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Consumer Cellular Tops in Customer Satisfaction Among Wireless Carriers; Xfinity Mobile Makes Strong Debut, ACSI Data Show

Satisfaction with cell phone industry reaches new high

ANN ARBOR, Mich., (May 19, 2020) – Amid a year of major developments in the wireless telephone service industry, overall customer satisfaction slides 1.3% to a score of 74 (on a scale of 0 to 100), according to the [American Customer Satisfaction Index \(ACSI®\) Wireless Service and Cellular Telephone Report 2019-2020](#).

“The advent of the nation’s first 5G networks will bring about monumental change for consumers, but not just yet,” said David VanAmburg, Managing Director at the ACSI. “Coverage is sporadic, but as the technology matures, new service providers will enter the game and smartphone manufacturers will compete to offer the best, newest, and shiniest 5G enabled device.”

The report covers three categories of wireless telephone service providers—value mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs), full-service MVNOs, and mobile network operators (MNOs)—as well as cellular telephone manufacturers and smartphone brands. Additionally, the report includes metrics for network quality as well as customer satisfaction by spending level.

Consumer Cellular leads value MVNOs and all other carriers

While customers are much less satisfied with value MVNOs—down 4.9%—the category remains the best among wireless services with an ACSI score of 77. Among brands, however, there is a wide gap from top to bottom.

Despite a 2% slip, Consumer Cellular still holds the customer satisfaction crown across all wireless service providers at 83, pleasing customers with the range of plans it offers.

Straight Talk Wireless (TracFone Wireless) stays in second place, tumbling 3% to 78. Price may be an issue for Straight Talk, as customer perception of value is worse than the year before. Customer satisfaction with the namesake Tracfone brand also takes a hit, dropping 1% to 76.

Two federally subsidized services join the ACSI in 2020 and score much lower. SafeLink Wireless (TracFone Wireless), premieres at 71. Despite residing at the low end of the category, it

fares much better than Q Link Wireless at 66.

Xfinity Mobile premieres atop full-service MVNO category

In its ACSI debut, Comcast's Xfinity Mobile tops the full-service MVNO category with a customer satisfaction score of 79, placing it above the category average of 75, which falls 2.6%. Xfinity Mobile ranks second across all three wireless categories and scores highest marks for the quality of its app.

Two full-service MVNOs lose ground this year, including last year's leader, AT&T's Cricket Wireless, which slides 4% to 76. Metro by T-Mobile, the largest U.S. prepaid brand, drops 3% to the bottom of the category at 74, tied with Sprint's prepaid brand Boost Mobile.

T-Mobile remains the one to beat in MNO category

Yet again, MNOs score lowest in the wireless telephone service industry, unchanged at 73. However, the satisfaction gap with the other two categories is closing.

T-Mobile remains the undisputed MNO leader with a stable ACSI score of 76. Per customers, the carrier offers the best range of plans in the category.

After nearly two years of waiting to complete their merger, T-Mobile and Sprint are one. The deal was finalized in April 2020, combining the nation's third- and fourth-largest wireless carriers. The new T-Mobile, however, does not represent a marriage of customer satisfaction equals, as last-place Sprint, up 2% to 66, ranks far from top-satisfying MNO T-Mobile.

ACSI data show most mergers negatively impact customer satisfaction, at least in the short term, so the next few years will be critical to watch for the combined company.

Verizon Wireless comes in second place at 74. Customers praise the carrier for overall quality but find its value leaves much to be desired. AT&T is next with an ACSI score of 73, followed by U.S. Cellular, which falls 4% to 71.

Verizon's reaffirms best-in-class network quality

Additionally, ACSI provides a unique rating of network quality based on customer evaluations of call quality (clarity and strength), call reliability (dropped calls), network coverage, and data speed.

Verizon remains first among MNOs with an unchanged network quality score of 80. AT&T slides back 1% to 77, tying T-Mobile (unchanged) for second place. U.S. Cellular declines 4% to 74 for network quality, while Sprint finishes last with a flat score of 72.

High-spending customers most satisfied with plans

As part of the ACSI survey, respondents are asked how much they spend each month for their wireless telephone service. This information, along with the customer satisfaction and customer loyalty data, shows which customer segments would have the greatest payoff if the customer experience is improved.

According to ACSI data, wireless companies provide the greatest satisfaction to high-paying customers who spend more than \$1,000 per month. Customers who spend \$501 to \$1,000 per month are also relatively satisfied and loyal.

The most dissatisfied customers fall in the midrange in terms of monthly spending. Collectively, those spending \$151 to \$500 per month are the least satisfied and least loyal customers.

Apple separates itself among cell phones, but Samsung tops the list of individual models

Following four years of stability, customer satisfaction with cell phones climbs 1.3% to a new high of 80. The smartphone market softened in 2019, with global sales down 1%, and 2020 has been no kinder, due to the global pandemic.

Still, Apple inches ahead of second place Samsung (unchanged at 81) with a 1% improvement to 82. Apple's overall iPhone revenue rose 8% year over year in the 2019 holiday quarter with strong sales for its iPhone 11 series. Overall, customers are more pleased with their device's battery life compared to a year ago.

LG ticks up 1% to 79, moving closer to Samsung. Conversely, Motorola (Lenovo) recedes 4% to 77, losing the advantage it had over LG for the last several years.

Among brands, the tale of two manufacturers continues as 17 of 18 models that earn scores of 80 or above belong to Samsung or Apple. Samsung's Galaxy Note 9 remains America's favorite smartphone with an ACSI score of 85 thanks to phone features and video quality.

Samsung's Galaxy S9+ and S10, and Apple's iPhone XS Max follow at 84. Four models earn ACSI scores of 83: Apple's iPhone X and 8 Plus, as well as Samsung's Galaxy S9 and S10+.

The ACSI Wireless Service and Cellular Telephone Report 2019-2020 is based on interviews with 27,346 customers. Download the [full report](#), and follow the ACSI on [LinkedIn](#) and Twitter at [@theACSI](#).

AMERICAN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION INDEX: CONSUMERS LIKE THEIR CELL PHONES MORE THAN EVER, BUT THEIR WIRELESS SERVICE—NOT SO MUCH



Cell Phones
+1.3%



Value MVNOs
-4.9%

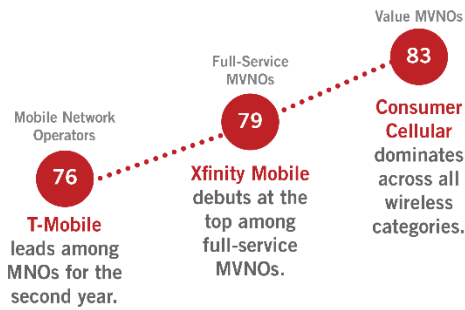


Full-Service MVNOs
-2.6%

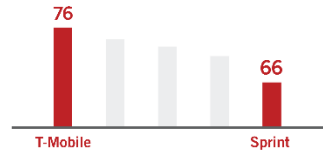


Mobile Network Operators
0.0%

Wireless leaders among three categories:

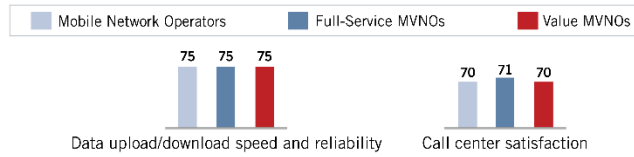


T-Mobile-Sprint merger joins leader and laggard for customer satisfaction.



The 10-point ACSI gap does not bode well for the new T-Mobile's future satisfaction. ACSI data show M&A activity can negatively impact satisfaction.

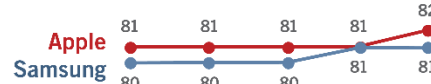
Across the customer experience, wireless subscribers are the most dissatisfied with data speed/reliability and call centers.



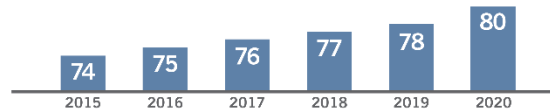
Cell phone industry posts ACSI high of 80, led by Apple and Samsung.

Among cell phone makers, a two-way battle continues as **7 out of 10** customers surveyed bought either an Apple or Samsung device over the past year.

ACSI: Apple and Samsung 5-year trend.



Customers see steady improvement in cell phone battery life.



0-100 Scale

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About the ACSI

The [American Customer Satisfaction Index](#) (ACSI®) has been a national economic indicator for 25 years. It measures and analyzes customer satisfaction with more than 400 companies in 46 industries and 10 economic sectors, including various services of federal and local

government agencies. Reported on a scale of 0 to 100, scores are based on data from interviews with roughly 500,000 customers annually. For more information, visit www.theacsi.org.

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