

## E-SERVICE QUALITY EXPERIENCE AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY: AN EMPHASIS OF THE NIGERIA AIRLINE OPERATORS

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to empirically evaluate the impact of electronic service quality experience on customer loyalty in the Nigeria airline sector. In measuring E-SQE the work of Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2002) was adopted like Website design and reliability, while the work of Wulf and Odekerken (2003) was adopted to measure customer loyalty CL, like Repeat Purchase. The researchers' used questionnaire instrument designed with a 5point Likert Scale from strongly disagree "1" to strongly agree "5". The researchers' adopted convenience sampling in selecting two airline operators in the industry. Thereafter used simple random sampling to select a sample of 100 customers of this operators. Face and content validity were used to ascertain if the questions on the instrument are valid, while Cronbach alpha was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument and a 0.978 reliability level was ascertained. A total of 90 copies of the instrument were returned used, while 10 unused were returned. In analyzing the respondent demographics, tables, simple percentages were used, while regression analysis was used to test the two hypotheses of the study with the ease of statistical package for social sciences SPSS version 17.0. Findings revealed that there is a positive correlation between website design of a company and customers repeat purchase, also findings revealed that the reliability of a company's on-line service impact on customers repeat purchase. We therefore, concluded that Website design and Reliability of e-service quality impact on customers repeat purchase in the aviation industry. The study recommended that since it is essential to meet customers expectation through reliable service and accessible website design, managers of the airline companies should deliver on their promise since it is a significant driver of customer satisfaction which will culminate into customer loyalty, in other words attracts repeat patronage on the airline products or services.

**Keywords:** E-Service Quality Experience, Website Design, Reliability, Repeat Purchase, Airline operators, Nigeria

## **1.0 Introduction**

The relevance of information technology developments in Nigeria aviation industry, can not be underestimated due to its role and inevitability in the committee of nations. No doubt that information technology IT has enhanced the confidence of customers in consuming aviation services. But, recently the Nigerian aviation industry has been journeying a tough phase. For an example the current banking reforms which have created room for liquidity concerns for the industry players and the current rise in the cost of aviation fuel have all orchestrated the mind of player to restrategies her survival (CFS, 2010). Some researchers' such as Teck-Chai et al (2011) studied the impact of e-service quality and customer satisfaction in the airline sector and found a correlation between e-services quality and customer satisfaction. Customer Feedback Services West Africa CFS (2010) carried out a customer satisfaction survey of the Nigerian aviation industry and found that most Nigerians prefer carrying out airline transaction, such as booking online. Sun (2010) studied the relationships among E-service quality, system quality, information quality and customer loyalty, her findings revealed a positive relationship among the variables of e-service quality, system quality, information quality and customer loyalty. But there is no available research on E-service quality experience and customer loyalty in the Nigeria airline sector. Hence, the objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of e-service quality experience on customer loyalty in the Nigerian airline sector. To fill this gap in literature, we recognized that a lot of models have been postulated by different researchers' to measure E-service quality and customer loyalty. But for the purpose of this study the researchers' modified and adopted the measure of E-service quality by Wolfinbarger and Gilly, (2002) such as reliability and Website design. Also in measuring the dependent variable the researchers' adopted the work of Wulf and Odekerken (2003) which is Repeat purchase.

## **2.0 Theoretical Background, Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1 Electronic Service Quality**

Electronic Service quality can be defined as the quality of all internet based customer interactions, purchases and experiences with companies. Also service quality is determined by the difference between expected service and perceived service from companies to customers (Zeithaml, 2000). As earlier mentioned to measure the independent variable we adopted and modified the measures postulated by Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2002) which are website design and reliability. This was because the researchers' assume that every e-service delivery must be reliable and the website well designed if it must deliver satisfaction.

#### **2.1.1 Website Design**

In the electronic service environment, website is the customers' main access to online firms and to attain a successful purchase process. The website design can influence customer's perceived image of a company and attract customers to carryout easy purchasing online with good navigation and useful information on the website page of the company. However, a good website page should be able to provide appropriate information and multiple functions for customers.

#### **2.1.2 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of performance and dependability of company's services, (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985, 1988). Reliability is vital to make customers to trust that the company will perform what it has promised to deliver. It also attracts credibility to the company.

### **2.2 Experience**

Online experience is customers' total impression about the online company resulting from customers' exposure to a combination of virtual marketing tools. Customers' online experience embraces the following, searching, browsing, finding, selecting, comparing and evaluating information as well as interacting and transacting with the online firms (Constantinides, 2004).

## 2.3 Customer Loyalty

According to Ozuru and Kalu (2009) Customer Loyalty refers to the level of faithfulness shown by a customer in continuing to purchase a particular product or service. Also customer loyalty is an indicator of the degree of satisfaction the customer has with the product.

Customer loyalty could also be defined as the feeling of attachment or affection for a company's product or service that will directly influence customer's behaviour, with the aim of keeping and satisfying them and making them buy more of the firm's products.

### 2.3.1 Repeat Purchase

Flavian, Guinaliu and Gurrea,(2005) states that customer loyalty is the consumer's intention or willingness to buy from a company's website now and in the future. Also they suggest that consumers will not change to another competitors' product, but will continue to buy from the company that satisfies their needs.

## 2.4 Relationship between E-Service Quality Experience and Repeat Purchase

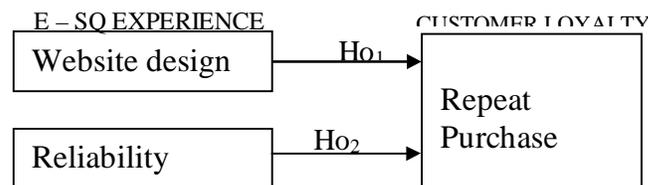
Fassnacht and Kose (2007) in there study revealed that increased satisfaction derived from online services will enhance customers' loyalty. This in other words it means that if a company's online services are reliable to perform her promises and website design also accessible and informative at the right time it will create customer satisfaction and in return the customer will repeat purchase. Sun (2010) in her study revealed that E-service quality has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction. It means that the better e-service quality, the more customer satisfaction and the likelihood of repurchase of these services which is customer loyalty. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** Website design will not have a positive effect on repeat purchase.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** Reliability will not have a positive impact on repeat purchase.

## 2.5 Operational and Conceptual Framework of the Study

The operational and conceptual framework links the two dimensions of e-service quality and customer loyalty. This is presented in fig. 1 below.



## 3.0 Methodology

In other to generate data to test the hypotheses, the researchers' used questionnaire instrument designed with a 5 point Likert scale from strongly disagree "1" to strongly agree "5". The part A of the questionnaire is constructed to measure the respondent demographics, while Part B is constructed with 14 questions to measure e-service quality experience and customer loyalty. The researchers' used convenience sampling to adopt two airline operators in the Nigerian aviation industry in Port Harcourt. Also we used simple random sampling to select 100 customers of these airline companies. Copies of the instrument were given to four scholars in this area to evaluate the validity of the questions on the questionnaire, these instrument were retrieved and necessary corrections were made, thereafter, the researchers' did a pre-test administration of the questionnaire on some students to ascertain if the questions on the instruments are understood and the retrieved data were subjected to the Cronbach alpha statistical technique to ascertain the reliability level of the instrument. Thereafter 5 undergraduate students' were used to distribute 100 copies of the instrument on the customers. A total of 90 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved while 10 copies were not retrieved. Regression analysis was used to analyze the dependent and independent variables, with the ease of Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS.

#### 4.0 Results and Findings

**Table 4.1 Analysis of Respondent Demographics**

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	40	44
	Female	50	56
	Total	90	100
Age	15-25	10	11
	26-35	30	33
	36-45	41	46
	46-55	9	10
	56-above	-	-
	Total	90	100
Frequency of internet usage per week	1-3hrs	20	22.22
	3-5hrs	20	33.33
	More than 5hrs	40	44.45
	Total	90	100
Frequency of airline usage per month	1-3times	40	44.45
	3-5times	38	42.22
	5-10times	12	13.33
	Total	90	100
Minimum Educational qualification	SSCE	8	8.89
	BSC/HND	70	77.78
	Master/PhD	12	13.33
	Total	90	100

From table 4.1 above 40 respondents representing 44% are male, while 50 representing 56% of the respondents are female, this means that the respondents are more of female customers. 10 representing 11% of the respondents are between 15-25yrs, 30 representing 33% are between 26-35yrs, 41 representing 46% of the respondents are between 36-45yrs, 9 representing 10% are between 46-55yrs, while none was between 56 and above. This means that majority of the respondents are between 36-45yrs. Also, 20 representing 22.22% of the respondents use internet 1-3hours weekly, 30 representing 33.33% use internet 3-5hrs weekly, and 40 representing 44.45% use the internet more than 5hrs weekly. This means that majority of the respondents understand the term electronic service quality experience.

Again 40 respondents representing 44.45% travel by air 1-3times per month, 38 representing 42.22% fly 3-5times, while 12 representing 13.33% fly 5-10times monthly. This analysis means that majority of our respondents fly between 1-3times per month and stands a good chance to experience e-service deliveries and can report reliably to asked questions.

Finally, 8 respondents representing 8.89% holds SSCE, 70 representing 77.78% hold BSC/HND, while 12 representing 13.33% holds masters/PhD. This analysis reveals that majority of our respondents are BSC/HND holders, meaning they are educated and will understand the questions on the instrument, thereby responding adequately to the questionnaire.

However, the Cronbach alpha analysis of test of reliability revealed that Cronbach alpha coefficient for web design is 0.973, also reliability is revealed as 0.955 and repeat purchase is 0.974. This means that the instrument is very reliable.

**Table 4.2: Regression Analysis on the relationship between web design and repeat purchase****Variables Entered/Removed<sup>b</sup>**

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	WEB DESIGN <sup>a</sup>		Enter

a. All requested variables entered.

b. Dependent Variable: REPEAT PURCHASE

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.980 <sup>a</sup>	.961	.960	1.176

a. Predictors: (Constant), WEB DESIGN

**ANOVA<sup>b</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2982.726	1	2982.726	2157.240	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	121.674	88	1.383		
	Total	3104.400	89			

a. Predictors: (Constant), WEB DESIGN

b. Dependent Variable: REPEAT PURCHASE

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.263	.516		.510	.611
	WEB DESIGN	1.434	.031	.980	46.446	.000

a. Dependent Variable: REPEAT PURCHASE

From the above table the coefficient of correlation  $R^2$  of 0.961 reveals that there is a strong positive relationship between web design and repeat purchase. Therefore the  $H_{01}$  is rejected and  $H_{a1}$  accepted, meaning there is a positive relationship between WD and RP.

**Table 4.3: Regression Analysis on the relationship between reliability and repeat purchase****Variables Entered/Removed<sup>b</sup>**

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	RELIABILITY		.Enter

a. All requested variables entered.

b. Dependent Variable: REPEAT PURCHASE

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.977 <sup>a</sup>	.954	.954	1.272

a. Predictors: (Constant), RELIABILITY

**ANOVA<sup>b</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2961.971	1	2961.971	1830.058	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	142.429	88	1.619		
	Total	3104.400	89			

a. Predictors: (Constant), RELIABILITY

b. Dependent Variable: REPEAT PURCHASE

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.674	.438		12.939	.000
	RELIABILITY	1.249	.029	.977	42.779	.000

a. Dependent Variable: REPEAT PURCHASE

From the table above, the coefficient of correlation  $R^2$  of 0.954 reveals that there is a strong positive relationship between reliability and repeat purchase. Therefore the  $H_{02}$  is rejected and  $H_{a2}$  accepted, meaning there is a positive relationship between R and RP.

## **6.0 Discussion and Conclusion**

As earlier mentioned, the importance of information technology can not be undermined. Electronic service quality delivery and customer satisfaction which leads to customer loyalty if the consumption experience is positive has grown into a cardinal factor for success in business. However, one of the ways to enjoy customer loyalty by a firm is to deliver better and high quality e-services. Based on previous studies conducted, this paper has been able to reveal that the Wolfinberger and Gilly (2002) model as modified as well as the Wulf and Odekerken (2003) model, respectively fits the data for this study. The results of the data analysis and hypotheses tested revealed that Website design impact on repeat purchase of airline products and services, this finding is in line with the findings of Fassnacht and Kose (2007). The second hypotheses tested revealed that reliability of the airlines online services has significant and positive impact on customers repeat purchase. This result is consistent with that found by Sun (2010).

Therefore, in conclusion if airline operators can provide better and reliable e-service product to boost customer satisfaction, it would in turn make their customer loyal (Repeat purchase) in consuming their products and services. Also, the loyal customers' will advocate their services to other prospective customers.

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing airline operators, having been exposed through this study on the imperativeness of a better e-service quality which would culminate into customer loyalty should; improve upon their online service deliveries by increasing their online infrastructure so as to deliver upon their promise of reliability. The companies should create a 24/7 functional customer complaints page on the website, wherein customers can interact with their staff where difficulties are experienced.

Also, online price slash incentives should be given to customers from time to time. If these recommendations are implemented customers will remain satisfied and repeat purchase of their product as well as advocate for the affected airline.

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