TRBR
Telecommunications, Radiocommunications & Broadcasting Regulator

TELECOMMUNICATIONS CONSUMER EXPERIENCE REPORT - 2018

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Executive Summary

Building on from 2016 and 2017 brief reports on online surveys conducted, to gauge consumer experiences on usage of telecommunications/ICT Services and products, this year's consumer Survey exercise was conducted to fulfil the TRBR's 2018 and onwards deliverables expected. The exercise is important because it assist TRBR to monitor the effectiveness of current services offered by the Services providers and also to guide TRBR's approach on regulating consumer protection, building on its Consumer Awareness Protection Plan and complaints Handling Processes established. The outcome of the survey will also assist the TRBR to tailor its awareness and education programs that will positively impact the consumer's lives.

In addition to the objectives of the exercise listed below, it was undertaken for the TRBR to fully understand the behaviour and attitude of consumers and or customers who are currently using these services and devices.

The exercise was a nationwide exercise targeting consumers and respective service providers' customers who have already had access to and are using internet services, including other ICT services such as fixed internet, mobile smart phones and tablets using a 2.5G to 3.5G and or 4G networks.

With the exercise conducted, TRBR is not only implementing its functions but also contributing to deliver on and enable respective sectors to deliver on specific goals for Vanuatu 2030 "the People's Plan", particularly on some specific Pillars of the National Sustainable Development Goals under the social and Economy Pillars.

Additionally the survey was conducted to understand a consumers' perspectives of their telecommunications service experiences, to get their opinions on a range of telecommunication topics which will help the TRBR to understand their service consumption behaviour, views and experiences with their service providers and, most importantly, provide the TRBR with valuable information and data that can shape the way the TRBR can further assist consumers and also become a vital element and reference for policy and industry planning for the telecommunication sector in Vanuatu.

Key Indicators at a Glance

Consumer Experience Indicators	Important Remarks	
Use of Mobile Phones	At random selection 100% of those selected owns mobile (488 participants)	
Preferred Type of Handsets and Brands	72% owns Smart Phones	28% owns button phone
Use of Mobile Phones by Gender	62% users are male	38% are female
Distribution of Mobile Users by Age groups	36% of surveyed age range from 15 – 29 years old while 33% ranged from 30-39 years old	Least are over 60 and below 15 years old - 3%
User's Network Choices	56% are Digicel's and 17% were TVL's	Using both networks – 27%
Users determinants of Network Choices	55% - better network coverage followed by better plans – 16%	2% respectively for redundancy and other reasons
Common Issues faced by Mobile (voice and data) Users	45% - faced drop calls followed by 40% unnecessary texts	6% - other factors without indicating what they are
Consumer General Satisfaction	60% of users are satisfied with current experiences	40% are not satisfied
Consumer Choices of Service Providers	55% chooses Digicel whilst 43% chooses TVL	The rest are other providers
Average month Spending per month	74% are willing to spend up to 5,000vt	3% are willing to spend more than 10,000vt
Areas of Challenges faced by Users	40% is around mobile coverage issues followed by Internet speed of 27%	11% are those with limited understanding of advertisements/promotion
Consumer Awareness of Complaint Handling Processes	70% of them do are not aware of consumer Handling processes	30% are aware of the processes
Internet Satisfaction	Complaint Handling. 30% satisfied	70% Dissatisfied
	Technical Support. 73% Satisfied	27% Dissatisfied

	Cost of Internet. 40% Satisfied	60% Dissatisfied
	Service Reliability 46% Satisfied	54% Dissatisfied
	Customer Service 70% Satisfied	30% Dissatisfied
	Internet Service Provider 70% Satisfied	30% Dissatisfied

Assessment based on those who have responded to the distributed Survey (488 participants).

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1 Background

The Telecommunications, Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator (TRBR) is responsible for regulating and overseeing the overall state of the telecommunication, Radiocommunications and Broadcasting/media industry in Vanuatu. Over the past few years the telecommunications sector has been continuously experiencing changes, especially with the technological transformation by the operators which contributed to the competitiveness of market and the customer experience. The TRBR has had a priority on the infrastructure side as part of its Universal Access Policy (UAP) supervisory responsibilities on the rollout of new towers and telecommunications services across the country. Given the competition of UAP rollout and in recognition of the need for TRBR to further enhance its consumer focus as well as for UAP compliance and monitoring, the TRBR wishes to gain increased knowledge of consumer experiences in using telecommunications services, as well as the quality of their experience in using the services offered.

To understand a consumer's perspective of their experiences, the TRBR conducted a nationwide survey in 2018 to get consumer opinions on a range of telecommunication topics which will help the TRBR to understand their service consumption behaviour, views and experiences with their service providers and, most importantly, provide the TRBR with valuable information and data that can shape the way the TRBR can further assist consumers and also become a vital element and reference for policy and industry planning for the telecommunication sector in Vanuatu. The topics explored in the survey include:

- Users of data through Mobile phone (smart phones);
- Consumer satisfaction with the telecommunications services and respective providers;
- Experiences on current pricing offered in the market;
- Experiences on Internet access across Vanuatu;
- Experiences on existing TRBR complaint handling procedures.

The survey targeted mobile and internet users across all age groups in Vanuatu. To ensure sufficient number of responses for the analysis, the islands were grouped into six provinces and survey forms (paper-based) were sent to a TRBR Consumer Community Champion[1] (CCC) in the respective islands of each province to distribute and facilitate the survey. The other mode was through the creation of an online survey via survey monkey and distributed to various Vanuatu discussion groups on Facebook, as well as through the TRBR website. A total of 488 surveys were completed and the results were then weighted to proportionately represent nationwide covered population.

[1] The TRBR Community Consumer Champion is an initiative of TRR, aimed at establishing and having local Champions assist TRR in raising awareness, education and empowerment of the community, on telecommunications and ICT services, under guidance from TRR.

1.1 Objectives

Consumer satisfaction has always been a paramount vision for the TRBR, promoting telecommunications services fairly offered within the industry. It is becoming an important factor leading to availability of choice of suppliers by the consumer; specifically with respect to coverage and quality of service. This survey was designed purposely to analyse customer satisfaction and to help the TRBR to further understand a consumer and a customer's needs and preferences in making a decision on choices. For this, TRBR conducted this survey with important underlying objectives as listed below:

- To understand customer satisfaction with the telecommunications industry;
- To research various variables that are impacting customer satisfaction;
- To understand if there is any difference in customer satisfaction from one operator to the other or from one location to the other;
- To help the telecommunications industry to identify specific improvement opportunities to improve customer satisfaction;
- To understand the effectiveness of complaint handling procedure established by the TRBR;
- To understand a consumer and a customer's understanding on prices offered in the market for respective services

2 Methodology

The survey was conducted using two different approaches which were an online-based survey and a paper-based survey. Both surveys contained the same questions.

2.1 Online Approach

The online survey was designed and placed on the TRBR website and the survey link, (https://www.trr.vu/en/regulatory-consumer-survey-form) was then shared across numerous popular social media (ie Facebook) groups in Vanuatu. This survey targeted all age groups as the online survey was accessible to the public on the TRBR website and social media through Facebook groupings, enabling anyone who had access to the survey to participate.

Online Survey			
	Sample Deposition		
Social Media Pages/Group	Group Type	Total Members In Each Group	Total Participation
North West Malekula	Forum group	790	
Brenwei Community	Forum group	60	
Tokbout Malekula	Forum group	4,868	
Live It Vanuatu	Forum group	4,666	
Yumi Toktok Stret	Forum group	100,122	
Living in Vanuatu	Forum group	24,259	
Rensarie College	Educational Updates	355	
Tafea College	Educational Updates	2,500	
Tafea Province	Forum group	579	
Walarano Ser	Forum group	1,562	
ICT in Vanuatu	ICT updates	3,800	
Total		**143,561**	**41**

Table 1 Sample Deposition

Table 1 above shows all the social media Facebook groups/pages that the online survey was distributed to. The total online available population was 143,561 as per face book social media groupings, however, out of 143,561 only 41 users participated and successfully completed and submitted the survey.

There are few important reasons behind this outcome and in our assessment, it is most likely due to:

- Active member numbers are far less than total group members;
- Multiple memberships across groups distorting total numbers;
- Difficulty of accessing online survey form via a mobile phone for a various contributing factors (network signal strength is low, no appropriate data network, no credit to participate in such and more others);
- Lack of internet access in certain rural areas as explained above in bullet point 3;
- General lack of interest in taking part;

- Data cost once you exit Facebook packaged offered (operators zero rate basic Facebook use).

This result has affected the total outcome, but with those that have participated, their responses have signalled an identified areas that needs to be investigated.

The timeframe for participation in the survey was two months (June 05th – August 08th 2018) and while receiving and analysing the survey, the TRBR was mindful of the same number of people that may also be involved in more than one social media group listed in the table.

2.2 Paper-Based Approach

The other approach was a paper-based survey which was more effective. This paper-based survey was facilitated by TRBR's 14 Community Consumer Champions (CCCs) across all provinces. The CCCs are TRBR's field officers designated across the 6 provinces of Vanuatu to assist TRBR in carrying out community awareness programs on ICT and be the point of contact for TRBR in the local communities on consumer issues that affects any respective communities that they are representing.

The survey forms were sent to the 14 CCCs in their respectively provinces and were coordinated accordingly to obtain feedback from the consumers concern. Table 2 below shows paper-based sample deposition. It illustrates the islands in each province that participated in the survey, and for each island there were one or two CCCs that facilitated the survey.

Paper-based Survey					
Province	Island	Participant	Total Participants by Province	Successful Participants by Province (%)	Unsuccessful Participation
Tafea	Tanna	63	76	17%	
	Aneityum	13			
Sanma	Santo	58	66	14%	
	Luganville	8			
Shefa	Tongoa	2	85	19%	
	Efate	44			
	Epi	25			
	Port Vila	14			
Malampa	Malekula	99	122	27%	
	Ambrym	23			
Penama	Ambae	28	53	12%	
	Pentecost	25			
Torba	Banks	45	45	10%	
Total Forms Send		**456**		**98%**	**2%**
Total Forms Voided		**9**			
Total participants			**447**		

Table 2 Paper-based Sample Deposition

However, there are some Islands that were not able to be included on the survey due to limitation of access to the forms as CCC are only approved to main Islands only, and as well as time and logistics constraints.

There were a total of 456 forms prepared and sent to the 14 CCCs in different islands in each province. Each CCCs had approximately 25 to 30 forms and they randomly picked their participants in the communities to complete the surveys. For some islands such as Malekula, Santo, Banks, Pentecost and Tanna there was more than one CCC assigned as these islands are more populated; thus the number of participants participated were as shown in Table 2 above.

The outcome of the survey was positive as, out of 456 targeted participants, there was a 98% participation rate in the provision of information from the forms. The high percentage of participation shows the eagerness of the consumers to voice their opinions on how satisfied or dissatisfied they are in using mobile and internet services.

	Total Participation	Successful Participation	Unsuccessful Participation
Online Survey	41	41	0
Paper-Based Survey	456	447	9
Total	497	488	9
Percentage		98%	2%

Table 3 Total Sample Deposition

2.3 Summary

Even though there was a very small number of online survey participation, the paper-based survey was more effective and the outcome provided the TRBR with a valuable statistical sample set for analysis.

3 Survey Analysis and Key Findings

For this survey a sample population was used, and out of this sample population 488 participants completed the survey to reflecting their views on current patterns in the telecommunication industry in Vanuatu. This section summarizes the major findings for each survey topic, with the results based on the total participation as a representation of the whole population.

3.1 Mobile Users

Mobile phone services are a critical means of communication for Vanuatu's telecommunications users, and play an important role in everyday lives, and greatly assist in global communication. As well as assisting communication, mobile take-up and use is stimulating growth in demand as suppliers continue to provide mobile handsets and mobile services at an affordable prices; attracting consumers of all kinds who can now afford these services.

This objective of this section of the survey was to identify whether mobile phones services have gained increased popularity in Vanuatu. Participants were randomly chosen, and a key question that was asked in the questionnaire was "Are you a mobile user". At random, out of the 488 successful participation, 100% indicated that they own a mobile phone and are currently utilizing mobile phone services.

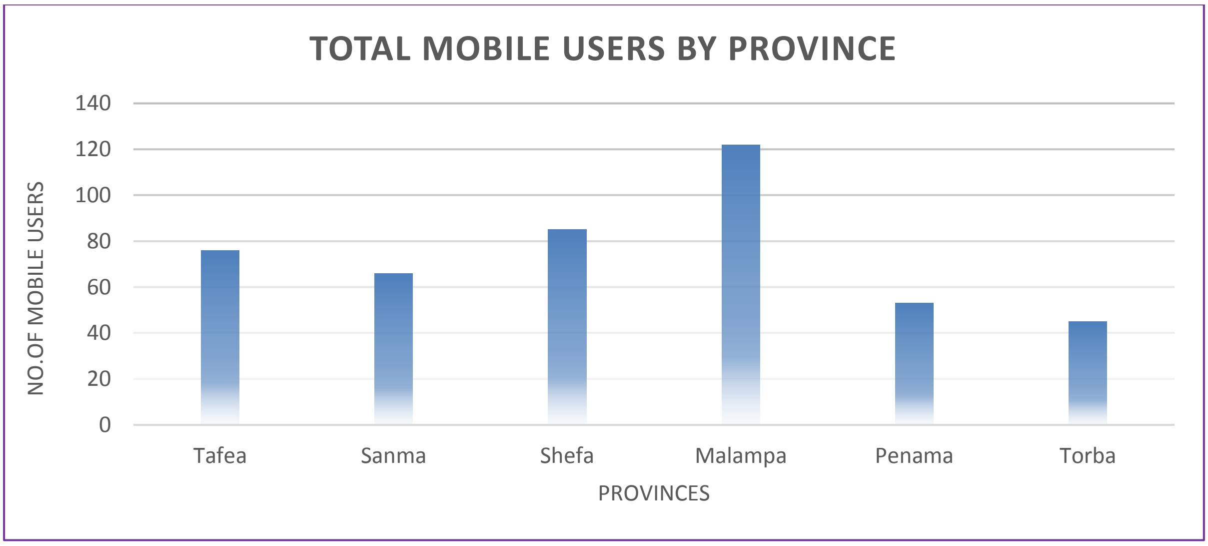

Figure 1 No. of Mobile users by Province that participated in the survey

Figure 1 above shows total mobile users in each province that were surveyed. Malampa province has the highest of participations and with Torba province to have the lowest.

Given that all participants indicated that they currently own and use a mobile phone, it implies that most people are now using a mobile phone as the prime medium for communication throughout the country. According to the Telecommunications Sector Report 2017[2], there are several important reasons stimulating increase in the usage of mobile phone services which includes:

- Cost – Due to effective and ongoing competition in the mobile market and higher demand for mobile services, the price of handsets and services have reduced significantly and this is attracting consumers of all kinds and classes who are willing and now able to purchase a mobile handset and a mobile service.
- Convenience - Mobile phones can be used from anywhere provided that there is a cellular network available to obtain voice, SMS, and data/internet services. It is seen to offer ease and convenience to users as compared to fixed services/a fixed phone.
- Coverage - Coverage is a particularly important factor that has impacted growth of mobile services across the islands of Vanuatu. With heavy investment in infrastructure from the mobile operators and the successful implementation of the UAP by stakeholders involved, mobile coverage has increased to 98.8% of total population, and this has boosted demand and growth of mobile services and take-up.

Thus, with expanded coverage, increasing demand and affordability, mobile services have gained significant momentum and popularity as a convenient and easy means of communication throughout Vanuatu.

3.2 Prepaid and Postpaid Customers

Consumers for mobile services can be categorized into two types based on the variety of plans offered and that consumers are willing and are able to afford. The analysis from this survey confirms that the majority of the mobile service consumers throughout Vanuatu are prepaid subscribers while post-paid plans remain valuable for certain consumer groups only.

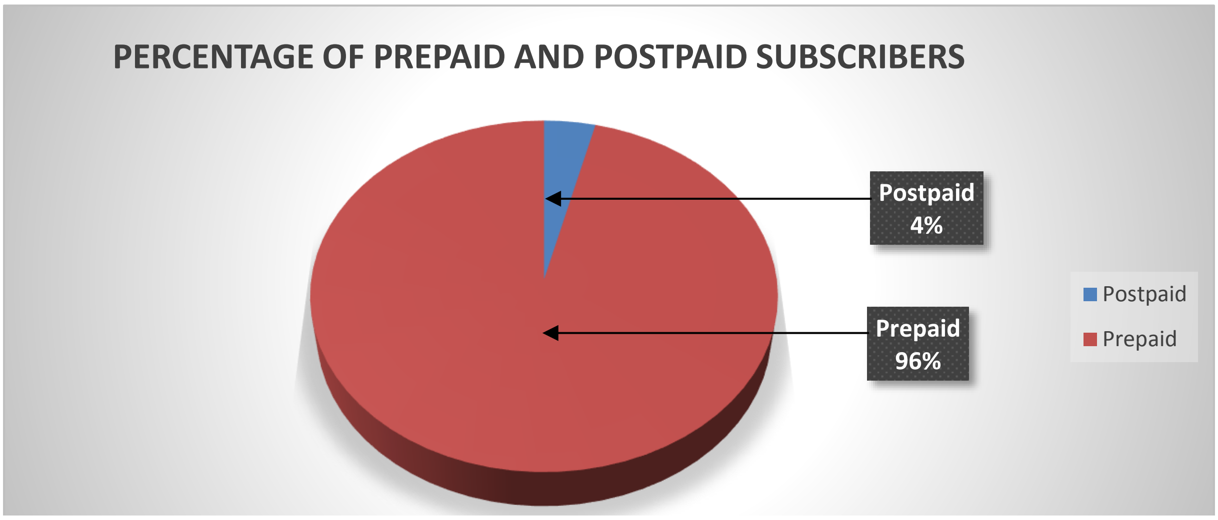

Figure 2 Percentage of Prepaid and Postpaid Subscribers

[2] https://www.trbr.vu/en/public-register/reports/telecommunications-sector-report/2017

Figure 2 above shows the percentage of both prepaid and postpaid subscription. The pie chart illustrates that 96% of the respondents are prepaid customers with the remaining 4% postpaid customers; majority of which live in urban areas (Port Vila and Luganville). These numbers clearly show that prepaid plans are the dominant plan in Vanuatu as the majority of the people are low earners allowing them to only pay for what they can afford.

3.3 Mobile Phone Type

One of the important questions asked in the survey was "What type of handset do you have". The main intention in formulating this question was to actually investigate and know which mobile phone type is currently preferred and widely used by the consumers. The response to this question will also contribute to entrepreneurs who wish to roll out businesses such as banking (mobile banking, on-line services etc.) in to rural communities, communities outside of Port Vila and Luganville.

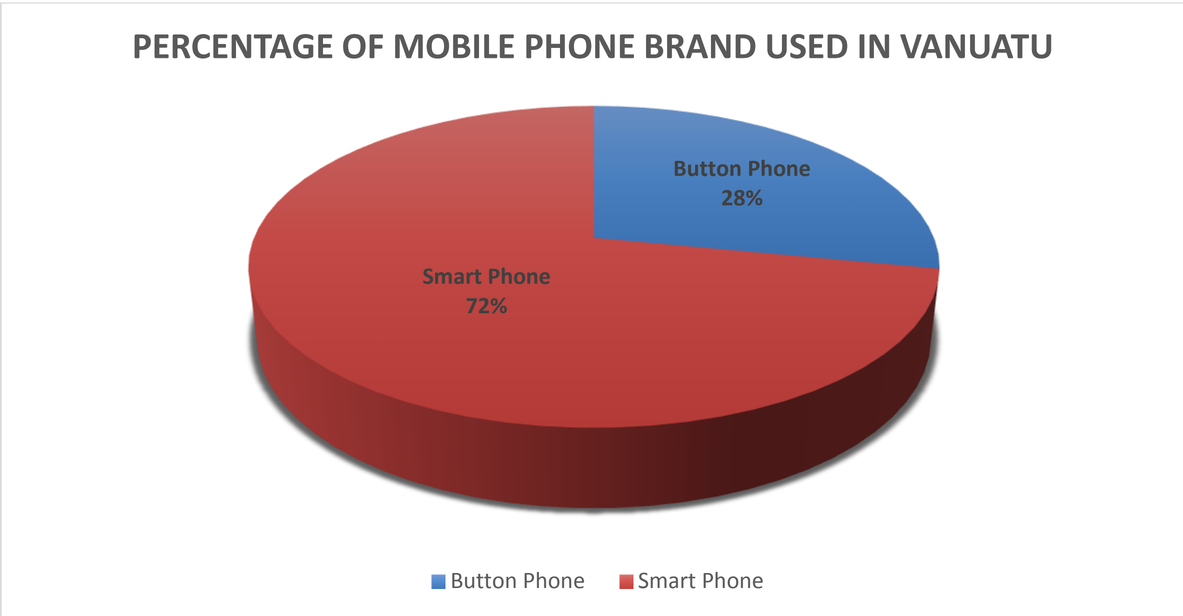

Figure 3 Mobile Brand Used in Vanuatu

Figure 3 above shows percentage of mobile handset types used in Vanuatu. Of the respondents to the survey 72% indicated that they currently own and use smart phones with only 28% of respondents still using the older 2G button style phones. Use of high-end smartphones such as the Apple iPhone is still low at 3%.

These numbers confirm that smartphones are now dominating the handset market and are gaining increasing popularity in Vanuatu through their features and the status held within the community. Smartphones are predominantly designed for use on the 3G and 4G networks to take advantage of data services, with 2G services also available to be used. However, with the closure worldwide of 2G networks and the phasing out of the 2G networks in Vanuatu the use of button phones will decrease quickly.

3.4 Mobile Phone Usage Based on Gender and Age

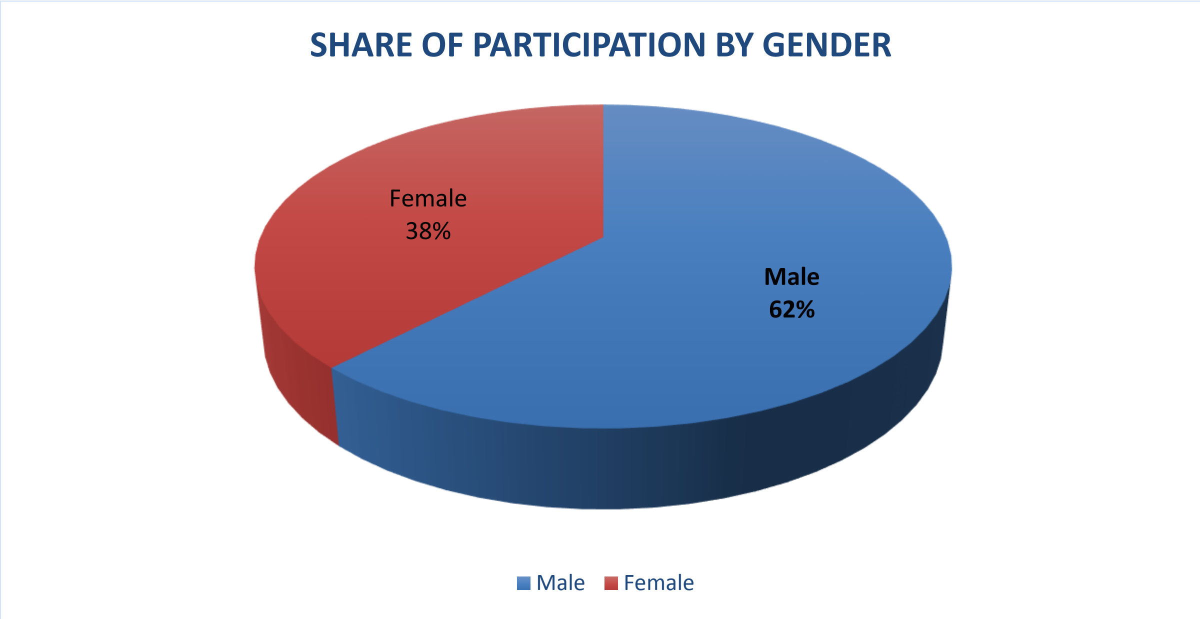

Figure 4 Share of Participation by Gender

With the uptake of digitization in the telecom sector, age and gender plays an important role; especially in the amount and type of phone and Apps being used by the consumers. Out of the 488 participants, 62% were identified to be male while female participants were low at 38% as illustrated in Figure 4 above.

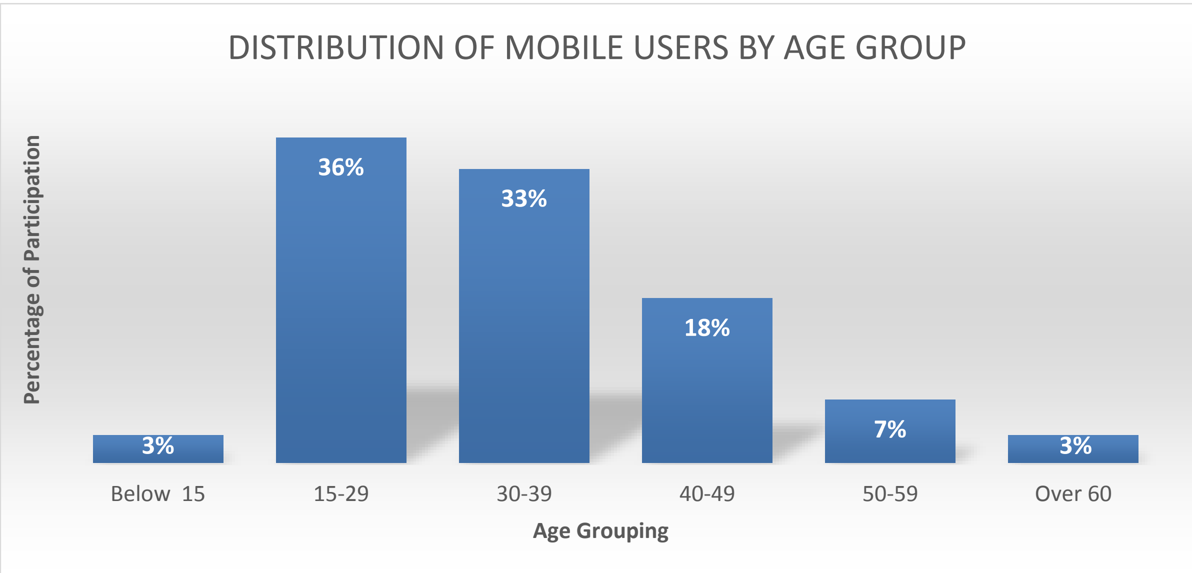

Figure 5 Distribution of Mobile Users by Age Group

Figure 5 above shows the distribution of mobile users by age group. The data shows that highest percentage of 36% are mobile users of age ranging between 15 to 29 years followed by 33% aged between 30 to 39 years and 18% range at 40 to 49 years old, while those aged below 15 years and over 60 years remain very low at 3%. This, in many ways, can be expected considering the market has only been open for ten years and early adopters have been younger, and the decreasing price of handsets and plans enabling today's youth to afford and access mobile services. Services offered such as Facebook and YouTube are also helping to drive mobile take-up and increase the younger age groups access and use of these services.

4 Consumer's Mobile Services Satisfaction

Competition in the Vanuatu's telecommunications sector has been highly competitive and a customer's satisfaction has now become one of the most important factors in respect of a telecommunications service provider's ability to attract and retain a customer. In many ways, an operator's price and service throughout Vanuatu may seem quite similar, however network coverage and signal quality varies and the differences can be seen particularly in rural areas of the country.

4.1 User's Network Choice

To determine a participant's Choice of mobile network operator, each participant was asked to indicate "which mobile operator do you use?" Out of the total participation, 56% indicated that they are using the Digicel network while 17% indicated they were TVL customers; with 27% of the participants advising that they are on both networks.

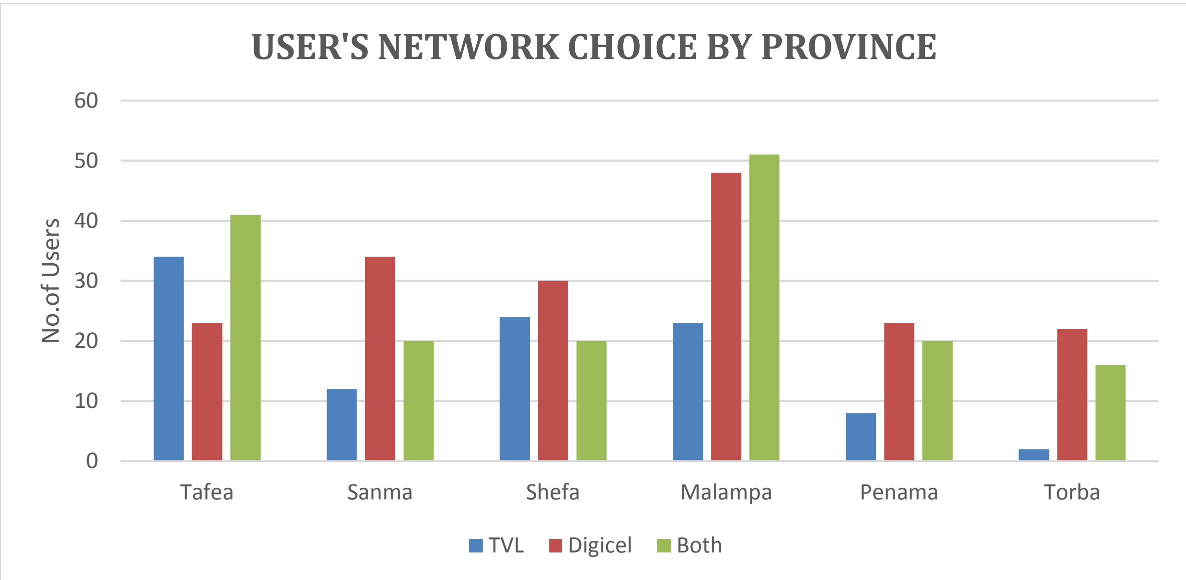

Figure 6 Network Choices by Province

Figure 6 above shows that mobile network preferences differ across provinces. The use of the Digicel network dominates in Sanma, Shefa, Penama and Torba while both networks are highly used in Tafea and Malampa. Customers rely heavily on the signal strength and reliability of the network coverage to make decision on which network they should use. In some areas Digicel is mostly used while TVL is preferred in other areas. Using two SIM cards to enable each network to be accessed enables a consumer choice and an ability to switch to the other mobile network when one network is down or when signal strength is weak in that area.

4.2 Determinants of Network Choice

A consumer's choice of mobile operators depends mainly on their geographic location. Participants were asked to provide a reason why they choose their current mobile network and the results obtained are indicated below in Figure 7.

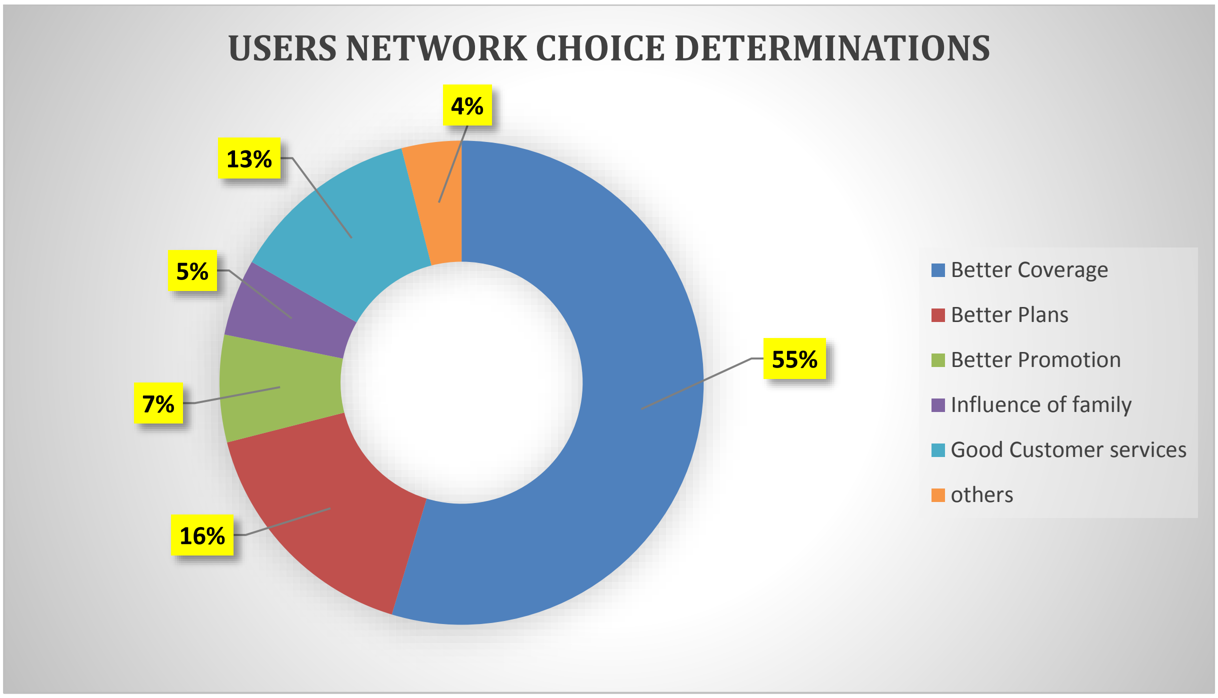

Figure 7 Users determinants of Network Choice

Figure 7 above show the users surveyed determinants of network choice. The graph shows that out of the total participants 55% indicated that their choice is determined by **Better Coverage**, followed by **Better Plans** with 16%, **Good customer service** with 13%, 7% indicated **Better Promotions** while 5% are **influenced by their family** and remaining low at 4% suggested they have **others** reasons which was not specified.

The numbers clearly illustrate that coverage is a major determinant of a customer's choice of service provider in Vanuatu. According to the CCCs who facilitated the survey, different geographical areas have a different degree of coverage and service quality which encourage users to choose carefully before purchasing any services from an operator so that it is from an operator that best satisfies their needs. These groups of users are mostly people in the rural areas who are very mindful of better coverage and improved service quality before making their decisions.

Better plans and promotions are also another factor that determines a user's choice of network provider. Many customers will look for plans or promotions with attractive packages at low prices. This is a driving factor that encourages users to have two SIM cards, one from each network, to take advantage of plans and promotions offered by the service providers.

Another important reason identified from the survey analysis is the provision of good customer service from a mobile operator. Users feel important and valued when they are cared for and looked after; especially when their queries and complaints are attended to and their problems are solved in a timely manner. Others are influenced by their families in making decisions on which service providers they should prefer. In particular, family members often want to be on the same network to avoid off-net charges while communicating with each other.

4.3 Issues Faced by Prepaid and Postpaid Users

Participants were asked to indicate what problems or issues they are currently facing with the network operator they are using and the aggregated results below were obtained.

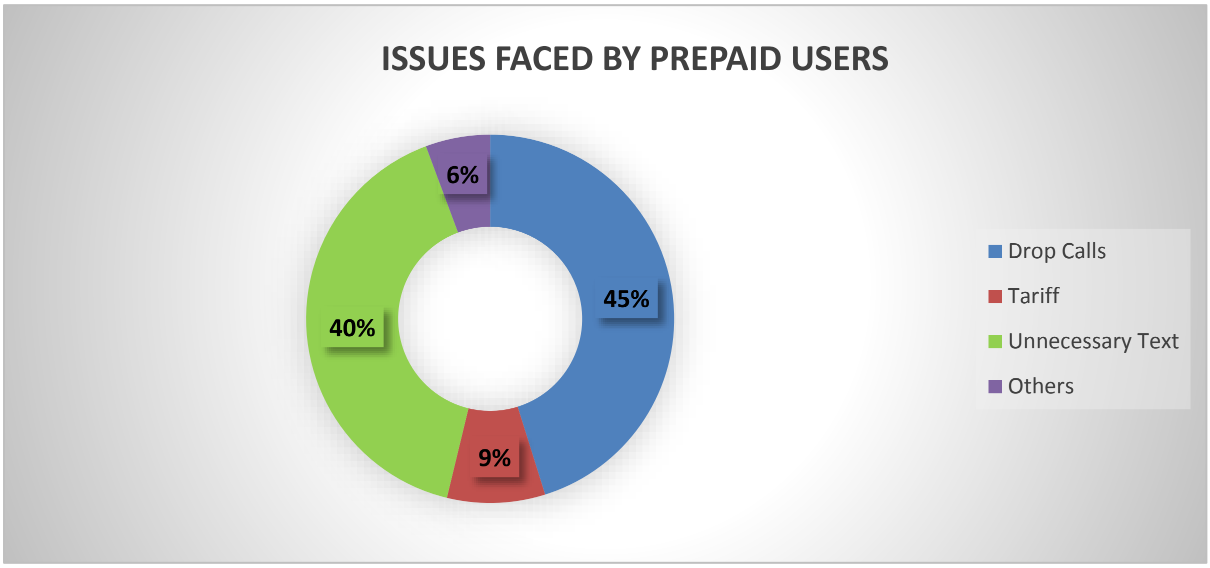

Figure 8 Issues faced by Prepaid Uses

Figure 8 shows issues faced by prepaid customers. Out of the 468 prepaid participants, 45% indicated that Dropped Calls is a commonly faced problem, followed by 40% complaining about Unnecessary Text Messages (Unsolicited) received from operators, while 9% indicated that the tariff they are on remains expensive for them. The other 6% suggested other reasons without indicating what they were.

Dropped calls are a major problem consumers are currently facing throughout Vanuatu. These are the fraction of telephone calls which are cut off before a conversation between parties has actually finished and/or before one of them hangs up. A dropped call can be caused by one or the other party moving and entering an area where signal quality is poor and there is no ability to handover to another cell, or it could be a network fault. This is particularly common in rural areas where there may only be one cell site in that area and moving within the area the signal may fade (due to many factors) and the call drops out. TRBR has considered quality of services issues to be its priority list to address in 2019 and onwards.

Participants also complained about regularly receiving unnecessary (unsolicited) message alerts which they have indicated are annoying to them. This particularly applies to messages that they feel are not important to them. Others have suggested that there is no suitable cheap tariff for them and the current plans on offer makes the price(s) very high for them.

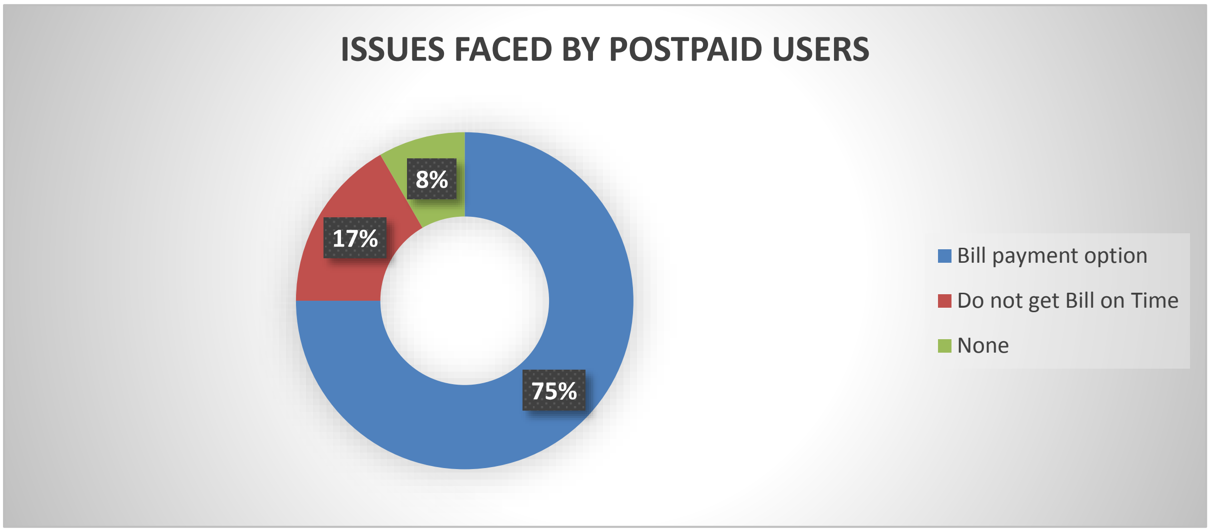

Figure 9 Issues faced by Postpaid Users

Figure 9 above shows the responses from post-paid participants. Out of the 4% of post-paid participants, 75% indicated Bill payment option as a common problem, followed by 17% who claim they do not get bill on time, while the remaining 8% indicated no issue and were happy with their current service provider. From this, it indicates that 90% of the issues for post-paid subscribers relates to billing.

Bill payment options is an issue particularly faced by post-paid users in rural areas. The difficulty in making a bill payment through a mobile App or through a Bank is a major problem as many of these users are in an area far from a Bank or their mobile service connection may not be reliable to do payments online. Others have claimed that not receiving a billing invoice in time is also an issue as it may take them time to make payment and if bill invoice is not paid on time, their service have suspended, will be suspended or switched off once the invoice due date has passed.

4.4 Participants Satisfaction

Despite common complaints of poor network coverage, voice call quality etc., participants were asked if they were satisfied with their current operator. Figure 10 below shows the percentage share of satisfaction by participants. Data obtained confirms that 60% of participants indicated that they are currently satisfied with their operator while 40% are dissatisfied mainly due to reasons and issues discussed above. As such they would like to see improvements in these identified issues contributing to their dissatisfaction.

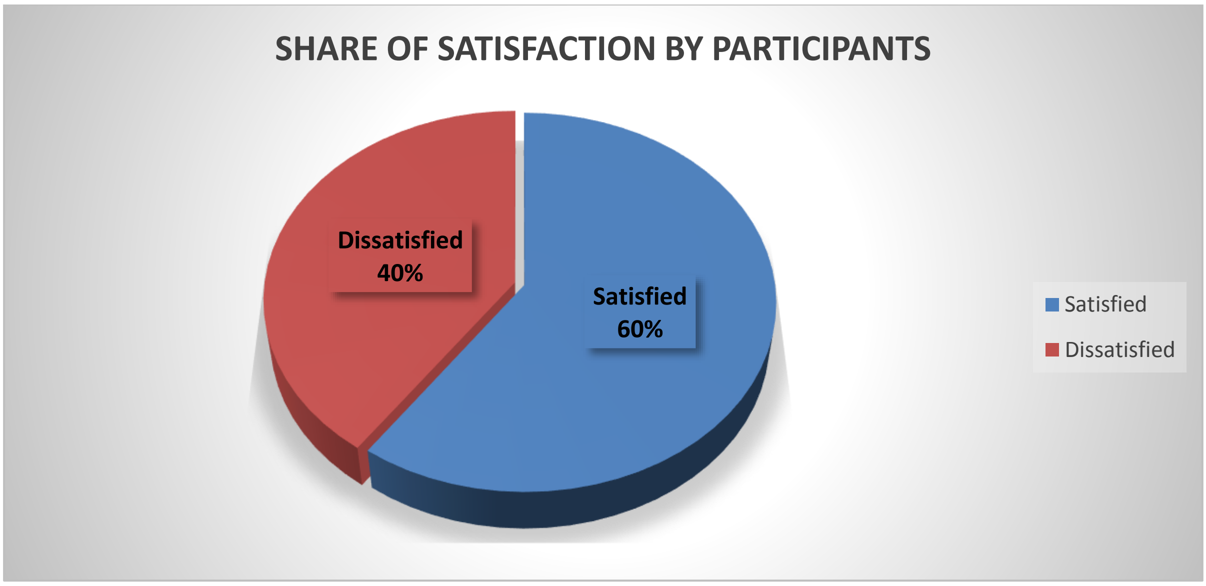

Figure 10 Share of Satisfaction by Participants

5 Internet Services

The internet is playing an increasingly important role in Vanuatu's society today and is becoming an essential service. It affects, impacts on and facilitates nearly every aspect of our modern life, making communication easier and more productive and for access to knowledge and government services in Vanuatu. Internet usage has continued to grow significantly in Vanuatu and demand is increasing especially in areas of communication, education, online money transactions, news updates and access to e-GOV services.

This survey was conducted to ascertain users' experiences, satisfaction and issues while using the internet.

5.1 Mobile and Fixed Internet usage

The opening question asked was in order to determine a user's preference between mobile and fixed internet. Internet participants were also asked which internet plans they are currently using. The results are represented below in Figure 11.

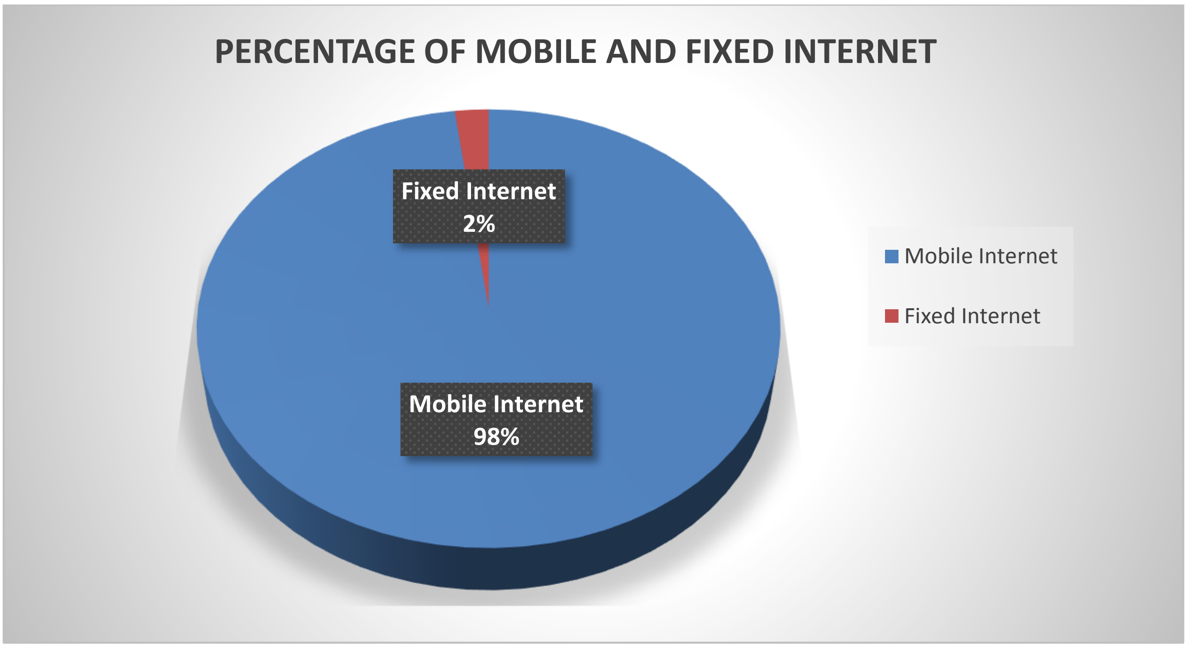

Figure 11 Percentage of Mobile and Fixed internet usage by the Participants

Figure 11 above shows the percentage of mobile and fixed internet usage by respondent. Out of the total participation, 98% indicated that they are currently using a mobile service to access the internet while fixed service internet usage is low at 2%.

The high percentage of mobile internet usage reflects the easier and more affordable way to access the internet for the vast majority of Vanuatu's residents, as well as the current high growth and trend observed in the mobile data market, as shown in the TRBR's 2017 Sector Report with mobile downloads having increased by 143% in 2017. With mobile data becoming cheaper, the increase in the use of OTT services, social media platforms, education research and entertainment is a driver and attraction for many users to subscribe for mobile data plans and bundles which, accordingly, stimulates growth of mobile internet users in Vanuatu. Vanuatu, in a like manner to other countries, is moving towards a data centric world as mobile voice and SMS is declining, and OTT services are gaining popularity as a medium of communication.

On the other hand, fixed internet usage is low as most of these users live in urban areas or in provincial headquarters where fixed infrastructure is available – something that does apply to rural areas.

5.2 Internet Service Provider

Respondents who reported having internet access were then asked which internet service provider they are using, and the results obtained are shown below in Figure 12.

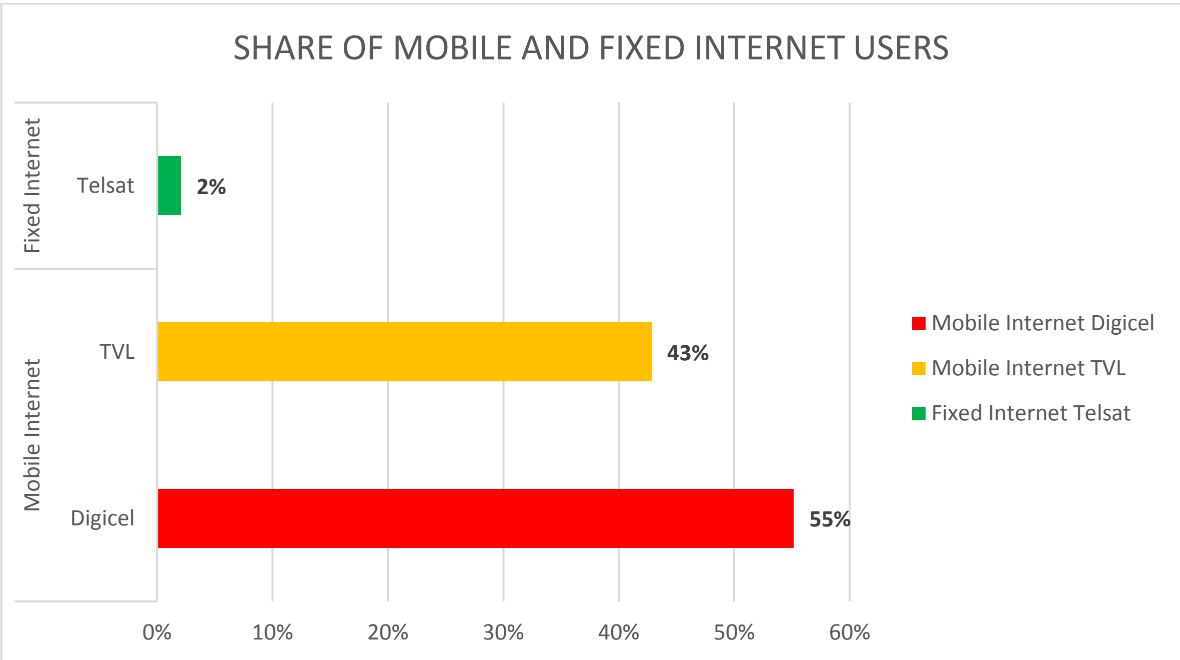

Figure 12 Participant's choice of Internet Service Provider

Figure 12 above shows the respondent's choice of internet service provider. The graph illustrates that of the 98% mobile internet users, 55% are Digicel customers while 43% are TVL customers. Fixed internet remained low at 2% and these are Telsat consumers. Digicel has a much bigger percentage due to its improved coverage and the same is expected from TVL.

Telsat's consumers can be seen to be low mainly due to the fact that Telsat provides fixed internet service is available on the island of Efate and most of its customers live in urban areas.

5.3 Average Monthly Bill

To gain insight to a consumer's spending habit(s) in respect of internet services/mobile data, respondents were asked how much they are currently spending for internet services per month. The results obtained and their average monthly spending are presented below in Figure 13.

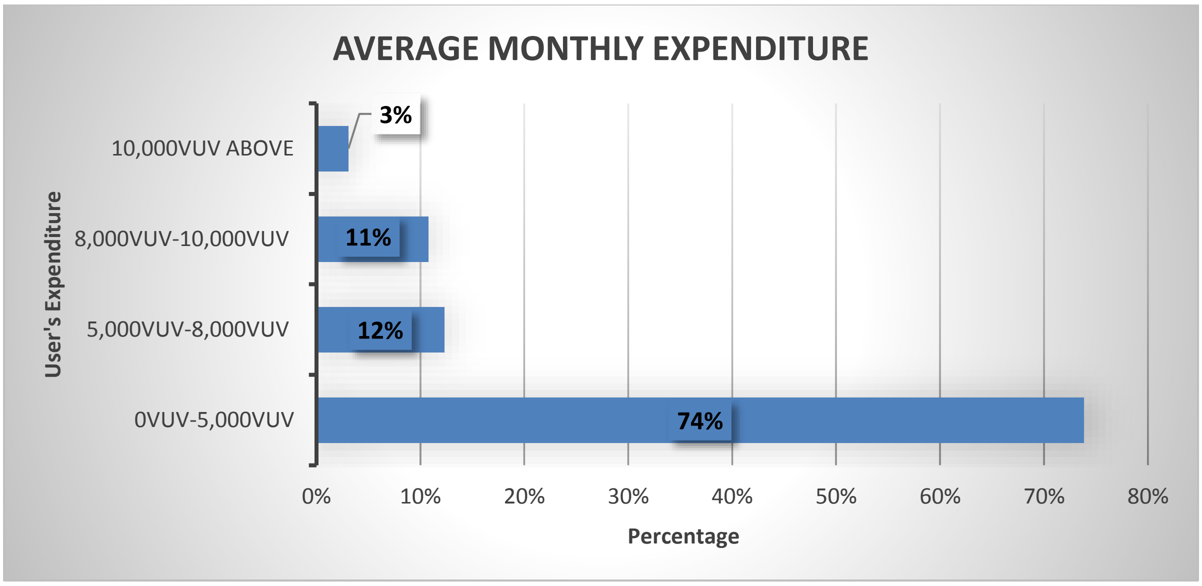

Figure 13 Average Monthly Expenditure

Figure 13 above illustrates the average monthly expenditure that participants are willing and able to make for provision of an internet services. The graph shows that out of the random participants, 74% were willing to spend a maximum of 5000VT per month for internet services. 12% indicated their affordability is between 5000VT to 8000Vt per month and 11% indicated their monthly expenditure is between 8,000VT to 10,000VT; while spending of over 10,000VT remains low at 3%.

The graph above paints a picture of the spending behaviour of internet users in Vanuatu. With the minimum wage set below 35,000VT per month, it is understandable that the highest percentage of users are currently spending less than 5000VT per month for internet. That figure equates to 14% of disposable income. They are predominantly prepaid customers who are currently low earners or self-employed and are willing and/or able to only spend that much and wish to control their spending by limiting their usage. On the other hand, others are willing to spend over 10,000VT a month and they are mostly post-paid fixed internet services users who are predominantly urban users/business with higher earnings and are willing to spend more for high speed internet services.

Furthermore, competition between the services providers has driven prices down especially in respect of the coat of smartphone handsets which are now much cheaper and have become more affordable. This has stimulated the use and growth of mobile data as users can now conveniently access the internet via their smart phones. With the rapid growth of mobile data downloads, a considerable amount of internet usage is through Facebook and YouTube.

5.4 Challenges Faced by Internet Users

To identify and address challenges that users are currently facing, respondents were asked to identify areas where they are still facing challenges. Below in Figure 14 are results obtained:

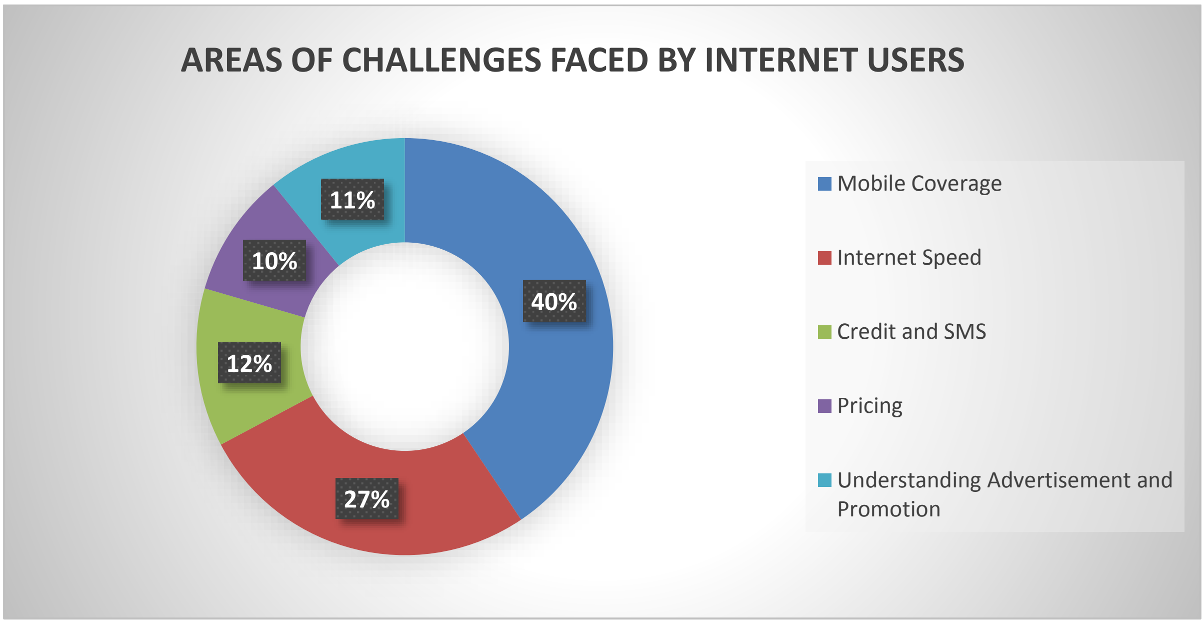

Figure 14 Areas of challenges faced by the participants

Figure 14 above shows some of the challenges that the participants indicated they are still facing. Out of the survey participants, 40% claimed that their major challenge is *mobile coverage*, 27% complained about the *internet speed* while 12% still find difficulties with *credit and SMS*. 11% indicated they are having difficulties *understanding advertisement and promotions* and 10% still think mobile service *pricing* is still not reasonable.

Mobile coverage remains a big challenge for internet users in the rural areas especially the very remote areas. A major contributing factor is the difficult and unique topography of the Vanuatu islands which is seen to be hindering mobile coverage especially islands with high mountains which disrupting the signals and connections resulting into mobile coverage issues and low service quality is certain areas.

Another important reason is population size. Most rural areas with poor or no coverage are very low populated areas which operators are not willing to invest in these areas as it would be more costly and not a very profitable decision. This hinders the mobile coverage in these areas which leaves the local population with no choice but to walk away or up hills in search of coverage or signal to be able to use the mobile services. Alternative solutions for internet service do exist.

With Internet usage increasing there is a need for appropriate speeds for uploading and downloading, internet speed provision is a complaint that users are frustrated and concerned with. Users have high expectations while surfing on the net and most of these complaints relate to loading time which has been indicated through this survey as annoying to them in certain areas. This issue is common for areas where signal strength is weak due to its geographical locations.

It can be seen through analysis of this survey that, credit/recharge is also a challenge; especially in rural areas. Even though both operators have allocated agents in certain areas in every island, complaints are still made on the shortage of credit or recharge facilities, and shortage of recharges or top ups availability/methods.

Lastly, understanding internet promotions and advertisements is another important challenge that has been identified. Most of the users in rural areas are not well educated and that makes it difficult for them to read and understand promotions and advertisements; especially when written in English. As such, users often end up purchasing services without a full understanding of what they will be receiving and paying for and this causes frustration and dissatisfaction. Others continue to complain about mobile data and internet service pricing and suggested that pricing is still high and should be more reasonable.

5.5 Internet User Satisfaction

To determine the overall satisfaction level of internet users', respondents were asked to identify whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with areas including, their current internet service provider, customer service, service reliability, cost, technical support and complaint handling procedures. The results obtained are presented below in Figure 15.

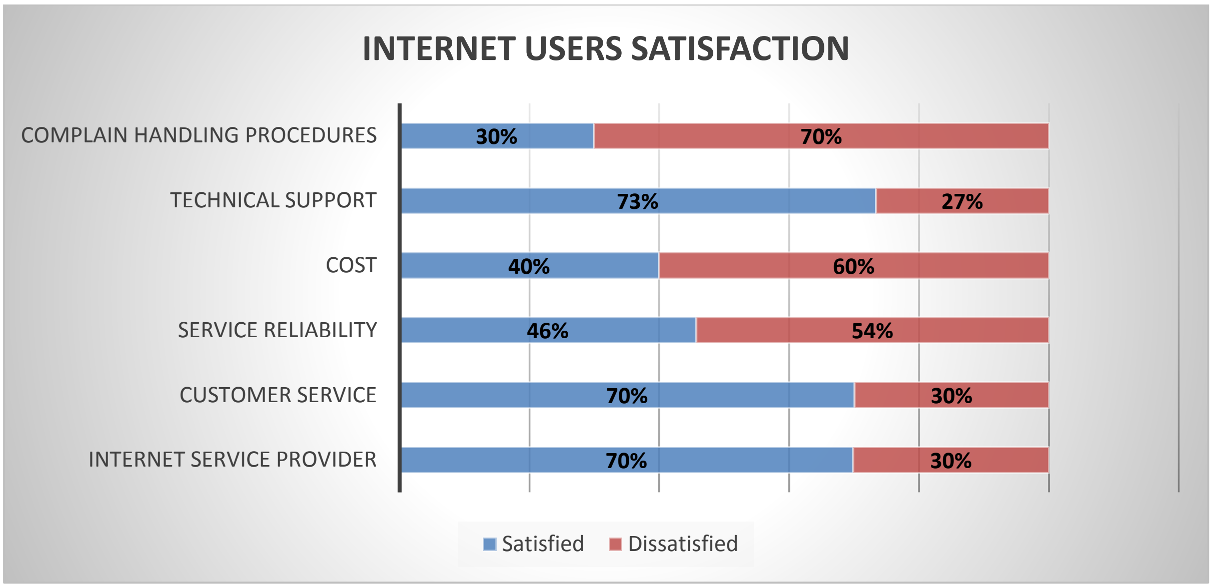

Figure 15 Internet User's Satisfaction

Figure 15 above shows the users' satisfaction level in each area of research. The graph illustrates that out of the total respondents, 70% were dissatisfied with the current complaint handling procedures while 73% were satisfied with the technical support from the providers. Moreover, 54% of the participants are dissatisfied by service reliability and 60% are still not satisfied with internet pricing. On the other hand, 70% have indicated that they are currently satisfied with their internet service providers and their customer service provision.

A large portion of the participants who claimed they are not satisfied with the current complaint handling procedure is due to the fact that they were unaware that there is a complaint handling procedure in place. Others who are aware of the procedure have complained that it is still difficult to launch a complaint via online forms or via voice calls due to network coverage issues that they face; especially in rural areas where signal strength is weak.

Furthermore, service reliability is another challenge that most participants indicated that they are not satisfied with. This challenge is faced mainly in rural areas where connection or signal strength is weak and therefore disrupting the use of internet leading to bad experiences by internet users.

Although there are some areas that are causing customer dissatisfaction and need improvement, there are also areas that have been identified where users feel satisfied with. This includes users showing satisfaction with the level of technical support that is provided in a timely manner when needed; especially when their internet service is down due to technical difficulties. Although internet users are facing issues with coverage, most participants have indicated that they are currently satisfied with their internet services providers.

6 Complaint Handling Procedure

The TRBR has put in place a complaint handling procedure and the operators are obliged, under their licence agreement to address a customer's complaint. The TRBR's complaint handling procedure aims to make it easy for users to bring forward to their operator's attention, any complaints, disputes and problems they may have. This survey particularly wished to understand whether users are aware of this procedure. Their responses are presented below in Figure 16.

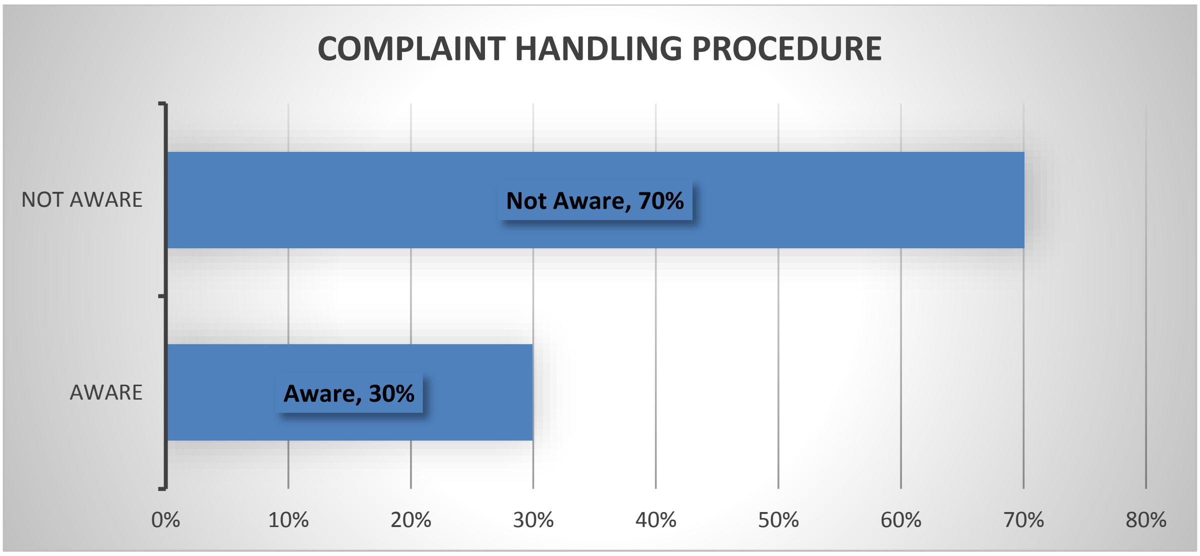

Figure 16 Complaint Handling Procedure

Figure 16 above shows the share of participants who are currently aware and those who are not aware of the TRBR's complaint handling procedure.

The graph shows that of the participants, only 30% of actually aware that there is a complaint handling procedure to assist them, while 70% indicated that they are not aware of the TRBR's complaint handling procedure.

The group of participants who indicated that they are aware of the TRBR's complaint handling procedures were those that learned through the consumer awareness programs conducted by the TRBR consumer team across Vanuatu in respective communities. The awareness programs were also supported and promoted at the community's level through the TRBR's CCC's. Although the TRBR has run awareness campaigns in certain areas of almost every islands of Vanuatu, there are still large groups of people throughout the nation who are still not aware of this procedure. Therefore, there is a need for the TRBR to advance consumer awareness in respect of its complaint handling procedure so that users are aware of their ability to utilize it and launch any complaints at any time they face issues. Responsibility for handling and resolving consumer complaints falls on the mobile operator and internet service providers and including the TRBR. This should include for the operators to provide more awareness to the communities in order to make their complaint handling procedure known to all of their users. More consumer awareness will also facilitate identification of key areas for improvement.

TRBR has released its online complaint handling process under consumer protection **“Voicing your complaint”** and is a very efficient tool that hits the TRBR’s database when a complaint use this tool to file its dissatisfaction. Similarly, the TRBR released its mobile app known as the **“TRBR Fact Infor”**, an app that is easy to have access to and to also have access to very useful information including an avenue where complaints can be submitted to the TRBR for its mediation.

7 Conclusion

Customer's satisfaction in the provision of telecommunications services is a prime driver for effective consumer take-up and use, and for satisfactorily conducting businesses in Vanuatu. However this survey shows that consumers will not necessarily grant loyalty and/or trust to their provider(s) or operator(s) due to some critical challenges they are currently facing. These include mobile coverage, pricing, service reliability, complaint handling other listed issues in this report.

This is something that all providers and operators are undertaking and seeking to address. It is important that they come up with new strategies or revisit their current strategies and to find options of solutions that will best satisfy their customers. This may mean paying more attention to the customer's experience (weaknesses and strengths) and gain deeper insights to take into account their customer's points of view, which would increase their satisfaction and drive more use and take-up of telecommunications services.

The report has clearly outlined areas where TRBR will place its focus on and especially on issues identified such as clear awareness on consumer handling processes, working on quality of service auditing and facilitating improvement on black spot areas in 2019 and onwards.

As the telecommunications industry in Vanuatu is growing and evolving, so too, are consumers' needs and wishes. The ever evolving means of communication such as OTT services, entertainment technologies, together with services such as Facebook and YouTube are continuously altering how ni-Vans are relating to one another and adapting to change.

Therefore it is important, and in everyone's interest, for service providers and the operators to continue and listen to the customers' requests and needs, and adapt and develop strategies and services that will enhance a customer's experience and is one that meets the ever-changing consumer's demand. The TRBR will also work closely with all the operators and its stakeholders to rectify some most common issues identified.

This survey brought forward some important recommendations that need to be addressed, by both the TRBR and the service providers/operators. These include:

I. To increase a customer's satisfaction, mobile operators and internet service providers need to continue to improve mobile services through investment and provision of improved service quality and coverage, and continue to offer more reasonable pricing and discounts;
II. To influence demographic variables such as age and location, and increase take-up and use of services, operators and providers should consider developing strategies and services that better captures and enhances all of their potential customer's needs.

III. Finally, more awareness should be done on the complaint handling procedure so that it helps customers to make any complaint that requires the operator's and the TRBR, including the Government's attention to enable improvement.

TRBR will continue to conduct a biannually survey which will enhance TRBR's understanding on difficult and satisfactory experiences encountered by consumers across Vanuatu.