RESEARCH ARTICLE

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION BETWEEN NTC AND NCELL IN NEPAL

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Manuscript Info	Abstract
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Nepal Telecommunication (NTC) and Ncell are the two main telecom players in Nepal at the moment. Ncell has been primarily focused on offering Global System for Mobile (GSM) mobile lines, while NTC offers all types of phone services. Although NTC remains the country's leading provider of total subscribers, Ncell recently overtook NTC as the country's leading provider of GSM mobile lines. This study aims to assess customer satisfaction in two highly competitive Nepalese telecom industries and make a comparison based on service quality. Descriptive and inferential tools are used to draw the comparative analysis. The research identifies the security service quality dimension as the major dimension of both telecommunication networks. It also locates reliability service quality of the NTC network is highly correlated with customer satisfaction whereas the security of the Ncell network is highly correlated with customer satisfaction. Tangibles are a high effect on customer satisfaction of NTC whereas security highly affects customer satisfaction of Ncell network. This study will aid the telecommunications industry in general, as well as the service quality, in better understanding their main areas of strength and, as a result, better framing their decision-making strategies to increase customer satisfaction and gain a competitive advantage.

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Introduction:-
After the establishment of Mohan Akashwani in 1948, telecommunication services in Nepal began. With the formulation of the first National five-year plan (1955-1960), the Telecommunication Department was established in B.S.1959. During the third five-year plan (1966–1970), it was renamed the Telecommunications Development Board in 1969 to modernize and expand telecommunications services. After the enactment of the Communications Corporation Act 1971 in 1975, it was officially recognized as a wholly-owned government corporation known as Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC). NTC was renamed Nepal Doorsanchar Company Limited on April 13, 2004, after 29 years. The Nepal Doorsanchar Company Limited is a limited liability company formed under the Companies Act of 1996 (Nepal Telecom brief introduction, 2020).

Another telecom company Ncell Axiata Limited is a Nepalese mobile service provider. It was formed in 2004 and began commercial operations in September 2005 under the "Mero Mobile" brand. It was renamed "Ncell" by its parent company Telia Company in March 2010. Ncell became a member of Axiata Group Berhad on April 12, 2016, when the group purchased 100 percent of Reynolds Holdings, which owned 80 percent of Ncell shares at the time.

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Nepal Doorsanchar Company Ltd., also known as Nepal Telecom, is Nepal's state-owned telecommunications service provider, with a government stake of 91.49 percent. The business was a monopoly until 2004, when the Nepal Telecommunications policy was passed, paving the way for the liberalization of Nepal's telecom market(Gautam, 2016). Nepal has turned out to be a progressive and competitive telecom market.

Nepal Telecom has a 52 percent market share while Ncell has 42 percent, and the rest of the market has been taken by others (NTA MIS Report June 2020). Because of the increased competition among operators, they must learn about service quality in terms of customer satisfaction. They must recognize the significance of the service quality component, which has an impact on high customer satisfaction.

As a result, the following research questions are addressed in this research:
1. What are the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction of NTC and Ncell telecommunication service?
2. Which service quality dimensions mostly responsible for customer satisfaction among NTC and Ncell telecommunication services?

Based on the research questions, the major objectives are :
1. To analyze the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction of NTC and Ncell telecommunication services.
2. To examine the service quality dimensions mostly responsible for customer satisfaction among NTC and Ncell Telecommunication service.

The association between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction has only been comparatively explored between NTC and Ncell network in this paper. For this paper, only a few regions of the Kathmandu valley were surveyed. More study is needed to generalize. This study helps to establish the main dimensions that lead to customer satisfaction and to understand customers' expectations of service quality to ensure customer loyalty to the NTC and Ncell network.

Literature Review:-
Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction
Service quality is viewed as either a difference between the expectations and perception of the service or as an attitude-based view. It is considered as a comparison between customer's expectations and perception of service quality(Parasuraman et al., 1985). According to Yulisetiarini & Prahasta service quality is an important indicator of a company's success in attracting new customers or retaining existing customers. The business of telecommunications services, namely service quality, is critical for customers to use as a guide when selecting cellular providers of good quality and service(Yulisetiarini & Prahasta, 2019). They found service quality has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is the degree of overall pleasure or contentment felt by the customer, resulting from the ability of the service to fulfill the customer's desires, expectations, and needs for the service(Kotler & Keller, 2006). It is the consumers' overall evaluation based on their overall experience and it can be viewed in two ways - transaction-specific outcome or cumulative evaluation. Satisfaction can be broadly characterized as a post-purchase evaluation of product quality given pre-purchase expectations(Kotler, 2011). According to Yulisetiarini & Prahasta customer satisfaction is an important factor in a company's long-term existence. It can also serve to improve the company's reputation among other customers(Yulisetiarini & Prahasta, 2019).

Agarwal and Boora stated if a company wants to stay competitive and expand, it must recognize the principles of service quality and customer satisfaction. In today's world, Delivering high-quality service in a competitive market is the secret to a long-term competitive advantage(Agarwal & Boora, 2018). Dahal also discovered in the service industry, service quality is a significant source of differentiated competence and is generally seen as a critical success factor in sustaining competitive advantage(Dahal, 2019).

SERVQUAL Model
The most commonly used tool for measuring service quality is the SERVQUAL model(Parasuraman et al., 1985; Parasuraman, 2004; Zeithaml et al., 1985, 2010). The model first consisted of ten dimensions which include access, responsiveness, reliability, competence, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/knowing the

customer, and finally tangibles and later changed to five dimensions such reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness after many kinds of research. Reliability refers to the service provider's ability to deliver the expected results, and flexibility, which is defined as the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, responsiveness is the ability to react quickly to the needs of customers, the service provider's guarantee to consumers is known as assurance, the act of service providers placing themselves on the same wavelength as their customers is known as empathy and tangibility, which is a physical characteristic such as customer-accessible facilities(Arokiasamy & Abdullah, 2013; Arslan et al., 2015).

According to the SERVQUAL model, tangibles is about the physical evidence of the service, reliability measures the consistency of performance and the dependability of the service, assurance entails the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence, Empathy entails caring and provision of individualized attention to customers by personnel of the firm and responsiveness concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service(Shrestha & Bahadhur Ale, 2020). They researched to explore the impact of the dimensions of service quality on the perceived performance of Nepal Telecom phone users in the Kathmandu valley of Nepal. They found empathy is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction among the five service quality dimensions.

SERVQUAL model is very reliable in different cultures and market environments in the telecommunications industry(Al-Hashedi, 2017; Arokiasamy & Abdullah, 2013; Arslan et al., 2015). The scale, on the other hand, must be adjusted to meet the needs of the research work. Al-Hashedi (2017), introduced a network quality dimension as an additional dimension to the modified SERVQUAL scale and argued that customers ranked network and service efficiency as the most significant factors in predicting overall satisfaction. As a result, telecom mobile companies should invest heavily in network improvement and expansion to expand network coverage and voice quality, minimize call drop and network congestion during social events and boost data speeds.

Vencataya et al.(2019) also used the SERVQUAL model to examine the impacts of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible aspects on customer satisfaction in banks of Mauritius. They found the SERVQUAL model has been found a reliable factor and appropriate tool to measure, evaluate, support, and improve the quality of services in the banking industry. Results indicated that all five service quality factors have significantly positively influenced customer satisfaction in banks. However, Dahal (2019) focused on seven constructs to examined as the antecedents of customer satisfaction such as price and service, brand image, customer service, facility, corporate social responsibilities, network, and innovation.

Many studies have been done concerning service provision in the telecommunication sector, but service quality and customer satisfaction studies attempting to do a comparative analysis of both telecom NTC and Ncell in Nepal with an emphasis on customer satisfaction and perception of service quality service are limited. Although a substantial number of studies have been conducted regarding service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Rahhal, 2015; Shrestha & Bahadhur Ale, 2020; Yousapronpaiboon, 2014), limited research, if any, have been conducted regarding the perception of service quality and customer satisfaction of both telecommunication sector.

The current study aims to find out how satisfied NTC and Ncell customers in Nepal are with their service quality. This study is important because the Nepalese telecommunications industry has evolved, changing the entire landscape of the industry. In addition, the current study would illustrate the service quality experiences of NTC and Ncell telecom customers, as well as the need for service quality enhancement, if necessary, within a context.

Methods And Methodology:-
The descriptive and causal-comparative research design was used to derive the truths from the targeted respondents' opinions, and a descriptive and inferential statistical tool was used to examine the opinions and draw the study's conclusion. Data were obtained by using a primary survey through a structured questionnaire. All survey items for the study variables were graded on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. The study's target population was all NTC and Ncell customers in Kathmandu's valley. Since the sample telecom has a large number of customers of various backgrounds, the analysis used a chance or simple random sampling technique. This sample size was also consistent with a generalized scientific guideline for sample size decisions (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Cooper & Schindler (2014) suggested a sampling layout and they recommended a sample size of at least 385 respondents for the analysis. A total of 300 respondents were approached via an online survey during 60 days period of January-February 2020, 198 responses

were received. In the same period, a field survey was also conducted for 300 questionnaires, and 250 were collected. From the 448 questionnaires collected, 48 were rejected, while 400 were found to be valid for review and entered into SPSS version 20. By using a simple random sampling method to measure comparison between NTC and Ncell, 114 of them chose from NTC, and 102 chose from Ncell. As a result, descriptive and inferential methods were used to interpret the collected data.

Results And Discussion:-

The results of various tests are discussed with each of the relevant research objectives. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the data. The mean and standard deviation were used to describe the data (Marshall & Jonker, 2010; Thompson, 2009). When the data revealed a mean value greater than 3, it was presumed that respondents gave positive responses to Likert statements. The comparative descriptive data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1:- The Descriptive Statistics of Different Service Quality Dimensions to Analyze Importance of Customer Satisfaction.

Service Quality Dimensions	Telecommunication Network	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Responsiveness	NTC	114	3.412	0.818
	NCELL	102	3.370	0.716
Reliability	NTC	114	3.439	0.835
	NCELL	102	3.270	0.724
Assurance	NTC	114	3.541	0.780
	NCELL	102	3.463	0.609
Tangibles	NTC	114	3.443	0.742
	NCELL	102	3.503	0.728
Empathy	NTC	114	3.438	0.803
	NCELL	102	3.353	0.726
Security	NTC	114	3.542	0.779
	NCELL	102	3.458	0.779
Customer Satisfaction	NTC	114	3.526	0.787
	NCELL	102	3.552	0.662

Source: Survey, 2019

Table 1 demonstrates security and assurance is considered more by respondents having mean value 3.542 and 3.541 with standard deviation 0.779 and 0.780 respectively of NTC network. It also shows tangibles and assurance is considered more by respondents having mean value 3.503 and 3.463 with standard deviation 0.728 and 0.609 respectively of Ncell network. Table 1 shows that all of the constructs' mean values were greater than 3, with a standard deviation of less than one (Thompson, 2009). As a result, the study can be generalized.

It indicates NTC customers were more satisfied with the service quality dimension of their respective dimensions such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and security than Ncell customers. Putting this into perspective, NTC customers were more satisfied with the responsiveness dimension (M=3.412, SD=0.818) than Ncell customers (M=3.370, SD=.716). Similarly, NTC customers were more satisfied with the reliability dimension (M=3.439, SD=0.835) than Ncell customers (M=3.270, SD=.724), assurance dimension of NTC (M=3.542, SD=0.780) than Ncell customers (M=3.463, SD=.609), empathy dimensions (M=3.439, SD=0.803) than Ncell customers (M=3.353, SD=.726) and security dimensions (M=3.542, SD=0.779) than Ncell customers (M=3.458, SD=.779). However, Ncell customers were more satisfied with the tangibles dimension (M=3.503, SD=0.728) than NTC customers (M=3.443, SD=.742) and customer satisfaction of Ncell was (M=3.552, SD=0.662) than NTC customers (M=3.526, SD=.787). Agrawal & Jain (2020) also revealed that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL (tangible, reliability, responsibility, assurance, empathy) service quality have a constructive effect on customer satisfaction. As a result, it demonstrates that all dimensions of NTC are very crucial for customers than the Ncell network.

Correlation analysis is used to determine whether two variables are related. It might be weak, moderate, strong, or extremely strong, as well as positive or negative relation. Table 2 shows the correlation analysis. In terms of the strength of the relationship, the value of the correlation coefficient varies between +1 and -1. Correlation

coefficients vary from -1 to +1: whereas -1 and +1 indicate perfect negative and perfect positive correlation coefficients respectively, a correlation coefficient of 0 implies no correlation (zero relationships). Further, correlation coefficients lower than 0.40 (whether negative or positive 0.40) are said to be low, between 0.40 and 0.60 are moderate, and above 0.60 are high(Isaac, 2018).

Table 2:- The Pearson's Correlation Coefficients Computed to Analyze the Strength of Linear Relationship among Service Quality Dimensions.

Service Quality Dimensions		Customer Satisfaction	
		NTC	NCELL
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.816**	.698**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.847**	.533**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.795**	.685**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Tangibles	Pearson Correlation	.828**	.766**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.823**	.695**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Security	Pearson Correlation	.825**	.783**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000

Source: Survey, 2019

Table 2 explains the Pearson's correlation coefficients which were carried out to establish the relationship between the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) and the independent variables of NTC and Ncell telecommunication network. The results showed positive relationships with the variables measured which were significant at a 1 percent level of significance of both networks. For instance, there was a strong positive correlation between customer satisfaction and the service quality dimension of the NTC network. Bhatta and Durgapal found a strong correlation between service quality dimensions – reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness, and customer satisfaction(Bhatta & Durgapal, 2016). However, there was a moderate positive relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality dimensions of Ncell. Shrestha & Bahadhur Ale(2020) also reported a moderate correlation between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. This implies that an increase in any of the independent variables would significantly lead to an increase in the dependent variable.

Regression Model Selection:
The multiple linear regressions were as follows
$Y = \alpha + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5X_5 + \beta_6X_6 + \acute{\epsilon}$………………………..(i)
Where, Y is the dependent variable representing customer satisfaction, X1, X2, X3, X4, X5, and X6 is the explanatory variable representing responsiveness, reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and security, β1-β6= Regression Coefficients and $\acute{\epsilon}$ is the error term.

Table 3:- Regression Analyze Report the Strength of the Relationship between the Model and Dependent Variable Customer Satisfaction.

Model		NTC		T	Sig.	NCELL		T	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients				Unstandardized Coefficients			
		B	Std. Error			B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	0.063	0.151	0.414	0.680	0.369	0.193	1.913	0.059
	Responsiveness	0.033	0.083	0.393	0.695	0.038	0.078	0.487	0.627
	Reliability	0.278	0.069	4.012	0.000	0.185	0.063	2.929	0.004
	Assurance	0.113	0.079	1.427	0.157	0.232	0.085	2.723	0.008

Tangibles	0.335	0.065	5.145	0.000	0.330	0.068	4.837	0.000
Empathy	0.041	0.081	0.506	0.614	0.064	0.073	0.870	0.386
Security	0.233	0.070	3.331	0.001	0.429	0.060	7.131	0.000
a Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction								
R^2	0.853				0.789			
Standard Error	0.301				0.314			
F-Value	103.8				59.165			
P-Value	0.000				0.000			
R-Value	0.924				0.888			

Source: Survey, 2019

Table 3 shows the NTC F-value and p-value of the regression model were 103.8 and 0.000 respectively that is significant at a 5% level of significance. So, the model became linear. R square of this model was 85 percent that means the model is estimated 85% in customer satisfaction by variation service quality dimensions and 15% by other constructs of the NTC network.

On the other hand, it also shows the Ncell F-value and p-value of the regression model was 59.165 and 0.000 respectively that is significant at a 5% level of significance. R square of this model was 79 percent that means the model is estimated 79% in customer satisfaction by variation service quality dimensions and 21% by other constructs of the Ncell network.

According to table 3 the multiple linear regressions of NTC were as follows:-
$Y = 0.063 + 0.033x_1 + 0.278x_2 + 0.113x_3 + 0.335x_4 + 0.041x_5 + 0.233x_6 + 0.151$........(ii)

According to equation (ii) there were three variables, namely reliability ($\beta = 0.278$, $p<0.05$), tangibles ($\beta = 0.335$, $p<0.05$), and security ($\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.05$) have significant impact on consumer customer satisfaction of NTC network. However, responsiveness ($\beta = 0.033$, $p > 0.05$), assurance ($\beta = 0.113$, $p > 0.05$), and empathy ($\beta = 0.041$, $p > 0.05$) had no significant impact on customer satisfaction. It shows tangibles construct highly influence on customer satisfaction followed by reliability and security respectively.

The multiple linear regressions of Ncell were as follows
$Y = 0.369 + 0.038x_1 + 0.185x_2 + 0.232x_3 + 0.330x_4 + 0.064x_5 + 0.429x_6 + 0.193$.........(iii)

Above equation (iii) describes that four variables, namely reliability ($\beta = 0.185$, $p<0.05$), assurance ($\beta = 0.232$, $p<0.05$), tangibles ($\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.05$), and security ($\beta = 0.429$, $p < 0.05$) have a major effect on customer satisfaction in the Ncell telecommunication network. It was not affected by responsiveness ($\beta = 0.038$, $p > 0.05$) and empathy ($\beta = 0.064$, $p > 0.05$) service quality dimension. Al-Hashedi (2017) also identified four dimensions of service quality (network quality, empathy, reliability, and assurance) are revealed a significantly positive impact on customer satisfaction while tangibles and responsiveness have no impact on customer satisfaction. It shows security quality highly influences customer satisfaction followed by tangible and assurance.

Conclusion:-
NTC and Ncell both have focused on aggressive marketing and enhanced service quality parameters. This research study investigates the telecommunication service quality and customer satisfaction of NTC and Ncell in Nepal to make a comparison by the SERVQUAL model.

The findings of Nepal Telecommunication (NTC) suggest that tangibles have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction, followed by reliability and security. On the other hand, the security quality of the Ncell cellular network has a strong impact on customer satisfaction, followed by tangible and assurance. Ncell is the leading GSM telecom service provider, with a market share of 42%. It has attracted over 80 lakhs customers. It has broken NTC's monopoly in the telecommunications sector.

Both the carriers have their pros and cons. While Ncell has not yet been able to reach every nook and cranny of Nepal, NTC has done so for the time being. Despite numerous complaints about NTC's services, there has been no change in the company's service quality, but Ncell, on the other hand, is doing everything in its power to deliver the best services to its clients with its strong internet presence and ongoing special offers. Ncell has continued to extend coverage, improve quality, and provide users with new, efficient, and simple-to-use services. Though NTC's services are generally satisfactory within the valley, the situation is not the same elsewhere. The study emphasized the relative relevance of service quality traits, and it attempted to determine the contribution of each service quality dimension to overall customer satisfaction of NTC and Ncell network.

Limitations And Future Implications
As this study was limited to only Kathmandu Valley, further research should be carried out on to the whole of Nepal. Future researchers can broaden the study's scope to obtain more precise results. If other qualities such as interest rates, technology, and network quality are studied further, this may be a great result.

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