

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE NIGERIAN AVIATION SECTOR

Adebayo Adebayemi Abdulwasiiu, PhD

Department of Business & Entrepreneurship, Kwara State University, Malete

adeyemi.adebayo@kwasu.edu.ng

Abstract

Due to competition that is evolving in Nigerian aviation industry and the need to build relationship with customer has results in the aviation sector's quest to device effective marketing communication elements to generate satisfaction. This study investigated the impact of marketing communication on customer relationships on the selected aviation businesses in Lagos state. The study employed an exploratory research design. The study further utilized a survey method with questionnaires to collect primary data from domestic customers of the chosen airlines. The sample size of 246 was determined using Godden (2004) model as a result of infinite nature of the population of the study and multistage sampling techniques was also used. A total of 150 copies of questionnaires were gathered for data analysis from the 246 copies of questionnaires distributed. Standard multiple regression was employed to analyze the data. The findings indicated that advertising showed a significant relationship with customer relationships ($\beta = .227$, $t = 2.015$, $p < .011$), and sales promotion also exhibited a positive and significant relationship with customer relationships ($\beta = 0.412$, $t = 1.925$, $p = .005$). The study concluded that implementing effective marketing communication elements such as advertising and sales promotion by aviation service providers enhances the relationship between the firm and its customers by facilitating interaction between customers and the service providers. The study recommends that aviation service providers should formulate their communication strategies to raise awareness, stimulate interest and desire, and prompt actions among customers toward their services. This approach aims to establish robust customer relationships capable of enduring the dynamic business environment and enhancing customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Advertising, Aviation, Customer relationship, Customer satisfaction, Marketing communication, Sales Promotion

Introduction

The airline industry is a vital part of Nigeria's transportation sector, making a significant economic contribution. While it contributes a smaller percentage to GDP than the road subsector, its direct impact is substantial, accounting for 6% to 7% of annual transportation revenue. The sector supports over 255,500 jobs and contributes approximately \$941 million to the GDP, with projections to reach \$1.7 billion by the end of 2025 (Nigerian Tribune Newspaper, 2025). According to the Nigeria Agenda 2050 report, the country's airline sector has achieved significant milestones in air safety, service, and economic growth. The sector's contribution to GDP grew from 0.06% in 2010 to 0.121% in 2019, and its share of total transport increased from 4.7% to 7.88% over the same period. The sector is also expanding, with passenger traffic reaching 17.5 million in 2019, and projections to increase passenger

capacity to over 45 million and cargo capacity to over 276,848 tons (World Bank Annual Report, 2020).

The concept of customer relationship management (CRM) originated in developed economies, primarily in organizations whose priority is to retain existing customer base as an important business segment especially in competitive environment (Pisker & Faganel, 2019). CRM is a philosophy, process, concept of development and management of customer relationships. With implemented CRM concept aviation industry are able to identify and anticipate customer`s needs and desires (Ogundipe & Victor, 2000). It is worthy of note that degree of competition and its association with market concentration is always a subject of controversy in aviation sector of Nigerian economy. In the highly competitive Nigerian aviation industry, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and customer satisfaction are critical for success and survival. With numerous private airlines vying for passengers, effective CRM strategies are seen as essential for building customer loyalty and gaining a competitive edge. Research indicates that customer satisfaction in the Nigerian aviation industry is influenced by several service quality attributes.

Customer relationship management, as the name implies, is saddled with the responsibility of establishing, developing and sustaining relational partnerships between an organization and its clients. It is becoming an important issue in marketing in order to gain customer loyalty, improve customer relations rates, as well as increase profits. According to Kuo-chung and Chin-shan (2022), Customer relations management refers to a management approach that seeks to create, develop, and enhance relationships with carefully targeted customers in order to maximize customer value and corporate profitability.

Customer relationship management also entails building or establishing a relationship between an organization and its customers through excellent service provision/delivery in order to create an impressionable opinion of the organization in the minds of the customers. Some organizations that have thrived in business over the years are those that carved a niche for themselves as customer friendly enterprises. In most cases, the difference between ailing and thriving companies or organizations lies in their customer service orientations.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is becoming an important issue in marketing in order to gain customer loyalty, improve customer retention rates (Nwodo *et al.*, 2025). In the highly competitive Nigerian aviation sector, customer relationship management (CRM) is no longer just an option—it is a strategic imperative for survival and growth. This study aims to provide an insightful, empirical understanding of the link between CRM and

customer satisfaction, a key determinant of an airline's success. As the industry faces pressures from globalization, technological advancements, and a discerning customer base, airlines must move beyond transactional interactions to foster lasting, value-driven relationships.

Statement of the Problem

While the importance of CRM is widely recognized, the Nigerian aviation industry faces significant challenges in its implementation. These include infrastructural limitations, financial constraints, and managerial issues. However, addressing these challenges presents an opportunity for airlines to stand out. By investing in CRM, particularly through technology and robust feedback mechanisms, airlines can move beyond traditional service models to create a more personalized and satisfying customer journey (Adeniran & Kanyio, 2019).

In essence, the general overview is that while the Nigerian aviation industry is a vital and growing sector, many airlines still struggle to meet customer expectations. The adoption of well-thought-out CRM strategies is not just a best practice but a necessity for enhancing customer satisfaction, building loyalty, and ultimately, securing a sustainable competitive advantage

Passengers frequently voice their dissatisfaction with a range of systemic issues that detract from a positive travel experience. These concerns are not isolated incidents but rather recurring problems that significantly impact customer perception and loyalty. A primary source of frustration is unpredictable and persistent flight delays and cancellations, which disrupt travel plans and can lead to significant financial and personal inconvenience. Beyond scheduling issues, poor customer service is a major pain point, often characterized by unresponsive staff, inadequate communication, and a general lack of empathy during stressful situations. Furthermore, baggage handling issues, including lost, damaged, or delayed luggage, are a significant source of distress for travellers. These negative experiences, as highlighted by Gambo *et al.* (2016), collectively contribute to a broader sense of distrust and dissatisfaction among passengers. They underscore a critical need for airlines to not only address these operational failures but also to proactively manage their customer relationships to rebuild confidence and enhance the overall travel experience.

Review of related Literatures

Customer Relationship Management

Customer relations, a marketing objective involving interactions with an organization's stakeholders, plays a crucial role in today's business environment as organizations are facing intense competition, making it crucial to retain existing customers while attracting new ones

(Fiiwe, *et al.*,2023). Customer relationship management (CRM) shifts the focus from merely the goods or services offered to the value customers derive from them. Companies aim to establish effective communication and relationships with their valued consumers through CRM strategies. Fraihat *et al.* (2023) note that to attain this objective, businesses are making use of various strategies, including customer relationship management (CRM), which has surfaced as a vital instrument for organizations to retain and satisfy their customers profitably.

Marketing fosters a mutually beneficial exchange where both parties derive value, necessitating effective communication across various relationship platforms (Eltahir, *et al.*, 2021). The process through which an organization cultivates customer satisfaction to ensure loyalty is known as customer relationship management. Satisfied customers are more likely to continue purchasing and recommending products to others, underscoring the importance for service providers in today's corporate landscape to deeply understand their clientele and meet their needs with value-added goods and services (Adebayo, 2021).

As evidenced by the relationship marketing concept, maintaining superior customer relationships embedded building relationship with individual customers through the services offered to them which will build up the relationship between the company and the customer and finally provide added value to the company. (Kakeesh, *et al.*, 2021). Mustapha *et al.*, (2023) highlighted the main goals of Customer relationship management as to the value long-lasting supportive relationships with the old customers and the upcoming customers. By doing this, it helps to retain old customers based on improvement gathered from the experience; to win new customers; win new contacts; to increase profitability and reduce costs related to managing customers. Furthermore, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) focuses on the worth that customer gets rather than the products or services to be put up for sale by the company. Through the execution of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), companies are expected to be able to set up communication and a better-quality relationship with their treasured customers (Adebayo, 2024).

The core of CRM lies in understanding and treating customers in a manner that enhances their loyalty and consequently boosts company revenues (Adebayo, 2021). Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has been applauded by the several research studies as opined by Kakeesh *et al.*, (2021) as a managerial viewpoint which is found to be strongly connected to the philosophy of marketing as well as information technology, enhancing the value of the brand in the minds of customers. Olasojumi, *et al.*, (2021) also found that CRM is a sequence of numerous methods of information technology for making an effective handling of CRM.

Loyal customers, as observed by (Yum & Yoo, 2023), tend to develop stronger ties with businesses and exhibit distinct behavioral patterns compared to less loyal customers. In summary, customer relationship management is a strategic approach aimed at understanding customer needs and behaviors to establish enduring relationships that ensure repeat business (Chikako & Hamu, 2021). Providing adaptable service quality and overall excellence has historically been fundamental to successful business practices across all sectors.

Customer Satisfaction

The term "customer satisfaction" is often used in business and marketing. Organizations nowadays must contend with fierce competition from other businesses. Marketing academics often claim that companies may outperform their rivals if they can go from a product and sales perspective to a marketing philosophy where the interest of the customer will be the primary priority for the service providers. The secret is to satisfy and fulfill client demands in a way that is both better and advantageous. Diverse authorities and intellectuals have reached a consensus in their conceptual explanation of consumer happiness.

According to Singh, *et al.*, (2023), customer satisfaction is defined as the insight of the customer's prospect being met as a result of the goods or services received. It examines the magnitude of satisfaction or pleasure a customer goes through after relating to a business. Fulfilled customers feel that their needs and wishes have been met or exceeded, and they recognize value in the products or services purchased. Juni, *et al.*, (2023) posit fulfilled customers will have a high magnitude and velocity of loyalty to the products and services provided compared to discontented customers. A happy consumer is more likely to become a devoted customer, repurchase goods, favorably participate in recommending items to other customers, and be less price sensitive. Customers are more inclined to stick with a brand or product if they are happy with it and are also more likely to tell others about it or buy it again rather than trying other brands.

Permana, *et al.*, (2020) asserts that the main solution to please the hearts of customers is by providing most favorable impact and satisfaction to customers so that the effect will build loyalty emphasizing that these expectations are crucial and extend beyond mere enjoyment. According to Kotler (2016), customer satisfaction is assessed based on how well a product's perceived performance aligns with a customer's expectations. They further explain that if the product performance falls short of expectations, customers will be dissatisfied, whereas meeting or surpassing expectations leads to satisfaction. Jobber and Jobber and Ellis-Chadwick (2024) corroborate this by noting that customers experience happiness when the perceived

performance meets or exceeds their expectations. It is cautioned by businesses not to overstate advertising claims to create unrealistic customer expectations, as highlighted by Adebayo (2023), as this can result in dissatisfaction when performance fails to meet these expectations. Expectations are shaped by various factors, including discussions with others, post-purchase experiences, and marketing efforts from the supplier.

Theoretical Review

Assimilation-Contrast Theory of Customer Satisfaction

The Assimilation hypothesis emerged from the understanding that consumers evaluate products after using them (Adebayo, 2023). Assimilation-contrast hypothesis explores how consumers perceive product performance post-exposure, drawing on assimilation and contrast effects. According to this hypothesis, when a consumer's performance expectations align with their acceptable range, any disparity between expectations and actual performance is typically overlooked. Instead, the consumer assimilates the performance and considers it satisfactory. However, if the performance falls outside the acceptable range, the contrast effect takes precedence, magnifying the difference and leading to dissatisfaction with the product or service.

The Assimilation-Contrast theory is an additional framework that aims to explain how variables interact within the disconfirmation model. It integrates concepts from both assimilation and contrast theories. According to this theory of customer satisfaction, satisfaction is determined by the size and direction of the gap between expected and actual performance. Like the assimilation theory, customers generally adjust or assimilate discrepancies in their perceptions of product performance to reconcile them with their initial expectations, especially when the deviation is minimal.

Empirical Review

Juni, *et al.*, (2023) investigated a study with the purpose to determine the consequence of product quality, service quality and price on customer satisfaction. The research adopted quantitative methods in addition to explanatory research. The population of the study is the customers of Fruts Café, with a sample size of 110. The result of the study shows that product quality, service quality and price have a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty through customer satisfaction while product quality and service quality have no significant effect on customer loyalty, while price has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty.

Subiyantoro (2021) conducted exploratory research revealing that product simplicity and quality significantly impact customer satisfaction, whereas service quality and pricing have minimal influence on customer happiness. This study aimed to assess the effects of service quality, convenience, pricing, and product quality on consumer happiness and loyalty, based on a sample of 140 consumers selected through convenience sampling. The analysis employed Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis, concluding that service quality, convenience, price, and product quality strongly influence customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction playing a pivotal role.

Saneva and Chorstoseva (2020) conducted research exploring the relationship between service quality, customer happiness, and customer loyalty in fast-food restaurants. The study included 148 questionnaires distributed to the respondents physically; the results of the study indicate a significant impact of service quality on satisfaction and loyalty, thereby highlighting the critical role of customer satisfaction in driving customer loyalty. Adebayo (2021) analyzed the relationship between effective communication and customer happiness in a specific hotel company in Offa and Ilorin metropolitan areas of Kwara State, Nigeria. Primary and secondary data were used to gather necessary information for the study. The results identified communication channel and message design as predictors of customer happiness, emphasizing a strong association between communication mediums and consumer loyalty. Based on these findings, the study recommended that both senior management and junior staff establish effective communication strategies to retain existing customers and attract new ones.

Method

This study employs exploratory research design to examine the impact of customer relationship management on customer relationships in Nigerian airline sector with emphasis on the selected airline businesses (Air Peace, Arik Air, Dana Air, and Azman Air) in Lagos state as area of study. The population of the study is infinite in nature as the sample size was determined using Godden (2004) to arrive at 246. A survey method was employed, utilizing a self-administered questionnaire, and a multistage sampling approach was utilized, involving multiple sampling procedures at different stages to select sample respondents. The analysis was conducted using SPSS software.

To ascertain the validity of the instrument, content validity was adopted. The instruments were validated by the researcher's superior researcher who have more wealth of knowledge on the subject matter to scrutinize the questionnaire to ensure that the questions

therein are not at variance with the subject matter under study. They ensured that the instruments represent the entire range of possible items to be tested in the study.

A total of fifty (50) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the experts in the field with the help of research assistants. Forty-five (45) were retrieved from the respondents and used for the pilot study. The observation received from pilot test was used to revise the items for the quality improvement of the questionnaire.

Table 1: Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients Table

Variables	Cronbach Alpha Coefficients
i. Customer Relationship Management	.743
ii. Advertising	.751
iii. Sales Promotion	.863
iv. Customer Satisfaction	.845

In this study, the customer relationship management, advertising, Sales promotion and customer satisfaction scales have good internal consistency. By implication, all the scales are reliable.

Results

Multiple regression analysis was used to establish the relationship between communication (Sales Promotion and Advertising) outcome and customer relationship in the selected airline businesses in Lagos state.

Table 1: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Durbin-Watson
1	.720 ^a	.520	.492	1.06378	1.970

a. Predictors: (Constant), Sales Promotion, Advertising

b. Dependent Variable: Corporate Reputation

Sources: *Researcher’s Survey, 2024*

In Table 1 above, the model summary reveals that the R-Square value is 0.520. This indicates that the independent variable (marketing communication) explains 52% of the variance in the dependent variable (customer relationship), while the remaining 48% of the variance is attributable to other variables not included in the model. This suggests that the

regression model is effective in generating hypotheses based on the relationship between marketing communication and customer relationship.

Table 2: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.203	2	25.701	26.684	.000 ^b
	Residual	123.745	167	.925		
	Total	143.480	148			

a. Dependent Variable: Corporate Reputation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Sales Promotion, Advertising

Sources: *Researcher's Survey, 2024*

The findings regarding the analysis of revisit intention, as detailed in Table 9, underscore several key points. Firstly, the regression sum of squares (31.203) significantly outweighs the residual sum of squares (123.745), indicating the model's robust ability to explain the variability observed in revisit intention. This highlights the model's effectiveness in capturing the factors influencing customers' likelihood to revisit. Moreover, the estimated F-value (26.684) provided in the table, alongside a highly significant p-value of 0.000, underscores the collective influence of marketing communication on changes in customer relationships. This statistical significance, well below the conventional threshold of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), provides compelling evidence that marketing communication plays a pivotal role in shaping and enhancing customer relationships within the context of the study. In essence, these findings reinforce the notion that effective marketing communication strategies are crucial for fostering positive customer relationships, thereby influencing customers' intentions to revisit selected airline businesses in Lagos state.

Table 3: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	2.312	.320	Beta	7.234	.000
	Advertising	.227	.251	.111	2.015	.011
	Sales Promo.	.412	.229	.420	1.925	.005

a. Dependent Variable: Corporate Reputation

Sources: *Researcher's Survey, 2024*

Table 3 depicts the dependent variable, which assesses the influence of marketing communication on customer relations, serving as a basis for examining the relationship with two independent variables: advertising and sales promotion. Regarding the correlation between

advertising and customer connection, the results demonstrate a significant relationship ($\beta = .227, t = 2.015, p < .011$), thus confirming Hypothesis H1a. According to Hypothesis H1b, there exists a positive association between customer relations and sales promotion. The findings reveal a statistically significant positive correlation between sales promotion and customer connection ($\beta = 0.412, t = 1.925, p = .005$), supporting Hypothesis H1b at the 10% significance level.

Overall, the summary of this regression analysis underscores the substantial impact of marketing communication coefficients on customer relationships within selected airline businesses in Lagos state. This implies the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis over the null hypothesis. Consequently, marketing communication plays a pivotal role in shaping customer relationships in selected airline businesses in Lagos state, aligning with findings from previous studies by Adebayo (2021).

Conclusion

Based on the data analyzed, it was discovered that the variables used in the study, for example, advertising significantly shows that the airline customers tend to have access to information on the airline's website which will enhance and improves customers' understanding of the airline business services as the sales promotion of the airline business would also stimulate the interest of their customers during the off-seasons. In contrast, the variables if implemented by the selected airline businesses in Lagos state without a constraint tend to increase the expenses of the firm in relation to their budget as the airline business would also needs to spend heavily to monitor the activities of the competitors from distracting the firm's target audience from receiving the messages the way it is meant to be.

The study concluded that effective implementation of communication elements by airline management significantly enhances the relationship between the company and its loyal customers. These communication elements provide customers with platforms for interaction with airline business management, thereby fostering a stronger and more enduring customer connection. The study emphasized that utilizing these fundamental communication components and ensuring clear, validated communication from airline business management are crucial steps towards building sustained customer relationships.

Recommendation

To cultivate a robust customer relationship capable of thriving in a dynamic business environment and gaining the trust and confidence of valued customers, the study recommended that airline business management should develop their communication strategies to build

awareness, stimulate interest and desire, and prompt customer action towards their services. Effective customer relationship management was identified as the primary tool through which clients assess an organization's reliability, credibility, responsibility, and trustworthiness. Airline business that excels in customer relationship management are likely to command higher customer satisfaction levels, attract and retain top talent, boost revenue, and expand their customer base. The airline industry needs to install a system that will quickly respond to customer needs and complaints, effective and efficient order processing and provision of moral support which are essential constituents for customer relationship and satisfaction.

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