Practiced for Telecom Service

Marketing strategies have changed according to some key and very important moments in the Albanian market. Market breakthroughs where the changes were most significant. These moments in time should definitely be related to the entry of operators in the market. It was originally the AMC operator which started as a state-owned company by privatizing the state-owned telecommunications company in 1995. At this point it was very important to move from a single market operator with 100% of the market to regulating and privatizing this market for them. brought in efficiency and for this reason AMC was the first private operator to enter the market.

The main focus of telecom service providers marketing strategies is to seek competitive advantage through a well-integrated program of 7 service elements of marketing, product, pricing, location, promotion, people, physical premises and processes, tailored to the needs and desires of potential customers in this target market. Amc at this point had simple differentiation because

there were no competitors and the only differentiation it had to make was to break away from the outdated state service and focus on the service which was gaining momentum in the world at that time, mobile telephony.

Amc did its best to do this, relying on existing state structures and staff, focusing more on introducing new service and signal coverage of all areas, first cities then rural areas. We recall that in the years 95-96 there was a marked lack of supply and a much greater demand than supply, so the Albanian market was in the product era. Such a market structure, it is enough to produce a product, service in this case, and offer it in the market because demand always had the opportunity to absorb this limited supply.

With the expansion of the service provided, the coverage of the areas and the increase of the number of subscribers, the company had the opportunity to slightly reduce the prices pushed by the regulatory institutions such as AKEP. The biggest and most significant change in the market, however, would come in the 2000s, when Vodafone, represented by Vodafone Greece, decided to enter the market. Differentiation is the most powerful and meaningful topic that differentiates companies in developing marketing strategies. As Michael Porter points out: "A company can only survive with its rivals if it can make a difference that it can sustain. "It should provide greater value to consumers, or create comparable value at a lower cost, or both."

Primary data collection for the study was conducted over a one-year period in 2016-2017. During this period, there were four providers of mobile telecom services in Albania namely: Telekom, Plus, Vodafone and Eagle Altelecom. Telecom service providers are privately owned organizations.

In 2017 one of the major changes that occurred in the telecommunications market was the closure of the company Plus Communication by terminating services on 31.12.2017. The rights and radiofrequency of using Plus were transferred to Vodafone and Telekom Albania. In 2017 there is also a decrease in revenues from operators in the telecommunications market and are estimated to be around 37 billion ALL and there is a decrease from 2016 by 13% 73 which were 42.4 billion. In mobile networks this decrease was 12%, while in fixed telephony by 14%. Despite the general market decline, the total revenues of mobile market operators in their retail revenues increased by 0.4%. Wholesale sales have declined significantly for all four operators.

The number of active users also decreased by 5.9% from 2016, reaching 3.2 million. The number of broadband internet users has increased. The number of active internet users reached about two million in 2017, an increase of about 20 percent. The averages for 2017 are these for mobile users: outgoing calls per month are 160 or two and a half hours for each active user, the average user has sent about 34 messages per month and consumed about 2.06 GB of broadband internet.

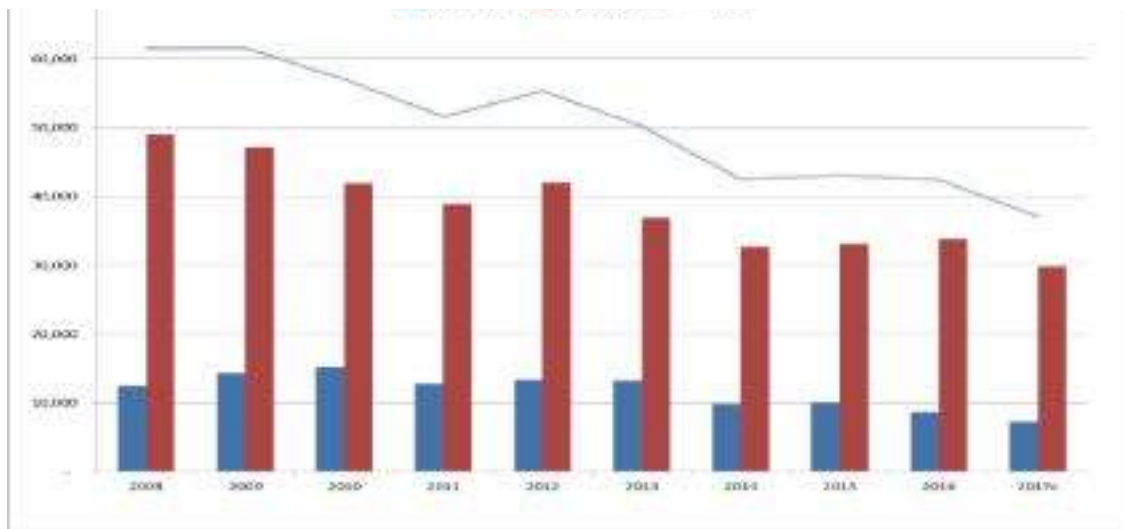
One of the changes that Vodafone, Altelecom and Telekom undertook was to reduce their bids from 30 to 28 days or 4 full weeks. This decision was to the detriment of the consumer, causing AKEP to intervene and change their decisions again in 30 days, thus acting against the companies and in favor of the Albanian consumer.

If we take an overview of the revenues that mobile and fixed network operators have had during the years 2008 to 2017, we will see fluctuations and a downward trend for these revenues. The decline is significant and if we take as a basis in 2008 the revenues of operators have been over ALL 60 billion, after the entry of the fourth operator Plus Communication, in 2010, we see that there is even more decline in profits and remember that prices for final customers at this time have started to decrease significantly. These prices with monthly packages up to 500 ALL would be kept in the market until the final release of Plus Communication at the end of 2017¹. After the release of the latter the prices returned to double those that had been during this time.

For 2017, the revenues of the four major mobile service operators accounted for 91-92% of all revenues of the telecommunications market. The revenues of these operators were reduced by 13% in 2017.

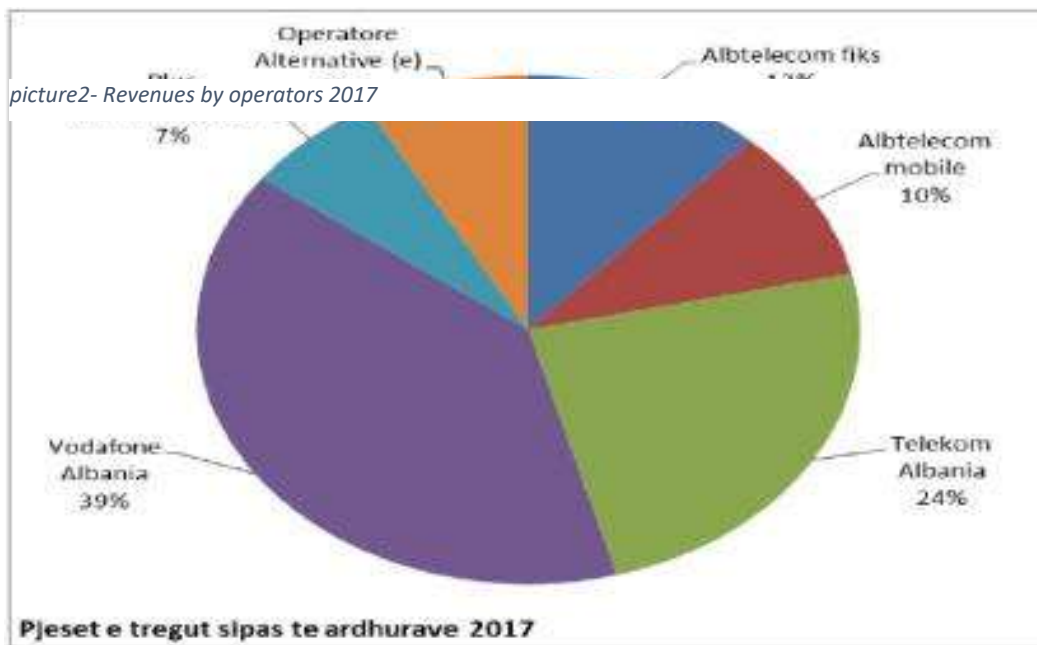
¹Akep. Annual Activity Report 2017.

picture 1 Revenues of Telecommunication Market Operators



Source: Akep. 2017. Annual Report 2017.

According to AKEP data, there is also a market division by operators or revenues per operator and it is seen that there is a market dominance by Vodafone as the leader and Telekom in second place as expected. Behind it we see the part of Plus Communication which is smaller in the market almost comparable to the market share of alternative operators. Albtelcom with both mobile and fixed companies has achieved a significant share comparable to the profit of Telekom.



Source: Akep. 2017. Annual Report 2017.

One of the very important trends which have been observed in 2017 is almost doubling the use of data or internet on mobile and not only. Although other indicators such as calls, profits, cost per person etc. are on the decline during 2017 from 2016, broadband internet usage has almost doubled or more by 71% increase. During the years 2013-2017 there is an increase of broadband users of 65% but the volume of data has increased more than 18 times during this period. You can also see the unstoppable downward trend of international incoming calls by about 44% in 2017 but if we compare with 2013 there is a 4-fold decline.

In terms of broadband network in 3G and 4G mobile networks there is an increase of 22% of users. Also, the penetration in the population of active users of broadband access has seen a significant increase, from 60% at the end of 2016 to 72% at the end of 2017. This is an increasing trend of the population where now even the elderly have started using social networks and communication networks via the Internet, such as Whatsapp and Viber, Facebook, etc.

A downward trend has been experienced in the traffic of telephone calls and the total number of SMS messages during 2017. Phone calls have decreased by 3% compared to 2016, while telephone messages have decreased by 13% compared to 2016.

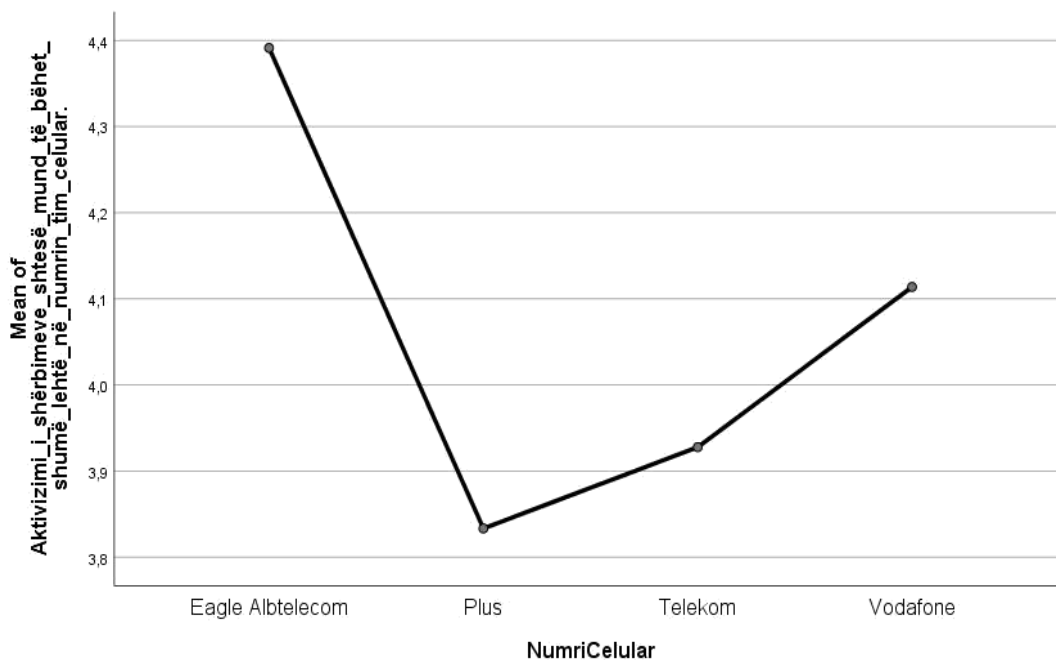
1.3 Hypothesis I

There are significant differences between product differentiation strategies between telecom mobile service providers.

The variables that are considered for the analysis of product differentiation strategies of mobile telecom service providers in Albania are: main basic service benefits, supplementary service benefits, customer support services in relation to product availability, customer support services that have relate to customer care, quality of service and brand value. The basic benefits of basic service are clearly measured in terms of voice, network coverage, geographical coverage or nationwide coverage, as well as ease of networking.

The main additional benefits are measurable from the questions on the quality of roaming and the ease regarding the activation of internet services. Customer support services related to the availability of the product consist of the ease of buying a new mobile number, the availability of prepaid numbers in convenient places and their location everywhere, support for prepaid customers, convenience in ease of payment of invoices and special care for contract customers. Customer support services are about customer care. They are measured by the ease with which customers can activate additional services and the ease of disabling them.

One of the ways to measure additional support services is also the ease of accessing or connecting to the customer care line on the phone, the ease of taking the turn of the customer care operator on the phone and the ability of the latter to solve problems. The quality of service of mobile network operators is measured by the 22-point SERVQUAL scale. All variables are measured on a



five-level Likert scale, with I don't Agree at all, up to I Completely Agree. All variables considered to perform the analysis of product differentiation strategies of mobile telecom service providers were tested separately as indicated by the study hypotheses.

Source: Author.

As seen in the graph and confirmed in the descriptive statistics of Anova there is a difference in the averages of additional services between the companies Eagle Albtelecom and Telekom. To see the magnitude of this effect of change the measurement must be made again through the table, done by taking the ratio of the sum of the squares between the groups over the total sum of the squares.

Measuring the effect of the statistical difference between the Albtelcom Eagle and Telekom groups for activating additional services can be calculated as: $RS^2 = 7642/305503 = 0.025$. The measurement of this effect is called ES, Effect Size, and is interpreted based on Cohen's theory². According to Cohen the magnitude of this effect can be presented and interpreted thus. He divides the effects into 3 groups according to finding the magnitude of this effect. The effect is small when the figure found is up to 0.2. The effect is medium when the number found is up to 0.5 and the large effect is when ES exceeds 0.8.

Chart 2-Anova for Support Services

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
It's very easy to get a new cell phone number (SIM)	Between Groups	2,142	3	, 714	, 814	, 486
	Within Groups	1117,930	1274	, 877		
	Total	1120,072	1277			
Activation of additional services	Between Groups	9,184	3	3,061	3,138	, 025
	Within Groups	1246,835	1278	, 976		
	Total	1256,020	1281			
Deactivation of additional services	Between Groups	7,505	3	2,502	1,889	, 129
	Within Groups	1686,923	1274	1,324		
	Total	1694,429	1277			

Source: Author.

It is clear that the effect in this case of ES is 0.25, which can be interpreted as medium. According to Cohen the square of the value r is the percentage of variance in the independent variable which can be explained by the participation in the groups of the independent variable. In other words, if the value 0.25 can be rounded to 0.3 then the value of r will be 0.148 and the value r squared will be = 0.022. this means that 2.2% of the variance of the independent variable can be explained by participation in factor groups or groups based on telephone operators. The median effect means that there is a difference and is between significance and insignificance, being in the 0.3 range. So, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant small difference between the groups.

A very important part for mobile users is also the solution of problems by the customer care from the company. This is part of additional services but with a critical importance for the quality of service and the perception that the client creates for the company. In the area of additional services related to customer care and recharging, Eagle Albtelkom has recorded higher averages compared to other competitors. In one of the variables, the ability of employees to solve customer problems Plus Communication seems to have a higher average than other companies. From the homogeneity test or assumption, it follows that there is no statistically significant variance change.

In their assessment of customer service in terms of accessibility and the possibility of making a connection with customer care, it seems that customers have a slightly higher rating in Eagle Albtelkom and Plus. Vodafone and Telecom averages appear to be slightly lower in terms of customer service achievement. If the homogeneity of the variances is seen no statistically significant difference is found to conclude that there is a difference between the means and their variances between the users rating.

The other variable where users are asked if it is easy to find the right person in the customer service tries to measure the effectiveness and the possibility of solving problems in the shortest possible time. In this variable it is seen that there is a difference in the percentage of users. Vodafone gets a rating that the right person is not always found in relation to customer

²Cohen, J. (1988). Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

service. This assessment seems to be more highlighted in the 21-35 age segment. While it seems to do better in groups less than 20 years old and the group over 50 years old. Here in the 21-35 age group Vodafone needs to do more about support services and user problem solving.

Regarding the variable that the staff of operators has solved the problems of the clients in an excellent way, it is seen from the analysis that the operators are highly appreciated by their users. In the age group with the highest concentration in the analysis of this study which is the age of 21-35 years, which reflects very similarly the situation or percentage of the population of Albania in 2017³, where the age that belongs to the group under 20 years old using as a lower limit the age of 10 years old, where around this age children start using the phone and have a number in use has about 14.3 percent of the entire population. The second group, the one between the ages of 20 and 34, which constitutes 23.4% of the population in 2017. The group between 35 and 49 years constitute about 17.9 percent. The group over 50 is also a very important group with a high concentration of the population although it remains to be seen what is the limit of end use of the mobile phone, maybe 75 years can be a reasonable age to say that after this age there a very limited number of persons use of cell phone numbers.

So, in the segment of the age group 21-35 years it is seen that in the variable of the ability of the staff of operators to solve the problems of customers Plus has a very high rating, significantly better than other operators. As the company is still smaller compared to other operators, customer service turns out to be effective and careful in solving the problems of its users. It is therefore the lack of massification of the company that allows it to have more interaction with customers and take better care of their needs and problems related to mobile number. In the 36-50 age group, Telekom has an opinion or perception of its users that it is very easy to find the right solution and the right person.

1.4 Hypothesis II

Pricing Strategy: There is a significant difference between the pricing strategies of mobile telecom service operators in Albania.

The pricing strategy has a direct impact on the revenue and profit of any organization. Although pricing is simply the exchange value of a product or service, pricing strategies depend on pricing objectives. Pricing targets are different for different service providers. Objectives can be: fast profits, steady profit, market growth, price leadership or to increase the firm image in order to attract as many customers as possible or to attack competitors strategically. During the mid-2000s, with the presence of newcomers to telecom operators, competition in the mobile phone market increased and inevitably competition over prices also began.

Pricing and setting them became the biggest strategy of all telecom operators. Tariff plan varieties have been introduced by telecom service providers to attract customers of multiple segments. Special services allow customers to make calls, or send SMS, and access low-cost Internet access, sometimes indefinitely. One of the pricing strategies can also be considered modelling or benchmarking as a marketing strategy that is effective in a turbulent environment.

Online services have also entered the market, electronic recharge, credit recharge via e-banking, special and combined offers for voice calls, data and messages all in one payment. Exclusive tariff plans are applied to closed user groups such as friends, family, official groups or business groups. These are tariff plans that aim to reach and retain no longer specific customers but natural customer groups, such as family, business or people who communicate frequently with each other.

Personalized tariff packages for individuals are also offered by some telecom services. Prices change as often as market players change. We can mention here the super high prices at the beginning of the first AMC operator in 1995-96. With the entry of the second operator Vodafone, prices fell drastically, even more in 2005 when the third operator Eagle entered Albania, and Albanian consumers recognized the lowest prices when there were 4 operators in the market. Since last year the fourth operator Plus has gone bankrupt, causing prices to return to high levels as they were before the 4th operator entered.

In the Anova table below you can see the difference that exists in the significance coefficient in relation to the first variable for the variety of tariff plans. It is seen that there is a coefficient less than 0.05, which indicates that the null hypothesis which is no statistically significant difference between the group variances can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis which says that there

³Instat. 2017. Population on 01 January 2018.

(<http://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/tregurit-demografik%C3%AB-dhe-social%C3%AB/popullsia/#tab2>). Accessed on 10.06.2021.

are statistically significant differences between the groups can be rejected. The same result is confirmed by the Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests, where the level of significance coefficient again confirms the significant difference between the variables.

Chart 2 - Anova for Tariff Plans

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
There are plenty varieties in tariff plans.	Between Groups	32,512	3	10,837	6,619	,000
	Within Groups	2079,454	1270	1,637		
	Total	2111,966	1273			
It's easy to change tariff plans.	Between Groups	9,554	3	3,185	2,164	,091
	Within Groups	1845,769	1254	1,472		
	Total	1855,323	1257			
My provider assists me in finding the right tariff plan that best suits me	Between Groups	17,222	3	5,741	3,885	,009
	Within Groups	1864,860	1262	1,478		
	Total	1882,082	1265			

Source: Author

So, as seen in the table there is a statistically significant difference between the groups in the variables "Variety of tariff plans" and "Advice of the service provider for customers" in relation to the existing tariff plans.

2. Company Brand Value

The questions that make up this brand measurement element are the service provider has a brand which is widely respected and considered. This question is asked to see if the operator's brand recognition feels strong in the perception of its existing customers. Another question is asked about the quality or qualitative opinion that consumers have about the brand and its recognition among the entire population. Looking at the first question that says the firm has established a brand which is different and special from other operators.

Although there is no large difference in absolute value between operators in this variable Eagle Altelecom has the highest average and then other operators follow. To the second question that says that the brand is considered high and respected in the market Vodafone is above as average although there is no major difference. On the question that sees and evaluates the part of the company as a business and its success perceived by its existing customers, again Vodafone has the highest opinion and average. In all three of these variables there is a small difference between the means of each group.

Data analysis by means of the Anova table shows that the statistical values of the three variables are .944, .840 and .145 respectively according to the order of questions or variables. These values are less than 0.05 which is the acceptance limit of the basic hypothesis. In this case it can be said that based on the value of statistical significance the null hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference between the variables across the control groups or the factor can not be rejected. It is thus concluded that the variances of the variables have no significant differences and the principle of homogeneity of the variances stands. These results are also reinforced by robust tests of equality of means and multiple comparisons made between groups for different variables.

3. Conclusion

The study shows that there are some important differences between the services provided even though it is a market with very similar and homogeneous services. The largest changes are seen to cause a statistically significant difference between operators and this significantly changes the perception that consumers have of the respective companies. Some companies have significant differentiation in the strategies followed in relation to the product launched on the market, as confirmed by the first hypothesis, which shows that Eagle Altelecom has a higher rating than all other operators and Vodafone has the highest rating low, in terms of the share of basic services as part of the product.

If the indicators of the basic supplementary service are taken, as confirmed again by the first hypothesis, it is seen that Vodafone has a significant difference with other companies, and the company Plus is ranked worse in these services. Being part of the basic or basic services of the product, this is one of those indicators that the company should have done better or that customers have valued less compared to the competition making it less attractive in the market.

Based on these identified changes for companies and following this logical model for other hypotheses where the significant differences between companies are confirmed, to companies that have scored lower in the averages of the study responses is recommended:

1. To work more on both the quality of services and the field of marketing strategies, after increasing the quality, the strategy to apply and communicate the growth in specific aspects is essential for the perception and customer satisfaction.
2. To gain knowledge of the shortcomings they may have and address these concerns of their customers, as seen from the study on specific aspects related to service quality or product features or one of the marketing mix variables, customers have reservations or their grievances which need to be seriously considered and remedied by operators in order to avoid abandonment or change of company by customers and avoid exit from the market as happened to Plus.
3. Once measures are taken in the indicators where it seems that the company is not only statistically significantly different from the others, but also below the industry average, in this case it is necessary to see what causes this low rating, to improve the service or aspects of product or the whole strategy.
4. Have a clear and relevant communication with customers to make them understand what has changed in relation to the specific indicator or overall marketing mix strategy. Marketing communication is one of the main and important factors in order for the marketing strategy to work and be conveyed to the customer, so customers will have the right information and evaluation of the strategy and its application.

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