



COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY AMONG AVIATION CUSTOMERS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The study assessed complaint handling and service recovery in the Nigerian Aviation Industry using Hirshman theory. In this survey, behaviours exhibited by clients in typical complaint situation usually evidenced in local airports in Nigeria; strategic approaches that local airline operators adopt to respond to complaint and the main service failures evidenced in service delivery in the Nigerian aviation industry were examined. Data for this study was collected using structured questionnaire containing 22 questions. Out of 195 questionnaire that were distributed, 178 (91.3%) were returned. The research finding revealed that all the three airlines receive clients who at any point in time will exhibit various complaints behaviours during service failures; they do not pay serious attention to complaints lodged by customers and there are possible and visible areas of failure in the three airlines. It was recommended among others that the operators of all the three airlines must offer some kind of service support to all passengers who will in the near future be experiencing and affected by service failures. Assistance to be provided can be based on different dimensions of the needs of passengers.*

KEYWORDS: Complaint, Complaint Management, Customer, Loyalty, Customer Loyalty

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of how good an organization's service is, it is inevitable that at some time, there will be unhappy customers. That is why it is important to have a system in place to handle customer's complaints. Complaints offer businesses an opportunity to correct immediate problems. In addition, complaints provide corrective ideas for improving products, adapting marketing practices, upgrading services, or modifying promotional materials and product information (Palmer, 2001).

“While occasional problems with the services of an organization are to some extent, inevitable, dissatisfied customers are not” (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991). Hence, organizations can learn to recover from mistakes when complaints are well attended to. A good recovery strategy can turn angry and frustrated customers into loyal ones. Recognizing the importance of responding fairly and efficiently to customer's disappointment, many organizations have established effective and innovative systems for resolving consumer's complaints. In the opinion of Kessler and Sheila (2003), companies with positive attitude to manage customers' complaints and able to retain them have a competitive edge.

Careful complaints management can save organizations unwanted cost. For example, negative publicity from dissatisfied customers could lead to loss of revenue and necessitate



additional investment in advertising to attract lost customers or replace them. Complaints and complaint trends tell an organization how to do its job better by alerting management to problems that need prompt attention and correction. It also indicates long-range opportunities for product/service innovation and problem prevention.

Arguably, the airline industry, like other service-oriented sectors in Nigeria, is powered by systems which are operated by various airline personnel. These systems which are both mechanical and manual and put in place by airline operators can occasionally break down or fail. This can directly affect the consumer in terms of consumption and finally satisfaction or service experience. The effect of this state of the service delivery will undoubtedly create dissatisfaction for both potential and established clients who patronize the service. Customers' dissatisfaction will sometimes lead them to become aggrieved and may resort to making complaints about bad service delivery. There are different kinds of customers (inbound and outbound passengers) of airline operators; and they are identified by the nature of behaviors they exhibited during complain process. These behaviors according to Kim (2013) can range from exit, loyalty and voice. Each of these behaviors can put any airline operators who do business in a competitive market place in a disadvantaged position.

Complaint management has become critical in customer relationship management and is considered as an important strategic tool for firms across industries (Strauss and Hill, 2001). Companies have agreed to this position and have become increasingly interested in customers' feedback received to the extent that dissatisfied customers in particular, are often encouraged to voice out their complaints to companies' service representatives (Garrett and Meyers, 1996). Challenges always occasion in managing service quality, as well as the important role played by customers in the service production process, have given a clear indication that customer loyalty drives profitability. It also makes complaints handling a critical "moment of truth" for service organizations in their efforts to acquire, and maintain customers through service satisfaction (Schoefer and Ennew, 2005).

Regrettably, literature on complaint management has not succinctly defined nor empirically identified the nature and scope of communication competence necessary to implement an effective complaint management (Garrett, Meyers and Camey, 1991). In addition, previous customer satisfaction research did not emphasize customers' evaluations of a company's complaint response (Goodwin and Ross, 1990), and on how customers respond to the organizational responses impact on customer complaint in order to provide a company a buffer against the consequences of ineffective complaint handling (Homburg and Furst, 2005).

More so, despite the fact that organizations appreciate the importance of managing complaints, overall customer satisfaction after a failure has not improved (Michel, Bowen and Johnston, 2009). Organizations ought to encourage dissatisfied customers to complain so that they can solve the problem and retain the customer. Unfortunately, most organizations seem not to rise to the challenge of complaining customers and as a result turning down the important opportunity of reclaiming and improving a relationship. Owing to the apparent importance of effective complaints handling, there is a research gap on how organization management should treat all complaining customers to create complaint satisfaction.



Furthermore, report by Phillips Consulting (2015) indicates that there is tremendous growth in the Nigerian airline industry which result in passenger traffic for inbound and outbound destinations rising above 15 million in 2014 out of which domestic traffic accounted for 69%-77% of total air passenger traffic. This growth has put pressure on the key players, due to a surge in the demand for their services. In addition to competition between airlines, there are challenges surrounding the satisfaction of ever discerning customers.

According to Phillips Consulting (2015), most airport facilities are generally inadequate, with many passengers complaining about flight cancellations, lost luggage, poor ticket service, inefficient service and other related problems. These failures combine to reduce customer satisfaction and increase the level of complaints among clients.

In spite of the apparent prevalence and magnitude of these problems, there has been little or no systematic study of the phenomenon in Nigeria in order to assess the complaint handling and service recovery in the Nigerian airline industry. The contentious issue is what steps or strategic options are always put in place by airline operators in Nigeria to respond to complaints lodged by the aggrieved clients who have experienced bad or defective service? The focus of this paper is to attempt an assessment of complaint handling and service recovery in the Nigerian airline industry.

In order to achieve the general objective of the study and to adequately address the research problem, the following research questions are asked:

1. What are the behaviors exhibited by clients in typical complaint situations usually evidenced in local airports in Nigeria?
2. What are the strategic approaches that local airlines operators adopt to respond to complaints lodged by their aggrieved clients?
3. What are the main service failures evidenced in service delivery in the Nigeria airline industry?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Complaint Management

A complaint is an expression of discontent by a customer/consumer, addressed to a service provider, third parties or consumer protection agencies in the event of service failure (Ateke et al, 2015). It is a set of behavioural and non-behavioral responses, some or all of which are triggered by perceived dissatisfaction with a purchase episode (Singh, 1989). Complaints can also be looked at as those actions that directly convey expressions of dissatisfaction following service deliveries that fall short of acceptable or tolerable standards (Halstead & Droge, 1991). Customers complain when they experience a service performance that falls below their expectation, and the consequent dissatisfaction they feel. Thus, dissatisfied customers are more likely to complain than satisfied ones (Keiningham et al, 2015). Complaint handling is therefore the procedures and actions of service providers aimed at addressing customer complaints and recovering dissatisfied customers (Taleghani et al, 2011). Based on the



various ways customers express their displeasure with service failure, Crie and Ladwein (2002) identify complainers and non-complainers as two distinct groups of customers that experience dissatisfaction; while Taleghani et al (2011), Singh (2008), Strauss (2002, 2004) and Stauss and Schoeler (2004) classify consumers into four broad categories based on their reactions to dissatisfaction. These are passives, voicers, irates and activists.

Understanding consumers' complaining behaviour requires a continuous assessment of negative feedback and criticism from consumers. Firms must therefore not only carry out sophisticated computerized analysis, but should also contact dissatisfied customers directly to ascertain their grouse against of the company (Verma & Kaur, 2001). This is because firms are in a continual search for better ways of serving their customers so as not to lose them to competitors who are keen on attracting new customers. And also, because a firm that does not look after its own customer will lose them to some others that can attract them with cheaper and better offerings (Ateke et al, 2015). Common practices that serve to assess good complaint handling schemes in organizations exist. George et al (2007) and BSI (2004) identify these practices as standards for effective complaint handling; and they include visible procedures, easy and free access, responsiveness, objectivity, commitment, confidentiality, customer-focused approach, fairness and organisational ownership and continual improvement. These may also serve as standard guidelines for effective complaint handling.

Complaints and the processes for handling them are important issues for service providers because they have the potential to have an adverse effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Anderson, 1994). Two major areas of research are on the motivation or antecedents for complaining behaviour (Bolfing, 1989); customer factors like demographic characteristics (Tronvoll, 2007); attitudes and experience with regard to complaining behaviour (Singh,

1990). Research on CCB has focused mainly on the customer's attitude towards complaining (Richins, 1983), attribution of blame and the likelihood of a successful solution (Singh, 1990). Lovelock et al., (2001) recommends effective generic guidelines in the successful resolution of complaints. They include acting expediently to resolve the issue; acknowledging mistakes without being defensive; not arguing with customers; openness in solving the problem; considering the possibility of compensation trying to regain the goodwill of customers (McCole, 2004).

The classifications commonly cited in the relevant literature are by Hirschman (1970); Day and Landon, (1977); and Singh (1988). Research on CCB enables academics and practitioners to gain a better understanding of the processes that emerge during and after the service (disappointing) experience to be loyal, seek redress or exit, based on the various taxonomies. Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit, voice and loyalty was one of the foremost scholars to conceptualize customer complaining behaviour and his, is one of the most accepted taxonomies. Hirschman (1970) focused on political parties and the possibility of members being able to change political strategy and aims. According to Hirschman (1970), the customer has three options, namely voice a complaint to the seller or a third party; exit the relationship with the seller through switching or take no action (loyalty). Exit can be seen as an economic action and voice is more of a political statement. The model suggests that the customer's action is dependent on the degree of customer loyalty and that loyal customers use their voice when they experience a reduction in quality. Heung and Lam, (2003) agree with Day and Landon (1977). Several researchers have added to Hirschman's



conceptualized model and have empirically confirmed that the three predictor's model finds reliable measures for exit, voice and loyalty (Andreasen, 1985). Hirschman's three-dimensional classification schemes have had a vital impact on complaining behaviour research and have influenced the work of political scientists, sociologists, social psychologists and marketers. His research has increased the interest and understanding of CCB and has resulted in a large collection of complaint data. It has also enlightened the conceptual structure of complaining behaviour and service recovery research. Huefner and Hunt, (2000), for example, have extended Hirschman's complaint model and included retaliation as an additional behavioural outcome.

The disappointed customers who take no action have the explanation that it may not be worth the time and effort (Heung and Lam, 2003). The action taken by consumers includes complaining to the seller, stopping patronage and diverting to mass media (Heung and Lam,

2003). Hirschman (1970), Day and Landon, (1977) and Tronvoll, (2007) described CCB with terms "take some action" or "take no action"; "private or public action". Private action is a type of action that may not be brought to the attention of the organization; there is little effort on behalf of the consumer to complain. The issue of action/no action may depend on the nature and importance of the product which is causing dissatisfaction, plus the evaluation of the effort and time required to make a complaint and the perceived outcome. Singh (1990) suggests that consumers tend to use third-parties: when other CCB options cannot be executed and when they think that direct voice to the organization is unlikely to be successful. However, the customer dissatisfied with service recovery may take all the options by voicing a complaint to the seller and to the third party, and exiting.

Service Failure and Service Recovery

Service failures are inevitable and can occur in both the process and the outcome of service delivery; and are more variable in services than goods (Morrison and Huppertz, 2010). Service failure is the problem that a customer has with a service and has been categorized as failure of the core service such as failure to get one's money from an automatic teller machine (ATM) or product and policy failures as attributable to the organization or the customers. They include situations when the service fails to live up to the customer's expectations (Johnston & Michel, 2008). If service providers recognize that the complaining process is interwoven with the co-creation process, it will be necessary to empower employees with regard to better procedures for handling negative critical incidents (Gruber, Szmigin and Voss, 2009). Organizations should use service failures to identify service system problems, reduce customer defections, increase loyalty and positive WOM communication (Spreng, Mackoy and Harrel, 1995).

There are different consequences of service failures including dissatisfaction, a decline in customer confidence, negative WOM behaviour and customer defection (Miller et al., 2000; Tronvoll, 2010). This includes "situations in which a service failure occurs but no complaint is lodged by the consumer" (Smith, Bolton & Wagner, 1999) which leads to loss of revenue and increased costs, or a decrease in employee morale and performance. Tax et al. (1998) assert that managing complaints well and recovering customers after a service failure and a complaint, should be the cornerstone of an organization's customer satisfaction strategy.



According to Miller, Craighead & Karwan (2000) service recovery refers to actions taken by a service provider in an attempt to resolve the problem that caused a service failure. Service failure is itself determined by elements such as the nature of the service encounter, the cause of the problem and the psychographics of the individuals involved. It is defined from the customers' perspective because what an organization needs to recover from is dissatisfaction that a customer perceives in relation to a service regardless of the cause (Komunda and Osarenkhoe, 2012). Effective service recovery has a positive impact on post recovery Word of Mouth and results in complainant satisfaction and recovery (Ndubisi and Ling, 2006). However, a growing number of researchers have identified service recovery as a rather neglected aspect of service marketing and one that warrants much attention (Kim et al., 2003; Ndubuisi and Ling, 2006).

Extant literature has been reviewed on service recovery with both theoretical and empirical assessments by Johnston (1998); Maxham and Netemeyer, (2003) and Davidow (2003). Researchers have modeled the antecedents and outcomes of service recovery (Bougie et al., 2003) from a theoretical perspective (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003) and an empirical perspective (McCollough, Berry & Yadav, 2000). They include organizational responses to service recovery (Davidow, 2003), satisfaction and service recovery (McCollough et al., 2000), reasons for not complaining (Stephens, 2000), service-recovery and perceptions of justice (Blodgett and Anderson, 2000). A common theme in all service recovery reviews is the need for customer satisfaction with the organization's recovery efforts (Tax et al., 1998); otherwise many negative outcomes will result, including lost sales and negative WOM and defections (Tronvoll, 2010). The operations function has the key responsibility and capacity to effectively recover from failures (Miller et al., 2000). Understanding the impact of service recovery on customer loyalty has important implications for the design of the service delivery and recovery systems (Miller et al., 2000); in problem prevention and providing superior recovery when problems occur (Parasuraman et al., 2005). The research sets out to understand how effective handling of customer complaints and service recovery process can turn angry and disappointed customers into loyal ones.

Service recovery refers to the actions a supplier takes to seek out dissatisfaction and in response to poor service quality, like service failure (Andreassen, 2000). Service recovery has to do with "those actions designed to resolve problems, alter negative attitudes of dissatisfied customers and to ultimately retain these customers" (Miller et al., 2000, p.38). Poor service recovery threatens the long-term survival of the organization (Michel & Meuter, 2008; Thwaites & Williams, 2006). Hence, if service organizations do not manage service recovery properly, it could harm their long-term success prospects. When organizations carry out effective complaint handling, this can have a great impact on customer retention rates, deflect the spread of damaging WOM, and improve bottom line performance (Morrison & Huppertz, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Based on the current study on complaint management and service recovery, a review of previous studies suggested the use of theoretical foundations (Oyewole, 2001; Westwood, Pritchard and Morgan, 1999). To this end, this study assesses complaints handling and service recovery in the Nigerian airline industry. Among the theories such as Justice theory, equity and perceived- justice theory has been validated as a powerful and parsimonious



framework for explaining complaints handling in the airline industry.

Justice theory is an important concept that helps to understand how dissatisfied customers evaluate complaint responses (Gruber, Szmigin and Voss, 2009). From surveys by Maxham III and Netemeyer (2003), justice theory has been used to provide evidence to those customers who perceive the organizational response to a complaint as fair, display higher levels of post complaint satisfaction than those who perceive the response as unfair. Fairness is perceived when the ratio of an individual's output (benefits) to inputs (financial and non-financial efforts) is balanced with the ratio of the other party (Adams, 1965). Attribution theory is also used to explain CCB and Customer behaviour responses (CBR). Fairness/equity theory is relevant where exchange takes place and it can be attained through effectively handling customer complaints (Adams, 1965).

Equity theory is of the view that consumers are prone to spread a negative Word of Mouth (WOM) when they perceive an unfair response to a service failure. When customers perceive that they have not been sufficiently compensated for the damage, they may feel even more annoyed than they were subsequent to the failure. This is because a report of a service failure may imply "unfair" treatment of the customer; service recovery must therefore re-establish justice – from the customer's perspective. With effective handling of complaints, consumers will perceive fair treatment. In the case of a service failure, individuals will perceive inequity and they will try to restore equity by complaining. According to Gruber (2011), complaining customers develop their equity or fairness perceptions by evaluating three facets of the complaint handling encounter: the fairness of the decision making criteria, procedures taken and policies used to accomplish the final outcome (procedural justice), the fairness of the obtained tangible outcomes (distributive justice) and the interactional justice or manner in which the service complaint handling process is carried out (Tax et al., 1998). Several researchers have used equity theory in the explanation of service failure and consumer responses to the failure (Maxham III and Netemeyer, 2003). The argument is that consumer ratings of failing organizations will increase when they offer fair recovery efforts. Researchers have suggested that consumers are prone to spread a negative WOM when they perceive an unfair response to a service failure. Therefore, when customers perceive that they have not been sufficiently compensated for the damage, they may feel even more annoyed than they were subsequent to the failure (Maxham III and Netemeyer, 2003). This is because a report of a service failure may imply "unfair" treatment of the customer; service recovery must therefore re-establish justice – from the customer's perspective (Michel, Bowen and Johnston, 2009).

As Tissot (2003) posits, service researchers have turned to theories of organizational justice to explain customers' reactions to service recovery. Justice perceptions are the individual subjective assessments of organizational responses. The subjective evaluation of the response of the complainant is crucial because perceptions are the subjective, often biased, interpretation of reality that account for individual behaviour (Gelbrich and Roschk, 2010). Blodgett and Anderson, (2000) contend that prior research demonstrates that the behaviour of complainants depends largely on their perceptions of justice. Higher levels of distributive, interactional and procedural justice lead to more favourable repatronage intentions and a decreased likelihood of negative WOM (Blodgett and Anderson, 2000). Complainants who perceive that justice is not served likely become even angrier, engage in negative WOM and exit (Tax et al., 1998). Carr (2007) incorporated justice theory as the



lens from which to view the relationship between the consumer, the service provider and satisfaction.

Distributive justice is “outcome” justice. It focuses on “equity” issues in the mind of the customer – an appraisal of the benefits received relative to the costs (money and time) associated with them. When the organisation does not deliver on expected benefits, leading to a sense of being unfairly treated, this necessitates recovery. In recovery, customers may expect a refund, an apology, or/and compensation (Michel, Bowen and Johnston, 2009). Distributive justice involves dealing with decision outcomes; namely, the principles of equity and equality (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1987). Every customer who initiates a complaint expects some outcome to result from it and it is the expectation of positive outcomes that drives consumer complaint decisions (Oliver, 1997). Most often, however, dissatisfied consumers want a refund, replacement, or compensation when they complain, and most studies of post-complaint satisfaction show that distributive justice in the form of compensation has the greatest impact on customer satisfaction with recovery, repurchase intentions and loyalty (Smith et al., 1999; Tax et al., 1998).

Interactional justice refers to how customers perceive the way they are treated; treatment is perceived as fair when complainants assume that information is exchanged and outcomes are communicated in a polite and respectful manner (Patterson, Colley and Prasongsurkarn, 2006). A complainant procedure is considered fair when it is allegedly easy to access, it provides the complainant with some control over the disposition, is flexible and is concluded in a convenient and timely manner, (Gelbrich and Roschk, 2010). Customers should be treated as individuals whose specific requests are acknowledged (Spreng, Harrel & Mackoy, 1995).

Procedural justice refers to “process” fairness and the evaluation of the procedures and systems used to determine customer outcomes, such as the speed of recovery (Tax et al., 1998) or the information communicated (or not communicated) about the recovery process (Michel, 2002). Procedural justice involves dealing with decision-making procedures, or having a complaint procedure the customers perceive as fair (Folger and Greenberg, 1985). Consumer evaluation of the interaction dimension suggests that the quality of the interpersonal treatment and communication during the encounter are likely to be heavily weighted by consumers when evaluating service encounters (Smith et al., 1999). However, procedural fairness could be mitigated by a rude, impersonal interactional style through which information is obtained and outcomes are communicated. Therefore, employees have the task of handling customer complaints equitably. In case of “unfair” treatment of the customer, service recovery must re-establish justice (from the customer's perspective). This is because justice during service recovery is determined by the customer.

This current study was anchored on Justice Theory because Justice Perceptions are the individual subjective assessments of organizational responses. The subjective evaluation of the response of the complainant is crucial because perceptions are the subjective, often biased, interpretation of reality that account for individual behaviour (Gelbrich and Roschk, 2010). More so, every customer who initiates a complaint expects some outcome to result from it and it is the expectation of positive outcomes that drives consumer complaint decisions (Oliver, 1997).



Empirical Review

Most of the previous studies conducted in the area of complaint management and service recovery provide the evidence that companies with positive attitude to manage customers' complaints and able to retain them have a competitive edge.

The study by Stauss and Schoeler (2004) revealed that service recovery provides an opportunity for firms to generate satisfied customers. The result of the study conducted by Wirtz and Mattila (2004) indicate that the procedures, interactions and outcomes of the service recovery process have joint effect on post-recovery satisfaction. Also, Boshoff (1997) in his study found that customer-firm interaction and service recovery procedures affect post-complaint satisfaction in travel setting. Similarly, the investigation by Hocutt et al (2006) strongly suggests that interactions, redress and responsiveness significantly affect satisfaction and word of mouth in the restaurant setting.

The outcome of the study carried out by Sparks and Callan (1996) and Tyler (1994) believe that post-complaint satisfaction is not based only on the ultimate outcome of the service recovery but also upon the procedures used to reach the outcome. In a similar manner, Nikbin et al (2010) and Sparks and McColl-Kennedy (2001) in their various studies found that the interpersonal interactions in the service recovery process significantly affects customers' evaluation. In the study carried out by Liu et al (2012), the authors found that speed of recovery and customer-firm interactions influence greater post-recovery satisfaction in cloud service. In the different studies conducted by the trio of Maxham and Netemeyer (2002), Maxham (2001), McCollough et al (2000) and Etzel and Silverman (1981), their findings revealed that customers who experience gracious and efficient complaint handling often become a company's best customers because effective complaint handling turns angry customers into loyal ones.

Hence, Ateke et al (2015) in their study found that understanding customers and addressing their complaints satisfactorily through honest interactions, easy access to complaint procedures and offering something tangible and valuable to the customers induces repeat patronage intention and other loyalty behaviours.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology discusses the research design, area of the study, sample and sample techniques, source of data collection, instrument of data collection, validity and reliability of instrument, administration of the instrument and method of data analysis used in this study is discussed.

Research design describes the data collection methods and its analysis (Burns and Bush, 2002). This study adopts a survey design method because of the involvement of large numbers of individuals from whom a representative of the entire population known as sample was collected. The aim of adopting survey method is to obtain detailed information so that the researcher could obtain deeper understanding of the problem in matter, (Yin, 2003) that is complaint management and service recovery in the Nigerian airline industry.

The study covers customers of local airlines in Benin City Airport. The three airlines selected for this study include: Arik Air, Dana Air and Aero Contractors. The findings and conclusion



of this study was based on information and data collected from customers/ passengers who patronize these airlines as at the time of this investigation.

This research covers airline customers in Benin City Airport. Since there was no sampling frame for the study, convenience sampling (a form of non-probability sampling technique) was used. According to Thornhill (2009), convenience sampling offers the researcher the easiest opportunity to obtain the real respondents. In this study, we used Cochran formula for calculating sample size for infinite population which is denoted as $n = z^2 (p) (Q)/e^2$ where n is the sample size, “ Z ” is standard deviation given a corresponding confidence level, “ P ” is the estimated proportion of incidence of cases in the population, “ Q ” is the assumed failure rate while “ e ” is the proportion of sampling error margin given in a particular situation (Luck, Taylor & Robin, 1987). Therefore, sample size of this study was 195 which were determined using the following assumptions: standard deviation given a corresponding confidence level “ Z ” is equal to 1.96, proportion of incidence of cases in the population “ P ” is equal to 0.85, and assumed failure rate “ Q ” is equal to 0.15 while the proportion of error margin “ e ” is equal to 0.05. Therefore,

$$n = z^2 (p) (Q)/e^2$$

$$n = (1.96)^2 (0.85) (0.15)/ (0.05)^2$$

$$n = (3.8416) (0.85) (0.15)/ 0.0025$$

$$n = 0.489804/0.0025$$

$$n = 195.$$

The study utilizes both primary and secondary data. The responses elicited from the sampled respondents, using the research instrument constituted the primary data.

Likert scales (1-5), with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” were used for all questions except the ones that bothered on respondents’ demographic attributes such as age, gender, income, academic qualification and profession. Pre-testing of these measures was conducted through selected aviation customers as well as experts in marketing research. The supervisor of this work contributed immensely for the content validity of the instrument. The items were modified to make them relevant within the context of complaints management and service recovery (See appendices).

In assuring the content validity of the instrument used, the items selected must represent the concept around which generalizations are to be made (Bohmstedt, 1970). The variables selected for the constructs were, therefore, largely adapted from previous studies in to ensure content validity.

First, items for complaints management were taken from the previously validated model developed by Day (1984), secondly, the items to measure behaviors exhibited by customers were taken from previous theory customer complaints behaviors by Hirschman (1970). Information and data for analysis was selected with questionnaire. The questionnaire was brief and direct so as to minimize the problem of unanswered questions. A structured questionnaire was developed to record the responses of airline customers in Benin City Airport. Airline customers were conveniently selected to collect data by self-administered



questionnaires. The questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher. Out of 195 questionnaires distributed, 178 (91.3%) were retrieved. Data analysis was done on the basis of the retrieved questionnaires.

The study made use of descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and mean to find valid percent of responses for each of the local airline and the average percentage in terms of responses for the three airlines (Arik Air, Dana Air and Aero Contractors). In this regard, the mathematical formula used to report the findings are relevant in this study. Thus, customers of the three airlines were asked to select as many as possible expected investigated item (s) for a particular question posed on the questionnaire. The number of investigated items chosen by respondents (nx) were divided by the total number of questionnaire retrieved from the field represented by (nqr) which was multiplied by 100 to get valid percentage for each airline (y): given by the formula $\frac{nx}{nqr} \times 100 = y$. this was followed by finding the mean of the percentages of the three case airlines to get the average percentage given by the formular $\frac{\sum y_{1,2,3=a.p}}{3}$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected in this study are presented and analyzed. Out of a total of 195 questionnaires that were administered, 178 representing 91.2% were retrieved.

The results in tables below are the results of the analysis.

Tables 1: Indicate the Response Rate

Selected Customers in Benin Airport			
Selected Cases	No of Questionnaires Distributed	No of Questionnaire Retrieved	Valid Percentage %
Arik Air (1)	65	59	90.8
Dana Air (2)	65	62	95.4
Aero (3)	65	57	87.7
Total	195	178 (91.3%)	N/A

Field Survey, (2017).

Results in table 1 indicate that 65 questionnaires were sent to customers purposively selected from each of the airlines. 59 were obtained from Arik representing 90.86%, 62 were retrieved from Dana, making 95.4% while 57 representing 87.7% were taken from Aero Contactors.



Table 2: Indicate the Responses Regarding Actual Behaviours Likely to be Exhibited by Airline Customers During Service Failures.

Customers of the Airlines.				
Investigated item (s)	Arik	Dana	Aero	Avg. Perc.
Agreement to Customers Engaging in Behaviors During Service Failures	100 % (59)	96.8% (60)	93% (53)	96.6%
Disagreement to Customers Engaging in Behaviors During Service Failure	0% (0)	3.2% (2)	7.0% (4)	3.4%
Voice	94.9% (56)	100% (62)	98.2% (56)	97.7%
Third-Party Action	96.6% (57)	95.2% (59)	94.7% (54)	95.5%
Private Action	91.5% (54)	98.4% (61)	93% (53)	94.3%

Field Survey, (2019).

The results in table 2 that report on average, 96.6% of responses indicated agreement to engagement in behaviors when service failure occurs as against 3.4% who indicated disagreement. On the actual behaviors, the results in table 2 showed that 97.7% of the responses indicated that customers or passengers who patronize the airlines are likely to voice out; 95.5% of the responses indicate that the customers will take third party action; and lastly, 94.3% of the responses indicate agreement to embarking on private action.

Table 3: Indicates the Responses Regarding Service Recovery Approaches Adopted by Airlines in Handling Customers' Complaints.

Investigated Items	Arik	Dana	Aero	Avg. Perc.
Agreement to handling customers' complaints	93.2% (55)	96.8% (60)	96.5% (55)	95.5%
Disagreement to handling customers' complaints	6.8% (4)	3.2% (2)	3.5%	4.5%
Timeliness	47.5% (28)	45.2% (28)	36.8% (21)	43.2%
Facilitation	35.6% (21)	42% (26)	52.6% (30)	43.4%
Redress	27.1% (16)	51.6% (32)	28.0% (16)	35.6%
Apology	61% (36)	51.6% (32)	80.7% (46)	64.4%
Credibility	47.5% (28)	43.5% (27)	77.2% (44)	56.1%
Attentiveness	81.4% (48)	27.4% (17)	56.1% (32)	55%
Compensation	18.6% (11)	14.5% (9)	21.0% (12)	
Employees Behaviour	81.4% (48)	50% (31)	61.4% (35)	18% 64.3%

Field Survey, (2019)



In table 3 above, on the average, 95.5% responses indicated agreement to handling or responding to customers' complaints by the airlines management as against 4.5% that indicated disagreement. On the specific approaches adopted, the data in table 3 report that 43.2% of the responses indicate agreement to employing of timelines; 43.4% agreement to facilitation; 35.6% agreement to redress; 64.4% recorded agreement to apology. Others include 56.1% who indicated agreement to credibility; 55% indicated agreement to attentiveness; 18% indicated agreement to compensation and 64.3% denoted agreement to employees' behaviour

Table 4: Indicate the Responses Possible Failure Points of Service Delivery Existed at the Airport.

Investigated items	Arik air	Dana	Aero	Avg. Perc.
Agreement to the Existence of Possible Failure Points	100% (59)	96.8 (60)	94.7 (54)	97.2%
Disagreement to the existence of Possible Failure Points	0% (0)	3.2% (2)	5.3% (3)	2.8%
Cleanliness Issues	96.6% (57)	98.4% (62)	96.5% (55)	97.2%
Mechanical Problems	86.4% (51)	87.1% (54)	93% (53)	88.8%
Lack of Responsibility and Accountability During Service Failure	88.1% (52)	92% (57)	96.5% (57)	92.2%
Flight Cancellation	96.6% (57)	97% (60)	98.2% (56)	97.3%
Lost Luggage	98.3% (58)	98.4% (61)	98.2% (55)	98.3%

Field Survey, (2019).

The results in Table 4 reveal that on average, 97.2% of the responses indicated agreement to the existence of possible failure points in service delivery as against 2.8% that indicated disagreement. On the possible and specific failure points, the data in table 4 report that on average 97.2% indicated agreement to cleanliness issues; 88.8% indicated agreement to mechanical problems; 92.2% indicating agreement to lack of responsibility and accountability during service failure, 97.3% agreed that flight cancellation sometimes occur, and lastly 98.3% indicated agreement to lost luggage.

In the results reported in Table 2, majority of the respondents agreed that they will voice out (comment) when a service they have paid for turns out to be bad in terms of delivery. Another majority of the respondents said if after series of voicing out and nothing is done to remedy or redress the defective service provided it is likely that the issue will be reported to an external authority or regulator which in this case can be the Ministry of Aviation or



Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) for appropriate action. Apart from reporting the issue to an external authority, it was found that private action could be engaged. This means that negative word of mouth communication will be passed to family members, friends and loved ones about the bad service received. This will be done to influence potential customers to change the positive perception they have about the services of the airline. Also, the aggrieved customers will persuade the established customers to discontinue patronizing the airline which can also lead to dangers like decrease in clientele base, market share and profit margins. It can be submitted that all these findings are consistent with previous studies that assumes that anytime customers face dissatisfaction, they exhibit several alternatives as behaviors (Hirshman, 1970, Day, 1984; Day and Ash, 1979, Blodgott et al; 1995; Singh and Wilkes, 1996; TARP, 1986; Singh 1988; Kim Dao, 2013).

The results in Table 3 suggest that all the respondents found in the three airlines are familiar with the approaches adopted to respond to clients' complaints elucidated in existing literature. This can be said to be in conformity with existing studies carried out by (Gilly and Gelb, 1982; Goodman, Malech and Boyd, 1987; Tedeschi and Norman, 1985; Levesque and McDoughall, 2000; Morri, 1988; Colon and Murray, 1996; Estelami, 2000; Davidow, 2000) on adopting approaches to respond to customers' complaints or aim at service recovery.

There is clear indication from the results in Table 4 that there are visible and possible failure points evidenced in various forms of service delivery by all the three airlines studied. That is, on average, 97.2% of the customers contacted indicated yes to the issue. On the issue of possible failure points as evidenced in services provided by the three airlines; it was found that on average, 97.2% of the responses recorded for cleanliness, 88.8% mechanical problems; 92.2% indicated lack of responsibility and accountability; 97.3% and 98.3% claimed to have experienced flight cancellation and loss of luggage respectively. Service personnel show clear unwillingness to take responsibility and be accountable for various forms of service failure. They are found of shifting blames on authorities and government even for their own contribution to a service failure.

The findings also revealed that there is lack of communication, which usually occurs in the process of delivering the service. This suggests that airline like any service firms have certain areas of possible failures which is in agreement with the studies of (Hoffman, Kelley and Chung, 2003; Cranage, 2004).

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- (a) In order to avoid been seen as customer unfriendly, the operators of all the three airlines must offer some kind of service support to all passengers who will in the near future be experiencing and affected by service failures. Assistance to be provided can be based on different dimensions of the needs of passengers.
- (b) Managers of the three airlines should effectively monitor, supervise and provide soft skill trainings to workers to enable them handle controlled as well as uncontrolled problems. (c) All the three airlines should consider adopting Customer Relationship Management. This is because CRM is capable of making all the "touch points" where clients interact with the airlines as effective as possible, through accessing valued information that can better and faster serve the clients.



- (d). Authorities of the three airlines should identify and brake down multitasking jobs into more manageable components. This will greatly enhance efficiency among staff of the companies.

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