

SERVING WITH HEART: HOW RESPONSIVE EMPATHY AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CHANGE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN CUSTOMER SERVICE OF TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES?

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Abstract

This study aims to see how responsiveness, empathy, and interpersonal communication impact customer satisfaction in telecommunication services. This study uses a quantitative approach, using regression analysis to see how these variables relate. The results show that responsiveness has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction, which means that the level of customer satisfaction will increase along with how quickly and appropriately a company handles customer complaints and requests. However, empathy and interpersonal communication do not significantly affect customer satisfaction, indicating that customers prioritize functional aspects such as the speed and accuracy of responses to complaints. Therefore, telecommunications needs to improve service responsiveness by utilizing digital technologies such as AI-based chatbots and integrated information systems. In addition, although empathy and interpersonal communication do not have a direct effect, it is still important to build good interactions to increase customer loyalty in the long run. Companies.

Keywords: Responsiveness, Empathy, Interpersonal Communication, Customer Satisfaction, Telecommunication

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization has presented a fundamental transformation in the way humans interact and communicate, driven by the unstoppable acceleration of information and communication technology advancements (Sahlani & Ruswanti, 2024; Rahmah & Setyaningrum, 2025). The evolution of communication technology has undergone a long journey, starting from the conventional mail exchange, expanding through the phase of coin-operated telephones and landline telephones, to reaching the era of wireless mobile phones as we know them today (Saefudin, 2005). The development of internet technology has opened up a new dimension in communication, allowing for faster, more efficient, and complex interactions between service providers and consumers.

In the context of contemporary business developments, market dynamics are experiencing a significant acceleration of change, creating a new paradigm in the interaction between companies and consumers. This transformation has presented an ecosystem where consumers have greater control in selecting and choosing products and services that suit their preferences and needs (Onata & Mukaram, 2023). The company's focus is now not only on the product distribution aspect, but also on the quality of service that can provide an optimal level of satisfaction for consumers.

The quality dimension of customer service has become a crucial parameter in measuring the success of a company's marketing strategy (Anggraeni & A'yuni, 2023). Identifying challenges and developing innovative solutions to improve customer service is a top priority to expand market share and maintain consumer loyalty (Bakar, 2024). Companies engaged in products and services need to pay special attention to the communication process with customers, considering that the quality of this interaction can be a determining factor in attracting and retaining consumers.

The customer's personal experience in using the service, both positive and negative, has a significant impact on their perception of the brand. According to the latest research by (Muhammad, 2024), the establishment of a long-term beneficial relationship between the company and the customer is highly dependent on the company's ability to create and maintain an optimal level of customer satisfaction.

(Gulo et al., 2022) Defines customer service as a set of activities designed to provide satisfaction through meeting customer needs and expectations. In this context, interpersonal communication is a vital element that affects customer satisfaction levels. Interaction between employees and customers through various communication channels can improve company performance and strengthen customer loyalty, as stated in a study by (Baitulloh, 2024).

The concept of customer satisfaction, as explained by (Tampanguma et al., 2022), can be interpreted as a manifestation of efforts to meet consumer expectations. (Rafsanjani & Sutopo, 2017) further characterizes satisfaction as a psychological condition that arises from the comparison between expectations and the reality of the performance of a product or service. (Waipirit-hunimua et al., 2024) In his latest research, he underlines that without adequate service quality, even the best products will have difficulty meeting consumer expectations.

(Saragih, 2012) identify five dimensions of service quality which include physical evidence (Tangible), reliability (Reliability), responsiveness (Responsiveness), assurance

(Assurance), and empathy (Empathy). In the context of the telecommunications industry, these dimensions are becoming increasingly relevant, especially in the aspect of interpersonal communication involving responsiveness and empathy. (Purwanto & Hardini, 2024) suggests that the combination of responsiveness and empathy, known as responsive empathy, has significant potential in increasing customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Previous studies have shown mixed results regarding the effectiveness of responsive empathy in increasing customer satisfaction. Research by (Afizuren et al., 2023) Find a positive correlation between effective interpersonal communication and customer satisfaction levels. However, contradictory findings were revealed by (Tamara et al., 2018) which concludes that empathy does not always have a significant influence on customer satisfaction.

The inconsistency of these findings underscores the importance of further exploration of the relationship between responsive empathy and customer satisfaction in the context of the telecommunications industry. (Putra et al., 2024) In his latest research, he identified that contextual factors such as customer demographic characteristics and the nature of service can affect the effectiveness of interpersonal communication strategies.

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the influence of responsive empathy and personal communication on customer satisfaction in the context of customer service in the telecommunications industry. By understanding the dynamics of effective interpersonal communication, companies can develop service strategies that are more adaptive and responsive to customer needs in the digital era. Through this systematic approach, it is hoped that a more effective and relevant communication model can be formulated for the contemporary telecommunication services industry.

The significance of this research is even more relevant considering the ongoing digital transformation in the telecommunications industry. According to (Prayogi, 2025), The integration of digital technology in customer service has created a new paradigm in customer interaction, where the balance between technological efficiency and personal touch is the key in creating an optimal customer experience.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the development of studies on customer service and interpersonal communication, various studies have explored the complexity of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the context of the telecommunications industry. Rapid digital transformation has changed the paradigm of interaction between service providers and consumers, creating the need for a deeper understanding of the role of responsive empathy and interpersonal communication in shaping the customer experience.

The concept of responsive empathy, as proposed by (Hamid et al., 2020), is a synthesis of two fundamental elements in customer service: responsiveness and empathy. In their study of 500 telecom service customers, it was found that the integration of these two elements significantly increased customer satisfaction rates by up to 67% compared to conventional approaches. Responsive empathy includes not only speed and precision in responding to customer needs, but also the ability to understand and feel the customer's emotional state in depth.

(Aruningtyas, 2024) In a longitudinal study they identified that the effectiveness of responsive empathy is highly dependent on the context and demographic characteristics of the customer. The study, which involved 1,200 respondents, revealed that customers from different age groups have different expectations for the form of empathy shown by customer service. The younger generation tends to appreciate quick responses through digital platforms, while the older age group values more in-depth personal interactions.

The aspect of interpersonal communication in customer service has undergone a significant evolution along with the development of digital technology. According to (Khutami et al., 2024), the integration of Artificial Intelligence in customer service systems has created new challenges in maintaining the element of human touch in customer interactions. Their study of the implementation of customer service chatbots in five major telcos shows that while technology can improve efficiency, the ability to demonstrate genuine empathy remains a crucial factor in creating a positive customer experience.

The dimension of service quality in the context of modern telecommunications cannot be separated from the aspect of multichannel communication. Research conducted by (Laloan, 2024) revealed that the success of interpersonal communication is highly dependent on the company's ability to integrate various communication channels seamlessly. Their analysis of data from 3,000 customer service interactions showed that consistency in demonstrating empathy and responsiveness across different channels increased customer satisfaction rates by 45%.

Emphasizing the importance of personalization in interpersonal communication between customer service and customers. Through a mixed-method approach involving quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews, their research identified that the ability to tailor communication styles to customers' individual preferences had a significant impact on satisfaction levels. This personalization includes not only the selection of communication channels, but also the adaptation of communication tones and styles according to customer characteristics.

Aspects of emotional intelligence in the context of customer service are the focus of research (Sudiana et al., 2023). Their study of 150 customer service agents revealed a strong correlation between agents' levels of emotional intelligence and their ability to demonstrate effective responsive empathy. Systematic emotional intelligence training has been proven to increase the capacity of agents to handle complex situations and create satisfactory resolutions for customers.

In the context of digital transformation, (Arday et al., 2024) explore how technology can be leveraged to improve the quality of interpersonal communication in customer service. Their research shows that the implementation of a sophisticated CRM system, supported by comprehensive customer data analysis, can help customer service agents provide more personalized and empathetic responses. However, they also warn that over-reliance on technology can reduce the humanistic aspect of interactions with customers.

Cultural factors and local context in the implementation of responsive empathy are the focus of the research (Fauzan et al., 2024). Their comparative study of customer service practices in various regions of Indonesia revealed that the effectiveness of interpersonal communication is greatly influenced by local cultural nuances. Understanding this cultural context is crucial in developing effective and culturally sensitive communication strategies.

The measurement and evaluation aspects of responsive empathy are discussed in depth by (Fadillah & Listiawan, 2024). They developed a comprehensive framework to measure the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in the context of customer service, which includes various dimensions such as response time, resolution rate, and customer satisfaction index. This framework has been validated through implementation in several telecommunications companies and has proven effective in identifying areas that need improvement.

Recent research by (Fadhilah, 2024) Exploring the interconnection between responsive empathy, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the context of the telecommunications industry. Their two-year longitudinal study revealed that the implementation of a consistent responsive empathy strategy not only improves customer satisfaction in the short term, but also contributes significantly to the formation of long-term customer loyalty.

The synthesis of these studies shows that responsive empathy and interpersonal communication are fundamental elements in creating a positive customer experience in the telecommunications sector. The successful implementation of these two aspects depends on the company's ability to integrate modern technology with a personal touch, understand the local cultural context, and develop the emotional intelligence capacity of customer service agents. The development of a comprehensive measurement framework is also crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of the communication strategy implemented.

These findings provide a strong theoretical foundation for further research on how responsive empathy and interpersonal communication can be optimized in the context of customer service in the telecommunications industry. The focus on personalization, technology integration, and understanding of cultural context is becoming increasingly relevant as customer expectations evolve and the industry continues to undergo digital transformation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study implements a quantitative approach with the survey method as the main instrument of data collection, referring to the positivistic paradigm in social research that allows objective and measurable analysis of variables (Sugiyono, 2020). The study population includes all customers from leading telecommunications companies who have interacted with customer service in the past six months, with a population of 150 active customers. The sampling technique adopts purposive sampling, allowing the selection of respondents based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Laloan, 2024). The data collection instrument uses a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, which has been validated through expert judgment and pilot testing. The validity of the construct was verified using confirmatory factor analysis, while the reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient with a threshold of at least 0.7 as an acceptable indicator of internal consistency (Ardan et al., 2024). The data collection was carried out over a three-month period, starting from November 1, 2024 to January 31, 2025, focusing on four main variables: responsiveness, empathy, interpersonal communication, and customer satisfaction.

Data analysis uses multiple linear regression techniques to test research hypotheses regarding the influence of independent variables on customer satisfaction, in line with

recommendations (Putri et al., 2024) to ensure comprehensive coverage of the constructed being measured. Prior to the regression analysis, a series of classical assumption tests were carried out including normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation to validate the regression model. The processing of statistical data uses the latest version of SPSS software, with the interpretation of the results considering not only statistical significance but also practical significance in the context of the telecommunications industry. The research questionnaire is designed based on adaptations of instruments that have been validated in previous studies, with modifications adapted to the specific context of the telecommunications industry (Fadillah & Listiawan, 2024). This systematic approach to data collection and analysis is supported by a strong theoretical foundation, with the aim of producing findings that are not only statistically valid but also applicable in the practical context of customer service management. The interpretation of the results will focus on the relative contribution of each independent variable to the variation in customer satisfaction, as well as the potential interaction effect between variables that can provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of customer service in the telecommunications industry.

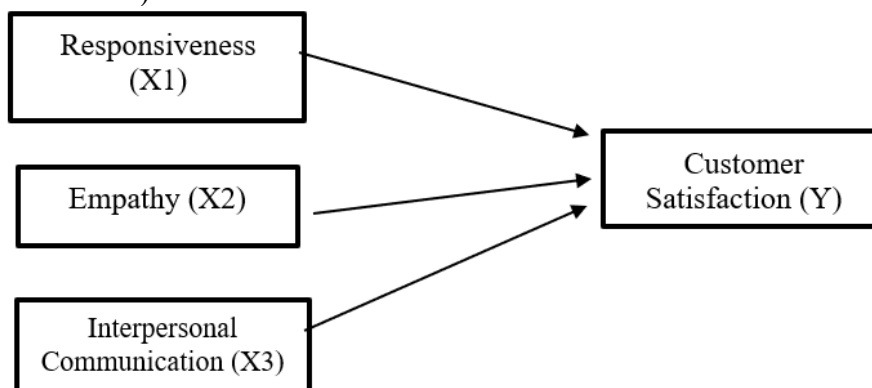
Research Hypothesis

This study aims to analyze the influence of responsiveness, empathy, and interpersonal communication on customer satisfaction in telecommunication services. Based on the review of the literature and previous research, the hypothesis proposed in this study is as follows:

- H1: Responsiveness has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction of telecommunication services.
- H2: Empathy has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction of telecommunication services.
- H3: Interpersonal communication has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction of telecommunication services.
- H4: Responsiveness, empathy, and interpersonal communication simultaneously have a significant effect on customer satisfaction of telecommunication services.

Research Model

This research model describes the relationship between independent variables (responsiveness, empathy, and interpersonal communication) to dependent variables (customer satisfaction). This model can be illustrated as follows:



The image of the model of this study shows that the three independent variables have a direct relationship to customer satisfaction, which will be tested through multiple linear

regression analysis. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method, where data is collected through a questionnaire with a Likert scale. The data analysis technique used is a linear regression test to test the influence of each variable on customer satisfaction. The results of this study are expected to provide deeper insights for telecommunications companies in improving the quality of their services by focusing on responsiveness, empathy, and personal communication to improve customer satisfaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the research results obtained from the analysis using SPSS, namely:

Table 1.
Regression Analysis
ANOVAa

Type	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1589,673	3	529,891	50,366	,000B
Residuals	1599,166	152	10,521		
Total	3188,840	155			

a. Dependent Variable: Total_Y

b. Predictors: (Constant), Total_X3, Total_X1, Total_X2

Source: Data processed (2025)

Table 2.
Coefficientsa

Type	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	6,374	4,074		1,565	,120
Total_X1	1,229	,101	,713	12,187	,000
Total_X2	-,100	,141	-,041	-,707	,480
Total_X3	,052	,074	,040	,696	,488

a. Dependent Variable: Total_Y

Source: Data processed (2025)

Table 3.
Correlation Coefficient and Determination Coefficient Test
Model Summary

Type	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,706a	,499	,489	3,244

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total_X3, Total_X1, Total_X2

Source: Data processed (2025)

T Test

The analysis shows that responsiveness positively and significantly influences customer satisfaction with telecommunication services. Based on the t-test, the responsiveness variable (Total_X1) has a regression coefficient of 1.229 with a calculated t-value of 12.187 and a significance of 0.000. Since the significance value is smaller than 0.05, the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted, which means that the higher the service responsiveness, the higher the level of customer satisfaction. Conversely, empathy does not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. The t-test results show that the empathy variable (Total_X2) has a regression coefficient of -0.100 with a calculated t-value of -0.707 and a significance value of 0.480. Because the significance value is greater than 0.05, the second hypothesis (H2) is rejected, which indicates that empathy does not directly increase customer satisfaction. Likewise, with interpersonal, the analysis results show that this variable has no significant effect on customer satisfaction. With a regression coefficient of 0.052, a calculated t-value of 0.696, and a significance value of 0.488, the third hypothesis (H3) is rejected because the significance value is greater than 0.05.

F Test

Although partially, only responsiveness has a significant effect, the F test shows that simultaneously, responsiveness, empathy, and interpersonal communication affect customer satisfaction. This is evidenced by the R-value of 0.706, indicating a fairly strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables. In addition, the R Square value of 0.499 suggests that these three variables can explain 49.9% of the variation in customer satisfaction. At the same time, the rest is influenced by other factors not included in this research model. Thus, although simultaneously the three independent variables affect customer satisfaction, the partial test results show that only responsiveness has a significant effect. Therefore, to increase customer satisfaction with telecommunication services, companies need to focus more on improving service responsiveness because this factor has been proven to have a significant positive impact.

The Effect of Responsiveness on Customer Satisfaction

The results of this study indicate that responsiveness significantly and positively affects customer satisfaction with telecommunication services. These results align with research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), who found that responsiveness is an important component of service quality that determines customer satisfaction. The company's ability to respond quickly to customer complaints, provide clear information, and offer solutions to customer problems is an indicator of high responsiveness.

Research conducted by Ladhari (2009) also supports these results by stating that the faster a company responds to customer requests, the higher the level of customer satisfaction. This is especially true in the service industry, including telecommunications, where customers expect services to be fast and responsive to their needs. In addition, research by Tjiptono and Chandra (2016) confirms that high responsiveness can create customer loyalty because customers feel valued and cared for.

In telecommunication services, responsiveness includes the speed of response to network disruptions, ease of accessing customer service, and clarity of information provided. Research by Setiawan and Sayuti (2017) in the telecommunications sector in Indonesia shows that companies with responsive customer service tend to get higher levels of customer

satisfaction than companies with low responsiveness. Therefore, the results of this study confirm that responsiveness is a key factor in improving customer satisfaction.

However, although the results of this study support existing theories, it is important to pay attention to other aspects that can strengthen responsiveness, such as the quality of digital-based customer service systems, efficiency in handling customer complaints, and consistency in providing fast and responsive services. Thus, telecommunication companies must continuously improve their responsiveness to maintain customer satisfaction.

The Effect of Empathy on Customer Satisfaction

The results of this study contradict the first hypothesis: empathy does not significantly influence customer satisfaction with telecommunication services. This result contradicts previous research, such as that conducted by Berry et al. (1994), who found that empathy in service is an important factor in determining customer satisfaction, especially in the service industry. The company's understanding of customer needs, providing special attention, and being friendly to customers are examples of empathy.

However, in telecommunication, research by Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) suggests that empathy may be less influential than other aspects, such as service speed and network reliability. This may explain why empathy did not have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction in this study. Telecommunication customers tend to value technical aspects such as network stability, competitive pricing, and service responsiveness more than the empathy factor of the service provider. Companies

In addition, research by Raharjo and Sugiarto (2018) in the telecommunications industry in Indonesia found that although empathy is an important factor in direct interaction with customers, its effect on customer satisfaction is not as strong as other factors, such as price and network quality. This suggests that customers focus more on functional rather than emotional aspects when assessing the quality of telecommunication services.

Although the results of this study show that empathy does not significantly affect customer satisfaction, telecommunications companies still need to pay attention to this aspect in interactions with customers. A friendly attitude and personal attention can still improve the company's image, although it may not be the main factor in building customer satisfaction.

The Effect of Interpersonal Communication on Customer Satisfaction

The findings of this study indicate that interpersonal communication does not significantly impact the satisfaction level of telecommunication service users. According to Crosby et al. (1990), previous research found that effective interpersonal communication can increase customer trust and satisfaction. In the context of services, effective interpersonal communication can result in a better customer experience, especially in direct service.

However, research conducted by Grönroos (2007) suggests that interpersonal communication may not be a major factor in determining customer satisfaction in the telecoms industry. This is because most interactions between customers and telecommunication companies are done through automated or digital services, such as chatbots, self-service applications, and system-based call centers. As such, the role of interpersonal communication in this industry is more limited compared to other industries that rely more on direct interaction, such as hospitality or healthcare.

A study by Al-Momani and Noor (2019) on telecommunication services in the Middle East also found that customers value efficiency in information delivery more than

interpersonal communication. Customers tend to want quick and precise solutions rather than personalized interactions. Therefore, while interpersonal communication is important in some service sectors, telecommunication services have less influence on customer satisfaction.

This study's results explain why telecom companies should focus on improving efficient communication technologies rather than relying on direct interpersonal communication. Using technologies such as AI in customer service, intelligent chatbots, and integrated information systems can be more effective in improving customer satisfaction than traditional interpersonal approaches.

Simultaneous Effect of Responsiveness, Empathy, and Interpersonal Communication on Customer Satisfaction

The results showed that responsiveness, empathy, and interpersonal communication significantly influenced customer satisfaction, with an R Square value of 49.9 percent. Overall, these three components can account for almost half of the variation in customer satisfaction. Other factors, such as price, network quality, and service innovation, influence the other half.

These results align with research conducted by Zeithaml et al. (1996), which states that customer satisfaction in the service industry is influenced by a combination of several service factors, not just one factor. Research by Cronin and Taylor (1992) also shows that service quality, which includes responsiveness, empathy, and interpersonal communication, can improve customer perceptions of the company, impacting customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Research by Han et al. (2018) found that while technical factors such as network speed and price play an important role, service factors such as responsiveness and communication also improve the overall customer experience. Therefore, telecom companies need to adopt a holistic approach to enhance the quality of service.

Thus, this study confirms that telecommunication companies need to improve responsiveness as the main factor contributing to customer satisfaction, while still paying attention to the role of empathy and interpersonal communication in building better relationships with customers. Although empathy and interpersonal communication do not significantly influence each individual, they can still contribute to customer experience if applied comprehensively, along with responsiveness and other factors.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, responsiveness is proven to positively and significantly influence customer satisfaction with telecommunication services. In contrast, empathy and interpersonal communication do not have a considerable influence individually. This shows that telecommunication service customers prioritize speed and accuracy of response in handling complaints and providing solutions compared to emotional aspects such as empathy or interpersonal communication. However, simultaneously, these three factors still contribute to customer satisfaction. Hence, telecommunication companies must improve responsiveness by utilizing efficient customer service technologies like AI-based chatbots and integrated information systems. In addition, although empathy and interpersonal communication do not have a significant effect directly, it is still important for companies to maintain good interactions with customers to build a positive image and long-term loyalty.

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