



# TEENAGERS' BRAND LOYALTY TO MOBILE PHONE SERVICES --A CASE STUDY IN NORTH 24 PARGANA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Indrani Majumder,

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor

<sup>1</sup>Department of Economics,

<sup>1</sup>Kanchrapara College, Kanchrapara, North 24 Prgns, State of West Bengal, India

**Abstract :** The Indian telecom industry has evolved significantly, from key players like BSNL, VSNL, and MTNL to numerous competitors. This has made the industry highly competitive, with companies introducing cost-effective and innovative schemes, often at the expense of their profits. These frequent market innovations encourage customers to switch providers. So for companies, building a strong and healthy brand is a challenging task. Marketers strive to establish a strong brand presence in the minds of both existing and potential consumers. Research in this area has produced numerous results, but opinions differ from study to study.

This paper examines brand loyalty and customer shift behavior among mobile phone service users, aiming to identify new measures for assessing brand loyalty among cell phone service consumers. It explores customer satisfaction with switching, reasons for switching or staying with a provider, and the effectiveness of shift behavior. The focus is on the brand loyalty status of teenage mobile phone service subscribers in North 24 Pargana district of the State of West Bengal in India.

**Index Terms - Brand loyalty, innovations, penetration, connectivity, growth.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian mobile services market has grown manifold in the last few years. As of the latest data available in March 2024, India has approximately 1.16 billion mobile phone subscribers, with urban regions accounting for around 636.83 million subscribers and rural areas for about 523.69 million (TRAI). This significant number underscores the expansive reach and importance of mobile telecommunications in the country. The growing affluent-middle-class population, low cost of handsets, and call tariffs has helped this stupendous growth.

As of 2024, the mobile phone penetration rate in India is about 76.6% and is projected to increase to over 86% by 2026. This indicates significant growth in mobile connectivity across the country (GSMA). Comparatively, China has a mobile phone penetration rate of approximately 83% as of 2024, reflecting its vast and rapidly evolving telecom market (GSMA). In Japan, the mobile phone penetration rate is significantly higher, with nearly 94% of the population using mobile phones (GSMA). Meanwhile, Europe boasts an impressive mobile penetration rate of around 90%, showing a well-established and widespread use of mobile devices across the continent (GSMA).

These statistics illustrate that while India is catching up quickly in terms of mobile phone penetration, it still lags slightly behind countries like Japan, and European countries. However, the growth trajectory suggests that India's mobile connectivity is set to expand rapidly in the coming years, driven by continued investment and innovation in the telecom sector.

This presents an enormous opportunity for Indian mobile service operators to enhance their market share through mindshare. The recent policy initiative of allowing new operators in a circle has added fuel to the competition in the cellular market, bringing the call tariffs to the world's lowest. The fierce competition among cellular service providers resulted in numerous tariff plans, group plans, contracts (life-long validity, etc.), and top-up plans. Today, an Indian mobile customer is overwhelmed with the competing offers and service packages from the competing operators.

Currently, the average mobile call rate in India varies, but it has seen significant reductions over the years. For instance, Reliance Communications recently increased their headline call tariffs to 1.6 paise per second. This reflects a broader trend where operators are revising tariffs to better align with their cost structures and the increasing demand for data services (Gadgets 360). For users, this means that while mobile call tariffs are relatively low compared to global standards, they are expected to rise gradually, making it essential to stay updated on new plans and offers from various service providers.

Competition is intense among the players to attract customers. Now and then, a new scheme with low service charges and tariff plan pops up and gets superseded by another new scheme within no time. The Mobile market is flooded with offers and packages and in fact, the customer is overwhelmed with competing choices. Customer retention has become a challenge for mobile operators with increasing competition. Some marketers target brand switchers because brand switchers have higher market potential.

Switching is encouraged by all the players in the mobile market to enhance the consumer base. Moreover, in prepaid GSM services, the switching costs are so low that they make switching easy. The only impediment to switching, as of now, is the inconvenience of changing to a new number.

Telecommunication is one of the few sectors in India that witnessed the most fundamental structural and institutional reforms since 1991. Emerging as one of the fastest-growing telecom markets in the world, India Telecom continues to register significant growth.

Gone are the days when people in India used to wait for 2-3 years to get a telephone connection. The tele-density has crossed 100% urban tele-density reflecting multiple SIM ownership. Urban India accounts for about 70% of India's 500 million cellular and over 75% of the telecom operator's revenues. Still, rural India has huge potential and is an untapped sector, with a tele-density of 19%. Now, operators are focusing more on rural expansion as the urban market has become saturated.

As of 2024, the telecommunications market in India has continued to expand and evolve significantly since 2011. Key highlights of the current scenario include:

1. **Subscriber Base and Tele-density:** As of December 31, 2024, India's total telephone subscriber base stood at 1,189.92 million (approximately 1.19 billion), according to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). Among them 1,150.66 million are Wireless Subscribers (Tele-density: 81.67%) (Increased by 0.17% from November 2024), and 39.27 million are Wire-line Subscribers (Tele-density: 2.79%) (Increased from 38.50 million in November 2024), 944.96 million are Broadband Subscribers. The rural market, previously under-penetrated, has seen considerable growth, achieving a tele-density of 58.11%, while urban tele-density stands at 133.45% (IBEF) (Invest India).
2. **Internet and Data Usage:** The country now boasts over 918 million internet subscribers, with a substantial portion using wireless connections. The average data consumption per wireless data subscriber was around 19.08 GB per month as of September 2023, showcasing the immense growth in data usage driven by affordable tariffs and extensive 4G and 5G coverage (IBEF) (TRAI India).
3. **5G Deployment:** The deployment of 5G services is well underway, with expectations of 350 million 5G subscriptions by 2026. This is bolstered by government initiatives and policy support aimed at enhancing digital connectivity and infrastructure, including significant investments in fiberisation of telecom towers and the establishment of 5G application labs (IBEF) (TRAI India).
4. **Market Players and Competition:** The market remains competitive with major players like BSNL, Bharti Airtel, VI, and Reliance Jio leading in subscriber base. As of December 2023, Reliance Jio had the largest share with 459.81 million subscribers, followed by Bharti Airtel with 257.37 million subscribers (IBEF) (TRAI India).
5. **Government Initiatives and Investments:** The Indian government continues to support the telecom sector through policies such as the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and significant budget allocations for research and development. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the telecom sector has also been robust, reflecting international confidence in the market's growth potential (IBEF) (Invest India).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand switching is industry specific, limits the generalization and needs to adopt broader perspective (Berry and Parasuraman, 1993). What causes brand switching in one product class may not be the same as in another. More research is, therefore, needed to determine the impact of product class on brand switching behavior. Couple of academic articles have dealt with mobile phone usage and grasped the consumer decision making process. To begin with, Riquelme in 2001 examines how much self knowledge consumers have when choosing between different mobile phone service providers. The study was built upon six key attributes such as access cost, mobile to mobile phone rates, call rates and free calls related to mobile. The research showed that consumers with prior experience about a product can predict their choices relatively well, although respondents tended to overestimate the importance of features, call rates and free calls and under estimate the importance of monthly access fee, mobile to mobile phone rates and the connection fee. Mobile phone service provider choice has also been found to be related to prior consumption styles. Joshi (2015) and Christiana (2015) identified call rate/quality, network coverage, and sales promotion as key drivers of customer loyalty, with brand image and prompt customer service playing a lesser role. Hudrasyah (2013) emphasized the importance of trust and social value in customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in mobile value-added services. Krishna Kumar (2015) further underscored the significance of service quality, price, customer relationship management, and corporate image in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. These findings collectively highlight the complex interplay of factors shaping brand loyalty in the Indian mobile services market.

As far as the past literature is concerned the brand loyalty of teenagers towards mobile phone services in India is influenced by a combination of service quality, satisfaction, technical features, and pricing strategies. While there is a trend towards reduced brand loyalty, factors such as product involvement and opinion leadership continue to play a role in shaping consumer behavior among the youth. According to Kaur & Soch (2012) factors such as corporate image and switching costs influence customer loyalty in the Indian mobile service sector. Nandi & Pattanayak (2015) investigated brand switching behavior and loyalty among young Indian adults. Their study explored technical incompatibility and the availability of new features as the primary reasons for brand switching among this demographic. Sarkar & Sarkar (2016) explores the evolutionary process leading to brand devotion among young Indian consumers, highlighting the role of emotional connection in brand loyalty. Kulshreshtha et. al. (2017) assessed how brand name, price, and technology influence mobile phone preferences among young consumers. A study conducted by Chakraborty (2019) in Kolkata focusing on young urban consumers' loyalty to mobile network operators. The research highlighted that service quality significantly influences satisfaction, which in turn affects brand loyalty. The study utilized exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to establish these relationships. Bhatti et. al. (2017) examines factors influencing customer loyalty in the mobile telecommunication market, with implications for emerging markets like India.

Gokhale et. al. (2020) identified functional value such as quality, social value, and emotional value as key drivers of brand loyalty among Indian Gen Z consumers. Tiwari and Mishra (2021) focused on students from Delhi University to identify factors influencing satisfaction and the selection of mobile service providers. Their study found that customer service, service quality, call quality, talk plans, and tariffs were significant determinants in the selection process. Chakraborty et. al. (2022) highlighted a shift towards value-seeking behavior and reduced brand loyalty among university students in India. Jasrai (2014) explored the innovativeness of youth in adopting mobile telecom services. The study revealed that youth exhibited significant product

involvement and opinion leadership, with price insensitivity positively associated with mobile telecom service innovativeness. Chakraborty et. al. (2022) investigated the determinants of mobile phone buying behavior among youngsters. Their research indicated that awareness of features and a higher risk appetite have led youngsters to try newer options with superior features. The study concluded that overall brand loyalty in mobile phone buying has reduced considerably among this demographic. . Shetty et. al. (2023) Examines the role of brand sensitivity and internet usage in fostering brand loyalty among Indian adolescents. Sree et. al. (2024) studied the switching behavior of Generation Z concerning mobile phone operators. The research emphasized that factors such as service quality, customer support, and pricing strategies significantly influenced the switching decisions of Gen Z consumers.

### III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Based on the past literature the objective of the present study are as follows:

1. To study the consumer loyalty towards mobile service providers (SIM card changing behavior).
2. To know the reasons for shifting/changing SIM cards.
3. To know on an average how many SIM cards are being used by consumers.
4. To know the latest preferences of consumers regarding SIM cards.

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The study is based on the primary data. Structured questionnaire was developed to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section of the questionnaire was used to measure the respondents' brand loyalty towards preferred brand in mobile phone service. This section also contained the 4 statements which states about innovative factors, best service provision and complaints management. In the second section of the questionnaire, questions were included to know behavioural and cognitive aspects of brand loyalty to be measured with the five-point Likert scale with a response format from "greater positive role" (+2) to "greater negative role" (-2). The study surveyed 100 respondents aged between 13 and 19 years from North 24 Pargana district. Respondents were chosen as per convenience. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 115 respondents, out of these 108 questionnaires returned, 100 qualified questionnaires were used for the data analysis after eliminating incomplete responses.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As of December 2024, India's telecommunications market is predominantly led by three major private operators: Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea (VI). Reliance Jio maintains a dominant position with a market share of 50.43%, followed by Bharti Airtel at 30.62%, and Vodafone Idea at 13.37% . Table 1 is showing the wireless subscriber market share, as of November, 2024.

Table 1. Wireless Subscriber Market Share (as of November 2024)

| Operator      | Subscribers (millions) | Market Share |
|---------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Reliance Jio  | 461.23                 | 40.15%       |
| Bharti Airtel | 384.27                 | 33.45%       |
| Vodafone Idea | 208.98                 | 18.19%       |
| BSNL          | 92.05                  | 8.03%        |
| MTNL          | 1.90                   | 0.17%        |

Source: TelecomTalk, November 2024

Table 2: Broadband Subscriber Market Share (as of December 2024)

| Operator                       | Subscribers (millions) | Market Share |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Reliance Jio                   | 476.58                 | 40.1%        |
| Bharti Airtel                  | 289.31                 | 24.3%        |
| Vodafone Idea                  | 126.38                 | 10.6%        |
| BSNL                           | 35.33                  | 3.0%         |
| Atria Convergence Technologies | 2.27                   | 0.2%         |

Source: AngelOne, December 2024

From Table 3 it is evident that 58 respondents out of 100 were showing brand switching tendency. Moreover, male respondents are more prone to change SIM cards. As per data obtained, 42 male respondents out of 58 total mobile service switchers, i.e., 72.41%, changed the SIM cards compared to only 16, i.e., 27.59% , female respondents.

It was evident that (Table 4) 77% of the respondents are using Reliance, 31% Airtel, 20% VI, 11% BSNL as their main mobile service. It was also found that as additional SIM card 11% of the total 100 respondents are using Reliance, 7% are using Airtel, 2% VI, and 1% BSNL.

Table 4: The Company the respondents considering the Main service provider and Additional service provider

| Company Name            | No. of Respondents considering the respective mobile service provider as main | Percentage (%) | No. of Respondents considering the respective mobile service provider as additional/ substitute | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Reliance                | 77                                                                            | 77             | 11                                                                                              | 11             |
| Airtel                  | 31                                                                            | 31             | 07                                                                                              | 07             |
| VI                      | 20                                                                            | 20             | 02                                                                                              | 02             |
| BSNL                    | 11                                                                            | 11             | 01                                                                                              | 01             |
| *Total No. of SIM Cards | 139                                                                           | -              | 21                                                                                              | -              |
| Total Respondents       | 100                                                                           |                | -                                                                                               |                |

\*(Total more than 100 because of multiple responses)

Table 5: Mobile Service Switching Scenario

|                                | Status      |                |            |                  | No |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|------------|------------------|----|
|                                | Yes         |                |            |                  |    |
| Frequency of SIM card change   | Every month | Every 6 months | Every Year | More than 1 Year |    |
| No. of Respondents             | 3           | 17             | 30         | 19               | 31 |
| Percentage (%) among switchers | 4.35        | 24.64          | 43.48      | 27.54            | -  |
| Percentage in Total            | 69          |                |            |                  | 31 |

Table 5 reveals that during last 1 year 69% of respondents changed their SIM cards and the remaining 31% did not change their SIM cards. It was observed that out of these 69 brand switchers 3 (4.35 %) respondents changes their SIM cards every month, 17 (24.64%) respondents changes every six months, , 30 (43.47%) every year, 19 (27.54%) of them changed-whenver there are offers, packages, schemes and very irregularly.

Table 6: The Number of SIM Cards Held by Respondents

| No. of SIM Cards | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| One SIM Card     | 61                 | 61             |
| Two SIM Cards    | 26                 | 26             |
| Three SIM Cards  | 9                  | 9              |
| Four SIM Cards   | 4                  | 4              |
| Total            | 100                | 100            |

Table 6 shows that 61% of the respondents are holding only one SIM Card, 26% of the respondents are holding two SIM Cards, 9% three SIM Cards, 4% four SIM Cards.

Table 7: The Holding Period of SIM Card/ Cards

| Name of the SIM Card | Period of holding SIM Cards |    |           |    |           |    |               |    |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|----|-----------|----|-----------|----|---------------|----|
|                      | 0-1 year                    |    | 1-3 years |    | 4-5 years |    | Above 5 years |    |
|                      | Persons                     | %  | Persons   | %  | Persons   | %  | Persons       | %  |
| Reliance             | 33                          | 33 | 35        | 35 | 23        | 23 | 34            | 34 |
| VI                   | 14                          | 14 | 26        | 26 | 09        | 9  | 13            | 13 |
| Airtel               | 15                          | 15 | 17        | 17 | 13        | 13 | 11            | 11 |
| BSNL                 | 10                          | 10 | 03        | 3  | 25        | 25 | 09            | 9  |
| Total                | 72                          |    | 81        |    | 70        |    | 67            |    |

\*(Total is more because of multiple responses)

From Table 7 it is evident that 72% of the respondents are holding the SIM Cards for 0-1 year, 81% for 1-3 years, 70% for 4-5 years, 67% for more than 5 years.

In the questionnaire the reasons behind changing SIM Cards were ranked from 1 to 10. Table 8 reflects that the respondent's response on this scale. For weekend offers & schemes, 39 of the respondents have given 1<sup>st</sup> rank, 16 persons ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, 15 ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> and so on. For Network connectivity, 31 respondents ranked 1<sup>st</sup> for 24 of them ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 15 ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>. For On-line Payment, 15 respondents had given 2<sup>nd</sup> rank. For SMS Packages 30 respondents ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and 26 of them given 2<sup>nd</sup>, 18 of then had given 3<sup>rd</sup>. For Poor quality of service 14 respondents ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 13 ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 14 ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>. For Group offers 12 respondents has given 5<sup>th</sup> rank 8 of them ranked 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>. For Roaming services 11 respondents ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>, 10 people ranked 8<sup>th</sup>. For Value added service 11 people ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and 5 people ranked 9<sup>th</sup>. For Hidden charges, 26 respondents ranked 10<sup>th</sup>.

Table 8: Ranking of Reasons for Changing SIM Cards by the respondents

| Reasons                         | Ranks for changing the SIM cards by respondents |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
|                                 | Rank 1                                          | Rank 2 | Rank 3 | Rank 4 | Rank 5 | Rank 6 | Rank 7 | Rank 8 | Rank 9 | Rank 10 |
| Weekend offers, Schemes etc.    | 39                                              | 16     | 15     | 12     | 7      | 7      | 8      | 2      | 4      | 0       |
| Network Connectivity            | 31                                              | 24     | 15     | 9      | 6      | 4      | 4      | 2      | 1      | 3       |
| On-line Payment Service         | 5                                               | 15     | 6      | 3      | 7      | 9      | 3      | 12     | 6      | 2       |
| Sms Packages                    | 30                                              | 26     | 18     | 13     | 6      | 5      | 6      | 4      | 2      | 1       |
| Poor service quality            | 9                                               | 9      | 7      | 5      | 14     | 9      | 8      | 4      | 5      | 1       |
| High call rates                 | 15                                              | 13     | 14     | 12     | 10     | 7      | 7      | 1      | 5      | 3       |
| Group offers                    | 5                                               | 6      | 7      | 6      | 12     | 6      | 8      | 8      | 6      | 2       |
| Best Tariff offer in the market | 9                                               | 7      | 6      | 11     | 9      | 5      | 7      | 8      | 6      | 3       |
| Roaming                         | 7                                               | 11     | 8      | 6      | 6      | 9      | 6      | 10     | 11     | 3       |
| Value added service             | 3                                               | 0      | 1      | 2      | 1      | 0      | 1      | 11     | 5      | 4       |
| Hidden Charges                  | 7                                               | 2      | 1      | 0      | 2      | 2      | 0      | 5      | 1      | 26      |

Table 9: The service satisfaction of the present SIM Card/Cards of the respondents

| Name of the SIM card Company | Yes | Percentage % | No | Percentage % |
|------------------------------|-----|--------------|----|--------------|
| Reliance                     | 66  |              | 12 | 4            |
| VI                           | 18  |              | 18 | 2            |
| Airtel                       | 25  |              | 13 |              |
| BSNL                         | 8   |              | 4  | 4            |

\*(Total will be more because of multiple responses from respondents)

Table 9 is showing the satisfaction scenario of the responses regarding the mobile service brand that they are using either as the principal service or the secondary service.

Table 10: The reason behind Mobile Service Dissatisfaction

| Reasons for Dissatisfaction | No. of respondents | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Network problem             | 28                 | 28         |
| Connectivity                | 22                 | 22         |
| Bad Customer Care Service   | 12                 | 12         |
| High call rates             | 17                 | 17         |
| Hidden charges              | 11                 | 11         |
| Other reasons               | 7                  | 7          |

It was observed from Table 10, that 28% are not satisfied with the present SIM Card because of bad network and bad signals, 22% are not satisfied for poor connectivity and 12% due to lack of response from customer care, 17% for High call rates, 11% for hidden charges of the mobile companies, 7% of the respondents are not satisfied due to other reasons.

Table 11: The Preference of SIM Cards,

| Name of the Company | No. of respondents | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Reliance            | 57                 | 57         |
| VI                  | 12                 | 12         |
| Airtel              | 28                 | 28         |
| BSNL                | 2                  | 2          |

Table 11 is showing the preference pattern of the respondents.



Table 12: Respondent's suggestion to improve the mobile services

| Suggestions                                           | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Improvement in network//connectivity                  | 27                 | 27         |
| Improvement incustomer care service                   | 1                  | 1          |
| Better SMS offers                                     | 18                 | 18         |
| Improve availability of recharge coupons              | 5                  | 5          |
| Presently working better                              | 7                  | 7          |
| Suitability to only less talking people               | 3                  | 3          |
| Increased Talk time                                   | 15                 | 15         |
| Internet, Night balance, Group calling                | 2                  | 2          |
| Increase in band width                                | 4                  | 4          |
| Introduction of benefit cards (one month to one year) | 5                  | 5          |
| Improve Marketing strategies                          | 2                  | 2          |
| Improved STD/ISD plans                                | 6                  | 6          |

From the above table 12, it can be observed that 27% of the respondents had given suggestions to improve network, signal, clarity and connectivity of mobile phone service provider. 1% of the respondents suggested to improve the quality of customer care services. 18% suggested to provide better SMS offers. 5% suggested to improve the availability of recharge coupons and top-up cards. 3% people suggested that their present service provider is useful only for those who talk for less time (seconds). 15% respondents suggested to improve talk time offers. 2% respondents suggested internet, night calling discount, group calling, and multi-media offers. 4% people asked to improve band width. 5% respondents suggested introducing benefit cards (business). 2% respondents suggested improving marketing and advertisement strategies. While 6% of the respondents suggested to improve even STD/ISD plans of their service provider.

## V. CONCLUSION

Price escalation, changing needs of customers, core service failure, inconvenience and voluntary reasons are the factors influencing the mobile customers to switch. Due to competitive pressures, the mobile operators in India, at one point of time, decreased the call tariffs abysmally low and later hiked them indirectly through top-up plans. This forced the customers to look out for cheaper packages. Typically, the starter packages offered for new customers had the low call tariffs. Hence, customers switched. Frequently juggling of tariffs and service charges is not a well paying proposition for the mobile operators.

Core service failure is another factor that necessitated switching. Network related problems such as poor connectivity, low coverage etc. are forcing the customers to switch to another operator who is perceived as better. Indian mobile operators have to invest in expanding network coverage and providing technically superior quality services to retain customers. Inconvenience caused by the unsolicited messages and calls from the operator containing promotional content. Though tolerated by majority of the customers, is definitely a cause of concern. Even though all the mobile service providers implement Do Not Disturb (DND) registry as a mandatory service, it is neither thoroughly popularized nor implemented properly. In some occasions, poor response from call centers / retailers and help line services is annoying the customers. Mobile operators need to enhance the quality at all touch points to ensure loyalty.

Service providers need to build relationship with the customers to understand their changing needs and design appropriate strategies to meet the changing needs. Data mining and CRM practices can be implemented to identify the specific requirements of the customers and customized plans can be delivered to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Loyalty programmes for existing, high volume users are another way to keep customers. There is an imminent need to concentrate on customer loyalty as mobile number portability is round the corner. Mobile operators in India should lay equal emphasis on retaining customers and finding new customers.

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