Effects of Internet Service Quality Perception on Brand Loyalty in Telecommunication Industry A Case of Vodacom Customers at St. Augustine University of Tanzania

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the impact of internet service reliability on customer retention and brand loyalty within the telecommunication industry, using Vodacom at SAUT, Mwanza, Tanzania as a case study. This study adopted a positivist philosophy with a descriptive design to determine the effect of service quality on brand loyalty among users of Vodacom services at St. Augustine University of Tanzania, using a sample size of 377 students. Data analysis was done through a linear regression model, where reliability was ensured through a pilot study and Cronbach's alpha of 0.9. The findings showed that, among Vodacom internet users, service reliability has a moderate positive correlation with brand loyalty; thus, service reliability strongly affects customers' perceptions of the brand. However, the regression analysis did not support a statistically significant direct effect of service reliability on brand loyalty, perhaps indicating that there are other factors contributing to this relationship. These factors included customer service quality, pricing strategies, perceived value, brand reputation, and emotional connection with the brand. The findings revealed that while service reliability is an important determinant of customer loyalty, more research should be done to identify other influence factors. The study concluded that service reliability bears positive influence on brand loyalty; however, the direct effect may be negligible, with other unexamined factors probably playing their role. The study recommended Vodacom to develop a strategy that would help the company improve its service reliability, particularly on network coverage and consistency of data, which would lead to improved customer loyalty. Furthermore, employee training that increases responsiveness and exploration of other variables influencing brand loyalty would serve to better complete an overall process of retaining customers.

Keywords: *Internet Service, Reliability, Customer Retention, Brand Loyalty, Telecommunication Industry, Vodacom, SAUT*

1. Introduction

Internet services have become integral to daily life, encompassing communication, commerce, and entertainment. As the demand for connectivity rises, customer expectations evolve alongside technological advancements, making the quality of services essential. High service quality significantly influences customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty.

The telecommunications sector in Tanzania is rapidly growing, driven by technological advancements and increased demand for mobile internet services. In 2018, the sector contributed 1.9% to the nation's GDP, reflecting its significant role in the economy (Akim, 2022). Regulated by the Tanzania Communication Regulatory Authority (TCRA), which oversees postal, electronic communications, and broadcasting services, the market is highly competitive, with five major providers: Vodacom Tanzania, Airtel Tanzania, Tigo

Tanzania, Tanzania Telecommunication Company Limited (TTCL), and Halotel offering voice, internet, messaging, and mobile money services (TCRA, 2022; TCRA, 2024). Vodacom Tanzania, the leading provider, serves 2.8 million subscribers across 19 regions and generates an estimated revenue of 11.8 billion TZS, while focusing on digital inclusion and social innovation (Vodacom, 2023). Despite its dominance, Vodacom faces intense competition, as service similarities among providers push each company to prioritize service quality as a key element of their business strategy (Msengi, 2022).

Service quality is crucial for businesses aiming to achieve growth, customer loyalty, and a competitive advantage (Herring, 2021). Companies must align their strategies with customer expectations, offering high-quality services at reasonable prices to ensure satisfaction and sustainability (Juhudi, 2020). Dissatisfied customers are likely to switch brands, making it essential for companies like Vodacom to prioritize customer satisfaction to avoid attrition and foster brand loyalty (Adewale, 2019). In the digital age, brand loyalty goes beyond repeat purchases and reflects an emotional connection with the brand, influenced by factors such as customer service, social media, and online reviews (Keller, 2018; Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020). Loyal customers not only drive revenue but also serve as advocates, amplifying the brand's reputation through word-of-mouth and social media (Yulianto et al., 2022).

University students represent a crucial demographic that can enhance brand loyalty for various products, particularly within the telecommunications sector (Izogo, 2017). Tossell et al. (2015) indicate that communication among university students now extends beyond mere functionality. Lepp et al. (2014) emphasize that mobile networks play an essential role in students' academic pursuits, social interactions, and overall campus life. The choice of a mobile service provider is now determined by a broader spectrum of experiences and perceptions associated with the brand, rather than solely by connectivity (Jones & Chin, 2015). The Vodacom brand, for instance, not only affects students' personal communication but also enhances their ability to access online resources through the implementation of 4G and 5G networks (Kola, 2022).

Technological advancement and growth in the adoption of cloud computing have relaxed study methods for students. This has significantly changed the educational landscape. By using mobile devices and computers connected via social networks and cloud storage, the practices followed by students have gradually shifted from analog to digital, while their screen time is extended day by day, and daily routines are changing accordingly (Kafyulilo, 2014). The quality of service provided by mobile service providers is crucial for supporting students' academic success (Temba, 2013). In the global marketplace, businesses face significant challenges in meeting evolving customer demands, requiring substantial investments in service quality (Shishi, 2021). A key factor in service quality issues is the failure to fully understand the changing needs of customers, influenced by various cultural,

social, psychological, and individual factors (Forhad et al., 2022). A strong link exists between service quality and customer satisfaction, with satisfied customers more likely to remain loyal and less likely to switch to competitors, which is crucial for fostering long-term brand loyalty (Shishi, 2021). Even a modest improvement in customer retention can lead to very significant profitability gains, from 25% up to 85% additional profitability, according to Sedoyeka (2015).

In Tanzania, Vodacom stands out as the foremost mobile network provider, boasting a market share of 30.5% of active users compared to its competitors. This statistic indicates a significant competitive edge over other mobile networks in the region (TCRA, 2023). As a leader in mobile services, Vodacom has implemented a range of offerings designed to enhance service quality for its customers over the years. Vodacom, along with several other companies, has allocated TZS 156.0 billion, representing 14.5% of its revenue in 2023, towards capital expenditures focused on enhancing network and IT infrastructure. This financial commitment has been directed towards expanding network coverage, increasing network capacity, deploying 5G sites, and installing fiber in key areas, thereby modernizing the network to improve security and resilience while also promoting operational efficiency (Vodacom, 2023). These enhancements aim to ensure that consistent services are delivered to customers, which in turn supports and elevates the brand's reputation among network users. However, loyal customers are more resistant to price-based competition and are more likely to recommend the business to others, thus reinforcing brand loyalty and benefiting the company. Thus, Vodacom, as a service provider, continues to encounter challenges in delivering services, particularly with network coverage in certain areas such as Mwanza (TCRA, 2024). Consequently, this study seeks to evaluate the quality of service offered by Vodacom in relation to achieving customer retention and brand loyalty within a competitive business environment.

2. Objective of the Study

To examine the internet services reliability (e.g. connection stability and uptime) on customer retention and repeat purchase in relation to brand loyalty to customers at St. Augustine University of Tanzania.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the SERQUAL model. The Model was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985). It is a widely recognized framework for evaluating service quality by assessing the gap between customer expectations and their perceptions of actual service delivery. This model identifies five key dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, which together influence customer satisfaction and loyalty (Batonda, 2022; Syahir et al., 2014). The model highlights five critical gaps that can affect service quality, including discrepancies in management's understanding of customer expectations, the alignment between service standards and actual performance, and the communication of service delivery (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

While SERVQUAL is highly regarded for its ability to assess service quality across various contexts, it has been criticized for issues like overlapping items across dimensions and low reliability in some cases (Rasheed & Rashid, 2024; Zulganef & Hodijah, 2023). Despite these limitations, the model remains highly relevant to the study of Vodacom's internet services, offering valuable insights into how students perceive the quality of the service compared to their expectations, and its impact on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. This makes the SERVQUAL model a useful tool for understanding service quality's influence on customer loyalty in the telecommunications sector, particularly in the context of mobile internet services provided by Vodacom.

3.2 Empirical Literature Review

The Effect of Internet Services Reliability on Customer Retention and Repeat Purchase in Relation to Brand Loyalty

Diallo et al. (2018) conducted a study in Morocco. In this study the service quality dimensions, tangibility, reliability, assurance and empathy are discussed to have a significant effect on customer loyalty. In the findings reliability is assessed to have a significant positive effect on customer loyalty and satisfaction. He explains that when services are good and match customer expectations, the customers are likely to do repeated purchases, trust the company and commit which are indicators of brand loyalty. The study also reveals the effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty where it shows that satisfied customers are likely to stay loyal. The study implies that businesses should prioritize enhancing service reliability and customer satisfaction to foster customer loyalty and long-term commitment.

In Yemen, a study by Tahir el. Al (2024) was conducted on the impact of brand image on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. The study assessed factors such as price, brand reliability, brand awareness and affiliation. Brand reliability was proven to closely impact customer satisfaction. They further explain that customer loyalty and customer satisfaction strongly correlate and, with customer satisfaction, repeat purchases, product recommendation and attaining loyalty will be achieved. The study highlights that brand reliability is a key factor influencing customer satisfaction, which in turn drives customer loyalty. By focusing on enhancing brand reliability and satisfaction, businesses can encourage repeat purchases, product recommendations, and long-term loyalty.

Another study was conducted in Ethiopia by (Feteh & Bijal, 2020) on the effect of service quality on customer loyalty. The study used exploratory research design with a quantitative approach. The results of the findings showed that customers of the hotels are likely to be satisfied when the staff effectively performs well on the five service quality dimensions reliability, assurance, tangibility, responsiveness and empathy had a significant and positive influence on customer loyalty. The reliability dimension was tested to have a positive and statistical significance towards achieving satisfaction of customer which is a critical influence of brand loyalty. They conclude that service quality has a positive effect on customer loyalty. The study underscores that service quality, particularly reliability, has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction, which is crucial for fostering brand loyalty. Hotels can enhance customer loyalty by focusing on the effective delivery of key service quality dimensions, including reliability, assurance, and empathy.

Tetteh & Boachie (2021) investigated the impact of bank service quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Using a sample of 753 bank customers, the study used structural equation modelling (SEM) using Smart-PLS to test the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty using the SERVQUAL model. The findings show that reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibility have a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction, except for assurance. In the study reliability is tested to have a positive and significance effect on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction also has a significant positive influence on customer loyalty, suggesting that more satisfied customers in Ghana tend to become more loyal to their banks. The authors recommend that banks invest in improving service quality to drive customer satisfaction, loyalty, and firm performance. This is the first study on bank service quality involving bank management in Ghana, ensuring the reliability of results.

Njeru et al. (2019) conducted a study in South Africa Airlines and discussed the five dimensions of service quality. In the study the five dimensions of service quality reliability, tangibility, assurance, empathy and responsiveness were assessed and reliability was proven have a significant positive influence on customer loyalty. He insists companies to ensure the five service quality dimensions are maintained to attain loyalty. The study emphasizes that maintaining high standards across all five service quality dimensions, especially reliability, is essential for fostering customer loyalty. Airlines and similar businesses should focus on consistently delivering reliable service to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Moreover, Yum & Yoo (2023) explored the relationship between service quality reliability and customer loyalty, mediated by customer satisfaction, within the mobile social media sector. The study aimed to elucidate the connections among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in this domain. Furthermore, it investigated the mediating role of customer satisfaction. The proposed research framework encompassed four dimensions of mobile service quality: usefulness, convenience, design, and security/privacy, alongside customer satisfaction and loyalty. A total of 256 responses were used in the data analysis. The study estimated the hypothesized relationships of the research model using a structural equation modeling technique. The results were as follows: first, usefulness, convenience, design, and security/privacy significantly and positively affect customer satisfaction. Second, customer satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on customer loyalty. Third, customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty; in particular, convenience, design, and security/privacy are completely

mediated while usefulness is partially mediated. These results can serve as a valuable reference for mobile social media providers to manage services and improve service quality and customer satisfaction.

4. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework consists of concepts, variables, definitions, and existing theories that are used by researcher for particular study. According to Tarimo (2015), the selection of variables in a study must have the characteristics that can be measured and it is important especially when creating and designing a questionnaire. From the conceptual model, the independent variables include customer expectation and service quality (reliability, assurance and responsiveness). The main dependent variable is brand loyalty.
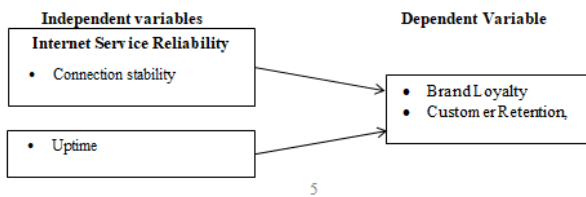
Internet service reliability, represented by connection stability and uptime, has a serious and direct relationship with customer retention and brand loyalty in the telecommunications industry. When customers receive stable and reliable internet connections, they are more likely to continue feeling satisfied with the service, therefore developing a sense of trust and confidence in the provider. This, therefore, has a direct relation to customer retention because users are less likely to turn to competitors offering similar services. In addition, consistency in the quality of service promotes brand loyalty: customers who repeatedly get reliable connections develop an emotional attachment with the brand and are more likely to continue using the service and recommend the same to others. Thus, high levels of connection stability and uptime not only improve customer retention but also strengthen brand loyalty by meeting the expectations of customers for uninterrupted and dependable service.

5. Methodology

This study employs a positivist research philosophy and a descriptive research design to explore the impact of service quality on brand loyalty among Vodacom users at St. Augustine University of Tanzania. Using a sample size of 377 students, selected via stratified random sampling and proportionate to the university's population, the study collected data through a structured questionnaire. The study examines three service quality reliability and its effect on customer retention and brand loyalty, analyzed using a linear regression model. Data reliability was ensured through a pilot study and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.9, confirming the consistency of the instruments. Ethical considerations were followed, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring privacy. The findings contribute valuable insights into the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty, with a strong response rate of 93.37%.

6. Presentation and Discussion of the findings

6.1 Presentation of the Findings

6.1.1 Response Rate

This section provides an analysis of the responses that were identified as successful in the study. The response rate plays a pivotal role in assessing the adequacy of the sample utilized in the study to draw valid findings. Therefore, statistical data concerning the responses that were considered successful is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Response rate

Targeted Participants	Successful Responses	Percent of responses
377	352	93.37%

Source: Field Data (2024)

The research study focused on a representative sample of 352 participants, rigorously selected from a broader community of 13,000 persons. The researcher distributed questionnaires to the participants to gather data. The researcher received a total of 352 completed surveys. The previously mentioned score indicates a response rate of 93.37%. Baruch and Holtom (2008) assert that the average response rate for internal surveys should be no less than 60%. As a result, 93.37% of the participants answered, above the minimum threshold and thereby satisfying the conditions for data analysis.

6.1.2 Reliability Test

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which advises a minimum value of 60% (0.60) to be a determinant of internal consistency of measurement scale (Ashworth et al., 2018), is the most often used reliability indicator in scientific research. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), the Cronbach's Alpha Scale is interpreted as follows: a = excellent, 0.9 > a = good, 0.8 > a = acceptable, 0.7 > a = doubtful, 0.6 > a = poor, and 0.5 > a = unsatisfactory.

Table 2 Reliability test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
Reliability	0.904	0.972	4
Brand Loyalty	0.953	0.978	4

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 2 indicates that the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for the data collection instruments. This represents exceptional value, indicating that the instruments were engineered for reliability. The findings reveal that the reliability test statistics exceeded the r=0.7 correlation, signifying that the results are credible.

6.2 Service Reliability

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics on respondents' views on the effect of service assurance in building brand loyalty.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Service Reliability

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I do not experience interrupted services when using Vodacom internet	351	3.63	.842
Vodacom internet performs as promised	352	3.84	1.009
Vodacom employees show interest in solving my encountered network problems on time	351	3.81	.671
I can depend on Vodacom internet service during peak time	350	3.80	.637
Vodacom network is reliable on coverage and signal strength for my communication needs	352	3.84	.684
Vodacom data quality is consistent as I use the network	352	3.84	.687
The 4G and 5G network perform well on speed and reliability of my communication data needs	352	3.82	.708
Valid N (listwise)	348		

Source: Field data, 2024

Table 3 illustrates the data on the effect of quality service on brand loyalty. The mean brand reliability score was 3.79, along with a standard deviation of 0.75. The calculated average score surpassed the neutral value of 3. This research indicates that a substantial percentage of students perceive Vodacom internet services as reliable, which influences their loyalty.

6.3 Relationship among Variables

6.3.1 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis is a statistical technique employed to quantify the degree of association between two variables (Denis, 2021). The correlation coefficient quantifies the strength of the association between two variables and is influenced by the variability of each variable. The correlation coefficient might display either a positive or negative value as a result of covariance (Reimann et al., 2017). The Pearson product-moment correlation is frequently utilized to compute a correlation coefficient. The described methodology produces a numerical score ranging from -1 to +1, indicating the degree of correlation between the two variables. A value of ±1 indicates a total positive or negative linear correlation, while 0 signifies the absence of any identifiable systematic relationship between the variables (Reimann et al., 2017).

Hsu (1993) posits that a correlation coefficient between 0.10 and 0.29 indicates a moderate to weak strength. A value between 0.30 and 0.49 is considered to exhibit medium strength. A coefficient between 0.50 and 1.00 signifies a high or strong value. Table 4.9 illustrates the empirical relationship between the independent variables, namely brand reliability, brand assurance, brand responsiveness and the dependent variable, brand loyalty.

Table 4 Correlations Analysis Results

		Reliability	Brand Loyalty
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	352	
Brand Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.525**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	351	351
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Field data, 2024

The table above shows the Pearson correlation between Reliability and Brand Loyalty. With a correlation coefficient of 0.525, there is a moderate positive relationship between higher reliability and high brand loyalty. The significance value, Sig. 2-tailed, is 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 threshold; therefore, this correlation is statistically significant and not due to any random chance. Sample size for reliability is 352, for brand loyalty, 351. So, the significant positive correlation shows that improving the reliability in the service can bring about an improvement in brand loyalty. Organizations like Vodacom can try to increase the reliability of the services to improve the loyalty among customers. Because the correlation is moderate, there might be other influencing variables on brand loyalty aside from reliability, which should be further explored in the study.

6.4 The Influence of Independent Variables on the Criterion

Before conducting multiple linear regressions to analyze the impact of predictor variables on the dependent variable (BE), it was essential to test the fundamental assumptions of multiple linear regression. The following paragraphs evaluate and elaborate on critical assumptions, including multicollinearity and the linearity of residuals.

6.4.1 Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity can be evaluated using multiple regression analysis with SPSS software. The collinearity statistics section provides the numerical values for tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Shifa (2019) defines tolerance as a measure that quantifies the extent to which the changes in the independent variable are unexplained by other independent variables in the model. The calculation of this measure involves applying the formula (1 - R squared for each variable). Habtie et al. (2022) indicate that a numerical value below 0.10 denotes tolerance, reflecting a strong correlation with other variables, suggesting a significant likelihood of multicollinearity. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) quantifies the extent to which variations in an independent variable are unexplained by other variables, with an acceptable value being below 10. The analysis additionally includes the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which is mathematically equivalent to the reciprocal of the Tolerance value. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values exceeding 10 signify the presence of multicollinearity.

Table 5 Collinearity Statistics Test of Independent Variables

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		
	Reliability	.346	2.890

Source: Field data (2024)

In addition, the results presented in Table 5 demonstrate that the value of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for each of the independent variables was found to be less than 10. The findings demonstrate that there is no evidence of multicollinearity.

6.4.2 Regression Model Summary

The model summary offers a comprehensive evaluation of the regression model's performance and relevance. The information relates to the statistical metrics of the correlation coefficient (r) and the coefficient of determination (R-squared). The correlation coefficient (r) is a statistical metric that evaluates the degree and direction of the linear association between two variables.

Table 6 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.630a	.397	.392	.641

a. Predictors: (Constant), service reliability
b. Dependent Variable: brand loyalty

The coefficient of determination (R²) was determined to be 0.397, as shown in Table 6. The numerical value assesses the extent to which the independent variables (service dependability, service assurance, and service responsiveness) in the model describe the dependent variable, brand loyalty. Table 6 indicates that 39.7% of brand loyalty is attributed to service reliability, service assurance, and service responsiveness, while the remaining 60.3% is accounted for by factors outside the scope of the study.

6.4.3 ANOVA

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is a statistical method employed to evaluate the significance of variations in means among multiple groups. The main aim of this research is to analyze the impact of service reliability, service assurance, and service responsiveness as determinants of brand loyalty. The F-value, significance value, and predictor variables included in the analysis offer critical insights into the model's overall relevance.

Table 7 ANOVA Results

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	93.593	3	31.198	76.038	.000b
	Residual	141.961	346	.410		
	Total	235.554	349			
a. Dependent Variable: Brand loyalty						
b. Predictors: (Constant), service reliability						

The goodness of fit results for a linear multiple regression model are shown in Table 7, where the predictors are service responsiveness, service assurance, and serve reliability, and the dependent variable is brand loyalty. According to the F statistic (F = 76.038, ρ≤0.000), the statistical study revealed a strong correlation between the predictor components and brand loyalty. This implies that the model showed a good fit or had statistical significance.

6.5 Regression Analysis

In educational research, regression models are commonly employed as a statistical analytic tool. The purpose of this tool is to make correlation analysis between several variables easier. To better understand the relationship between a dependent variable and a group of independent factors, regression models are frequently used (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Developing a hypothesis or research question about the relationship between the variables being studied is the first step in starting a regression study.

Multiple linear regression analysis was used in this study to investigate the relationship between brand loyalty and service quality. Multiple linear regressions are used in this study to investigate how brand loyalty is influenced by high-quality

services. Assuming that the mistakes exhibit homoscedasticity that is, a constant variance of the errors the model functions. Additionally, the model indicates that additivity and linearity characterize the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. When all other variables are held constant, a linear equation relating to each independent variable can be used to express the expected value of the dependent variable.

Table 8 Marginal effect between independent variables and dependent variables

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.148	.238		.623	.534
	Service reliability	.046	.038	.057	1.193	.234
a. Dependent Variable: Brand loyalty						

The table presents the result of a regression analysis in which brand loyalty is the dependent variable and service reliability is the independent variable. From the table, the unstandardized coefficient for service reliability is 0.046, implying that for every 1-unit increase in service reliability, it would be expected that brand loyalty will increase by 0.046 units. The associated standard error for this coefficient is 0.038, and the standardized beta coefficient is 0.057, reflecting a very small effect size. The t-value is 1.193, and the significance level (p-value) of 0.234, higher than the threshold value of 0.05, which suggests that the relationship between service reliability and brand loyalty is not statistically significant. The constant term is 0.148, its p-value being 0.534, too, which means the intercept is not significant, either. In general, this analysis would suggest that service reliability does not have a statistically significant effect on brand loyalty in this model and, if anything, this effect is negligible. Such insignificance suggests factors not captured in the model might be at play.

6.6 Discussion of Findings

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the degree to which service quality influences brand loyalty, with a focus on service reliability as mediating factors. The analysis of correlation and regression data indicated a positive relationship between service reliability and brand loyalty at SAUT, the designated research site. Consequently, it can be concluded that the research question is addressed by affirming that service reliability has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

6.6.1 Internet Service Assurance and Brand Loyalty

Regarding the second research question, the study seeks to understand the impact of service assurance on brand loyalty.

Service assurance is proven to have a positive and statistical significance towards brand loyalty. The results corroborated the SERVIQUAL Model concerning service quality. As noted by Ehigie & Jesse (2018), service assurance encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of employees from mobile service providers, as well as their capacity to instill trust and confidence during service delivery. This, in turn, fosters customer confidence in a brand. Brand assurance plays a crucial role in the development of brand loyalty, standing out among other influencing factors. To cultivate a diverse range of positive brand associations, it is essential for customers to have brand awareness and engage in repeat purchases. Achieving this objective can be supported through the implementation of proactive marketing communication strategies. Oliver (1999) suggests that individuals who are informed about the benefits of a particular brand are more likely to develop loyalty towards it.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation
7.1 Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the influence of service reliability on brand loyalty, with a focus on Vodacom's internet services. The findings indicate a moderate positive correlation between service reliability and brand loyalty, suggesting that reliable service is an important driver of customer loyalty. While the regression analysis did not show a statistically significant direct effect of service reliability on brand loyalty, the correlation results and descriptive statistics reflect that a large portion of students perceive Vodacom's services as reliable. This perception of reliability influences their brand loyalty, indicating that service quality, especially in terms of reliability, plays a crucial role in fostering customer commitment to the brand. However, other unexamined factors may also contribute to brand loyalty, warranting further investigation into additional drivers beyond service reliability.

7.2 Recommendations

To enhance brand loyalty, Vodacom should prioritize improving service reliability, particularly in areas such as network coverage, performance during peak times, and the consistency of data quality. Although the direct impact of service reliability on brand loyalty in this study was not statistically significant, the positive correlation suggests that enhancing customer experiences related to service reliability could yield long-term benefits in terms of customer retention. Additionally, the company should invest in employee training to improve responsiveness and issue resolution, as these factors were also linked to perceived service quality. Finally, Vodacom may benefit from exploring other variables that affect brand loyalty, such as brand assurance and customer engagement strategies, to build a more comprehensive loyalty-enhancing approach.

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