

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION**



**Leveraging AI in Service Marketing Communication: Empirical Evidence from Ethio-  
Telecom**

**A thesis submitted to Addis Ababa University, School of Journalism and Communication,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Art in Public  
Relations and Strategic Communication.**

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This is to clarify that this thesis prepared by Bethel Tibebe, entitled "Leveraging AI in Service Marketing Communication: Empirical Evidence from Ethio-Telecom," submitted to the College of Humanities Language Studies, Journalism and Communication in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Relations and Strategic Communication. It complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards concerning originality and quality.

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**Declaration**

I declare that this research project, titled "Leveraging AI in Service Marketing Communication: Empirical Evidence from Ethio-Telecom," is entirely my own work. I further confirm that this thesis has not been submitted either in part or full to any other higher learning institution to earn any degree.

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## **Acronyms**

AI- Artificial Intelligence

CRM- Customer Relationship Management

CX- Customer Experience

IMC- Integrated Marketing Communication

ML- Machine Learning

NLP- Natural Language Processing

VA- Virtual Assistants

### ***Abstract***

*The growing presence of Artificial Intelligence is an intriguing new frontier that is yet to be studied with an enormous potential to transform the service marketing communication environment. AI can enhance service marketing communication by improving communication tactics, gaining insights, streamlining operations, and developing image and it can also leverage visual content for effective communication. With this expanded application area, this study strives for holistic investigation integration of AI in service marketing with empirical evidence from Ethio-Telecom. The interpretive research paradigm and qualitative research method are employed. Data was gathered through semi-structured and in-depth interviews with purposively selected customers and marketing practitioners of the focal company. The findings in this study revealed that Ethio-Telecom has not used the AIs to their full potential. The core issue lies in Ethio Telecom's focus on introducing AI without fully addressing customer hesitancy and lack of awareness regarding AI applications. Mari's (2019) research emphasizes the importance of effective communication tactics when integrating AI which Ethio-telecom has failed to do. Recommendations include developing AI-Powered Customer Service, Building Customer Trust, and Leveraging AI for Personalized Marketing*

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Chapter Preview

This chapter introduces the study “Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for Service Marketing Communication: Empirical Evidence from Ethio-Telecom. This study is carried out in a broader theoretical and practical context of Artificial intelligence (AI) in the service industry, specifically focusing on Ethiopia's telecommunication industry. The provisions of background information on service marketing and artificial intelligence are briefly presented. Following the context and motive of the study, a statement of the research problem is formulated. The research gaps are identified in theory, practice, and methodology. Then, specific research questions guiding this study have been articulated. Further, the scope of this study is defined in terms of theory and methodology.

## 1.2. Background of the Study

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a fascinating and complex phenomenon reflecting human intelligence's creativity and limitations. AI is a transformative technology that has emerged in recent years and has profound implications across various sectors (Boucher, 2020). The advancement of AI has changed how humans communicate in their day-to-day activities by delegating machines to mimic human intelligence and complete tasks that usually require human acquaintance. Acemoglu & Restrepo (2018), stated that the anticipated advancements in AI are poised to be even more remarkable in the future, with numerous analysts forecasting that these technologies will revolutionize workplaces globally. AI can perform multiple complex tasks effortlessly and this is due to the cutting-edge computing power of AI.

According to Delipetrev, et al., (2020) and Haenlein & Kaplan (2019), the origins of artificial intelligence can be traced to the early part of the 20th century when revolutionary scientist Alan Turing established the field's theoretical underpinnings by publishing "Computing Machinery and Intelligence." In the publication "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" Turing tried to address whether machines can demonstrate deep insight and understanding indistinctly from human beings. Turing's work paved the way for researchers to inspect the concept that machines can exhibit intelligent behavior similar to humans. Alan Turing's pioneering efforts significantly influenced a new wave of investigation, leading researchers to dig deeper into the

potential for machines to exhibit capabilities akin to human intelligence. This, in turn, ignited a revolution in the field of what we now know as artificial intelligence.

The area of AI hasn't always been successful, it has faced several hindrances where no further advancements were made in the field and this period was known as the AI Winter. Haenlein & Kaplan (2019), explained that one of the many reasons that led to the AI winter was that artificial intelligence was overstated followed by disappointment and criticism, leading to cutbacks on the funds made for research in the field. The wave of enthusiasm and excitement died because of the unfulfilled promises leading government and funding organizations to divert their focus and pour their resources into other fields that were believed to make a change. Toosi, et al., (2021), stated that the criticism was so high during the AI winter that researchers avoided using the term "AI" in favor opted for titles like "informatics" or "analytics" so that funds would still be made. Delipetrev, et al., (2020), further affirmed that the renaming of AI under different aliases did work and allowed funds to continue, however, overall support was lacking and low, resulting in slow progress.

Although AI went through several other setbacks and many failed attempts it has now advanced to the point where it is a crucial element in almost all spheres of the contemporary economy and considerably impacts practically all facets of our personal, social, and political lives (Pedreschi & Miliou, 2020). AI has developed and changed so much since its consumption at a rapid rate to the point where it has become an essential part of many aspects of our lives and different sectors such as healthcare, finance, transportation, marketing, etc. These are just a few examples of how AI applications have advanced in recent years and we can expect further innovations and improvements in various domains.

For this specific paper, we will focus on AI and its application in service marketing. In today's dynamic business landscape, services are pivotal in shaping economies and enhancing customer experiences. Service comprises all economic activities whose output is of non-physical products and delivers additional value in forms that are fundamentally intangible concerns of its first consumers (Quinn, et al., 1987). Service marketing is a dynamic, complex, and multidimensional phenomenon encompassing various aspects. Service marketing is a major sub-discipline of marketing driven by a rapidly growing population of service marketing scholars and a knitting

system of publication outlets that have emerged to publish their works (Brown, et al., 1994). According to Gummerus & Koskull (2015) and Brown, et al., (1994), the interest in service marketing began in the 1970s, and although new approaches take time to gain traction the early scholars were quite determined to establish service marketing as a distinctive discipline and succeeded in doing so.

The surge of service marketing as a discipline brought new ideas and differences for discussion. Previously, the marketing notion was based on a manufacturing model focused on items and objects for economic exchange (Hole, et al., 2018). Marketing was solely focused on exchanging goods and objects as a main source of a developing economy. Still, the emergence of service marketing has placed the distinction between physical products and services at the forefront. Gummerus & Koskull (2015), stated that service marketing emphasized customer perceptions of service which made customers the final judge of the service provider's actions thus, this resulted in researchers becoming preoccupied with determining perceived value. Service marketing puts a significant emphasis on customers' perceptions so much that practitioners became engrossed in trying to understand what the customers' thoughts were.

Lapierre (2000) and Aulia, et al., (2016) have stated that scholars disagree on how to define and conceptualize perceived value, indicating that it is a complex construct but even with this dilemma people still go back to the definition given by Zeithaml (1988), which he defines perceived value as the overall assessment of the customers on a product based on their impressions of what they receive and what they contribute. Keep in mind that the customer's perception of the standards of services is a critical factor in the service provider's success, particularly because customer satisfaction guarantees the success of the business. Service providers must give proper service and be responsive to client's requirements and complaints, as there is a direct relationship between waiting time and customer satisfaction (Finaritra & Benjamin, 2021). Effective communication is the link between service quality, responsiveness, wait time, complaint resolution, and continual improvement. Service providers prioritizing communication generate great experiences and develop long-term client relationships. Theaker (2002), further explains that clear and well-managed communication can go a long way toward influencing a strategically crucial perception. However, neglected communication can send out all the wrong messages, leading to unfavorable perceptions. Service providers who actively listen

to clients, understand their needs and respond accordingly improve the overall service experience.

According to Mari (2019) and Ma & Sun (2020), marketing professionals must navigate the growing number of digital and data touchpoints and analyze rich media information to gain insights into consumer views and meet consumers' high expectations for connection, content, and personalized offers. Although this is a strenuous task, the development of AI technology has made it easy. Cutting-edge and creative AI-powered marketing solutions can quickly adjust to the shifting needs, and provide communications and solution packages that are profitable and essential to the relevant parties (Epstein, 2018). Service marketers now have access to powerful tools that have the potential to transform their work. Institutions that use AI optimize semi-automated and real-time procedures to create a seamless customer experience.

According to Mari (2019), predictive and augmented experiences enhance customer interactions, improve omnichannel experiences, and differentiate products. With the help of chatbot integration, automated content development, and media monitoring AI technologies give the tools to navigate the ever-changing business dynamic. While existing studies show the promise of AI for service market analysis, there is a lack of academic research on applying AI to produce effective service marketing applications and the application AI tools proving they are still in their infancy (Huang & Rust, 2020; Haleem, et al., 2022). Thus, this research aims to holistically examine the integration of AI into service marketing with evidence from Ethio Telecom.

### 1.3. Research Problem

Service marketing is a well-established discipline with theories, communication, and other social science theories to contribute to the body of knowledge within the discipline of service marketing. However, the rapid presence of Artificial Intelligence presents a fascinating new frontier with immense potential to reshape the service marketing landscape. Many studies argue the scarcity of empirical research and the inadequacy of the existing in addressing AI's theoretical and practical application in service marketing. Pedreschi & Miliou (2020), emphasized transnational and multidisciplinary research in AI is necessary to create a strong alliance with other fields, including social sciences, cognition, and ethics.

According to Myers (2023), the capacity of generative artificial intelligence has sparked both wonder and nerves in individuals in knowledge-based professions. While some credit AI as a transformative technology that can change the service marketing landscape others label it as a disruptive force. Suciati<sup>1</sup>, et al., (2021) and Wirth (2018), argue that AI will help more than hurt white-collar workers by freeing them from more mundane tasks and allowing them to concentrate on innovation and creativity. On the contrary, Panda, et al., (2019) and Chintalapati & Pandey (2022), caution that due to its rapid growth in recent years, AI automation has brought difficulties by unleashing the next wave of enterprise business disruption such as job losses, ethical concerns, and computers managing humans.

The ever-changing digital landscape presents service marketers with a complex challenge in bridging the communication gap between the abundance of customer data and the ability to translate it into personalized, engaging interactions Deveau, et al., (2023) and AI offers a beacon of hope in navigating these complexities. The service industry thrives on building relationships and exceeding customer expectations. Strong relationships and exceeding expectations are the cornerstones of success in service marketing, where the quality of the experience is paramount. While many data touchpoints offer rich customer insights Mari (2019), effectively utilizing this information to meet heightened customer expectations for personalization remains a significant hurdle (Ma & Sun, 2020). This is further compounded by the dynamic nature of customer needs and the pressure to deliver seamless omnichannel experiences (Mari, 2019).

Huang & Rust (2020), and Berger, et al., (2019), previous research has shown that AI can be useful for market analysis. While existing research acknowledges the potential of AI in market analysis Huang & Rust (2020), the application of AI for effective communication strategies in service marketing remains relatively unexplored Haleem, et al., (2022) leaving a gap in understanding how AI can be harnessed to optimize communication and elevate service quality. Studies acknowledge the transformative power of AI in market analysis, yet there's a dearth of research on its practical applications in crafting communication strategies and optimizing service experiences. Though previous research illustrates the promise of AI for market analysis, there is a paucity of academic work on applying AI to generate effective service marketing applications and implementing AI technologies, demonstrating they are still in their infancy.

Therefore, a critical research gap exists regarding the effective integration of AI into service marketing communication strategies. Further research is necessary to bridge this gap and unlock the full potential of AI in creating personalized interactions, crafting dynamic customer journeys, and fostering stronger brand loyalty within the service industry. This research addresses this gap by examining how AI can bridge communication, personalize interactions, and improve service experience in the dynamic digital service landscape.

#### 1.4. Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to investigate the comprehensive integration of Artificial Intelligence within Ethio Telecom's service marketing communication strategies.

##### 1.3.1 Specific Objectives

1. Identifying key areas where AI is being leveraged in Ethio Telecoms customer service operations
2. Evaluating Ethio Telecom's current use of AI technologies in their service marketing communication
3. Analyzing the Impact of existing AI implementation on Ethio Telecom's Market Performance

#### 1.5. Research Questions

- 1, In which key areas is AI currently being leveraged in Ethio Telecom's customer service operations?
- 2, How does Ethio Telecom currently utilize AI technologies in their service marketing communication?
- 3, What impact does the existing AI implementation have on Ethio Telecom's market performance?

#### 1.6. Significance of the Study

As mentioned earlier, existing research acknowledges the potential of AI in market analysis but, Huang & Rust (2020), the application of AI for effective communication strategies in service marketing remains relatively unexplored Haleem, et al., (2022), leaving a gap in understanding how AI can be harnessed to optimize communication and elevate service quality. Therefore, a



critical research gap exists regarding the effective integration of AI into service marketing communication strategies.

This study aims to address the unexplored area in the existing literature and make a meaningful contribution to the general understanding that we have of AI, more so its integration into service marketing and transforming service marketing communication. This research explores AI and its integration into service marketing communication. It emphasizes practical implementation and its impact on both marketers and customers. It contributes valuable insights to the field of Service marketing communication.

### 1.7. Scope of the Study

This study investigates the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve Ethio Telecom's service marketing communication, particularly its impact on customer experience and service quality perception. Targeting professionals familiar with AI, the research will utilize a service quality model, like SERVQUAL, to assess how AI chatbots and virtual assistants influence customer perception across dimensions like reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide insights for Ethio Telecom to leverage AI for enhanced customer satisfaction, improved service quality perception, and a strategic framework for integrating AI effectively within its service marketing communication strategy.

## Chapter Review

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of AI and its growing influence across various industries while exploring the historical journey of AI, from its theoretical beginnings to its current role as a transformative technology. The chapter then focused on service marketing, a field that emphasizes customer perceptions and experiences. It distinguished service marketing from traditional product-based marketing, highlighting the importance of understanding customer needs and creating value through effective communication and responsiveness. Finally, the chapter acknowledged the limited research on the practical application of AI in service marketing, particularly within developing economies like Ethiopia. This gap emphasizes the need for further research, which this study aims to address by examining the integration of AI into service marketing communication using Ethio Telecom as a case study. The scope of the

study is limited to Ethio-telecom and the data is primarily due to factors related to resources available to the researcher.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Chapter Preview**

This chapter focuses on the related literature regarding service marketing and the integration of Artificial Intelligence. The first section gives an overview of the evolution of marketing communication, from its traditional one-way model to the current emphasis on two-way communication and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). The second section explores the field of service marketing, highlighting the key differences between service and physical product marketing. It discusses the evolution of service marketing from its early debates to its current focus on customer experience and relationship building. The third part of the chapter goes into the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence in service marketing communication. It explores how AI can be used to enhance communication, gain customer insights, streamline operations, and personalize the customer experience to get a lead in the marketing sphere. Specific examples of AI applications like chatbots and virtual assistants are discussed. Finally, the chapter examines the concept of AI-powered personalization in service marketing and its benefits for customer engagement and loyalty.

### **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

The service quality framework, originally proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), identifies five dimensions that influence customers' perceptions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Service quality models provide a framework for understanding how customers perceive the service they receive. Unlike physical products, services are intangible experiences. These models help bridge this gap by identifying key dimensions that shape customer perception. A widely used model, SERVQUAL, focuses on five core aspects: reliability (consistent service delivery), assurance (competence and trustworthiness of the service provider), responsiveness (willingness to help customers promptly), empathy (individualized attention and understanding customer needs), and tangibles

(appearance of facilities, equipment, and personnel). By measuring these dimensions and comparing them to customer expectations, organizations can identify areas for improvement and ensure their service offerings consistently meet or exceed customer expectations.

Service marketing communication thrives on delivering a high-quality experience. Established models like SERVQUAL identify key aspects influencing customer perception, such as reliability and empathy. The challenge lies in bridging the gap between what customers expect and the service they receive. Here's where Artificial Intelligence (AI) comes in. AI can analyze customer interactions and expectations, allowing for personalized communication that sets realistic service benchmarks. Additionally, AI chatbots and virtual assistants can handle routine tasks and inquiries, freeing up human employees to focus on complex interactions and personalized service. This focus on efficiency translates to clear and consistent communication across channels, building trust and reinforcing positive perceptions of service quality. Ultimately, by leveraging AI to address customer expectations, deliver efficient service, and provide personalized communication, organizations can create a more satisfying customer experience, fostering loyalty and a strong brand reputation. However, it's important to remember the importance of transparency about AI use, maintaining a human touch for complex interactions, and ensuring ethical data practice

### 2.3. An Overview of the Evolution of Marketing Communication

For an extended period, communication in marketing has been essential in influencing consumer behavior and brand impression implying that the phenomenon of marketing communication is not new. Mulder (2022), explains that since people have been trading goods, communication has always been an integral aspect of the marketing process and, the development of research and technology has made the marketing communication process more complex over the past few decades, giving rise to the integrated communication phenomena and integrated marketing communication (IMC).

The traditional view of communication usually concentrates on one message at a time, sent by an identified sender (the corporation) to a clearly defined recipient (the client) (Hailu, 2020). Schramm (1955), developed the model mentioned above now known as the basic or linear communication model consisting of a sender, message, and receiver. For decades, the old one-way model of a sender conveying a message to a receiver Schramm (1955), dominated marketing

communication, with an emphasis on mass communication and product-centric communications (Hutton, 1996).

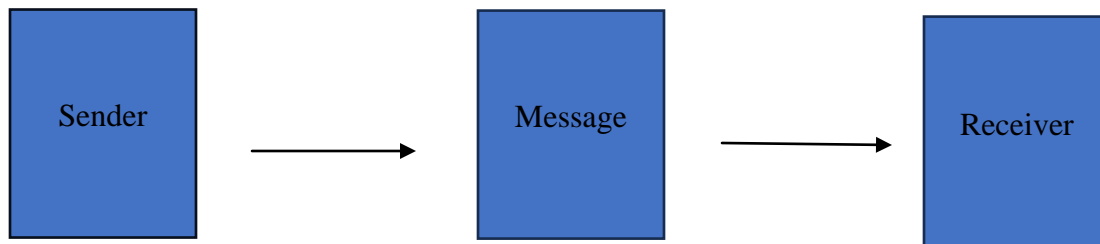


FIGURE 2.2. SCHRAMM'S MODEL OF COMMUNICATIONS.

But conveying a message is only one aspect of communication and this approach focused on a one-way flow of information which was also applied in marketing communication. However, the landscape in marketing rapidly evolved, moving beyond mere information dissemination to a focus on persuasion. In the past, the goal was to broadcast messages to a large audience in the hopes of grabbing their attention and influencing their purchase decisions (Hutton, 1996). It is clear from the foregoing that marketing communications aimed to promote the company and its products without accepting feedback but people were not satisfied.

Marketing communication was formerly thought to be a one-way connection between businesses, their products, and their target audiences. However, the engaged reality necessitates an adjustment where marketers can no longer rely simply on product-specific messaging (Groom, 2008). The old strategy of segregated advertising messages began to show weaknesses with the expansion of television channels, radio stations, and print periodicals, customers were overwhelmed with an overload of messages. With the advancement of technology and information overload, this strategy has become useless. Customers, empowered by technology, want a more personalized experience, requiring a transition from product-centric messages to a two-way conversation (Groom, 2008).

Customers, aided by technology, became more active players in the communication process. They sought a more personalized experience, so marketers had to react by adapting to this

dynamic environment and developing new ways to reach consumers in a world where communication is two-way. The late twentieth century witnessed a media revolution propelled by advances in information technology and globalization Hailu (2020) new communication channels evolved, and customer behavior changed and this development necessitated a new strategy for marketing. IMC arose as a response to the changing landscape by recognizing the importance of integrating various marketing communication techniques, such as advertising, public relations, and sales promotion, to offer a consistent and unified brand message across all touchpoints (Hailu, 2020). The emphasis on customer-centricity, data-driven techniques, and interactive communication represented a significant departure from traditional marketing practices (Groom, 2008).

While the technologies and methods used to reach audiences vary over time, the essential concepts of IMC remain constant: a unified voice, a consistent message, and a focus on consumer demands (Ang, 2021). IMC has had to adapt, incorporating these new tools while maintaining a consistent brand story across all platforms and artificial intelligence is a significant tool for marketers looking to improve their communication strategies within the scope of Integrated Marketing Communication. Artificial intelligence and automation will play an increasingly important role, in personalizing messages and conversations in real-time (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2018). Bridging the communication gap between the vast amount of consumer data and the ability to convert it into tailored, interesting interactions has proven difficult due to the constantly evolving digital world Deveau, et al., (2023) but, AI enables marketers to achieve this level of personalization by leveraging massive amounts of customer data.

In conclusion, the significance of consistency in IMC never changes, even though the media landscape may. Effective marketing communication strategies are based on three key elements: a consistent message, a single voice, and an emphasis on the demands of the customer. AI provides marketers with a formidable tool to fortify consistency and realize the full potential of IMC in the digital era by expediting content development, reducing human error, and enabling tailored communication within a consistent framework. Finding a balance between AI's capability and the priceless contributions of human creativity and strategic planning is crucial. Marketers can create effective, dependable, and customer-focused communications by embracing this synergy.

## 2.4. Service Marketing: From Tangible Products to Intangible Experiences

Service marketing is the specialized field of marketing that focuses on promoting and selling intangible offerings, like experiences or expertise, rather than physical products. Since services can't be held or touched, service marketing strategies emphasize the benefits and value the service provides to the customer. The history of service marketing is one of continuous evolution in a dynamic and competitive landscape. Physical commodities were the focus of marketing theory and practice before the 1950s and it was not until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that service marketing emerged as a field bringing new ideas to the table and placing the distinction between physical products and services at the forefront (Gummerus & Koskull, 2015). During the early stages, service marketing was surrounded by debates and analyses. Fisk, et al., (1993), the debate surrounding service marketing was due to scholars questioning whether services genuinely deserved a different marketing approach, given their intrinsic differences from tangible products.

The 1980s were a turning point where concepts of intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability were explored in detail by Gronroos (2015), and pioneering scholars such as Lenord Berry emphasized the unique characteristics of services, implying that their value could not be easily grasped before purchase which placed a clear difference between service and physical products. Despite the challenges that it faced the field continued to flourish where service-oriented models were developed and emphasis on managing customer expectations and relationship building was made (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2016). Research flourished in areas like customer relationship management (CRM), customer experience (CX), service quality measurement, and service innovation, and the development of service-oriented models like the SERVQUAL model further accelerated the growth of service marketing.

Unlike tangible products, services are inherently intangible therefore communication becomes the vital link between the service itself and how clients evaluate its worth. Service marketing emphasizes customers' perceptions, and acknowledging the importance of customer perceptions in service marketing is a critical point of differentiation. Unlike physical goods, services are often experienced, not just possessed. Gummerus & Koskull (2015) further explained that the provider usually designs and builds the consumer experience and perception. Service marketers actively

plan and build customer perception by matching connections with customer needs and altering opinions through branding, quality, and strategic communication. Service providers must give proper service and be responsive to client's requirements and complaints, as there is a direct relationship between waiting time and customer experience (Finaritra & Benjamin, 2021).

Grönroos (2011), contradicts the statement made by Gummerus & Koskull (2015), stating that customers are also co-producers of the experience, he explains customers actively shape service experiences through encounters, so the supplier is no longer the lone designer. Grönroos (2011), further explains throughout the exchanges, the supplier can collaborate with the clients directly and actively impact the direction and result of their value-generating operations. Communication helps customers create value; if Service marketing communication fails to help customers create value, it hinders their ability to make informed decisions (Hailu, 2020). Nonetheless, consumers create value aided by service marketing communication. Through comments, online evaluations, and involvement in social media conversations, customers are becoming more and more involved in co-creating value. Clear, consistent, and individualized communication across all touchpoints enables a better knowledge of client demands and the continual enhancement of service offerings. Grönroos (2000), further elaborates that businesses can bridge the gap between what customers expect and what they perceive by clearly articulating service options and restrictions through communication. So, in the evolving landscape of service marketing, the critical role of communication is highlighted building in strong customer relationships and achieving sustainable growth.

In summary, the changing nature of services requires a thoughtful communication strategy. Encouraging conversations, paying attention to customer feedback, and collaborating with them can help service providers connect service delivery, with customer perception. Additionally using technology to tailor communication at every interaction point guarantees a customer journey. As the service sector evolves effective communication will continue to be vital, for nurturing customer connections driving lasting growth, and ultimately surpassing expectations.

## 2.5. Integration of AI in Service Marketing

Service marketing thrives on a solid theoretical foundation, drawing on communication and social sciences to create a vast body of knowledge. However, the growing presence of Artificial

Intelligence is an intriguing new frontier that is yet to be studied with an enormous potential to transform the environment. AI is an innovative technology that has significantly impacted various fields and service marketing is no exception. The service marketing landscape is one met with fierce competition. Wirtz & Lovelock (2021), explain that veteran organizations struggle to retain customer loyalty due to competition from innovative corporations providing new product features, enhanced performance price cuts, knowledgeable promotion, and the advent of more convenient technologically driven service delivery systems. Thus Healy, et al., (2007) state that to stand out from the competition, businesses and designers aim to differentiate their products and services through retail design, Petermans, et al., (2013) further, explain that this can be achieved especially by creating memorable client experiences that involve integrating both tangible and ethereal stimuli.

In light of this AI holds enormous potential as it helps with the proliferation of data sources and information, enhancing the data management skills of software, and creating complex and sophisticated algorithms (Haleem, et al., 2022). AI technology provides service marketers with powerful tools that can alter their work. AI can enhance service marketing by improving communication tactics, gaining insights, streamlining operations, and developing image and it can also leverage visual content for effective communication (Mari, 2019). AI has the potential to revolutionize service marketing by enabling better communication, data-driven insights, and more efficient methods. AI technologies provide service marketers with tools to navigate the shifting media ecosystem, including chatbot integration, automated content production, influencer identification, and media monitoring. Cutting-edge and innovative AI-powered marketing solutions can quickly adapt to changing needs, providing profitable and vital communications and solution packages to the appropriate parties (Epstein, 2018). Service marketers now have access to strong tools that can revolutionize their profession. AI-enabled institutions optimize semi-automated and real-time procedures to provide a smooth client experience. In essence, incorporating AI into service marketing strategies represents not only a technological advancement but also a profession-wide revolution. By implementing AI-enabled tactics, marketers may open up new opportunities for development, profitability, and meaningful connections with their audiences.



Service quality is a critical determinant of customer experience and loyalty in the service industry. Effective communication plays a central role in shaping customers' perceptions of service quality, influencing their overall satisfaction and likelihood of repeat patronage. With the advent of AI technologies, businesses have unprecedented opportunities to revolutionize communication channels and elevate service standards. The service quality framework, originally proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), identifies five dimensions that influence customers' perceptions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. The integration of AI into service marketing holds immense potential for enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction, particularly in the realm of communication. By leveraging AI-driven communication solutions, businesses can augment the reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles of their service offerings, thereby delivering superior experiences that delight customers and drive business success. As AI continues to evolve, organizations need to embrace innovation and leverage technology to optimize communication channels and elevate service standards in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

### 2.5.1. AI-Driven Customer Service and Support

Customer service and support are critical components of any successful service-oriented organization and are undergoing a significant transformation driven by artificial intelligence and automation. Successful organizations understand that developing strong customer relationships through great service and adopting customer service strategies for competitive advantage is crucial to their success (Wilson, et al., 2020). This involves all contacts and processes aimed at helping customers before, during, and following their purchase or service experience. AI-enabled customer service is the fastest and most effective way for institutions to provide proactive experiences, increasing client engagement (Chinda & Okpor, 2023). Technology is essential for a company's customer service and success in the marketplace as it improves the availability, accessibility, and accountability of assistance provided to customers. The integration of Artificial Intelligence into customer service has transformed how organizations interact with their customers (Mohanty, et al., (2023) AI technologies like chatbots, virtual assistants, speech analytics, and self-service portals have greatly improved the efficiency and quality of customer service (Chinda & Okpor (2023) because they can offer prompt responses and customized

interactions to users at any time or location, virtual assistants and chatbots have become increasingly popular.

#### *2.2.1.1. Chatbots*

Chatbots are computer programs or applications that replicate human-like discussions with users by utilizing artificial intelligence and natural language processing (NLP) (Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020). They are intended to connect with people via text or voice. They can be implemented into various platforms, including websites, messaging apps, social networking platforms, and customer support systems. Over the last ten years, chatbot quality and quantity have risen since when they were first established covering a wide range of industries (Bakkouri, et al., 2022). The concept originated with the Turing test in 1950 preceded by *Jabber Wacky* in 1988, and subsequent improvements led to the introduction of smart personal voice assistants such as Siri, Watson, and others, which are now integrated into smartphones and home gadgets (Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020). Nimavat & Champaneria (2017), stated chatbots can range from simple rule-based systems that follow predefined scripts to more sophisticated AI-powered bots that can learn from interactions and adapt to user preferences. Some advanced chatbots utilize machine learning algorithms to improve their responses over time, making them more effective and capable of handling complex conversations.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence into service marketing has ushered in a new era of innovation, efficiency, and data-driven decision-making. AI technologies, such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine Learning (ML), and sentiment analysis, have revolutionized various aspects of service marketing, transforming the way organizations communicate, and engage with audiences (Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020). Chinda & Okpor (2023), AI-powered technology, such as chatbots, dramatically improve customer happiness by providing immediate, contextually relevant assistance. Mohanty, et al., (2023) the ability to interact in real-time makes for a smooth and effective support experience. This reduces the wait periods and inconveniences that come with traditional phone support.

Furthermore, these technologies facilitate self-service options, empowering users to access information and resolve basic issues autonomously (Smith et al., 2019). These technologies enable self-service alternatives, enabling consumers to obtain information and handle simple

problems on their own. Chatbots allow human agents to focus on more problematic customer concerns by quickly answering basic questions. This improves overall efficiency and enables customer service teams to devote their time and expertise to solving complex problems. Customers can receive immediate assistance at any time, including after office hours. AI-powered chatbots can tailor interactions based on customer data. This data enables them to provide targeted solutions and recommendations, resulting in a more relevant and enjoyable customer experience. Customer satisfaction increases significantly when response times are faster and issues are resolved more efficiently because there is a direct relationship between waiting time and customer satisfaction (Finaritra & Benjamin, 2021). As AI technology advances, chatbots will continue to play an increasingly important role in molding the future of customer service into a more modern and efficient system.

#### *2.2.1.2. Virtual Assistant*

Virtual Assistants (VAs) are software agents that carry out tasks or provide services in response to inquiries or commands triggered by voice commands, text-based inputs, or proactive operations based on context or environment analysis (Pereira, et al., 2023). VAs are abstraction layers that operate on top of the system, utilizing its services and applications to carry out actions. Pereira, et al., (2023) virtual assistance is a fast and effective way to get information as it works by filtering and interpreting data from large databases and making recommendations based on that data. Virtual assistants for customer service have the potential to improve customer satisfaction, boost operational effectiveness, and offer insightful data to help companies provide top-notch customer care. They provide individualized support based on user preferences, improve productivity, and streamline daily tasks by interacting with a variety of devices and services.

VAs have become so advanced that they are now being humanized. Visser, et al., (2016) explain that the idea behind this approach is that by humanizing virtual assistants, users of AI-powered technologies will feel more connected to, satisfied with, and trusting of them. Drichoutis, et al., (2023) add that including gender aspects in a virtual assistant through anthropomorphizing, such as names, voices, and appearance, is crucial to making a VA seem more human. When engaging with an AI that resembles a human, users might be more forthcoming and trustworthy, which could speed up issue resolution, especially when dealing with irate and frustrated clients, a warm disposition and captivating personality can diffuse the situation and foster a more positive

relationship leading to a better customer experience. Ultimately, by retaining client information and customizing communications, humanized virtual assistants can open the door to a whole new world of customization. Drichoutis, et al., (2023) state that it's crucial to keep in mind, though, that even if it is too humanized VAs cannot satisfy emotional demands, it may result in inflated expectations or a feeling of alienation because AI still doesn't possess emotional intelligence. In general, the intelligent implementation of humanizing virtual assistants can foster trust, boost engagement, and produce a more customized customer support experience.

### 2.5.2. AI-driven Personalization in Service Marketing

The service industry is characterized by intangible offerings that thrive on building strong customer relationships. As previously mentioned, Petermans, et al., (2013) explained that by creating memorable client experiences that incorporate both tangible and ethereal stimuli businesses and designers differentiate their products and services. To differentiate themselves in a competitive context, service providers must understand their clients on a deeper level and personalize accordingly. As Shareef & Reddy (2020), emphasize maintaining market share, companies should prioritize understanding each customer's behavior and providing the best user experience. Personalization has evolved as an essential approach for providing relevant and engaging experiences across the consumer journey. This is where AI steps in, offering a transformative approach to personalization in service marketing, and by using AI effectively and ethically, service companies may usher in a new era of customer involvement and loyalty.

Personalization is a competitive advantage strategy that involves learning about, matching, and offering products and services to individual customers based on customer preferences (Chandra, et al., 2022). White, et al., (2007) define personalization as a tailored communication flow that transmits messages based on individual preferences or traits. Personalization has evolved as a critical technique for delivering relevant and engaging experiences across the consumer journey. Further Shareef & Reddy (2020), emphasize that as competition grows globally, businesses see the need to shift away from traditional marketing and sales methods to more targeted approaches to better reach their target audience. To differentiate from competitors and leave a lasting impact on consumers, service marketers must prioritize customer interest, service, and experience. Shareef & Reddy (2020), since each person has unique experiences, segmenting the market in bulk has become outdated, and adjusting to this contemporary personalization

method based on each person's data maximizes profits is necessary. Boudet, et al., (2019) study has shown that successful personalization deployment leads to a 5%-15% increase in revenue and a 10%-30% improvement in marketing efficiency within a single channel, highlighting its growing importance. Personalization has become a strategic requirement, whether used to adapt marketing messages, customize product recommendations, or improve user experiences. AI enables service marketers to reach this level of personalization by utilizing massive volumes of client data. With AI-driven audience segmentation and data analysis, service marketers can deliver tailored messages that resonate with individual consumers, deepening brand loyalty and fostering meaningful connections.

Bridging the communication gap between the vast amount of consumer data and the ability to convert it into tailored, interesting interactions has proven difficult due to the constantly evolving digital world Deveau, et al., (2023) but, AI enables service marketers to achieve this level of personalization by leveraging massive amounts of customer data. AI can use complex algorithms to examine data points such as demographics, purchasing history, and internet behavior to identify client categories and predict specific needs which enable customized marketing efforts with individualized messaging and offers that address unique customer desires (Shareef & Reddy, 2020). AI allows service providers to personalize their marketing campaigns by being able to analyze massive volumes of data and spot patterns. AI personalization is revolutionizing service marketing, allowing organizations to provide more meaningful client experiences and foster better relationships. By using AI safely and ethically, service companies may usher in a new era of customer involvement and loyalty. As AI continues to evolve, service marketers who embrace this technology will be well-positioned to thrive in the customer-centric future.

## 2.6. Chapter Review

This chapter explores the history of marketing communication, highlighting its continuous transformation. It explores the shift from one-way messaging to a more interactive approach, driven by the rise of information overload and empowered customers. The concept of Integrated Marketing Communication emerges as a response to the complex media landscape, emphasizing consistency, a customer-centric focus, and data-driven techniques. While communication technologies continue to evolve, the core principles of IMC a unified voice, consistent messaging, and a focus on customer needs remain essential for successful marketing strategies.

Then the second section explores the unique challenges and opportunities of service marketing. Unlike tangible products, services are intangible experiences. The chapter explores the historical debate surrounding service marketing, emphasizing the importance of managing customer expectations and building strong relationships. The development of service-oriented models is traced, highlighting the role of customer relationship management, customer experience, and service quality measurement. The critical role of communication in service marketing is emphasized, as communication shapes how customers perceive the value of a service. The concept of co-creation is introduced, acknowledging that customers actively participate in shaping their service experience through interactions with providers. The section concludes by stressing the importance of clear, consistent, and personalized communication across all touchpoints to enhance customer understanding and continually improve service offerings.

The chapter then explores the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence in service marketing. The ever-growing volume and complexity of data pose challenges for traditional marketing methods. AI offers powerful tools for service marketers, with its capabilities in data analysis, personalization, and automation. The section highlights the intense competition in service marketing and the need for differentiation through memorable customer experiences. AI empowers service marketers to gain valuable insights, streamline operations, and develop effective communication strategies. The chapter explores how AI chatbots and virtual assistants are revolutionizing customer service and support. These technologies offer 24/7 accessibility, personalized interactions, and self-service options, ultimately improving customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. The final section focuses on personalization as a key differentiator in service marketing. Understanding individual customer preferences is crucial for delivering relevant and engaging experiences. The rise of AI-driven personalization is explored, leveraging massive amounts of customer data to create targeted marketing messages and offers. The section highlights the benefits of personalization, including increased revenue, marketing efficiency, and customer loyalty. The challenge of bridging the gap between vast data volumes and meaningful customer interactions is acknowledged. AI's ability to analyze complex data sets and predict customer needs is presented as a solution to personalize marketing messages and offers effectively.

## 3. Research Design and Methodology

### 3.1. Chapter Preview

The first section of this chapter begins by defining the concept of a research paradigm and its crucial role in guiding the researcher's perspective and approach to a research problem. It then examines the key characteristics and underlying assumptions of the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The chapter goes into the four fundamental components of a research paradigm: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology, and how they differ between the positivist and interpretivist approaches. Then the chapter goes into the complexities of research paradigms, focusing on the interpretive approach within the context of AI integration in customer interactions at Ethio Telecom. This section begins by explaining the significance of research paradigms as guiding frameworks that shape researchers' perspectives and methodologies. Then the chapter goes into the methodological framework that guides the research. It began by outlining the chosen research approach and design, laying the foundation for how the subject is investigated. Following this, it goes into the specifics of participant selection, detailing the criteria used to ensure a representative and insightful sample. The heart of the chapter explores the data collection methods employed. We discuss the utilization of both semi-structured and in-depth interviews, unpacking the development of a comprehensive interview guide to elicit rich and nuanced data. Additionally, the procedures for recording these interviews are addressed.

Next, the chapter navigates the process of data analysis and interpretation. Here, it sheds light on the approach used to generate codes from the collected data, ultimately leading to the construction of themes and meaningful insights. The chapter ensures the trustworthiness of our findings by addressing the crucial aspects of validity and reliability. The section outlines the measures taken to guarantee the accuracy and dependability of the research. In conclusion, it explores the ethical considerations that tie the entire research process. The chapter emphasizes the steps taken to safeguard participant privacy and well-being.

### 3.2. Research Paradigm

In research, paradigms serve as guiding ideologies, influencing how we approach the world and study our questions. In short, a paradigm is a fundamental aspect of research. Denzin & Lincoln (2000) define paradigms as human constructs that establish the researcher's perspective and create meaning from facts that play a crucial role in shaping the ideas and practices of researchers within a discipline. Similarly, Guba & Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as a set of fundamental ideas that deal with ultimate or first principles representing a worldview that directs a study or research activity. A research paradigm serves as the foundation for the rest of the research effort. It's a comprehensive framework for approaching the world and investigating a research problem. Thus, a research paradigm is important because it serves as a prism or a lens through which people examine a research topic. Different paradigms provide opposing perspectives, influencing the study process greatly.

Although several paradigms have been over the years, experts cannot agree on how many classifications of each paradigm are appropriate. Saunders, et al., (2019) categorized paradigms into five: positivism, initial realism, interpretivism, post-modernism, and pragmatism. Healy & Perry (2000) classified paradigms into four paradigms: namely positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and realism. Guba & Lincoln (1994) also divide paradigm into four: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and, critical theory. However, we will be discussing two paradigms, the positivist paradigm and the other one is interpretivism paradigm as these are the two common ones. Positivism and Interpretivism are two prominent paradigms that will be discussed as they provide different perspectives through which reality is comprehended and knowledge is developed.



Positivist philosophy as advocated by philosopher Auguste Comte originated in the 19th century (Ugwu, et al., (2021) and emphasizes the value of objective evidence and verifiable facts in comprehending society. Positivism is an evolutionary philosophical approach often linked to Auguste Comte's belief that knowledge can be quantified in objective reality (Neuman, 2000). This is done by observing reality and making generalizations about the culture (Scotland (2012), where the emphasis is on the value of objective data and facts, avoiding human biases (Saunders, et al., 2019). Park, et al., (2020) stated that the positivist inquiry aims to generate causal linkages that predict and govern phenomena. The research located under this paradigm relies on deductive logic, formulation of theories, putting those theories to the test, providing operational definitions, formulas, and calculations, conclusions through extrapolations and expressions (Kivunja & Kuyini (2017) because it seeks to provide justifications and forecasts based on measurable outcomes. In basic terms, positivism aims to comprehend the social world via a scientific lens, using quantitative facts to reach generalizable conclusions. Positivism seeks to explain and anticipate nature's causes and effects through measurable outcomes (Ugwu, et al., 2021). The positivist technique emphasizes the intellectual grounds for conducting research (Yong, et al., (2021) it directs researchers to choose appropriate methodologies based on the concepts of objectivity and measurability, rather than prescribing specific research tools or techniques.

Guba & Lincoln (1989), state that the primary goal of the interpretivism paradigm is to comprehend the subjective realm of human experience and the focus is on understanding the subject's perspective, not the observer's (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Weber and Dilthey were the developers who maintained the perspective that everything has a subjective meaning (Schwandt, 2000). Interpretivists seek to understand the deeper reality behind human behavior by examining and deciphering their behaviors, experiences, and intentions. The interpretive paradigm's foundational tenet is that understanding people's perspectives, ideas, ways of thinking, and meanings may be achieved through cultural studies (Boas, 1995). It focuses on comprehending the subjective meaning and experience of individuals within their social context, stressing the construction of reality through social interactions and individual awareness. The interpretive approach seeks to understand the phenomenon by analyzing human behavior and activities (Hailu, 2020). It permits researchers to explore the complexity of human experience that is frequently ignored by prioritizing subjective meaning-making.

This paradigm places theory after research, building on the evidence gathered throughout the research process thus, aligning data collection and analysis with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This means that the research process itself plays a crucial role in shaping the understanding of the phenomenon under study. In this specific paradigm, theory comes after research, hence it is based on the evidence gathered during the research process. The interpretivist paradigm, combined with grounded theory, is an advantageous approach for academics attempting to understand the subjective interpretation that people align their experiences and the social world around them. Thus, in this paradigm theory arises alongside data analysis, much like putting together a puzzle with the pieces discovered during the research. Predominantly, the interpretive viewpoint prioritizes qualitative research methodologies, subjectivity, and the examination of specific circumstances (Healy & Perry, 2000).

In addition to these foundational characteristics, understanding the interpretive paradigm requires an exploration of worldview, reflexivity, a holistic approach to social phenomena and especially understanding the fundamental component. Expanding on the interpretive paradigm namely, its emphasis on revealing subjective interpretations a deeper understanding can be attained by investigating the four fundamental components that characterize a research paradigm, as stated by Lincoln & Guba (1985): ontology, axiology, methodology, and epistemology. Next, we will provide concise discussions for each of these points.

Crotty (2003), defines ontology as a state of being Ugwu, et al., (2021) also define ontology as a study that explores the nature of existence and reality and focuses on the core of the social phenomenon under investigation (Scotland, 2012). Guba & Lincoln (1989), state that the ontological assumptions address the topic of what can be known. or 'What is the nature of reality?' Ontology is essential in a paradigm because it analyzes research data to understand its significance by identifying the fundamental concepts that make up the themes. Ontology enables you to assess your philosophical presumptions and underlying belief system regarding the nature of being as the researcher, real and philosophical presumptions regarding the nature of reality are essential to comprehending how you interpret the information you have collected (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This indicates that the basic ideas that comprise the themes that we examine to interpret the meaning ingrained in research data are referred to as the ontology of your work. The

ontological assumptions a researcher holds influence the methodologies they use (Scotland, 2012). A researcher employing a positivist ontology is most likely to prioritize quantitative data collection, using surveys and experiments to gather objective data points. On the other hand, a researcher employing an interpretive ontology might favor qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups to capture the lived experiences of a certain group.

The word Epistemology has its origins in Greek, where the word episteme implies knowledge Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), it corresponds to the knowledge or the theory of knowledge, or how the researcher comes to know the reality (Carson, et al., 2001). Schwandt (2000), defines epistemology as a pursuit of knowledge and justification. Epistemology goes deeper than simply obtaining the information it tries to deal with the basic questions of what constitutes knowledge, the ways of acquiring it, and the grounds for accepting it as true. Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), explain that when analyzing the epistemology of your research, you can inquire whether knowledge can be acquired or gained through human experience, what is the nature of knowledge, and the interaction between the knower and those who seek to know. What is the relationship between me as the inquirer and what is known? These questions assist researchers in positioning themselves in the study context and identifying fresh discoveries based on what is known. Researchers have various avenues for gathering insights: they can rely on intuition, their own lived experiences, or authoritative knowledge derived from established sources such as experts or scholarly works. Moreover, logical reasoning and empirical inquiry, which are central to rationalist and empiricist epistemologies, offer additional avenues for constructing knowledge (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Epistemology, as a foundational element of rigorous research methodology, invites us to scrutinize the very process by which we acquire knowledge and comprehend the world. This critical self-reflection enriches our research endeavors, leading to a more profound grasp of the data we gather and the insights we contribute to our specific domains.

Keeves (1997), simply refers to methodology as the research design, methods, tactics, and procedures utilized in a well-planned investigation to uncover information while Alharahsheh & Pius (2020), define methodology as the overall research plan that is utilized to conduct research, which also determines the methods that should be applied to align with the research strategy. The methodology outlines the methodical steps used to conduct research and gain knowledge about a

topic (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This comprises the research design, technique, data collection methods, and analytical tools. In simple terms, methodology describes how researchers will move from research questions to knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, methodology begins to diverge dramatically between the positivist and interpretivism paradigms. A well-defined methodology serves to clarify assumptions underlying the research and acknowledges any limitations encountered during the investigation. Furthermore, it justifies the chosen methods and explains how potential limitations were addressed or minimized (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). When comprehended thoroughly, empowers researchers to embark on a journey of rigor and transparency. A meticulously crafted methodology fortifies research endeavors, ultimately paving the path for significant contributions to the realm of knowledge. A methodology serves as a navigational guide, leading researchers through the intricate data collection, analysis, and interpretation journey. By rigorously scrutinizing assumptions, substantiating chosen methods, and prioritizing transparency, a meticulously crafted methodology instills confidence in research findings and bolsters their impact on the continuous quest for knowledge.

Axiology can be considered the cornerstone of ethical research as it refers to the ethical issues that must be considered when developing a study project and explores a philosophical approach to making value-driven or correct decisions (Finnis, 1980). It forces researchers to confront the ethical issues that accompany their work. Ethical research conduct translates into concrete practices encapsulated by the acronym PAPA: Privacy, Accuracy, Property, and Accessibility (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Axiology entails defining, analyzing, and comprehending the principles of right and wrong action concerning research. It evaluates what importance we shall assign to the many parts of our study the participants, the data, and the audience to which we shall present the results of our research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Through an understanding of axiology, researchers embark on ethical research conduct. This commitment fosters trust in the research process and ensures the protection of the rights and well-being of all participants. Ultimately, ethical research contributes to knowledge creation that benefits society.

The positivist paradigm embraces objectivist epistemology, naive realism ontology, experimental methodology, and beneficence axiology, while the interpretive approach posits a subjectivist epistemology, relativist ontology, naturalist methodology, and balanced axiology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Given this paper focuses on studying user experience, perceptions, the impact of

AI on customer interactions, and the impact of AI on market performance, an interpretive approach is best suited. This paradigm highlights the subjective aspect of reality and the necessity of interpreting the meaning that people assign to their interactions with AI in Ethio Telecom's services. The subjectivist epistemology assumes that researchers interpret data based on their cognitive processes and interactions with participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Saunders, et al., (2019) explains subjective epistemology connects research and study subjects by recognizing that humans are inextricably linked to their knowledge. This stresses the researcher's involvement in building knowledge alongside participants. The researcher will seek to understand the lived experiences and viewpoints of Ethio Telecom customers and service professionals on AI integration. According to relativist ontology, reality is understood through intersubjectivity, taking into account semantic, social, and experiential components of inquiry (Saunders, et al., 2019). If the nature of reality is entirely subjective, evaluating the objective impact of AI on Ethio Telecom's market performance becomes challenging. Consequently, identifying a singular metric to guide its success remains elusive. Moreover, comparing user experiences from various backgrounds becomes difficult. It may be difficult to discern broad trends or draw conclusions regarding the efficacy of AI implementation across the entire market. So based on this relativist ontology is not the best fit for this study and this study's social constructionist ontology is a better fit. Given that AI's significance and effects on Ethio Telecom's services are socially created, this is consistent with the interpretivist perspective. The way that users and customer care representatives interpret and interact with AI will determine how the technology affects the business as a whole.

According to Hailu (2020), qualitative methods are well-suited for examining how individuals incorporate new information sources into their decision-making processes. His study on brand contact within the Ethiopian beer market aligns with our exploration of AI integration. In both cases, the focus is on understanding how people interpret and synthesize information whether it's brand messages in Hailu's research or AI interactions in this context to inform their decisions, such as property purchases or service utilization. Therefore, employing qualitative methods aligns with established research practices and allows us to investigate the subjective dimensions of user experience with AI in Ethio Telecom's customer service and marketing operations. This approach will provide valuable insights to enhance customer interactions, marketing communication strategies, and ultimately, Ethio Telecom's market performance.

Thus, in alliance with Hailu (2020), the interpretive research paradigm, subjectivist epistemology, and qualitative methodology are considered appropriate for understanding the Leveraging AI in Service marketing communication: Empirical Evidence from Ethio-Telecom. A significant methodological challenge in this research lies in capturing the intricate nuances of user experiences with AI in Ethio Telecom's services. While quantitative methods excel at objectively measuring outcomes, they often fall short in comprehending the underlying reasons ('why') behind those numbers. In this context, the impact of AI on customer interactions is highly subjective and influenced by individual interpretations, emotions, and cultural contexts.

### 3.3. The Research approach and design

The research aligns with an interpretive approach, recognizing that the significance and influence of AI in customer interactions are subjective and contingent upon individual interpretations (Creswell, 2014). While quantitative methods hold value in various contexts, they might encounter challenges in capturing the intricate nuances of user experience. To explore this complex ground, a qualitative approach, such as the one advocated by Gummesson (2000), is most appropriate. This qualitative perspective enables us to untangle the multiple dynamics of how people perceive and engage with diverse brands, particularly those incorporating artificial intelligence. Qualitative research is a social science research method focusing on understanding phenomena via individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research presumes that reality is subjective and socially formed. Assuming that meanings are formed through interactions and interpretations, the researcher seeks to comprehend these interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative methods like interviews and focus groups allow us to understand how customers perceive and interact with AI in Ethio Telecom's service by capturing their subjective meanings, emotions, and cultural influences on their experiences. By directly engaging with customers, we can gain valuable insights from their perspectives on AI interaction and its role in customer experience. This allows for a richer understanding compared to solely relying on pre-defined categories used in quantitative research.

Considering the emerging nature of AI integration in customer service and marketing at Ethio Telecom, an exploratory research approach proves most fitting. Creswell & Creswell (2018), explains that exploratory research serves as the initial stage of the research process, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon with limited prior knowledge. This is in

harmony with Huang & Rust (2020), explaining that although existing research acknowledges the potential of AI in market analysis, the application of AI for effective communication strategies in service marketing remains relatively unexplored Haleem, et al., (2022) leaving a gap in understanding of how AI can be harnessed to optimize communication and elevate service quality making it a relatively new phenomenon. In qualitative research, an exploratory research design is defined by an inductive process of rewriting and modifying explanations, ideas, and preliminary hypotheses (Mason, 2017). Through active engagement with participants, we can refine existing understandings of AI's impact on customer interactions and potentially generate new research questions. Silverman (2017), emphasizes that similar to deductive research, exploratory research design can start with pre-existing theories and use empirical data to clarify, refine, or reframe theories until the observed makes more sense to the observer and is, therefore, more plausibly and consistently explained. Qualitative data can be used to adapt and refine existing theories about customer decision-making processes in the context of AI integration. The research may contribute to the theoretical development of how AI affects customer interactions within the Ethiopian telecommunications landscape. Going back to the point made by Huang & Rust (2020), explaining that although existing research acknowledges the potential of AI in market analysis, the application of AI for effective communication strategies in service marketing remains relatively unexplored Haleem, et al., (2022) leaving a gap in understanding how AI can be harnessed to optimize communication and elevate service quality making it a relatively new phenomenon. Based on the above notions, this study approaches the concept of integration of AI in service marketing through exploratory research design, to refine, adapt, specify, or reformulate the idea by using empirical evidence.

### 3.4. Participant Selection

Unlike quantitative research, which generalizes findings through random sampling, qualitative research prioritizes rich data collection from targeted participants who can best inform the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participant-researcher connection is frequently less formal in qualitative methods offering more detailed and comprehensive responses that can be given by participants than in most cases when using quantitative approaches (Natasha, et al., 2005). This study employs purposive sampling to achieve this goal. The idea behind purposeful sampling is to choose samples with a wealth of information to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Shaheen, et al., 2016). Purposeful sampling

involves intentionally selecting information-rich samples to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. Natatasha, et al., (2005) further explain purposive sampling, one of the most prevalent sampling procedures, groups participants based on preselected characteristics relevant to a certain research issue. Researchers believe that purposeful sampling enhances the quality of data collected for their research. Therefore, choosing suitable participants based on research objectives, theoretical stances, and potential to enlighten the study is the most crucial role in qualitative design (Mason, 2017). Following these principles, purposefully selected customers and marketing communications personnel of Ethio Telecom are participants in this study.

The customers of Ethio-Telecom were selected for a semi-structured, face-to-face interview based on the following criteria:

- ✓ Participants must be customers of Ethio Telecom.
- ✓ They should represent diverse economic and demographic groups.
- ✓ Specifically, customers from middle to high-income groups, comprising both genders.
- ✓ Participants must have the ability to discuss, share, and argue on the issue under investigation.
- ✓ They must be willing to sign the informed consent form and agree to take part in the study.
- ✓ Fluency in Amharic (the common language between speakers whose native languages are different) is required.
- ✓ Additionally, participants must use the AI-based communication tools provided by Ethio Telecom.

Similarly, the marketing communication personnel of Ethio-Telecom were selected based on the following criteria:

- ✓ Participants must be employees of Ethio Telecom.
- ✓ They should handle marketing communication within the company.
- ✓ Specifically, participants who handle customer relationship management and are part of the customer support team.



- ✓ Participants must have the ability to discuss, share, and argue on the issue under investigation.
- ✓ They must be willing to take part in the study.
- ✓ Fluency in Amharic (the common language between speakers whose native languages are different) is required.

Accordingly, a semi-structured interview approach was employed to gather insights from a purposefully selected group of participants comprising Four customers from Ethio-Telecom. These participants, including both male and female individuals from middle to upper-middle-class backgrounds, engage in diverse occupations such as private business management, academics, and executive management roles in business organizations. Notably, many of the participants are tech-savvy, enriching their perspectives on integrating AI-driven solutions, Wi-Fi connectivity, and other cutting-edge technologies into brand interactions. This is a mix of Ethio Telecom customers who have experienced the integration of AI into the company's service offerings.

Furthermore, four participants were purposively selected from Ethio Telecom to provide insights into the company's perspective. The participants included members from the customer service support and marketing teams. These individuals were chosen based on their extensive service within the company and their ability to offer valuable insights into the subject under study. These participants can provide insights into the specific AI-powered features and tools used, the reason behind the employment, and the observed impact on marketing communication effectiveness and overall market performance. These four in-depth interviews helped identify both prominent and underlying perceptions. By gathering perspectives from both the customer and the company side, the research can develop a comprehensive understanding of the current state of AI integration in Ethio Telecom's operations and its implications.

Research question # 1 question aims to understand the specific applications of AI within Ethio Telecom's customer service. By identifying these areas, we can explore how AI enhances efficiency, responsiveness, and overall customer experience. Ethio Telecom likely uses AI for tasks such as chatbots, automated responses, and personalized recommendations. Investigating these areas can reveal insights into the company's AI strategy.

Research question # 2 focuses on assessing how AI is integrated into marketing communication. Understanding the extent of AI adoption helps gauge its impact on customer engagement, brand perception, and promotional effectiveness. Ethio Telecom may use AI for targeted advertising, segmentation, or content personalization. Evaluating these practices provides a holistic view of AI's role in marketing efforts.

Research question # 3 goes into the business outcomes resulting from AI implementation. It considers whether AI positively affects revenue, customer retention, or the market. By analyzing performance metrics before and after AI adoption, you can assess whether Ethio Telecom's investment in AI yields tangible benefits. This informs strategic decisions. The participant selection process aligns with convenience purposive sampling, a technique well-suited for exploratory research (Ritchie, et al., 2013). This approach prioritizes selecting participants who are readily accessible and possess characteristics relevant to the research question. In this context, we prioritize face-to-face interviews with Ethio Telecom customers and employees who have direct experience with AI-powered customer service or marketing interactions, allowing us to gather rich insights into their perspectives on this relatively new phenomenon.

### 3.5. Data Collection Method

This study employs a dual approach to data collection, combining the strengths of semi-structured and in-depth interviews to gather comprehensive insights from participants. Semi-structured interviews provide a structured framework for exploring key themes and concepts, while in-depth interviews offer a more flexible and open-ended approach to understanding the differences in participants' experiences and perspectives. Below, we will briefly outline the definitions and methodologies of each approach, highlighting their unique contributions to the research design.

#### 3.5.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Holloway & Wheeler (2010), explain that semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used method in qualitative research and these interviews use established questions and allow the researcher to seek explanations. Magaldi & Berler (2020), explain that these interviews use established questions allowing the researcher to seek explanations, and suggest that semi-structured interviews, even with pre-determined topics, allow for in-depth discovery. This allows

the interviewer to push deeper into interesting areas that arise, while still ensuring key information is collected across all participants. During semi-structured interviews, researchers can discover new avenues that were not before investigated Gray (2004), by giving the interviewee a chance to phrase questions and maintain a focused conversational approach (Patton, 2002). In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer typically has a framework of themes to examine. According to Rubin & Rubin (2005), effective interviews typically include a mix of major questions, follow-ups, and probes. To ensure a successful interview, interviewers should prepare particular subjects to cover ahead of time. It provides the researcher with a clear structure to operate within, which helps to keep the interview focused and efficient. At the same time, the flexibility allows participants to express their individual opinions and experiences in their own words, resulting in rich, contextual data. This balance makes semi-structured interviews ideal for exploratory research, which seeks an in-depth comprehension of the views, actions, and decision-making processes. Overall, the semi-structured approach is a versatile and extensively used qualitative technique that can provide useful insights to researchers.

### 3.5.2. Face-to-Face In-depth Interview

In-depth interviews were employed for data gathering due to their advantages. In-depth interviews can effectively uncover attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions (Silverman, 2017). Creswell & Poth (2017) and Mason (2017) further explain that in-depth interviews can provide valuable insights into participants' perspectives. They provide researchers with a powerful tool for exploring individuals' lived experiences, perspectives, and opinions on a specific topic while allowing participants to explain their thoughts and feelings in their own words. Boyce & Neale (2006), further emphasize the statement above by explaining that in-depth interviews provide valuable insights into a person's beliefs and actions and a deeper exploration of new subjects. Interviews provide context for other data, such as outcome data, providing a full picture of program events and their causes. In-depth interviews are a useful alternative to focus groups in qualitative research. While focus groups promote lively conversations and group dynamics, individual interviews offer a more controlled setting for going deeper into individual experiences and opinions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Guion, et al., (2011) explain four key points when conducting in-depth interviews these are:

1. Open-ended questions. Questions should be framed so that they encourage responders to elaborate on the topic rather than just answering "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions often begin with "why" or "how," allowing responders to provide their answers.
2. Semi-structured format. Pre-planning crucial questions is important, but interviews should also be conversational, with queries based on past responses. To respond to an interviewee who mentions "the elections are approaching," consider asking, "How do you feel about the candidates involved?"
3. Seek understanding and interpretation. Active listening involves reflecting on the speaker's message. During the interview, the interviewer should interpret and ask for clarification to ensure understanding.
4. Recording responses. Interviews are often audio-recorded and supplemented with written notes from the interviewer. Notes from interviews should contain observations of verbal and nonverbal behaviors, as well as personal reflections on the experience.

In research, face-to-face interviews serve as a valuable tool for gathering primary data. The direct interaction between the researcher and the respondent allows for a deeper exploration beyond mere verbal responses. However, conducting face-to-face interviews can be resource-intensive, involving both time and financial costs (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Hay-Gibson, 2009). The authors have highlighted the need to make respondents comfortable by allowing interviews in locations of their choice. Unfortunately, these interviews are often constrained to local geographical areas due to practical limitations. In the case of this study conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, we arranged face-to-face interviews with customers at convenient venues and went to their offices for the selected customers who were too busy to meet in public venues. These interviews allowed us to engage directly with participants while respecting their preferences. Additionally, interviews with the company's marketing communication personnel were conducted at the company's head office, ensuring accessibility to suitable staff.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants for in-depth interviews and semi-structured. This method involves strategically selecting individuals who possess the knowledge and experience most relevant to the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This began by recruiting initial participants who met the selection criteria. We began by identifying specific criteria for participation, such as current Ethio Telecom customers with experience interacting

with the company's AI-driven communication channels. Participants were then carefully chosen based on their ability to provide rich insights into this specific area. When the researcher anticipates the participants' responses to nearly every item brought up during the interview, it could be considered saturated data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Data saturation is the key indicator for determining the sample size. This study signifies the point at which no new insights or themes emerge from further interviews with customers or marketing communication personnel. Reaching data saturation ensures a comprehensive understanding of Ethio Telecom's AI-driven service marketing strategies from both the customer and company perspectives. This approach allows us to efficiently gather data from a diverse range of participants while focusing on those most likely to provide rich information about the research topic. In this context, reaching data saturation ensures a comprehensive understanding of Ethio Telecom's AI-driven service marketing strategies from both the customer and company perspectives. Purposive sampling allows us to target participants with the most relevant knowledge and experiences, leading to efficient data collection focused on the core research topic.

### 3.6. The Development of the Guide and Schedule for the Interview

This study employs an inductive approach, aligning with the exploratory nature of research on Ethio Telecom's AI-driven service marketing communication. Inductive coding analyzes data by identifying themes based on participant tales (Hennink, et al., 2011). The basic goal of the inductive technique is to let research discoveries emerge through frequent, prominent, or noteworthy themes inherent in raw data, without the limitations imposed by formal techniques (Thomas, 2003). Detailed observations of the outside world serve as the foundation for inductive reasoning, which progresses to more abstract concepts and generalizations (Liu, 2016). An inductive research approach begins with the collection of data relevant to the researcher's topic of interest. After gathering a large amount of data, the researcher looks for connections in the data and works to construct a theory that will explain those patterns. Thus, when researchers use an inductive technique, they begin with a collection of observations and progress from those specific experiences to a more general set of propositions about them.

The inductive approach involves collecting in-depth data from participants and then identifying recurring themes within that data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These themes can then be compared with existing literature or personal experiences to inform broader patterns or theories

(Flick, 2018). This allows for the emergence of unforeseen insights and the potential to challenge or support existing theoretical assumptions. The interview guide utilizes a "funnel" technique, starting with broad, open-ended questions and gradually progressing to more specific and targeted ones (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2017). This approach allows participants to introduce their experiences and perspectives freely, while subsequent questions go deeper into specific areas of interest aligned with the research questions. This makes it possible for new themes to arise and for certain sensitizing thoughts to be probed (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Overall, the questions were generated using literature as a reference, and the question organization was done using the funnel technique approach. The rationale for this is that the study's comparative methodological perspective depends on the discussion guide and interview schedule's questions aligning.

Open-ended questions encourage participants to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences with Ethio Telecom's AI-driven communication channels (e.g., "Can you describe your recent interactions with Ethio Telecom's AI chatbots?"). Later questions may probe deeper into specific concepts, such as perceived value or influence on decision-making (e.g., "How, if at all, did interacting with Ethio Telecom's AI system influence your recent service purchase?"). This structure allows for the emergence of unexpected themes while ensuring coverage of key areas.

In the context of study design, researchers must remain vigilant about potential pitfalls and challenges that may arise during the main research endeavor (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Flick (2018) emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the research process by rigorously testing data collection tools, methods, and procedures. To preemptively address any issues, Maxwell (2018) recommends conducting pilot studies as a valuable step in identifying and rectifying potential pitfalls. In alignment with this approach, a preliminary pilot test was conducted before embarking on the comprehensive in-depth interviews. The pilot study's success criteria were benchmarked against the objectives outlined by (Maison, 2019) and (Barbour, 2018). The data collection instruments were designed to elicit the desired types and range of responses. In addition, the researcher's competencies were evaluated by the interpretivist paradigm's requirements. Ultimately, the decision was reached to move forward with the primary study as scheduled. Ensuring that the data collection tools elicited the desired type and breadth of responses was a priority. Additionally, the researcher's personal competencies and interpretive

perspective were evaluated to ensure alignment with the study's requirements. Having meticulously assessed these factors, the decision was made to proceed with the main study as originally planned.

In conclusion, this research employs an inductive approach, leveraging existing literature on service marketing communication and Artificial intelligence as a foundation for the interview guide and schedule. The "funnel" technique and piloting process ensure the effectiveness of the interview guide in gathering rich and informative data on Ethio Telecom's AI-driven service marketing communication from both customer and company perspectives.

### 3.6.1. Recordings

The face-to-face interviews with both customer participants and Ethio Telecom's marketing communication personnel were conducted in Amharic, the national working language of Ethiopia. This choice ensured clear communication and eliminated potential misunderstandings due to language barriers, fostering a more comfortable and productive interview environment for participants.

To capture the richness of the discussions and ensure accurate data analysis, all interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent. This allows for verbatim transcription of the Amharic interviews, preserving the participants' exact words and nuances. Following the transcription process, the recordings will be translated into English by a professional translator experienced in qualitative research to maintain the meaning and context of the participants' experiences. This multi-step approach ensures the comprehensiveness and fidelity of the data collected for analysis.

## 3.7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

There are various frameworks available in the qualitative research literature for analyzing qualitative data transcripts. Semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews are typically analyzed using inductive content analysis due to their exploratory character. Following the inductive coding approach, coding in this study entailed reading participants' perceptions and relating them to existing literature. The codes were divided into themes and concepts linked to the topic under inquiry, as suggested by (Silverman, 2017). In the realm of qualitative research, distinct entity codes, themes, and subthemes play crucial roles in unraveling the complexities of

data. Each serves a unique purpose, yet they interweave to create a comprehensive understanding.

Codes, as discrete units, capture specific ideas or concepts embedded within segments of data related to the research question (Creswell, 2014). These codes act as building blocks, allowing researchers to dissect and analyze individual insights. For instance, when examining interview transcripts or observational notes, researchers identify snippets of information that encapsulate key concepts. These codes serve as the raw material for subsequent analysis. Themes, on the other hand, transcend individual codes. They emerge as broader patterns or recurring concepts within the dataset. Imagine themes as the threads that weave together related codes, forming a cohesive narrative (Creswell, 2014). Researchers identify commonalities, recurrent motifs, and central ideas across various data segments. These themes provide a higher-level perspective, allowing for deeper interpretation. Within the thematic landscape, we encounter subthemes. These exist under the thematic canopy, sharing the same central idea. Subthemes add nuance and depth to the overall understanding (Maison, 2019). They represent variations, exceptions, or specific dimensions within a theme. For instance, if a theme revolves around “resilience,” subthemes might delve into different facets of resilience personal, social, or cultural. Subthemes enrich the analysis by capturing the intricacies that might otherwise remain hidden.

In this specific study context, the journey unfolds as follows: Codes contribute to the development of subthemes. These subthemes, in turn, collectively shape the emergence of core themes. It’s akin to assembling a puzzle each piece (code or subtheme) contributes to the larger picture (theme). Remember that this iterative process moving from codes to subthemes to themes allows researchers to explore the richness of qualitative data, revealing insights that quantitative methods alone cannot capture. By embracing these interconnected elements, researchers gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Thematic analysis, a powerful qualitative research method, involves the systematic categorization of themes that hold significance for the subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers appreciate thematic analysis for its flexibility in coding approaches and its ability to yield rich, detailed, and multifaceted insights from the data. Among the various thematic analysis frameworks, the version outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), stands out as the



most widely cited. This framework provides a robust structure for uncovering patterns and meaning within qualitative data. Consequently, our study aligns with the approach advocated by (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018), adopting the Braun & Clarke (2006), method as a fundamental guideline for categorizing and analyzing our data.

### 3.7.1. Familiarizing Oneself with the Data

During this initial phase of the research process, attention is given to transcribing interviews and organizing the data. Researchers draw from established works such as Creswell (2014) and Guest, et al., (2014) to guide their approach. Additionally, Braun & Clarke (2006), emphasize the researcher's immersion in the data process that fosters familiarity with its content. This researcher commenced the analysis journey by actively listening to audio recordings before meticulously transcribing the verbatim accounts from all interviews. Rigorous cross-referencing between the audio files and their corresponding written transcripts ensured the accuracy of participants' statements. This meticulous transcription process provided a holistic sense of the information and allowed for reflection on its overarching meaning a crucial step in generating meaningful codes (Creswell, 2014). In essence, this initial phase served as the foundation for subsequent analysis. The data, now meticulously organized, stands ready for deeper exploration and thematic development.

### 3.7.2. Generating Initial Codes

The initial phase of thematic analysis involves generating initial codes from the transcribed data, following the framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this stage, codes are extracted from the dataset, with a focus on segmenting sentences or paragraphs into meaningful categories. These categories are then labeled using terms that often align with the language used by the research participants (Guest, et al., 2014).

The coding process unfolds in three key steps, as outlined by Creswell (2003):

#### Initial Coding:

- Researchers meticulously analyze the data line by line, generating detailed codes.
- These codes serve to break down the data into smaller, manageable segments.
- At this semantic level, the focus is purely on participants' statements.

#### Selective Coding:

- Researchers reorganize the fractured data into conceptual categories.
- Themes begin to emerge as related codes are grouped.
- This step involves identifying overarching patterns and connections.

Axial Coding:

- Researchers synthesize the most meaningful aspects of the data.
- By distilling the essence of the codes, they arrive at a compact summary.

This summary informs the subsequent analysis, including the development of descriptive categories or themes. In this study, this coding process not only generates a description of the setting or people but also lays the groundwork for further thematic analysis.

### 3.7.3. Searching for Themes

During the third phase of thematic data analysis, the meticulous organization of coding plays a pivotal role (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). After initially categorizing codes semantically and inductively, researchers collate similar codes to construct common subthemes. These subthemes emerge based on shared characteristics or relationships between the codes (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018).

The arrangement of codes within each potential subtheme is guided by their relevance. Researchers ensure that these common codes contribute cohesively to a narrative about the data. Interestingly, although Braun & Clarke (2006), specifically, mention “searching for themes” in phase 3 of thematic analysis, this study adopts a similar approach by focusing on codes that collectively shape common subthemes, ultimately leading to the emergence of the main theme.

### 3.7.4. Reviewing Themes

During this phase, researchers engage in a dual-level review and refinement of themes. The process unfolds as follows:

- **Comprehensive Data Reading:** Researchers thoroughly examine the entire dataset for two distinct purposes, following (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, they assess whether the identified themes align effectively with the dataset. Second, they meticulously code additional data within existing themes, addressing any potential oversights from earlier coding stages.

- **Comparing Potential Themes:** The next step involves revising the potential themes across the entire dataset. Researchers conduct a rigorous comparison between the themes and the corresponding codes under each theme. This evaluation includes revisiting subthemes identified in the previous phase to ensure their validity and alignment with the coded extracts.
- **Collating Subthemes:** At this juncture, the subthemes are collated to contribute to a central idea or overarching theme. This iterative process of theme development ensures coherence and consistency. Researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of the various themes, their interconnections, and the overarching narrative they collectively convey about the data.

### 3.7.5. Defining and Naming Themes

During this phase, researchers engage in a nuanced exploration of each theme's essence. Their goal is twofold: first, to discern what specific aspect of the data each theme encapsulates (Thornberg (2018) second, to deliberate on suitable names for the final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involves several steps. Researchers meticulously analyze and refine each subtheme, ensuring that it contributes cohesively to a central main themea narrative that spans the entire dataset. Clear definitions and precise naming are crucial to accurately represent these themes. Importantly, the evaluation goes beyond mere frequency; themes are not labeled solely based on occurrence. Instead, their alignment with the perception of integration of AI in service marketing guides their definition. Throughout this iterative process, researchers continually check whether the essence of each theme resonates with the research problem at hand.

### 3.7.6. Producing and Writing Up the Report

The sixth and final phase of thematic data analysis begins with the exploration of themes. Researchers embark on the conclusive analysis and subsequent report writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Their dual objective involves:

- **Demonstrating the Analytical Process:** Researchers meticulously present the step-by-step analytical journey. This includes showcasing the evolution of codes, subthemes, and overarching themes.

- **Crafting a Coherent Narrative:** Simultaneously, researchers weave a cohesive story that envelops the entire dataset. This narrative aligns with prevailing theories and the research questions that guided the study. The analysis aims for conciseness, logical flow, and avoidance of repetition, providing insights both within and across themes.

### 3.8. Verification Strategies to Ensure Reliability and Validity

The stability of findings is referred to as reliability, whilst the honesty of findings is represented by validity (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). In qualitative research, verification mechanisms play a crucial role in enhancing reliability, validity, and overall study rigor (Morse, et al., 2002). Rather than relegating rigor assessment solely to external reviewers, we argue that qualitative researchers should reclaim responsibility for reliability and validity. This involves implementing integral and self-correcting verification strategies during the inquiry itself.

The suggested verification strategies by Morse, et al., (2002) include methodological coherence, appropriate participant selection, simultaneous data collection and analysis, thinking theoretically, and theory development. Methodological coherence ensures alignment between research questions, published literature, participants, data collection, and analysis. In this study, qualitative data collection harmonizes with exploring people's perceptions. Appropriate participant selection involves choosing relevant participants (customers and marketing communications practitioners) who contribute essential insights related to Integration-in-use within both customer and company contexts. Simultaneous data collection and analysis maintain focus and consistency. Thinking theoretically grounds the study in theory and applies valid measuring instruments (e.g., in-depth interview questions). Lastly, theory development rigorously tests emergent concepts and constructs. By adhering to these strategies, the study ensures reliability and validity, ultimately enhancing the rigor of qualitative research.

Triangulation also serves as a robust method to enhance the validity and reliability of qualitative research. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), triangulation involves seeking convergence among diverse data sources to develop meaningful themes. By combining multiple qualitative methods, researchers can produce findings that are both valid and reliable (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

Four types of triangulation techniques: methodological triangulation, data triangulation, theory triangulation, and investigator triangulation. Theory triangulation has been employed to validate the study's findings, as identified by (Flick, 2018). The study draws upon theoretical frameworks related to Service marketing and the concept of AI, as reviewed in Chapter 2. These theories serve as a reference point for designing in-depth interview schedules. Thus, triangulation effectively enhances the reliability and validity of this research.

### 3.9. Ethical Considerations

A collection of guidelines that direct the design and procedures of research are known as ethical considerations in research. Voluntary involvement, informed consent, anonymity, secrecy, risk of damage, and results communication are some of these guiding concepts. According to Flick (2018), it is critical to take ethical considerations into account before, throughout, and following the study process. The majority of research involves human participants, and human research ethics permission must be acquired. It is critical to obtain approval before beginning data collection from human participants because human research ethics committees are involved and cannot approve permission for the study once data collection has begun (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Any research involving human participants, data collection, or sensitive themes must take ethical considerations into account. Describing the process of providing clear and comprehensive information about the research, its objectives, data collection procedures, and potential risks or benefits is mandatory. Ensure that participants were aware of their voluntary participation and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any given time without consequences. Explaining the measures taken to safeguard their privacy, such as using unique identifiers instead of personal information (code names) storing data securely only disclosing the data to necessary people, and limiting data access.

### 3.10. Chapter Review

This chapter lays out a foundation for the philosophical underpinnings of the study, highlighting the interpretive paradigm as the guiding force. This approach emphasizes understanding the lived experiences and meanings participants attach to the topic. The next section goes into the chosen research design: exploratory qualitative research. This design allows us to uncover rich insights and generate new questions on leveraging artificial intelligence in service marketing. To gather

this data, the researcher employed a combination of focus group discussions and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The questions for these discussions were meticulously crafted based on existing literature. The chapter sheds light on the inductive approach adopted for data collection. We progressively developed our understanding through the data itself, rather than starting with a pre-set hypothesis. The chapter details the specifics of data collection, including conducting four focus groups and four face-to-face interviews with carefully selected participants. To analyze the collected information, we opted for the thematic analysis framework. This method allows us to identify recurring themes and patterns within the data.

Furthermore, the chapter emphasizes the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Strategies employed were discussed to achieve descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity. This includes methods like cross-checking recordings and transcripts, incorporating participant feedback, and rigorously reviewing theories for developing research tools. The chapter also addresses verification strategies for ensuring both reliability and validity. Finally, the chapter concludes by reiterating our commitment to ethical research practices.

## 4. Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

### 4.1. Chapter Preview

Chapter four outlines the methodology and research design guiding the study. The present chapter focuses on presenting field data and corresponding findings. It is organized into two major sections: one analyzing data from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, and another discussing themes and subthemes that emerged from these interactions. The themes and subthemes are supported by direct quotations from the data set. Within this chapter, the research methodology and design serve as the guiding framework for the study. By outlining the approach taken, the chapter sets the stage for the subsequent analysis of field data. The semi-structured and in-depth interviews provide a rich tapestry of insights, revealing how the brand resonates with its audience. These interactions yield themes and subthemes that are further substantiated by direct quotations from the data set.

## 4.2. Findings from Customers and Practitioners

In presenting the findings from the research study, insights gathered from interviews with both customers and employees offer a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping the customer experience landscape. Through Semi-structured conversations with customers, valuable perspectives on satisfaction levels, pain points, and preferences emerge, shedding light on their expectations and interactions with the service provider. On the other hand, insights from practitioners provide a behind-the-scenes look at the strategies, challenges, and innovations driving customer service delivery. By merging the viewpoints of customers and practitioners, a holistic view of the customer service ecosystem is revealed, offering actionable insights and recommendations to enhance service quality, optimize processes, and foster stronger customer relationships.

### 4.2.1. In-depth and Semi-structured Interviews

One of the main objectives of this study is to explore how AI is Being Leveraged in Ethio Telecom's Customer Service Operations. Accordingly, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with four customers of Ethio-Telecom. Then an in-depth interview was held with the employee (head of the marketing team and customer service support team). Then, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed consistently according to the data analysis procedure. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the in-depth and semi-structured interviews are discussed in the following sections. The discussion begins with customer experience as presented below.

#### 4.2.1.1. *Theme 1: Customer Service Experience*

The customer service experience refers to a consumer's entire view and feelings when interacting with a company's sales, support, and service teams before, during, and after a transaction. It includes the quality of support, the effectiveness of problem-solving, and the friendliness and professionalism of customer service professionals. A pleasant customer service experience is critical for creating client loyalty and cultivating long-term business connections. The subthemes on which this core theme is constructed are Chatbots, customer service representatives, and Human vs. AI Integration. These subthemes and their respective quotes are presented here below.

Chatbot

The subthemes Chatbot comprise codes such as Proactive Messaging, Multilingual support, and Speed and resolution rates along with features like sentiment analysis for tailoring responses and natural language processing for more human-like interactions. These elements all contribute to a customer experience that is not only efficient but also feels personalized and engaging.

Despite the potential benefits of chatbots like Ardi in enhancing customer experience, Ethio Telecom's efforts in promoting this service seem limited. This was discovered during the interview with the participants most of the participants did not even know the chatbot's name was Ardi and they were informed of that during the interview. Subthemes like multilingual support and proactive messaging within the chatbot itself point towards its potential for efficiency and personalization. However, a lack of proper advertising and public awareness campaigns is hindering Ardi's reach, especially considering the potential it has. Many customers are unaware of the chatbot's existence, leading them to rely on traditional customer service channels that could be streamlined through AI-powered solutions. Moreover, people who are aware of Ardi's existence are hesitant to use it due to fear and misunderstanding. By prioritizing user education and promoting Ardi's functionalities, Ethio Telecom can unlock the true potential of this technology and improve overall customer satisfaction.

- Participant # 1- Since I was on the go and needed a quick update on my postpaid sim balance, I decided to use the chatbot. The app offered a seamless way to access my account information. It didn't require any complicated login procedures; with just a few taps for security verification, I was able to access my account details. The bot presented my account information in a clear and user-friendly format. Not only did it display my current data balance, but it also provided details like the remaining minutes and SMS, my plan type, and my next billing date. This comprehensive overview helped me plan my usage more effectively.
- Participant # 2- Recently, I encountered a service disruption internet connection. In an attempt to report the outage, I called Ethio Telecom service support. However, the initial automated system did not provide an option for on-call complaint submission. Instead, it directed me towards utilizing the Ethio Telecom chatbot. While I acknowledge the potential benefits of AI-powered customer service solutions, I must admit that the initial



interaction with the chatbot presented a slight learning curve. The interface, while functional, appeared less intuitive for a first-time user like myself. However, with a degree of perseverance, I was able to navigate the chatbot and successfully file a report regarding the internet outage. This initial experience, however, proved to be a turning point. Having successfully utilized the chatbot for my primary purpose, I decided to explore its additional functionalities. To my surprise, I discovered that the chatbot offered a comprehensive suite of features beyond outage reporting. Given the breadth of services available and the convenience of on-demand customer support, I have become a regular user of the Ethio Telecom chatbot. While the initial interaction may require some familiarization for new users, the overall experience has been positive. The chatbot offers a time-saving and efficient alternative to traditional customer service channels.

- Participant # 3- In the past, reporting a Wi-Fi outage with Ethio Telecom necessitated contacting customer service representatives by phone. Fortunately, the introduction of the Ethio Telecom chatbot, Ardi, has significantly streamlined the process of reporting Wi-Fi outages. Now, I can conveniently report these issues directly through the chatbot application. Once I provide this information, Ardi promptly generates a registration number for the outage report. This newfound ease of reporting is a welcome change compared to the previous phone-based system. While I haven't encountered any Wi-Fi outages recently, my past experiences with the chatbot in such situations have been demonstrably positive. The process is efficient, requires minimal effort on my part, and represents a significant improvement over the prior method.
- Participant # 4- The Ethio Telecom chatbot, has become my go-to tool for information and service issues. Especially for things reporting like Wi-Fi and landline problems, it's fantastic. No more waiting on hold or explaining things to a customer service representative just a quick chat with Ardi gets the job done. It's a time-saver! Now, the interface could be a little more user-friendly, especially for first-time users. It might take a few tries to get the hang of navigating it and finding what you need. But overall, it's a pretty straightforward process, and the convenience far outweighs any minor navigation challenges. Honestly, I have very little to complain about with Ardi. It's been a reliable

resource for getting information and reporting problems quickly and efficiently. While there's always room for improvement, especially when it comes to first-time user experience, I'm a big fan of Ardi and the convenience it offers.

**Strengths: Convenience and Time-Saving:** All participants highlighted the convenience and time-saving benefits of Ardi. It allows users to access information and report issues quickly without waiting on hold or lengthy phone calls.

**Easy Account Information Access:** Participant #1 specifically mentioned the ease of accessing account information through Ardi. It offers a clear and user-friendly interface displaying data balance, plan type, and billing date.

**Efficient Outage Reporting:** Participants #2 and #3 emphasized the efficiency of reporting Wi-Fi outages through Ardi. It simplifies the process compared to the previous phone-based system, requiring minimal effort and providing a registration number for reference.

**Weaknesses: Learning Curve for New Users:** Participants #2 and #4 mentioned a slight learning curve for first-time users. The interface, while functional, might not be the most intuitive for navigating and finding desired options.

**Overall:** Despite a slight learning curve for new users, the analysis suggests Ethio Telecom's chatbot Ardi is a valuable tool for customers. It offers significant convenience, time-saving benefits, and efficient solutions for tasks like account information access and outage reporting. With potential improvements to the user interface, Ardi's positive aspects seem to outweigh the drawbacks, making it a valuable addition to Ethio Telecom's customer service channels.

### **Customer Service Representatives**

Customer service representatives are one of the subthemes that customer experience is built upon. Customer service representatives or customer service agents are professionals in charge of giving support and resolving problems for consumers over the phone, frequently employing a combination of technical expertise, communication skills, and problem-solving talents to address customer concerns.

Participants have pointed out that in recent years, Ethio-Telecom customer service agents have made significant strides in improving their responsiveness and effectiveness in handling customer inquiries and issues. However, despite these advancements, there are still instances of customer dissatisfaction due to various factors. One common complaint mentioned by all the participants is that they often have to navigate through multiple options or "short codes" to reach customer support, only to be met with long wait times or no answers at all. This frustrating experience forces customers to repeatedly explain their problems to different agents, leading to confusion and further delays in resolving their issues. Additionally, there are instances where customers' calls go unanswered altogether. These lapses in communication and understanding can lead to a breakdown in the customer-company relationship, emphasizing the need for continuous improvement in customer service practices to ensure a seamless and satisfactory experience for everyone.

- Participant # 1 While I appreciate the availability of phone support, reaching a representative can sometimes take a few calls. Once I do connect with a representative, they actively listen to my concerns and try to find a solution. In the past, they've been able to troubleshoot technical issues with my internet connection. However, the initial wait times can be frustrating, especially when dealing with time-sensitive issues. We are an advertising company and the internet is a lifeline to our job so when we have trouble with the internet and not being able to get our complaints in is frustrating. It might be helpful if Ethio Telecom could explore ways to improve call wait times, perhaps by offering a call-back option or a more informative on-hold message system that estimates wait times.
- Participant # 2- My experience with Ethio Telecom's customer support has demonstrably improved in recent years. Previously, reaching a representative by phone could be a time-consuming and frustrating activity. Long wait times and a perceived lack of technical knowledge on the part of some representatives were significant drawbacks. One particularly memorable instance involved an internet outage at our company. After finally connecting with a customer service representative, we have assured the outage had been registered. Unfortunately, two days later, our internet remained inoperable. A follow-up

call revealed that the initial complaint hadn't even been logged, further exacerbating the issue. Thankfully, the current state of customer service is far more positive. Representatives are generally courteous and attentive to customer concerns. While their technical expertise can sometimes appear limited, they actively listen to problems and strive to find solutions. Ethio Telecom's customer service has undoubtedly undergone positive changes. While some room for improvement remains, the overall trajectory is encouraging.

- Participant #3- While my experience with Ethio Telecom's customer service representatives has generally been good, there's room for improvement. The representatives themselves are courteous and helpful when you finally reach them. However, reaching a representative can be a time-consuming endeavor, often requiring multiple calls. Sometimes I think they just watch the phone ring and choose not to answer. There have also been instances where reported problems haven't been registered initially, necessitating a follow-up call to rectify the situation. This can be frustrating, as it extends the resolution time. Despite these shortcomings, the representatives do strive to find solutions once connected. Overall, the customer service experience is functional, but not exceptional. While the representatives themselves are professional, the process of reaching them and ensuring accurate issue registration can be cumbersome.
- Participant # 4-Look, the Ethio Telecom customer service representatives themselves are great. They're knowledgeable and helpful once you finally reach them. That's the catch. Getting through to a representative can be a bit of a challenge. The biggest hurdle is the wait time. The line is often busy, and you might find yourself stuck on hold listening to that message about "all customer service representatives handling calls" for a few minutes. Now, two minutes might not seem like a long time in the grand scheme of things, but when you're facing a problem with your service, it can feel like an eternity. Having to call multiple times just to get through can be frustrating, especially when you have a pressing issue to report. It would be fantastic if Ethio Telecom could find a way to improve its phone support system and reduce wait times. However, despite

the wait times, I do appreciate that the representatives themselves are professional and work to resolve issues once you connect with them.

**Strengths: Knowledgeable and Helpful Representatives:** All participants acknowledged that the customer service representatives themselves are courteous, helpful, and actively listen to concerns. They try their best to find solutions to customer problems.

**Weaknesses: Long Wait Times:** The primary concern across all responses is the extensive wait time to connect with a representative. This wait time can be frustrating, especially for time-sensitive issues.

**Inaccurate Issue Registration:** Participants #2 and #3 mentioned instances where reported problems weren't initially registered, necessitating follow-up calls and extending resolution times.

**Overall:** Despite the long wait times and occasional registration issues, the feedback suggests that the customer service representatives themselves are professional and dedicated to resolving customer concerns. By addressing wait times and improving registration accuracy, Ethio Telecom can significantly enhance the overall customer experience for phone support.

### **Human Vs AI Service Support**

The realm of customer support has undergone a transformative shift with the advent of Artificial Intelligence technology, challenging the traditional model of human-centric support. The argument between human and AI support has spurred debates about the efficiency, customization, and effectiveness of consumer interactions. While human assistance provides empathy, intuition, and a personal touch, AI support adds speed, scalability, and consistency to the equation.

The participants have enthusiastically embraced the company's new AI-powered chatbot, expressing a strong preference for this innovative support channel over traditional customer service methods. The chatbot's ability to provide instant responses in multiple languages, including Amharic, English, and Afaan Oromo, has significantly improved accessibility and reduced wait times. As Ethio Telecom continues to invest in cutting-edge technologies to simplify life and empower businesses, customers are hopeful that the successful integration of AI

in customer support will pave the way for its adoption in other aspects of the company's services. Ethio Telecom's commitment to digital transformation and customer-centric innovation has been well-received by its customer base, who eagerly anticipate the continued evolution of AI-powered solutions that will shape the future of telecommunications in Ethiopia.

- Participant # 1 While the Ethio Telecom customer service representatives are helpful once I reach them, getting through can sometimes be time-consuming. There have been instances where I've had to call multiple times as I mentioned earlier. For that reason, I often prefer using their chatbot. It's convenient because it's available 24/7, and for simple tasks like checking my balance, it's quick and efficient. However, I do believe there's room for improvement with the chatbot. Expanding its features would be beneficial. For example, the ability to schedule in-person appointments or make minor plan changes directly through the chat would be quite useful.
- Participant # 2 My experience with Ethio Telecom's customer service representatives has been mixed. While they've always been pleasant and helpful once I finally connect with them, reaching a representative can be a time-consuming ordeal. Multiple calls are often required, as I mentioned, which can be quite frustrating. For that reason, I've gravitated towards using their chatbot, Ardi. Its 24/7 availability is incredibly convenient, and for simple tasks like checking putting complaints topping up data, it's a quick and efficient solution. However, I believe there's significant room for improvement with Ardi. Expanding its features would make it even more valuable. The ability to schedule cancel plans or even make minor plan changes directly through the chat would be incredibly beneficial. This would further reduce the reliance on phone support, going in person to their office, and streamlining the customer service experience. Ideally, I'd prefer to handle most interactions through Ardi. Unless the issue is critical or requires a human touch for resolution, the convenience and efficiency of the chatbot make it my preferred choice. Hopefully, with future updates, Ardi will become a truly comprehensive self-service tool, further reducing the need for traditional phone support.

- Participant # 3- In all honesty, I find myself constantly bouncing between using Ethio Telecom's customer service and the chatbot. Sometimes, only a customer service representative can provide the information I need. However, whenever possible, I vastly prefer utilizing the chatbot. It's incredibly convenient available 24/7 and readily accessible once you get the hang of it. The chatbot is a lifesaver for simple tasks like topping up and troubleshooting basic issues. It allows me to quickly and efficiently handle these matters without the hassle of waiting on hold or lengthy phone conversations. Overall, I appreciate having both options available. While Ethio Telecom's customer service representatives are helpful when needed, the chatbot offers a much faster and more streamlined experience for many everyday tasks. This flexibility allows me to choose the most efficient approach depending on the situation.
- Participant # 4- Honestly, whatever gets the job done the quickest is what matters most to me. And as I mentioned before, the thing that gets under my skin with phone customer service is the waiting. Sitting on hold forever listening to that message about all the reps being busy is enough to get you angry! Sometimes you even end up connected to someone who seems to take forever to understand the issue. That's why I love the Ethio Telecom chatbot. It's a lifesaver, especially for simple stuff. Need to an information and report a quick Wi-Fi issue? Ardi's got me covered, no waiting, no fuss. Now, the chatbot could be even better with some extra features. More options for handling problems or getting additional information would be fantastic. But even as it is, it's a way faster and more convenient option than dealing with phone support most of the time. So yeah, whatever works! If the chatbot can handle it, that's my go-to. But if there's a complex issue that needs a human touch, then the phone support is there. Hopefully, they can find a way to streamline that process and make those wait times a thing of the past.

Customer Preferences: Convenience and Efficiency: All participants prioritize convenience and efficiency. They appreciate the 24/7 availability and quick solutions offered by Ardi for simple tasks.

Reduced Wait Times: Phone support wait times are a major pain point. Participants prefer using Ardi to avoid long hold times and potentially unhelpful interactions.

### Strengths of Each Channel

Phone Support:Human Touch: Representatives can handle complex issues and provide personalized solutions.

Chatbot (Ardi):Availability: 24/7 access for quick and efficient handling of basic tasks.

Reduced Wait Time: No need to wait on hold.

### Weaknesses of Each Channel

Phone Support:Long Wait Times: Discourages customers from using phone support.

Inaccurate Issue Registration (mentioned by some): This leads to frustration and additional calls.

Chatbot (Ardi):Limited Functionality: Currently cannot handle complex issues or require human intervention.

Overall:Customers value a multi-channel approach with options for both phone support and the chatbot. By addressing wait times and expanding Ardi's functionalities, Ethio Telecom can create a more streamlined and efficient customer service experience. Ideally, Ardi can become a comprehensive self-service tool for most customer interactions, while phone support remains available for complex issues requiring a human touch.

#### 4.2.1.2. Theme 2 Customer Adoption and Trust

One primary hurdle Ethio Telecom faces are fostering customer adoption of this new technology. Many customers remain unaware of its existence. The lack of prominent advertising raises questions about Ethio Telecom's strategy. Furthermore, trust in AI for customer service is a delicate dance. Traditionally, human interaction has been the cornerstone of such interactions. Ethio Telecom must address the inherent skepticism some customers might hold toward AI's ability to understand and resolve their issues. Transparency regarding Ardi's capabilities and limitations becomes crucial. Clearly outlining the types of inquiries Ardi can effectively handle and offering alternative support channels for complex issues will build trust and encourage user adoption. The sub-theme on which this core theme is constructed is comfort level with AI handling personal data and shifting expectations for customer service. These subthemes and their respective quotes are presented here below.

#### **Comfort Level with AI Handling Personal Data**



This sub-section is where security questions and fears are analyzed. Most of the participants interviewed, like many individuals globally, harbor concerns regarding their data by Artificial Intelligence systems. The prospect of AI managing sensitive personal information raises apprehensions about data security, privacy breaches, and potential misuse of data. Specifically, Ethio Telecom customers worry about the transparency of data collection practices, the risk of unauthorized access to their information, and the implications of data sharing with third parties especially because most of the risks aren't properly disclosed. The fear of AI mishandling personal data, especially in the context of a telecommunications company like Ethio Telecom, underscores the importance of data protection measures, clear privacy policies, and stringent regulations to safeguard customer information and alleviate these apprehensions.

- Participant # 1- Honestly, I found out about the Ethio Telecom chatbot kind of by accident. It wasn't through any official channels no ads on TV or anything (though I don't watch much TV anyway). It came up on TikTok of this other guy I don't recall his name. People were talking about this chatbot called Ardi (or whatever the name is) and how it could help you check your balance or top up your data. Now, I'm not one to shy away from new tech. I think anything that can make my life easier is a good thing. So, I gave Ardi a try. I wasn't sure how much to trust it at first, you know, the whole AI customer service thing. But honestly, it's been pretty good. I still have hesitations from time to time because not much is discussed but it makes things easier so I use it. I can check my balance in seconds, and top up my data plan without any hassle, and it even helps troubleshoot basic issues. Sure, maybe Ethio Telecom could've done a better job promoting Ardi. But hey, at least it works! And who knows, maybe down the line, they'll add even more features to make it even more useful. As for Ethio Telecom using other AI stuff, I'm not entirely sure. But if Ardi is any indication, then I'm all for it if it makes dealing with customer service smoother.
- Participant # 2- As I mentioned before, the Ethio Telecom chatbot weirdly came across my radar. It wasn't advertised anywhere, no big announcements or anything. I found out about it while I was stuck on the phone with customer service! They kept pushing me to use this "chatbot" to handle my inquiry. They gave me no other option but to turn to the

chatbot. So, I gave this chatbot a try. At first, it wasn't exactly user-friendly. The menus and buttons weren't super clear, and it took me a few tries to figure out how to navigate it. After a little fumbling around, I got the hang of it. One thing I don't have is trust issues with AI. I think AI can sometimes be better at handling data than humans. They don't get confused or forget things, you know? So, using Ardi felt pretty straightforward for me, no worries about it messing up my information. Sure, maybe Ethio Telecom could've done a better job letting people know about Ardi, but hey, at least it works! And the best part? I'm really curious to see what new features they might add in the future. The potential for this chatbot is exciting, and I'm all for anything that makes dealing with customer service smoother!

- Participant # 3- Like many people, I probably miss most of the text messages Ethio Telecom sends out. But there was one I saw that included a link to their new chatbot. Curious, I decided to give it a try. Now, Ardi wasn't exactly intuitive at first. It wasn't immediately clear how to navigate it, and it took a few stumbles before I figured things out. This, coupled with the fact that Ethio Telecom didn't offer much upfront information about the chatbot, did raise some initial concerns for me, especially considering it's a new technology. However, I persisted, and I'm glad I did! Once I got the hang of it, Ardi proved to be quite useful. While there's room for improvement on the user-friendliness front, it allows me to handle basic tasks like checking my balance or topping up data quickly and easily. Hopefully, Ethio Telecom will provide more information about Ardi in the future. This would go a long way in addressing concerns some users might have, myself included, about a new technology handling their data. Overall, while the initial learning curve was a bit steep, Ardi's potential is exciting. Here's to hoping they keep improving it and making it even easier to use!
- Participant # 4- Finding out about the Ethio Telecom chatbot, was actually through a friend, not through any official channels from Ethio Telecom itself. He convinced me to give it a shot, and I'm glad he did! Of course, there's always a bit of hesitation when it comes to trusting new technology, especially with something as personal as your data. There's not a whole lot of information readily available about Ardi, and it would be great

if Ethio Telecom was more transparent about how far they've integrated AI into their systems. That being said, in my experience, the convenience of Ardi outweighs the initial apprehension. It's a secure and efficient way to handle basic tasks, and hopefully, Ethio Telecom will address the lack of information in the future. Here's hoping they put out some resources that explain how Ardi works and how they use AI to protect user data. A little more transparency would go a long way in building trust with users like myself who are cautious about new technology.

#### Discovery of Ardi:

- None of the participants discovered Ardi through official channels like advertisements or Ethio Telecom announcements.
- One participant learned about it through social media.
- One participant learned about it through a friend.
- One participant found out while on a phone call with customer service.
- One participant learned about it from a text message with a link.

#### Initial Trust Concerns:

- All participants expressed some initial hesitation about using a new AI-powered chatbot, especially for tasks involving personal data.
- Lack of information about Ardi and Ethio Telecom's use of AI raised concerns for some participants.

**Overall Impression:** Despite initial apprehension, all participants found Ardi to be a useful and convenient tool for basic tasks. They appreciated the efficiency and time-saving aspects compared to traditional customer service channels.

#### **Shifting Expectations for Customer Service**

The advent of Artificial Intelligence in customer service has significantly altered the expectations of Ethio Telecom customers. The integration of AI-powered solutions has not only streamlined communication channels but also raised the bar for personalized and efficient support globally. As AI continues to transform the customer service landscape, customers are increasingly

expecting seamless interactions that cater to their unique needs and preferences. In the interview with the participants, many Ethio Telecom customers expressed enthusiasm for the potential introduction of additional AI technologies, highlighting the growing appetite for innovative solutions that can further enhance their overall experience.

- Participant # 1- Of course, the implementation of AI has improved my overall satisfaction with Ethio Telecom. The introduction of the chatbot, for instance, has been somewhat of a game-changer. It's made interacting with Ethio Telecom so much easier and less time-consuming but there is still room for improvement. However, to be honest, the decision to stick with Ethio Telecom wasn't necessarily influenced by AI. I had never contemplated switching providers before, but the improvements they've made, including the AI implementation, are certainly appreciated. While I can't say that AI has directly impacted my choice of specific services or products, it's encouraging to see Ethio Telecom embracing new technology. It shows a commitment to progress, which is always a positive sign.
- Participant # 2- The introduction of the Ethio Telecom chatbot, has improved my satisfaction with their service. It's a convenient tool for handling basic tasks, and once I got the hang of it, it's been a real time-saver. However, while Ardi is a positive addition, it wouldn't be the sole reason I'd switch to Ethio Telecom or stay with them. I wasn't necessarily planning on leaving anyway, and having another option doesn't mean I'd automatically switch providers. Here's where I think Ethio Telecom could leverage AI even more. If they expanded its use and made it truly comprehensive, handling a wider range of tasks and offering greater functionality, then AI could potentially influence my choice of service provider. A truly robust and user-friendly AI system could be a deciding factor in the future. But for now, it hasn't made me decide on a certain service.
- Participant # 3- The introduction of the Ethio Telecom chatbot has been a positive development. It's a convenient and efficient tool for handling basic tasks, and it's improved my overall satisfaction with Ethio Telecom's service. However, it wouldn't be a deal-breaker for me when choosing a service provider. There are other factors I consider

more important, like network coverage, data plans, and overall cost. Ethiopia's telecom landscape isn't that competitive. There are only two service providers that I am aware of so there isn't much of an option, and while Ardi is an additional value provider, it likely wouldn't be the sole reason I would stay with them if another provider offered a significantly better overall package. The impact of AI on my service provider choice could be more significant in the future, though. If Ethio Telecom implemented AI in a way that truly streamlines the customer experience across all touchpoints phone support, online billing, and data management then that could become a differentiating factor. For now, Ardi is a welcome addition, but the broader implementation of AI across the customer journey holds the potential to truly influence my service provider decisions.

- Participant # 4- Let me tell you, the Ethio Telecom chatbot, Ardi, has been a game-changer! It's made things easier for me, especially for simple stuff like checking information and reporting a quick internet issue. No more waiting on hold forever, which seriously used to drive me crazy! Sure, it wouldn't be the only reason I'd switch providers. There are other things I care about more, like coverage and data plans. However, the convenience of Ardi has boosted my satisfaction with Ethio Telecom. Honestly, AI could play a much bigger role in who I choose for my phone service. Imagine if Ethio Telecom, or any company for that matter, totally revamped their whole customer experience with AI. Like, not just a chatbot, but smooth sailing everywhere phone calls, online stuff, managing my data that would be impressive! Right now, Ardi's a great addition, but if they take AI to the next level and make everything super user-friendly, then that could sway me when it comes to choosing a service provider.

**Improved Satisfaction:** All participants agreed that Ardi has improved their overall satisfaction with Ethio Telecom's service.

Participants appreciate the convenience, time-saving aspects, and efficiency Ardi offers for handling basic tasks.

**Limited Impact on Provider Choice (Currently):**

- While Ardi is valued, none of the participants considered it the sole reason to switch or stay with Ethio Telecom.
- More importance is placed on factors like network coverage, data plans, and overall cost.
- The limited competition in Ethiopia's telecom market (only two providers mentioned) also reduces the immediate impact of AI on provider choice.

#### Potential for Greater Influence:

- Participants envision a more comprehensive AI system influencing their decisions in the future.
- Features like handling a wider range of tasks, offering greater functionality, and streamlining the entire customer experience across touchpoints are seen as potential tipping points.
- A truly robust and user-friendly AI could become a differentiating factor when choosing a service provider.

Overall: The implementation of AI, particularly Ardi, has demonstrably improved customer satisfaction with Ethio Telecom. However, its influence on actual service provider choice is limited in the current competitive landscape. The potential for AI to significantly impact provider choice exists if Ethio Telecom expands its use and creates a truly comprehensive and user-friendly AI system that streamlines the customer experience across all channels.

#### *4.2.1.3. Theme 3 Service Marketing Communication*

Service marketing communication is a crucial element of any successful business plan. Organizations may reach their target audience, increase brand awareness, and foster consumer engagement by using these technologies efficiently. The service marketing communication landscape is always changing in today's fast-paced digital world, which presents firms with both opportunities and problems. Businesses need to have complete marketing communication strategies that are in line with their objectives and target audience if they want to compete in the cutthroat industry. The subthemes on which this core theme is constructed are AI-driven personalization, AI-generated content, and Customer perception of artificial intelligence.

## **AI-Driven Personalization**

Personalization is a competitive advantage strategy that involves learning about, matching, and offering products and services to individual customers based on customer preferences. Providing a tailored client experience has become a critical distinction for success in today's fiercely competitive corporate environment. Businesses are looking to artificial intelligence to harness the power of personalization at scale as customer expectations rise. AI-driven customization allows companies to customize their products, communications, and interactions to each customer's distinct tastes and habits by utilizing sophisticated algorithms and machine learning. Artificial intelligence is changing how businesses interact with their customers. It is resulting in higher customer happiness, loyalty, and revenue growth through tailored product suggestions, targeted marketing campaigns, predictive analytics, and real-time optimization. This sub-section on the marketing personnel at Ethio-telecom

### Interview with Employees

- At Ethio Telecom, we're constantly striving to improve the customer experience, and the introduction of our chatbot, Ardi, has been a major step forward. While Ardi doesn't currently offer personalized recommendations, it excels in providing a user-friendly platform for a wide range of tasks. Think of Ardi as your 24/7 self-service assistant! Need to report a service issue, check your account balance, or get quick answers to FAQs? Ardi's got you covered, no waiting on hold or navigating complex menus. It streamlines these everyday tasks for our customers, freeing them up for more important things. We understand that true personalization goes beyond basic functionality.
- While Ardi doesn't currently offer tailored recommendations, we're actively exploring ways to leverage AI to enhance the customer experience further. Imagine a future where Ardi can analyze your data usage patterns and suggest plans or features that perfectly align with your needs. That's the future we're working towards! In the meantime, Ardi provides a solid foundation for efficient customer interaction. It's a valuable tool that complements our existing efforts, such as personalized text message reminders about payment due dates and subscription updates. We're confident that Ardi, along with our

ongoing commitment to personalization across all touchpoints, will continue to elevate the customer experience at Ethio Telecom.

### **AI-generated content**

The emergence of AI-generated content has caused a huge upheaval in the telecommunications sector. Conventional marketing approaches that depend on the human production of content are no longer adequate to meet the ever-changing demands and tastes of consumers. The way telecom firms interact with their audience is being completely transformed by AI-generated content, which makes it possible to produce personalized, interesting material quickly and in large quantities. Telecom marketers may produce a wide range of content formats, from blog posts and social media postings to product descriptions and customer support materials, at a fraction of the time and expense of traditional ways by utilizing AI-powered solutions. This change has the potential to completely change the telecom sector by enabling businesses to run more focused marketing efforts, improve client interactions, and eventually.

### **Interview with Employees**

- Innovation is a cornerstone of Ethio Telecom's 3-Year LEAD Growth Strategy. We've made significant progress in AI implementation, with our successful chatbot, Ardi, demonstrating its potential. While we haven't yet integrated AI-powered content delivery, it's definitely on the horizon. The LEAD Growth Strategy prioritizes future projects with exciting possibilities, and AI content delivery is a key area of exploration. Imagine a future where AI analyzes customer data usage patterns and preferences to personalize content across all touchpoints. This could revolutionize the customer experience, offering tailored information, support, and promotions. We're committed to responsible implementation, with data security and transparency at the forefront.
- “While specifics about these future projects remain confidential, we're confident that AI-powered content delivery will play a significant role in driving customer satisfaction and growth for Ethio Telecom. We're excited to explore the possibilities and unlock the full potential of AI in the years to come.” This future envisions AI playing a more transformative role in personalizing the customer experience across all touchpoints.



Imagine a future where AI analyzes your data usage patterns and preferences, tailoring content and interactions to your individual needs. While the details of these plans are still under development, we're confident that AI-powered content delivery will be a transformative force in driving customer satisfaction and ultimately, growth for Ethio Telecom.

### **Customer perception of Artificial Intelligence**

- “One of the main goals of Ethio Telecom's three-year LEAD Growth Strategy is to promote innovation. To improve the client experience, we unveiled Ardi, our AI chatbot. We recognize that customer perception of AI in developing countries like Ethiopia can be quite biased. Let's be honest, Ardi hasn't yet reached its full potential user base. Many customers are still hesitant to embrace this new technology. We understand this it's been a while since we introduced Ardi, and even existing users haven't quite tapped into its full capabilities.”
- The LEAD Growth Strategy acknowledges this reality. While future projects explore AI-powered content delivery, our primary focus is building trust and demonstrating the value of AI for our customers. We know that transparency and data security are paramount when dealing with customer hesitancy towards AI. We'll be upfront about how AI is used and empower customers with control over their data and the level of personalization they desire.
- “Think of Ardi as the first step on our AI journey. It tackles basic needs and helps customers become comfortable with AI interaction. Future projects within the LEAD Growth Strategy will prioritize user education alongside AI development.” By addressing these concerns and demonstrating the benefits, we believe AI-powered content delivery can become a valuable tool. It has the potential to personalize experiences, improve efficiency, and ultimately drive customer satisfaction and growth for Ethio Telecom. We're committed to working alongside our customers as we navigate this exciting future of AI integration. We believe AI has the potential to revolutionize the customer experience at Ethio Telecom. However, building trust and user education are crucial steps

alongside AI development. By optimizing Ardi and educating our customers, we're laying the groundwork for future AI-powered content delivery systems that can personalize experiences, improve efficiency, and ultimately reduce call center volume.

#### Customer service support team

- Honestly, while Ardi exists, we still receive a high volume of calls related to issues and misunderstandings. Some customers prefer human interaction, might not be aware of Ardi's full capabilities, or simply encounter problems beyond its current scope.
- We still receive a high number of calls, often for very basic issues or misunderstandings. While Ardi offers solutions for some, many customers prefer human interaction or simply aren't aware of its full potential. I believe AI has the potential to revolutionize customer experience, but user education and trust-building are essential. By optimizing Ardi and educating the customers, they will lay the groundwork for future AI-powered content delivery systems. These systems have the potential to personalize experiences, improve efficiency, and ultimately reduce call center volume.

### 4.3. Chapter Review

Findings from the data set gathered through semi-structured and in-depth interviews with customers as well as the practitioners of Ethio-Telecom are presented in this chapter. This interview explored Ethio Telecom's approach to Artificial Intelligence and its role in enhancing the customer experience. Key takeaways include Innovation is a core principle, with AI identified as a key area of exploration and while the AI chatbot, Ardi, has been introduced, it hasn't yet significantly reduced call center volume or addressed customer misunderstandings. The interview acknowledged a potential hesitancy towards AI in Ethiopia, a factor influencing Ardi's current adoption rate. The focus for improvement lies in two key areas optimizing Ardi's capabilities which includes expanding the range of customer concerns it can address, empowering users to resolve more issues independently, and user Education Campaigns developing targeted campaigns that will raise awareness of Ardi's functionalities and encourage its use for appropriate tasks.

Streamlining Ardi's integration into the overall customer journey is crucial. This might involve prompting callers about Ardi's availability before connecting them to live agents. Building trust and user education are seen as essential foundational steps for future AI-powered content delivery systems. Overall, the interview reveals Ethio Telecom's commitment to innovation and the exploration of AI in customer experience. While there's an acknowledgment of current limitations with Ardi, the focus on improvement and user education suggests a proactive approach to unlocking the potential of AI for the future of Ethio Telecom and its customers.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In this final chapter, the major findings of the study are summarized and the research questions of this study are answered. The theoretical and practical implications of AI-integrated service marketing that emerged from the findings of this study are discussed followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study. Then, conclusions and recommendations are also presented. Practical implications for the telecommunication industry are also recommended.

### 5.2. Summary of the Major Findings and Conclusion

The potential of Artificial Intelligence to revolutionize customer service marketing is undeniable. Studies by Mari (2019) highlight its ability to enhance communication tactics, glean valuable customer insights, streamline operations, and cultivate a positive brand image. However, this transformative power hinges on proper implementation. Ethio Telecom's introduction of the AI chatbot, Ardi, exemplifies their commitment to innovation. However, findings in this study through the interview revealed that Ethio-Telecom has not used it to its full potential. The core issue lies in Ethio Telecom's focus on introducing AI without fully addressing customer hesitancy and lack of awareness regarding Ardi's capabilities. Mari's (2019) research emphasizes the importance of effective communication tactics when integrating AI. Furthermore, AI could be used to personalize customer experiences by analyzing past interactions and preferences. This would allow Ardi to tailor its responses and recommendations, fostering a sense of connection and trust with customers.

The summary of the research findings along with the answers to the research questions outlined in Chapter One of this study is discussed below.

#### 5.2.1. Research Question 1

In which key areas is AI currently being leveraged in Ethio Telecom's customer service operations?

As discussed in Chapter Four the only AI-based system being leveraged by Ethio-Telecom is their chatbot called Ardi. Ethio Telecom's chatbot, Ardi, plays a role in providing self-service options. However, its current impact remains limited. Despite offering solutions for specific customer concerns, Ardi has not significantly reduced call center volume. Ardi's capabilities are

currently confined to basic tasks such as account management, bill payments, and data plan changes. Additionally, it serves as an information retrieval tool, providing details about services, promotions, and store locations. However, its limitations become apparent when faced with complex or varied inquiries. To enhance customer experience, Ethio Telecom needs to invest in further developing Ardi, expanding its functionalities, improving its understanding of user queries, and promoting awareness among customers about its features.

Nimavat & Champaneria (2017) stated chatbots can range from simple rule-based systems that follow predefined scripts to more sophisticated AI-powered bots that can learn from interactions and adapt to user preferences. Unlike the advanced AI chatbots capable of learning and adapting, Ethio Telecom's Ardi currently operates as a rule-based system. Users navigate menus and choose from pre-determined options, limiting their ability to address complex issues or misunderstandings. While Ardi might handle basic inquiries and tasks, its effectiveness is hampered by customer hesitancy and a lack of features for intricate problems. However, Ethio Telecom's planned improvements, including expanding functionalities and educating users, hold promise for transforming Ardi into a more valuable tool for streamlining customer interactions and enhancing the overall customer experience.

### 5.2.2. Research Question 2

How does Ethio Telecom currently utilize AI technologies in their service marketing communication?

This question was formulated to understand the extent to which AI adoption helps gauge its impact on customer engagement, brand perception, and promotional effectiveness. Ethio Telecom isn't currently utilizing AI technologies directly in its service marketing communication. However, the interview hinted at plans for AI integration, details of which remain confidential. This secrecy is likely due to the competitive nature of the telecommunications industry.

While specifics are under wraps, AI offers a multitude of benefits for service marketing communication. Imagine AI analyzing vast customer data sets to understand preferences and tailor marketing messages. This could involve targeted promotions for relevant services or personalized recommendations based on usage patterns. conversations with customers.

Ultimately, a well-implemented AI strategy could lead to more effective and engaging marketing communication, fostering stronger customer relationships and driving growth for Ethio Telecom.

### 5.2.3. Research Question 3

What impact does the existing AI implementation have on Ethio Telecom's market performance?

While Ethio Telecom has taken initial steps towards AI implementation with their chatbot, Ardi, the interview revealed it hasn't significantly impacted their market performance. This is likely because Ardi's current functionality is limited, and AI hasn't yet been integrated into their service marketing communication.

The interview did, however, highlight Ethio Telecom's plans for future AI projects, details of which are confidential. This suggests they recognize the potential of AI to revolutionize service marketing communication. Imagine AI analyzing customer data to personalize marketing messages and promotions, or powering intelligent chatbots for real-time customer engagement. By leveraging AI in these ways, Ethio Telecom could significantly improve the effectiveness and reach of its service marketing efforts, ultimately leading to a stronger market position.

## 5.3. Contributions of the Study

This research breaks new ground by exploring the potential of AI-driven service marketing within the Ethiopian telecommunications industry. There's a distinct lack of prior research on this topic in Ethiopia, making this study a valuable contribution to the field.

The empirical evidence for this research was gathered through in-depth interviews. These interviews focused on two key groups:

- Customers: Understanding customer perspectives on service marketing and their openness to AI-powered approaches was crucial.
- Marketing Communication Practitioners: Insights from these professionals provided valuable information on current practices and potential areas for AI integration.

The focus of the research was Ethio Telecom, a major player, if not the leader, in the Ethiopian telecommunications industry. By studying their approach to service marketing, the research identified unique constructs relevant to the Ethiopian landscape. These include:

- Geographical Location: Understanding the influence of location on service marketing strategies is crucial in a geographically diverse country like Ethiopia.
- Company Documentation: The specific documentation required for telecommunication services in Ethiopia can be a factor in marketing communication.

These unique constructs, along with the overall exploration of AI in service marketing, contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge. This research has the potential to shape the future of service marketing in Ethiopia and beyond.

#### 5.4. Limitations of the Study

This research goes into exploring AI-driven service marketing in the Ethiopian telecommunications industry. However, one limitation is important to acknowledge:

- Generalizability of Findings: The research focused on Ethio Telecom, a leading player within the industry. While the findings offer valuable insights, their generalizability to other companies or markets may be limited. Further research would be needed to determine the broader applicability of these findings.

Moreover, the findings are limited to one study industry and in one geographical location. The study would have been more holistic and comprehensive if more companies in the telecommunication industry and customers from those companies were included. That would enable the researcher to apply comparative perspectives. Thus, the findings may not be generalizable to other customers and companies in the Ethiopian real estate market as well as other markets and industries.

#### 5.5. Recommendations

This study explored the potential of AI-driven service marketing within the Ethiopian telecommunications industry. Here are some key recommendations based on the findings and limitations identified:

- **Leveraging AI for Personalized Marketing:** Explore AI capabilities to analyze customer data and personalize marketing messages across various touchpoints. This could involve targeted promotions based on usage patterns or location-specific service offerings.
- **Developing AI-Powered Customer Service:** Increasing the ability of the current AI chatbots and introducing virtual assistants for real-time customer support. These tools can ultimately improve customer satisfaction.
- **Building Customer Trust:** Initiate educational campaigns to raise awareness about AI and its potential benefits for customers. Transparency regarding data usage and customer control over personalization is crucial for building trust.



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## Appendix 1

### In-depth Interview Guiding Questions for Ethio-Telecom Marketing Communication Practitioners

#### Invitation Letter for Participants

Dear Marketing Practitioners:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by me Bethel Tibebu, a student affiliated with Addis Ababa University. This study aims to investigate the use of Artificial Intelligence in service marketing communication by Ethio Telecom. The purpose of this study is to understand how Ethio Telecom utilizes AI in its marketing strategies, and how this impacts customer experience and satisfaction. The study intends to enhance quality and customer-oriented communication between you, the company, and the customers. The points of discussion move from general to specific questions about this study.

There are no wrong answers but rather different points of view in this discussion. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others will have said. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments will be the most helpful. I will be recording this discussion which will be later transcribed and used purely for academic research purposes. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will be used for this research purpose ONLY. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that proceed at the end of this study. No reference will be made in the written reports that could link you to the study.

You are invited because you work in the marketing department at Ethio-Telecom, so it is believed that you are familiar with the marketing strategies of the company. This interview will last for approximately an hour. So, I strongly believe you will passionately stay till the end. For

ethical reasons, I kindly request you to sign the informed consent form. Now, before we commence the interview, if you have questions, comments, or suggestions, you are welcome.

If you agree to participate, you will be involved in an interview that will last approximately one hour. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences with Ethio Telecom's marketing practices, specifically those that involve AI. The interview may be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription.

All information collected during this study will be kept confidential. Your name and any other identifying information will not be disclosed in any reports or publications that result from this research. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study. The potential benefits include contributing to a better understanding of how AI can be used effectively in service marketing, which may ultimately benefit both Ethio Telecom and its customers. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

## **Questions**

For Identifying Key Areas Where AI is Being Leveraged in Ethio Telecom's Customer Service Operations:

- What AI technologies are currently implemented in Ethio Telecom's customer service?
- How does Ethio Telecom integrate AI into its customer service channels?
- Can you provide examples of AI-driven improvements in customer service efficiency at Ethio Telecom?

For Evaluating Ethio Telecom's Current Use of AI Technologies in Their Service Marketing Communication:

- In what ways has AI been utilized to enhance Ethio Telecom's service marketing communication?
- What are the measurable outcomes of implementing AI in Ethio Telecom's marketing strategies?

- How does AI contribute to personalization and customer engagement in Ethio Telecom's marketing?

For Analyzing the Impact of Existing AI Implementation on Ethio Telecom's Market Performance:

- What has been the effect of AI on Ethio Telecom's customer acquisition and retention rates?
- How has AI technology influenced Ethio Telecom's market share and revenue growth?
- Can you describe the ROI of AI investments in terms of Ethio Telecom's market performance?

## Appendix 2

Interview Guide Questions with Ethio-Telecom Customers

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by me Bethel Tibebu, a student affiliated with Addis Ababa University. This study aims to investigate the use of Artificial Intelligence in service marketing by Ethio Telecom. The purpose of this study is to understand how Ethio Telecom utilizes AI in its marketing strategies, and how this impacts customer experience and satisfaction.

For Identifying Key Areas Where AI is Being Leveraged in Ethio Telecom's Customer Service Operations:

- Can you describe any recent experiences where you interacted with AI during a customer service interaction?
- How do you feel AI has changed the way you receive support from Ethio Telecom?
- Are there specific tasks or services where you prefer AI assistance over human interaction?
- How do you perceive the responsiveness of AI-based customer service compared to human agents?
- Are there any specific challenges you've faced when interacting with AI-driven customer support?
- Can you share any instances where AI successfully resolved your issue or query?

For Evaluating Ethio Telecom's Current Use of AI Technologies in Their Service Marketing Communication:

- Have you noticed any personalized marketing communications that seemed to be tailored by AI?
- In what ways do you think AI is being used to enhance your experience with Ethio Telecom's services?
- How effective do you find the AI-driven recommendations or advertisements you receive?
- Have you noticed any instances where AI-generated content (such as personalized emails or chatbot messages) influenced your decision to engage with Ethio Telecom?
- How well do you think AI understands your preferences and tailors marketing messages accordingly?
- Do you find AI-driven marketing communication more relevant or intrusive?

For Analyzing the Impact of Existing AI Implementation on Ethio Telecom's Market Performance:

- Do you believe AI implementation has improved your overall satisfaction with Ethio Telecom?
- Has the introduction of AI in services influenced your decision to continue using Ethio Telecom?
- Can you share any instances where AI directly impacted your choice of services or products from Ethio Telecom?
- Have you recommended Ethio Telecom's services to others based on positive AI-related experiences?
- How do you perceive Ethio Telecom's brand image in terms of technological innovation and AI adoption?
- Can you provide examples of how AI has contributed to improving your overall experience as an Ethio Telecom customer?

