AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ROLE OF AIRLINE SAFETY MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON PASSENGER SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF COMMERCIAL AIRLINE BUSINESSES IN NIGERIA

Timilehin Olasoji, Olubiyi, PhD
Department of Business Administration & Marketing,
School of Management Sciences, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
drtimiolubiyi@gmail.com

Abstract
One of the significant tasks of airline companies globally is to ensure a high standard of safety management principles for staff and passengers to remain profitable. However, in Nigeria, the airline industry continues to record low profitability, lower service standards, increased missed trips, flight cancellations, low patronage, reduced passenger satisfaction, and stiff competition induced by weak airline safety management, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing economic challenges. But due to differences in consumer behaviour, and income levels across continents, it is extremely difficult to generalise the findings of existing studies on safety management and its relationship to passenger satisfaction. Therefore, this study examines the effects of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction in Muritala Muhammed Local Airport, Lagos State, Nigeria the biggest economy in Africa. The study adopted a survey research design and the population for this study comprises all users of the existing functional domestic airline operators having their hubs in Muritala Muhammed airport, Lagos state, Nigeria which is 62,340 according to the aircraft arrival and departure log for March 2022 documented by the Nigeria Airspace Management Agency (NAMA). The Research Advisor Table was adopted in determining the sample size, which was given as 382 with a confidence level of 95% and a margin error of 5%. Considering the provision for a non-response rate, 115 was added to the sample size which is at 30% of the sample size. A total of 497 copies of the structured questionnaire were administered to passengers waiting in the lounges at the MMA domestic airport who intended to travel with any of the four domestic airlines operating in Lagos state Nigeria as at July 2023. A response rate of 97.76% was achieved in the study representing 480 copies of the questionnaire filled and returned for analysis. Findings from the regression analysis show that the coefficient of the independent variable "Airline safety management" is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.650$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2=0.423$), indicating that there is a significant relationship between airline safety management and passenger satisfaction. The study concluded that airline safety management had positive effects on passenger satisfactionin Muritala Muhammed Local Airport, Lagos State, Nigeria. The study recommends airlines should invest in airport infrastructure to improve service quality and enhance passenger satisfaction, which can lead to higher patronage and better airline performance.
Keywords*: Airport service quality, Aviation industry Nigeria, Flexibility, Passenger satisfaction, Reliability*

Introduction

Traveling by airplane involves accepting risks and implies risk-taking, yet the demand for air transportation is projected to increase over the next three decades (Yue & Byrne, 2022). The aviation sector is projected to be one of the highest revenue earners the world over according to a review of previous literature (Waribugo & Chiedu, 2021). Despite the enormous importance of the airline industry and its benefits such as the promotion of trade, tourism, innovation, and the creation of employment, its growth and development have been an issue made evident in literature (Garaus, & Hudakova, 2022; Saleh & Migdadib, 2018; Waribugo & Sylva, 2021;) the airline operations are faced with numerous issues such as the boarding process, longer queues at baggage claim areas, accessibility, security and safety protocols, flight delays, the cleanliness of check-in areas, the check-in process, information on flight status. These issues cause customer dissatisfaction and are so prevalent in Nigeria and other developing economies around Africa. Amongst these many factors contributing to airport service dissatisfaction in Nigeria, poor airline safety management exists in many of the airports around the country. Currently, the global aviation industry is still struggling with the consequences of health safety challenges occasioned by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Olubiyi, 2022a; Waribugo & Sylva, 2021). Several issues have also been raised concerning the poor operations and safety measures carried out by the airline industry of sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria. The substandard quality of key infrastructure in African airports poses a challenge to both domestic and international airlines' safety procedures. According to Akinshipe, Adefulu, and Akinlabi, (2021) in Nigeria, many airlines have only a few aircraft in their fleet, so if investment in airline safety management infrastructure is low and demand is greater than capacity, there will be an increase in passenger congestion, flight service quality and safety concerns This study is aimed at determining the effect of airline operations on passengers' satisfaction at the Muritala Muhammed local airport satisfaction at the Muritala Muhammed local airport, Lagos state, Nigeria. Not being satisfied can also make passengers begin to search for an alternative airline that will provide them with maximum satisfaction - a shift in demand, eventually leading to high competition among airlines. When passengers are satisfied with the services rendered by an airline, they tend to remain with that airline which in turn leads to more income for the airlines (Barros, Wanke, Nwaogbec, & Azad, 2017; Garaus, & Hudakova, 2022; Kefang, & Po-Ju 2017). Numerous studies, such as those by Udo (2018), Adeniran and Fadare (2018a) and Adeniran and Fadare (2018b), Ohida (2023); Oluwole, Ohida, Nwaogbe, Ojekunle, & Owoeye (2020) have demonstrated that Nigerian airports and airlines have, over the years, provided low-quality services, much to the chagrin of Nigeria's thronging air travellers.By bridging the gap in the existing research, this study makes key contributions to the body of knowledge by incorporating airline safety management as a driver of passenger satisfaction because it is scarce within the context of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Airline Safety Management

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) defines safety as the situation in which hazards connected with aviation activities in direct support of aircraft operations are regulated to an acceptable level. According to the International Civil Aviation Organisation, safety is "the state in which the possibility of harm to persons or property damage is reduced to and maintained at or below an acceptable level, through a continuous process of hazard identification and safety risk management." Safety is a tough term to quantify since it is defined by an airline's or airport's unique operations and the lack of incidents. Buying a plane ticket involves a variety of risks, including financial risk, social risk, and psychological danger (e.g., Cunningham and Young 2002; Nwaogbe, Ejem, Ogwude, and Pius 2021). Customers rely on proxy measures of safety such as an airline's service quality or their judgements of the look of an aircraft because true airline safety levels are difficult to obtain (Alkhatib & Migdadi, 2018; Oluwole, Ohida, Nwaogbe, Ojekunle, & Owoeye, 2020; Ugo & Ejem, 2020). According to the study, safety is an important consideration in airline choosing (Oyewole, Sankaran, & Choudhury, 2007; Gilbert & Wong, 2003). Despite public impression of aviation as a high-risk industry (which it is not), safety is not a factor in airline selection for regular customers (Nwaogbe, Ojekunle, & Owoeye, 2020; Ugo & Ejem, 2020). In contrast, the literature on the impact of airline safety management on customer pleasure in emerging nations, notably Nigeria, is deafeningly silent. Air travel, unlike the great majority of other services, exposes passengers to physical risk. Despite the airline industry's claim that safety is its "number one priority" (International Air Transport Association 2010b), and accident rates have decreased over the last two decades (International Civil Aviation Organisation 2009), passengers are aware that accidents cannot be completely avoided. Individuals tend to overestimate the risk associated with low-probability incidents (Moeun, & Vichethtithkanitha, 2022), making air travel seem more perilous than is really warranted. The tactics employed at many airports by airlines for health safety and COVID-19 include isolation and quarantine, social distance, and community confinement (Alkhatib & Migdadi, 2018; Oluwole, Ohida, Nwaogbe, Ojekunle, & Owoeye, 2020; Ugo & Ejem, 2020). According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, safety is defined as the condition of being safe from a certain risk or injury. In the context of airports and tourism, safety entails both the physical protection of passengers and the safeguarding of the image of a certain destination's surroundings.

Passenger satisfaction

Passenger satisfaction is synonymous with customer satisfaction which has long been a theoretical and practical concern for airline and consumer researchers.

According to Szczepaska and Gawron (2011), a customer's level of satisfaction with a product/service bought is influenced by his/her subjective judgment of the product/service, the value of the benefits obtained, and the customer's entire relationship with the organization. Passenger satisfaction also acts as an exit barrier, assisting a company or airline in keeping its clients/passengers according to Sandada, and Matibiri, (2016).As a result, the drivers of satisfaction have been identified as Service quality constructs tangibles, dependability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Akinshipe, Adefulu & Akinlabi,2021; Kefang, & Po-Ju, 2017; Hassan and Salem, 2021; Gummesson, 1994). Various studies have also indicated that acquiring a new client costs more than retaining a current one (Akinshipe, Adefulu & Akinlabi,2021; Kefang, & Po-Ju, 2017; Gummesson, 1994). Furthermore, Adeniran, and Fadare, (2018) stated that organizations might enhance profitability by increasing the airline load factor and getting a larger market share, as well as recurring passenger patronage by passenger satisfaction. The significance of customer satisfaction stems from the widely held belief that for a company to be successful and lucrative, it must please its consumers (Shin & Elliot, 2001). According to Iqbal, and Khalid, (2018), client satisfaction is a key component of the marketing idea. According to Hassan and Salem, (2021), customer satisfaction influences future passenger or consumer patronage and consumer behaviour, profitability, and shareholder value.

Theoretical Review

Comparison Level Theory

According to the Comparison Level Theory, consumers may introduce numerous distinct comparison standards into the consumption experience. The comparison level theory, a branch of marketing theory that claims that customers judge their degree of satisfaction based on an implicit comparison to an internal standard rather than the result they experienced, focuses on comparison. Consumers may be more inclined to employ predictive expectations based on external communication (advertisement) before making a purchase (in their decision-making) and various criteria such as previous experience and the experiences of other consumers. However, there is little evidence on what criteria customers bring into the consuming experience that are affirmed and disproven. The use of prior experience as the comparison standard in customer satisfaction investigations recommended by the Comparison Level Theory may lead managers to evaluate their performance with rivals and take necessary steps to catch up or differentiate their products. The researcher relied on the Comparison Level Theory for this investigation. As a result, this research investigated airline safety management as it relates to customer satisfaction at Muritala Muhammed municipal airport in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Relationship betweenairline safety management and passenger satisfaction

In many current and past studies, scholarly discourse is developed for shedding light on the impact of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction in many contexts. Over the years, numerous studies on airline safety management, service quality, and passenger satisfaction have been published in Europe, Asia, North America, and Africa, but sparingly in Nigeria. These studies have attempted to establish a connection between airport safety management and anticipated levels of passenger satisfaction. However, empirical evidence suggests that airline service quality management has a mixed influence on customer satisfaction. Chinonso and Ejem (2020) used the SERVQUAL Model to evaluate airport service quality (ASQ) in Nigeria from the viewpoints of both airlines and air transport passengers, who are key users of airport services in Nigeria. The case studies were Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport (NAIA) in Abuja and Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA) in Lagos. The study's findings reveal that, from the standpoints of both airlines and passengers, the airport service quality (ASQ) at both airports is poor and cannot fulfil the service quality expectations of both airlines and passengers. However, the data suggest that the MMIA in Lagos provides better airport services than the NAIA in Abuja. Ogwude, Ejem, Obioma, and Nwaogbe (2021) studied the quality of service given for air travel in Nigeria as well as passenger satisfaction with the service received. This was accomplished by concentrating on both airports and airlines as service providers. In this approach, the research captures a large portion of the impacts of organisational culture, personnel behaviour, and societal norms on passenger happiness. Ahmed, Vveinhardt, Warraich, and Hasan (2020) investigated the economic features of airline sector company operations in relation to organisational employee experience and passenger loyalty. Hence, this study will examine the effect of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction at the Muritala Muhammed local airport, Lagos state, Nigeria. The findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge on passenger satisfaction in the airport setting in developing economies, particularly in Nigeria the largest economy in Africa. Moreover, recognition of key drivers of passenger satisfaction and airline safety management will provide valuable implications for the aviation industry. Based on the strength of the existing inconclusive argument in the literature the following hypothesis is proposed

H_{o1}: There is no significant relationship between airline safety management and passenger satisfaction in Muritala Muhammed Local Airport, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Model

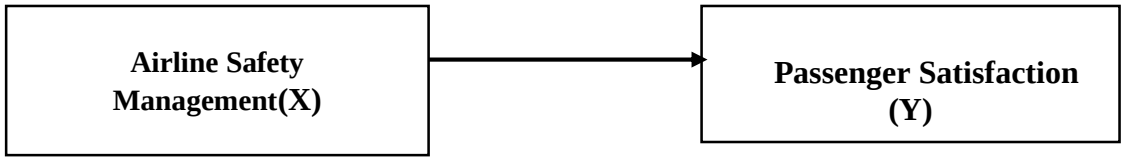

Figure 1: Author's Conceptual Model (2023)

The model sheds light on the relationship between airline safety management and passenger satisfaction which is the research framework. The independent and dependent variables for this research are airline safety management(X) and passenger satisfaction (Y) respectively.

Model Specification

The model sheds light on the relationship between airline safety management and passenger satisfaction which is the research framework. Given, the mathematical derivative function which gives the value of the slope at any value(x-------$x_{n)}$ since intuition explains that as $\Delta x \rightarrow 0$, then $\Delta y \rightarrow 0$. This can be deduced mathematically since passenger satisfaction is a function of airline safety management; $y=f(x_1 \text{---} x_n)$.

Hypothesis:

$y_{1i}=\alpha_0 + \beta_{1x1} + \mu_i$ ……Regression equation (1)

Methodology

The research context is the aviation industry and the study adopted the survey research design. The justification for adopting the survey is due to its usefulness in assessing the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of different groups of individuals and allowing them to give more valid and honest feedback on the area of study. This paper relied on the prior study methodology of Olubiyi, Adeoye, Jubril, Adeyemi, and Eyanuku, (2023), Adeyemi, and Olubiyi, (2023). Olubiyi, Egwakhe, and Akinlabi (2019), Olubiyi, Egwakhe, and Egwuonwu, (2019), Olubiyi, Egwakhe, Amos, and Ajayi (2019), Olubiyi, Lawal, and Adeoye, (2022). Olubiyi (2019), Olubiyi, Lawal, and Adeoye, (2022), Olubiyi, (2022a), Olubiyi, (2022b), Olubiyi, Jubril, Sojinu, and Ngari, (2022), Ukabi, Uba, Ewum, & Olubiyi, (2023) and Uwem, Oyedele, and Olubiyi, (2021). Olubiyi, Jubril, Sojinu, and Ngari, (2022), Olubiyi, (2022), Uwem, Oyedele, and Olubiyi, (2021) with cross-sectional have adopted this method in their respective studies and found it useful. The population for this study comprises all users of the existing functional domestic airline operators having their hubs in Muritala Muhammed airport, Lagos state, Nigeria which is 62,340 according

to the aircraft arrival and departure log for March 2022 documented by the Nigeria Airspace Management Agency (NAMA). The Research Advisor Table was adopted in determining the sample size, which was given as 382 with a confidence level of 95% and a margin error of 5%. Considering the provision for a non-response rate, 115 were added to the sample size which is at 30% of the sample size. A total of 497 copies of the structured questionnaire were administered to passengers waiting in the lounges at the MMA domestic airport who intended to travel with any of the (4) operating airlines in Lagos state Nigeria as of July 2023. For this study, a proportionate sampling technique was used in selecting each member that made up the sample size. Proportionate sampling is a form of stratified sampling in which one draws the sample size of a study from a strata in the proportions that are observed in the larger population. According to Olannye (2006), stratified random sampling is a method for getting representative samples from a heterogeneous population. This strategy entails dividing the target population into homogenous groups that are mutually exclusive and do not overlap, known as strata (Yomere & Agbonifoh, 1999). Therefore, this technique was employed in selecting the respondents from passengers of each airline to be surveyed. This ensured that every element of the strata had an equal chance of being selected from the population and therefore prevented bias against any member of the population strata. This decision was supported by the fact that stratified random sampling approaches create less sampling error than other sampling techniques/methods.

Airlines	**Population**	**Sample Size**	**Percentage**
Air peace	28,577	204	40.84
Arik	12,250	127	25.65
Dana	14,444	110	22.17
Greenlight Africa	7,069	56	11.34
Total	62,340	**497**	100

Table 1: Researcher's computation (2023)

The research instrument adopted in this study is the close-ended structured questionnaire. The close-ended structured questionnaire allows the researcher to ask inquisitive questions and is often fast, cheap, and self-administered (Akinshipe, 2018). The construction of the questionnaire follows the funnel approach by starting with customary questions such as demographic information and sequentially proceeding to specific questions on the dependent and independent variables. The questionnaire comprised three sections. Section A contains a question that discloses the background information of passengers (demographic characteristics) such as gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, and income. Section B covers the multi-dimensional variables of airline operations while section C considers 20 items on multi-proportional variables measuring passenger satisfaction. The items in the questionnaire were broken down as follows - one item for demographic - 5

items each for airline operations sub-variables and 5 Items each for passenger satisfaction Sub-variables.

Data Analysis

Response rate is the percentage of people who responded and administered copies of the questionnaire in the survey. The researcher distributed 497 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents: From the 497 copies of the questionnaire distributed by the researcher and trained research assistants, a total of 480 copies of the questionnaire were filled and returned for analysis representing a response rate of 97.76%. The rest were either unreturned or had missing responses, the detail of the responses is shown in Table 2

Table 2: Response Rate

Response Rate	Frequency	Percentage
Filled and returned complete	480	97.80%
Incomplete or unreturned	17	2.20%
Total	497	100%

Source: Researcher's computation (2023)

Restatement of Research Objective and Research Question

Objective: To evaluate the impact of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction at Muritala Muhammed local airport, Lagos state, Nigeria.

Research Question: What is the effect of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction at Muritala Muhammed local in Lagos state, Nigeria?

The objective of the study examine the effect of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction at Muritala Muhammed local in Lagos state, Nigeria. The respondents were requiredto rate their level of responses about airline safety management and passenger satisfaction on a scale of (Very Low) to 6 (Very High). The results are presented in Table 3 followed by an analysis and interpretation.

Table 3: Linear regression on the effect of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction

Dependent Variable: Passenger satisfaction and independent variable: Airline safety management

Dependent Variable: Passenger Satisfaction						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	-0.075	1.187		-0.063	0.950
	Airline Safety Management	0.899	0.053	0.650	16.991	0.000***
$R^2 = 0.423$						
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.421$						
F-stat = 288.708 (0.000) ***						
Durbin-Watson stat. = 1.844						
*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$						

Source: Researcher's Field Results (2023)

Interpretation

The interpretation of the hypothesis is that airline safety management has a significant positive effect on passenger satisfaction at the Muritala Muhammed local airport, Lagos state, Nigeria. The regression analysis shown in Table 3 indicates that airline safety management has a statistically significant positive impact on passenger satisfaction, as evidenced by the beta coefficient of 0.650 and the p-value of 0.000 (which is below the significance level of 0.01). Furthermore, the R^2 value of 0.423 and the adjusted R^2 value of 0.421 suggest that the model explains a substantial portion of the variation in passenger satisfaction, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.844 indicates that there is no issue of autocorrelation and the F-statistic of 288.708 is significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the findings suggest that airline safety management measures are important factors in shaping passenger satisfaction. This means that when employees and passengers feel safe and secure in their workplace and around the airport facilities and air fleets it can lead to better overall customer satisfaction and may contribute to improved job satisfaction and overall business performance. Organizations need to prioritize airline safety management measures to create a positive work environment for their employees. Therefore, the null hypothesis of airline safety management having no effect on passenger satisfaction is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted that airline safety management has a positive significant effect on passenger satisfaction at the Muritala Muhammed local airport, Lagos state, Nigeria.

Discussion

This study sought to examine the effect of airline safety management on passenger satisfaction at Muritala Muhammed local in Lagos state, Nigeria. The finding of the hypothesis revealed that airline safety management significantly affects passenger satisfaction at Muritala Muhammed local in Lagos state, Nigeria *($\beta = 0.650$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2=0.423$).* The finding from the objective revealed that airline safety management of an airline operation has a statistically significant positive impact on passenger satisfaction at the Muritala Muhammed local airport, as evidenced by the beta coefficient of 0.650 and the *p*-value of 0.000 (which is below the significance level of 0.01). Also, the F-statistic of 288.708 is significant at the 0.01 level suggesting that safety and security measures are important factors in shaping passenger satisfaction. The null hypothesis of airline safety management has no effect on passenger satisfaction at the Muritala Muhammed local airport, Lagos state, Nigeria is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted that airline safety management has a positive significant effect on staff experience. The finding of this study was in line with the work of Akinshipe, Adefulu, and Akinlabi, (2021); Gbadamosi *et al.* (2016);Alkhatib and Migdadi, (2018); Obioma, Nwaogbe, Innocent, Ogwude, Ejem, & Pius, (2021); Nwaogbe, Akorede, Omoke, and Eru, (2021); Olorunniwo, Hsu, and Udo, (2006) that also find out that safety and service quality positively impact employee well-being, passenger satisfaction, performance and job satisfaction.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The major findings from the regression analysis show that the coefficient of the independent variable "airline safety management" is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that there is a significant relationship between airline safety management and passenger satisfaction. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made: airports and airlines should prioritize safety and security measures to improve staff experience, which can lead to better job satisfaction and productivity. Airlines should invest in airport infrastructure to improve service quality and enhance passenger satisfaction, which can lead to higher patronage and better airline performance. Airports and airline stakeholders must fund research to improve safety management processes at the airports in Nigeria and indeed in other developing economies. They should also focus on service flexibility to enhance airport service reliability and passenger satisfaction. This can be achieved by airport managers and airline managers designing effective strategies that prioritize flexibility to enhance overall airport services and passenger satisfaction. Airlines should increase their capacity to attract more passengers and improve their patronage. This can be achieved by investing in new aircraft, expanding their route network, and improving their service quality to enhance passenger satisfaction and continued patronage.

The findings suggest that improving airline safety management measures, airline infrastructure, service flexibility, and airline safety management can enhance service quality, reliability, and passenger experience, which can lead to increased patronage by passengers. The study highlights the importance of considering these factors in airport service design and management to improve overall service quality and enhance passenger satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, the study provides evidence to support the existing literature on the positive effects of safety and security, airline infrastructure, service flexibility, and airline safety management on airport service quality and passenger satisfaction.This study could demonstrate to the government and aviation authorities the need to examine safety measures within the airlines from just safe to exceptionally safe.

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