
Effect of Service Quality on the Performance of Airline Industry in Nigeria

Uchechi Chinazom Ekejiuba, Hauwa Lamino Abubakar
Faculty of Management Sciences,
Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria
Faculty of Management Sciences,
Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the inadequacies in service delivery provided by organizations due to issues like poor infrastructure, poor budget allocations, corrupt practices, and lack of employee incentives, amongst others. The objective, therefore, is to ascertain the effect of such service delivery on the performance of the Airline industry in Nigeria. Primary data was employed in the survey research design and obtained through administration of structured questionnaires. Simple percentage was used to analyze the data collected and ordinary least square (OLS) was used to estimate the effect of service delivery on the performance of the Airline industry in Nigeria. Findings from this study revealed that the constructs of responsiveness (RES), reliability (REL) and assurance (ASS) had positive and significant effect on customer retention with the respective values of 0.0000, 0.0000 and 0.0000. On the other hand, Empathy (EMP) had a negative and significant effect on customer retention with 0.0000. Furthermore, it showed that service delivery influenced 86% of the variation in the performance of Airline industry in Nigeria with the following breakdown: Customer retention increased by 52.4% due to a 1% increase in responsiveness; Additionally, customer retention increased by 61% due to a 1% increase in reliability, whereas it increased by 43% and 53% respectively due to a 1% increase in assurance and empathy respectively. The study concludes that there is a direct impact of service delivery on performance. In view of these, this study recommends that Airline Managers identify with and prioritize the needs of their customers, among other strategies for improving service quality such as live chats, dedicated telephone lines, and suggestion boxes. This will sustain responsiveness, and reliability constructs as well as improve the constructs of assurance and empathy which are necessary for any business to succeed.

Keywords: Service Quality, Responsiveness, Reliability, Assurance, Empathy, Customer retention

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

With the world gradually becoming a global village, different countries' growth and development increasingly hinge on their interdependence, leading to them offering various forms of commercial services to one another. Such exchanges also occur within each country,

effectively stimulating the local economies, and range from the specialized types offered by private organizations such as banking, insurance, airline, consulting, to artisanal activities like carpentry and hair salon services, as well as those offered by public institutions (as monopolies or in perfect competition). These public services include economic infrastructural services such as supply of electricity, potable water, road maintenance and communication networks, as well as social infrastructural services such as schools, hospitals, and housing.

The gap existing between African countries and other developing countries regarding service delivery can be viewed from different perspectives. Masiya *et al.*(2019) opined that service delivery satisfaction in South Africa is influenced by perception of inequality, uneven access to services, provision of substandard services, and high level of poverty. In another vein, Kuye and Akinwale (2020) believe that it is inherent bureaucracy in such public service institutions like Nigerian hospitals that should be carefully deemphasized and detached for quality service delivery to thrive.

While it is generally understood that the provision of services that affect the larger population of any nation is mainly the responsibilities of the country's central government, failure of government to meet such obligations has led to investments by private organizations to fill some of these gaps. These are organizations which prove themselves capable of providing private funding or do so through public-private partnerships with government.

Inability of government to meet obligations to its citizenry manifests in provision of low-quality schools, degrading roads, poor mass transportation systems, poor health facilities, delays in processing licenses and passports, and a general high rate of inflation and unemployment due to lack of job creation. Beyond directly negatively affecting its citizens, this failure has an indirect effect on the economic development of the nation and greatly reduces their confidence in its ability to provide services for their day-to-day existence. In the face of such uncertainty, preference of citizens for public versus private service delivery depends strongly on the service area and not the service provider (Van den Bekerom *et al.*, 2020)

Service delivery failures and their subsequent recoveries vary between the public and the private sector respectively and may be related to the reactions of customers when such failures occur. Unlike most public service organizations, private organizations have competition that would easily put them out of business should such failures persist without immediate and effective resolution, as this is how their performance is measured. Furthermore, customers pay a little higher for services in the private sector when compared with the public sector and this ordinarily makes them feel entitled to value for their money. On the contrary, public service providers – most of which have limited or no competition at all – obtain funding from the central government and are more unlikely to go out of business irrespective of poor recovery rate after service failure.

From the aforementioned, it can be assumed that successful organizational performance, especially for private sector organizations, is dependent on the customer loyalty, customer retention and customer satisfaction which will in turn increase its turnover and revenue. Data from a study carried out on Dutch citizens revealed that customers rated service providers based

on responsiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. These indicators best reflected their level of satisfaction.

Typically, it is assumed that, while private service organizations tend to treat failures as deviations from the norm, public service organizations consider them as norms. This statement, though true in many cases, may not apply to all countries as there are instances of successful government reforms that improved service delivery. In Malaysia for example, the introduction of Government Transformation Program (GTP), which is the country's most recent public service reform, produced material improvements where previous reforms failed. According to empirical findings, this success was aided by a detailed performance management framework which encouraged inter-agency collaboration and accountability (Siddiquee, 2019). Similarly, according to a 2017 survey conducted in Qatar among citizens and expatriates on basic public services like education, health, roads and infrastructure, water and electricity, resident expatriates held more positive feelings about public service delivery. Findings showed that the highest levels of satisfaction were expressed with government offices, while the lowest was with independent schools (Abdelkader Benmansour, 2019).

This study examines the effect of service delivery on the performance of the airlines industry in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The services provided by public organizations are the essential aspects of operating a viable economy for any twenty-first century nation, as well as the fact that establishment of social and economic infrastructures create opportunities for employment and investments for willing private organizations. In Nigeria however, the lack of maintenance of infrastructures due to poor budget allocation and corrupt practices, combined with staff dis-incentives such as meagre and irregular salary payment and lack of capacity building create factors that lead to absence of effective and efficient service delivery.

Kuye and Akinwale (2020) opined that bureaucratic impersonality had no effect on the standard of care provided in Nigeria's public hospitals. This is because, in Nigerian government hospitals, the provision of high-quality healthcare is impeded by formal rules and regulations, which include administrative procedures, policies, and rules.

Service decay has created opportunities for private investors to offer services to the Nigerian public in sectors like education, transportation and health, thereby adding value and making returns on their investments. This study examines the effects of inadequate service delivery provided by these organizations specifically, the airline industry in Nigeria, stemming from poor infrastructure, corrupt practices, poor budget allocation, lack of employee incentives, and the impact of such on their performance.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the effects of service delivery on the performance of the airlines industry in Nigeria. The study specifically seeks to:

- i. Ascertain the effect of responsiveness on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.
- ii. Examine the effect of reliability on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.
- iii. Examine the effect of assurance on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.
- iv. Evaluate the effect of empathy on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The study focused on the effect of service delivery on the performance of the airline industry in Nigeria using five Nigerian airlines as case study. Consequently, the following specific research questions were postulated:

- i. To what extent does responsiveness affect customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria?
- ii. How does reliability affect customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria?
- iii. Is there any effect of assurance on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria?
- iv. What is the effect of empathy on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

This research work was guided by the following null hypotheses:

Hypotheses One (Ho₁): Responsiveness has no significant effect on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.

Hypotheses Two (Ho₂): Reliability has no significant effect on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.

Hypotheses Three (Ho₃): Assurance has no significant effect on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.

Hypotheses Four (Ho₄): Empathy has no significant effect on customer retention by the airline industry in Nigeria.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study will be beneficial to certain groups of people namely: policymakers, professionals and researchers who will guide policymakers, consisting of top-level management of airlines and their regulatory body in making strategic decisions for their successful performance. It will also help professionals improve their skills and job role, expand their horizon, and take corrective measures where necessary. Increased knowledge from the study will assist researchers in producing more valuable work as well as engage with and guide professionals, policymakers, and other such intermediaries.

1.7 Limitation of Study

Access to Airlines' Data: Researcher experienced delays and difficulty in getting email addresses of possible airline customers due to data protection and bureaucracy.

Sample size and Scope: The infinite sample size of respondents and likelihood of respondents residing within, and outside Nigeria may have led to inadequate data analysis because some respondents rarely patronized the airline while others were quite frequent because of their location of residence.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

The word “service” implies meeting a need, mainly intangibles, as against products that are tangible. Quality or Delivery, on the other hand, is the performance or assessment of the service provider in the process of meeting such needs. Service delivery can therefore be referred to as the periodical performance in the supply of needs to the public (Wesonga, 2018).

The goal of service delivery irrespective of whether it is a public or private service is to achieve customer satisfaction as this serves as a measure of the delivered service. In most organizations in different parts of the world, studies have shown that some recipients of services are either unsatisfied or rarely satisfied for various reasons given by either the service provider or the receiving public. Recipients of public services provided by a central government are perceived to be at a disadvantage when compared to decentralized services provided by locals outside of it. A notable argument for providing services locally is that the local population can influence decisions relating to type, quality, and price they are willing to pay, unlike where the services were provided by the central government and consequently may be monopolized. The argument in favour of centralization, however, is that it is more cost efficient to provide service for a larger population (Steiner et al., 2018). Ongoing debate shows that decentralization is customer centric while the centralization focuses on the organization’s bottom line. Steiner et al. (2018) further believes that service delivery is enhanced by governance rather than government which supports the collaborative approach, since more stakeholders other than government are concerned with service delivery. In the Taliban area of Afghanistan, service delivery may have been better in the Taliban-controlled area rather than the government-controlled areas, mainly due to government failure rather than the Taliban’s competence (Smith, 2020).

Acceptance of a service by customers is dependent on effectiveness and affordability (Chakraborty et al., 2021), as such service providers relying on a significant technology component are not likely to benefit customers who do not have access to technology. Also, there are cases where the impact of technology, though useful, may have negative consequences on the service provider due to damage. For instance, Seyitoğlu and Ivanov (2020) in their conceptual review on the healthcare and hospitality in Bulgaria identified robots as one of the service delivery systems but also suggested the need for legal regulations for damages caused by robots as they take autonomous decisions. In all, there is a positive relationship between service delivery, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (YuSheng& Ibrahim, 2019).

Psomas et al. (2020), in their study conducted in Greece to show the effectiveness of using Citizens Service Centres (CSCs) to avoid bureaucratic process, adopted the Servperf model using its five dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, reliability and empathy. The findings revealed a high influence of these dimensions on performance. Furthermore, Akdere et al. (2018) also adopted the Servperf model in their study of a Turkish hospital which revealed that high level of service quality was linked to assurance, responsiveness, and reliability when compared to the other two dimensions.

The unique importance of quality to service firms can be demonstrated through increased market share, increased profits, customer satisfaction and future purchase intentions. Several studies have shown that firms with superior quality products and services outperform those with inferior quality. Thus, making the customer the priority by making him the focal point of any business is the key to a successful business (Loeffler & Church, 2015). For optimal service delivery to occur there should be a synergy of factors from both public and private organizations, such as affordability of services from public organizations and effectiveness of the delivery from private organizations. Based on the various reviews of the concepts of service delivery, this study adapted the measures of service delivery adopted by Psomas et al. (2020) and Akdere et al. (2018) which are responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy, so as to show their effect on airline performance in Nigeria.

The will and timeliness for which a service provider delivers service is a key value in the service industry. The ability of any organization to identify and effectively adapt to the continuous change in its industry and in their customers', preferences will affect the performance of that firm positively or negatively through customer retention or customer decline (Murray et al., 2019).

Studies show that responsiveness as a measure of service delivery influences the performance of organizations. However, the level of significance may vary depending on the sector. In the healthcare service sector for instance, research has revealed that responsiveness is a significant determinant of successful patient and healthcare provider relationship (Murray et al., 2019). Other examples of service sectors that are significantly affected by the responsiveness dimension include retail and internet banking, life insurance companies (Ramamoorthy et al., 2016), railway, and tourism industry (Miranda et al., 2018).

Organizations are better able to manage disruptions in their services and meet customers' expectations when they adapt easily to changes in their industry. In the airline industry, the speed at which the airline attends to customer requests with respect to flight cancellations, refunds and rescheduling of flights either physically or via telephone is a typical example of such responsiveness. This study shows how responsiveness affects performance through customer retention by the airlines in Nigeria.

An organization's ability to deliver service dependably and accurately is an important measure of service delivery. Service reliability comprises the firm's ability to keep promises, do things right and ensure quick turnaround time in providing service (Izogo, 2016). A study of telecoms industry in Nigeria shows that reliable services enhance customers' non-defection, and induces brand loyalty (Izogo, 2017). In addition, customers that perceive services to be reliable are likely to recommend others. The study also showed that this dimension of service quality has greater influence on customer loyalty than the assurance dimension as customers exhibit loyal behaviour in appreciation of firms that deliver reliable services (Ladhari & Leclerc, 2013). Some of the ways organizations can demonstrate reliability include managing commitments, communicating and engaging customers, handling and resolving customer complaints promptly. In the airline

industry that this study focuses on, acts of reliability include the airlines keeping to time-of-flight schedules, having a contingency plan when the original plan fails such as forming alliances with sister airlines to assist in times of delays and cancellations, communicating with customers in advance in cases of expected delays due to weather or operational reasons, and generally being consistently proactive. This study shows the influence of reliability on the performance of the airlines in Nigeria by either customer retention or its decline.

One of the critical measures of service delivery is the ability of the organization to command trust and confidence from its customers. Assurance helps to eliminate sources of uncertainty (Izogo, 2015), most useful for sectors with low-contact service where human interface is minimal – such as telecommunications – because of the dominant role of machines allowing standardization of such services (Izogo, 2015). For firms in this category, promotion is the only way of building service assurance as it helps to shape customers' positive attitude towards a particular brand (Izogo, 2017). Organizations can demonstrate assurance to customers by recruiting competent employees to do the following: pinpoint the issues, provide customer feedback, benchmark, choose the right software, record and monitor calls across various channels. These assurance attributes are generic for any service industry as capacity building may be required to improve employee expertise. This study shows the significance of assurance on the performance of the airlines in Nigeria.

Employees with high level of cognitive and emotional empathy are likely to understand customer needs and can show interpersonal concern better than those without such skills (Murray et al., 2019). Empathy denotes the attention an organization gives its customers in the delivery of service and is more effective when service delivery is failing. Empathy is the caring and loving attitude of an organization's employees towards its customers; shows its customers that they are valued, are being heard and are appreciated. However, in non-health sectors where customers are less likely to have high empathetic relationships with employees, the level of influence of this dimension on performance is likely to be low when compared to other dimensions of the Servperf model (Daniles et al., 2014).

The performance of any organization is its assessment based on actual output, otherwise known as goals and objectives. This could be either financial (sales/profit, shareholders return, working capital and inventory turnover) or non-financial (customer satisfaction, customer retention, product/eservice quality, and employee training and development). The performance of a firm is important to its management, board, stakeholders, and the public, for critical decision making. Optimal decisions would be difficult if a firm relies on its financial performance only (Milost, 2013). Milost (2013) opined that the annual financial statements of a firm do not provide a true picture of its operations in the past as accounting data cannot be seen as a suitable source of information for making decisions about the future. However, while non-financial performance measures can be seen as complementing financial ones, they cannot replace them,

Omran et al. (2019) discovered in their study of Australian manufacturing firms, that for firms where management compensation is tied to non-financial performance measures, their financial

performance (as measured by Return on Investment) has no significant direct link with the extent of disclosure of non-financial measures in their financial statements. Furthermore, it was revealed that a firm's non-financial performance measures indirectly and significantly affect its financial performance through quality-based strategy implementation. For firms that adhere to such quality-based strategies, the disclosure of non-financial performance measures positively impacted financial performance.

Different factors contribute to performance as viewed by different authors. Some of these are, but not limited to, leadership, motivation, knowledge management and organizational culture. Accordingly, competent leaders create a conducive environment that affects employees' attitudes and behaviors positively. Employee performance on the other hand is the assessment of employees at their workplace and this is influenced by the organizational culture of the workplace and employee satisfaction, which are dependent on the leadership of the organization. These two factors can therefore be said to be interwoven in achieving organizational performance. In their study, Adam *et al.* (2020) discovered that while organizational culture had a significant effect on employee performance, organizational commitment proved to be a mediator in the relation. They therefore opined that organizations develop a strong culture of commitment to enhance employee performance.

Kumari and Singh (2018) opined that organizations and their managers are willing to obtain employees' commitment so as to increase productivity. In doing so, management would introduce norms, values, and objectives to the employees as part of their culture. These could be through formal means such as classroom training, or informal ones such as interactions/associations on the job. The most effective way has been shown to be the orientation of employees at the point of recruitment into the organization. In all the reviewed literature, it is safe to assume that employee performance reflects organizational performance, though various literatures have viewed organizational performance indices differently.

This study utilized the non-financial performance measure (customer retention) as adopted by Gengeswari *et al.* (2013) and modified by YuSheng and Ibrahim (2019), to assess the performance of the airline industry in Nigeria. This dimension was chosen because of its suitability to measure the performance of service sector-oriented firms as justified by Gengeswari *et al.* (2013) in their study of retail firms in Malaysia, whose findings showed that four dimensions of customer retention, namely: word of mouth, price insensitivity, repeat purchase, and non-complaining behaviour, significantly influenced a firm's performance.

Customer retention is a strong dimension of organizational performance as it is more profitable to retain existing customers than to attract new ones. Provision of superior service quality is one of the ways firms differentiate themselves from competitors and create loyalty from retained customers (Ladhari&Lecleric 2013). Loyalty is a fallout of retention and the benefits a firm may derive from loyalty as an outcome of customer retention include business expansion, influence on existing customers and advocacy from existing customers.

Customers are the strength of a firm. They are what keeps any firm alive. According to a worldwide survey conducted by “The Economist”, 65% of senior executives of international companies agree that customers are their topmost priority in achieving their target performance (Gengswari et al., 2013). Furthermore, high level competition coupled with matured markets have given customer retention relevance. Due to the cost savings from retention rather than in the acquisition of new customers, it is therefore safe to assume that a small increase in customer retention rate will speed up a firm’s profit.

Retention is a measure of whether existing customers make repeat purchases or still engage in business with a firm. This process of influencing existing customers to continue buying an organization’s products and/or services is a necessity for the survival of the organization. To achieve this, investment in the development of service delivery quality becomes necessary as it will enhance such retention, loyalty and profitability in the long run. Customers are valued assets of any organization because satisfaction of their needs creates opportunity for them to be retained, and the level of retention of customers indicates the level of organizational success (Ibojo, 2015). On the other hand, failure of the organization to satisfy existing customers and evoke repeat purchases will have adverse effect on the sales and profitability of the business.

Due to the rising costs of human and material resources, many organizations may underinvest in service empathy and responsiveness by downsizing staff levels (Ye et al., 2017). While this strategy may achieve cost reduction in the short run, its long-term effect would be uncertain as these elements positively affect customers’ satisfaction and their eventual retention, leading to overall profitability of the organization over time.

Employees also play a key role in the retention of the organization’s customers. However, they must be motivated by the organization, through its leadership. As the organization invests heavily in customer loyalty programs, employees should not be ignored, as this may hold negative consequences for the organization. Employee motivational variables include, but are not limited to, those propounded by Herzberg and Abraham Maslow’s ‘higher needs’: growth, recognition, advancement, achievement and responsibility. This study employs employee attitudes as a mediator variable and utilizes customer retention as a tool for evaluating the performance of airlines in Nigeria through the analysis of questionnaires completed by respondents.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

In figure 1, Service Delivery represents the independent variable (IV) with four (4) proxies. It is noteworthy that there are several other indices for measuring service delivery which are not exhaustive; some of these are effectiveness, efficiency, equity, timeliness, bureaucratic procedures, policy change, delivery, and transparency. However, the four proxies in figure 2.1 were selected due to the type of service offered by the airline industry in this study. On the other hand, the dependent variable is represented by performance, which is measured by a non-financial index: customer retention. The mediating variable in this framework is employee attitudes. This mediating variable (employee attitudes) is a linkage between the independent

variable (service delivery) and dependent variable (performance). The effect of service delivery on the performance of airlines in Nigeria is exhibited in the attitudes of their employees, who can effectively make or mar it.

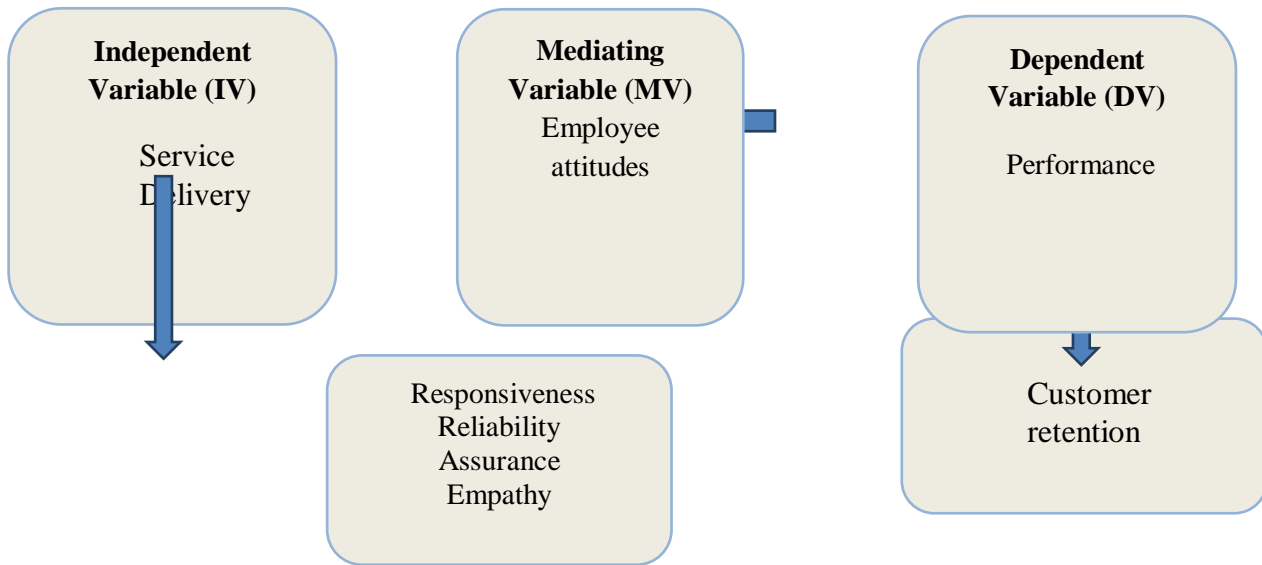


Figure 1 Schematic representation of variables
Source: Author

2.3 Theoretical Review

There are several theories and Models which may be applied to this research. The researcher reviewed four (4) of these theories which were used on the reviewed literatures, namely: Bureaucratic Theory, Institutional Theory, Expectation Disconfirmation Model, Performance Model, while Servperf Model was the theoretical framework.

Bureaucratic Theory: Max Weber, the founder of bureaucratic theory believed that bureaucracy was the most efficient way to set up an organization. Bureaucracy is a structure that consists of rules, standard processes, procedures, division of labour and responsibility, as well as hierarchy. It believes that selection and promotion are based on competence and qualification, while penalties are applied based on laid down rules and procedures. The theory was designed to assist large organizations in carrying out their duties effectively. It however focuses on positions within the organization, rather than their occupants.

Kuye and Akinwale (2020) opined in their study adopting the bureaucratic theory that bureaucracy in Nigerian hospitals should be discouraged to enable quality service delivery to thrive in government hospitals. This was due to the adverse effects of bureaucracy listed in their study which resulted in things like delays in patients’ waiting time, poor procedural rules, political interference, and time-wasting processes.

Despite the criticisms, the bureaucratic theory has been shown to have some benefits for an organization such as encouraging creativity, provision of job security, discouraging favouritism, specialization, establishing best practices, creating predictability and providing stability.

Institutional Theory: This theory, founded by John Meyer and Brian Rowan, focuses on processes by which structures become established as guidelines for behaviour. These structures could be schemes, rules, norms and routines, and emphasize productivity, ethics and legitimacy. Some constructs of the theory are normative (ought-to), cognitive (want-to), and regulative (have-to)– all elements geared towards service delivery effectiveness. The elements of rules, laws and sanctions are the basis of regulative compliance, while norms and values are social obligations which are a basis of normative compliance. Shared understanding, such as common beliefs and symbols, are a basis of cognitive compliance. Saxena (2017) opined that no study has deployed such an institutional framework, while appreciating the successes and failures of e-government initiatives in a developing country.

The benefit of the institutional theory lies in the fact that it provides a basis for a logical evaluation of innovation and flexibility since varying components of the theory would apply to different kinds of institutions. For instance, the regulatory compliance element which imbibes rules, laws and sanctions would only apply to formal institutions like education or banking sectors, which have regulatory institutions that govern them while informal associations such as clubs or political groups may adopt the normative and cognitive elements which imbibes norms and values. This theory is more suitable for public organizations.

Expectation Disconfirmation Model: This model was first conceptualized by Oliver (1980) and often used in explaining citizens' satisfaction with public services. It postulates that customers compare performance of a service against their expectation of that service. Service delivery satisfaction therefore occurs if the perceived performance meets or exceeds expectations. Such service expectations measured against observed performance include public services such as access to housing, access to electricity, water, healthcare, and refuse collection services. This model has been adapted frequently in analyzing public service delivery satisfaction among citizens(Masiya et al., 2019).

Performance Model: Closely related to the Expectation Disconfirmation Model, is the Performance Model. In this case, citizens' satisfaction is deemed the determinant or judgement for public service delivery. The actual satisfaction of citizens forms the basis of comparing how government is performing to how they think government is expected to perform, and the authentication of customer satisfaction determines the increase in the level of services provided as well as the level of improvement. Understanding customer satisfaction with service delivery then becomes the basis for assessing the level of government performance (Masiya et al., 2019).

2.3.1 Theoretical Framework: The theoretical framework of this research is the Servperf model, developed by Cronin & Taylor (1992) as an important variant in the serv-quality scale, but originally proposed by Parasuraman et al (1988) in the Servqual model using their five service

quality dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Murray et al.,2019). Servperf provided an alternative method of measuring service quality by investigating the significance of the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and purchase intention (Akdere et al., 2018). Advocates of this model believed that service quality is a precursor of customer satisfaction, which has a significant effect on purchase intention. The dimensions of Servperf model are non-financial in nature and therefore makes it almost impossible to rate organizations without getting the perspectives of customers on them. According to advocates of this model, perceived performance by customers is therefore the most appropriate measure of service quality.

A study conducted in a Turkish hospital by Akdere et al. (2018), adopted the Servperf model using 15 items under the perception dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy to measure patients' perception of service quality. The results showed that the highest levels of perception of service quality were linked to knowledgeable medical staff, feeling of being safe when patients interacted with the staff, neatness, being sympathetic, being reassuring, being polite and the willingness of staff to help patients. Tangibles such as the physical facilities, modern tools and equipment were ranked lowest. The most important dimensions identified by the patients were responsiveness, assurance and reliability. Servperf model is therefore one of the measures to adopt for optimal organizational performance by engaging in continuous measurement and improvement of service quality as part of the organization's quality management process (Akdere et al., 2018).

The researcher's preference for this model is to obtain optimal assessment of the performance of airlines in Nigeria, the high impact of the dimensions of service delivery on customer satisfaction and retention, as well as the current dearth of empirical study on such private organizations the model was used on, based on the reviewed literatures. The dimensions of the Servperf model, however, will ultimately be ideal to ascertain customer satisfaction, retention and, by extension, performance of the airlines in Nigeria.

2.4 Previous Studies

There are several empirical studies on service delivery and its effect on performance. This section reviews previous studies stating their findings and authors' recommendations.

The following studies showed significant positive relationships between the service delivery dimensions and the measure of performance in the respective firms or sectors:

Siddiquee (2019) conducted a study on "Driving performance in the public sector: what can we learn from Malaysia's service delivery reform?". The model adopted was the Government Transformation Program (GTP), which was introduced in 2009. 20 interviews were conducted representing key informants of government officials, academics and civil society organizations, and it was discovered that the GTP produced concrete improvements in service delivery areas where previous reforms had failed. The author noted that there were rare cases of successful reforms in developing countries because little is known on what makes reform work. Accordingly, more research is required in this area.

Abdulkareem and Mohd Ramli (2021) conducted a study titled “Does trust in e-government influence the performance of e-government? An integration of information systems success model and public value theory” The model adopted was Information System Success model and Public Value Theory. A sample size of 369 e-government users from Nigeria was used. The method of analysis was structural equation modelling-partial least squares. The findings showed that trust in e-government is influenced by quality of information and service, and that trust in e-government predicts the value of e-government in the eyes of the public. The study also showed that there was a significant effect between the relationship between trust in e-government and the public value of e-government.

Psomas et al. (2020) conducted a study on "Determining the impact of service quality on citizens' satisfaction and the role of citizens' demographics: the case of the Greek citizens' service centers." Their study examined the relationship between service quality dimensions and citizens' satisfaction from the services provided by the Greek Citizens Service Centers (CSCs). The five dimensions of the Servperfmodel was adopted for this study. A random sampling technique was used with a sample size of 1,226 respondents. Their findings revealed that the levels of the service quality dimensions (Servperf) and citizens' satisfaction are medium to high, and they have a significant impact on citizens' satisfaction.

Rahim and Shirazi (2018) conducted a study on “Fiscal decentralization and citizens’ satisfaction from local public service delivery in Pakistan”. The study adopted multiple choice models. The findings revealed people’s satisfaction level declined significantly when the devolution plan was rolled back and meant that the devolution plan had a positive significant effect on people’s satisfaction.

Sidiquee and Xavier (2020) investigated on “Collaborative approach on public service improvement: The Malaysian experience and lessons.” The model adopted was the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS). The findings revealed that the NBOS had made remarkable improvements in promoting cross agency collaboration, demonstrating evidence of improved service delivery and cost savings for the government. It had also produced results where previous reforms failed.

The following studies showed positive relationships between the service delivery dimensions and the measure of performance in their respective firms or sector:

Abdelkader Benmansour (2019) conducted a study on "Citizens and expatriates' satisfaction with public services in Qatar: Evidence from a survey." A sample of 1,356 respondents 18 years and older were used to analyze citizens' and expatriates' satisfaction with public service delivery. The findings revealed that expatriates hold more positive feelings about local public services than citizens, with the highest levels of satisfaction found to be with government agencies, while the lowest levels of satisfaction were with independent departments.

Lanin and Hermanto (2019) investigated “The effect of service delivery quality towards public satisfaction and public trust in local governments in Indonesia”. The model adopted was the

hypothetical model. The findings revealed that the model adopted (hypothetical model) was able to increase satisfaction and citizens' trust with local governments in the areas of basic needs (health and education).

Babic-Hodovic et al. (2019) investigated on "IPA and Servperf quality conceptualizations and their role for satisfaction with hotel services." Two models were assessed namely: Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) and Servperf models. The findings showed that Servperf dimensions of service quality was positively related to satisfaction.

Biljohn and Lues (2019) investigated on "Social innovation and service delivery in Belgium and South Africa." The findings showed that although local government is obliged to collaborate with citizens, various factors influence citizens' ability to make contributions even when platforms are created. The social innovation initiative, though positive, was not significant.

Li, *et al.* (2019) investigated on "Employees' customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the public utility sector: The mediating role of service quality." The findings revealed that employees' customer orientation behaviours impacted customers' perceived service quality and satisfaction towards public institutions.

Valle-cruz (2019) conducted a study on "Public value of e-government services through emerging technologies." The findings showed that the constructs of transparency, access to information and social media, all generate public value. Therefore, technology is a vital mechanism to boost public value generation.

Adaku, *et al.* (2018) investigated on "improving public sector service delivery: A developing economy experience." The findings showed that the implementation of a new system "Age 54+" decreased the average processing time of new claims by 20%. This experiment had a positive effect on the performance Ghana public sector.

Musenze and Mayende (2019) investigated on "Coordination and quality service delivery in service organizations: Qualitative investigation." The findings revealed that co-ordination technique improves quality service delivery in Uganda's local governments. The researcher opined that organizations should imbibe and execute policies that are critical for co-ordination processes to deliver quality service.

Uzir, *et al.* (2021) investigated on "The effects of service quality, perceived value and trust in home delivery service personnel on customer satisfaction: Evidence from a developing country. The findings showed that quality of service, customer perceived value and trust influenced customer satisfaction. Furthermore, it was found out that "trust" was the mediator between service quality and customer satisfaction on one hand, as well as between customer perceived value and customer satisfaction.

Hwang, *et al.* (2021) conducted a study on "Investigating consumer innovativeness in the context of drone food delivery services: Its impact on attitude and behavioural intentions." Structural Equation Modeling was used in the study. The dependent variable was behavioural intentions while the independent variable had eight dimensions, namely: novelty seeking, eagerness, vigilance, openness, quality experience seeking, hedonic experience seeking, venturesomeness, and social distinctiveness. The study was conducted in Korea using a sample size of 321. The findings revealed that four of the listed components, namely: novelty seeking, quality experience seeking, hedonic experience seeking, and social distinctiveness, improve customers' attitudes towards drone food delivery service.

The following studies showed no impact and no significant relationships between the service delivery dimensions and the measure of performance in the respective firms or sector:

Van den Bekerom *et al.* (2020) conducted a study titled "Are citizens more negative about failing service delivery by public than private organizations? Evidence from a large-scale survey experiment." The findings showed that ratings were dependent on the type of service with respect to the type of organization that is expected to provide such service. For instance, transportation was seen as a public service and the public organization was therefore condemned harshly if the provider failed in that area. On the contrary, emergency ambulance and safety services was viewed as a private service delivery and the private sector was blamed if the provider failed in that area. The author noted that public organizations were punished more severely than private organizations for negative performance information, but this tendency was concentrated on people who preferred private service provisions. The author recommended future research to utilize other national contexts where public/private differences of high salient services can be meaningfully and systematically examined. However, the study did not reveal a significant effect on performance of either private or public sectors of Denmark.

Masiya *et al.* (2019) conducted a study on "Assessing service delivery: Public perception of municipal service delivery in South Africa. The findings revealed that citizens' satisfaction with service delivery was influenced by factors such as perceptions of relative denial and inequality, unfulfilled political promises, unequal access to services, provision of poor-quality services and high level of poverty. This study did not show a significant relationship with citizens' satisfaction.

Bozic (2020) conducted a study on "Global trends in a fragile context: public-nonpublic collaboration, service delivery and social innovation". The study utilized Institutional Theory in its investigation. The findings showed that collaboration and social innovation in a fragile welfare context are triggered by influences from multiple actors, challenging power relations and external pressure from civil society organizations. This study revealed no significant effect on performance on social services delivery.

Lopes *et al.* (2019) investigated on "Key drivers for public value creation: Enhancing the adoption of electronic public services by citizens." The study analyzed how key drivers for

public value creation can improve the adoption of electronic public services by citizens in Brazil and adopted a descriptive-explanatory qualitative approach. Findings showed that public value can only be created after the adoption of e-services by citizens, perception by those who use it directly or indirectly, and by the observations of people who have adopted it. The study therefore had no significant effect on citizens in Brazil.

The following studies showed negative relationships between the service delivery dimensions and the measure of performance in the respective firms or sectors:

Kuye and Akinwale (2020) conducted a study on “Conundrum of bureaucratic processes and healthcare service delivery in government hospitals in Nigeria”, with the Bureaucratic theory as the adopted framework. Their findings revealed that service delivery in government hospitals in Lagos, Nigeria were in adverse positions on all the four concepts of bureaucracy (division of labour, separation of duties, formal rules and regulation, and patients’ waiting time). The authors concluded that the features of bureaucracy are not compatible in the management of government hospitals in Lagos, Nigeria. Bureaucracy therefore had a negative effect on the performance of healthcare services in Lagos, Nigeria.

Saxena (2017) investigated on "Factors influencing perceptions on corruption in public service delivery via e-government platform". The Institutional Theory framework was adopted for the study using the "Digital India" program of the Indian government as the institutional measure. The findings showed that while the potential e-government initiatives in curbing corruption are high, this potential is yet to be realized in a full-fledged manner. Consumers perceive that they would incur more costs for public services, and this is an indication of corruption in government services. The impact of e-government had a negative effect on combating corruption.

2.4.1 Literature Gap

The reviewed literatures show that there are gaps in scope, theory and methodology.

Scope: There is a dearth of literature on service delivery from the American Continent. Furthermore, most of the studies were on public service organizations as there are a few empirical studies on private organizations from reviewed literatures. Based on these facts, it is unknown as to whether the constructs adopted for the study of public organizations will be effective on private organizations.

Theoretical gap: Most of the reviewed articles adopted models suitable for the product sector. Only three out of the over 50 reviewed articles utilized the Servperf model, which is the most ideal for the service sector. Furthermore, the limitation of the adopted theory is the constructs are non-financial performance measures. The outcome will be more objective if some secondary data on profit for the airlines were captured and measured.

Methodology: Several of the reviewed articles adopted inappropriate models not suitable for cause-and-effect relationships. This study’s adoption of multiple linear regression model is suitable for impact relationships and describes relationships of multiple independent variables

and one dependent variable. Furthermore, the variables adopted as service delivery measures were mostly for tangibles.

3.0 Method

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design by using a customer satisfaction survey due to the wide range of customers of airlines. The target population of this study covers the customers of Aero Contractors, Arik air, Air Peace, Max Air and Dana Air in Nigeria. However, this population cannot be defined, as the customers may be resident in different parts of the world during the period of the research. Furthermore, the airlines are not likely to have the database of all clients who have patronized their airlines at some point. The accessible population, therefore, is Nigerian residents who patronize these airlines, even though it is not a definite population size. Also, it is possible that several customers may have patronized several airlines at the same time depending on various factors such as timing, cost, urgency, etc, thereby creating overlap. Therefore, due to the difficulty of determining and accessing a definite population size, the researcher adopted an "infinite" population size, which is appropriate for this study.

For this study, the researcher adopted Cochran's formula to determine sample size from an infinite population size as it is considered especially appropriate in situations with large populations. A sample of any given size provides more information about a smaller population than a larger one, but adjustments can be made by increasing or reducing the percentage population if the sample population is either too small or too large. Cochran's formula is thus:

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 P (1-P)}{C^2}$$

SS represents Sample size

Z is determined from Z statistics table

P is the percentage of population. (This study will assume 50% of the unknown population)

C is the confidence interval. (This study will adopt the 95% confidence interval) which implies a 0.05 margin of error. While the given Z value is 1.96 based on the 50% margin of error and the variability.

$$\text{Substituting } SS = \frac{(1.96)(1.96) 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.05) (0.05)} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.16$$

Sample size is therefore approximately 384.

This study adopted stratified random sampling technique for the research. This sampling technique is productive in situations where the sample population needs to be further broken down into smaller populations of different locations, companies or customer preferences, depending on the research. It is a useful technique in this study because the sample size is representative of the customers of five airlines being investigated. The customer satisfaction survey was divided into five parts, a method which provided an objective and fair representation of the total respondents.

3.2 Sources and Methods of Data Collection

This study surveyed 138 combined customers of Arik Air, Air Peace, Max Air, Aero Contractors and Dana Air in Nigeria by distributing the questionnaire electronically to residents in different parts of the country who have organized data bases either in their workplace or their places of abode. The researcher employed the closed ended questions strategy for reasons such as ease of measurement, avoiding irrelevant answers from respondents, ease of answering, and easy customization, as questions are strictly tailored to address the research questions and objectives. The research questionnaire was modelled to align with Akdere et al. (2018), Babic-Hodovicet al. (2019) and Jan (2012), where Servperf model was used to assess the performance of Turkish hospital, tourism and hospitality management sector and airline industry, respectively. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, with the first part seeking information on demography of respondents while the second part focused on obtaining respondents' views on the research questions and objectives.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

The validity of this research was established by doing a pre and post regression analysis test to check for the strength of association among a set of variables that are normally distributed, and those variables which are not normally distributed. The tests, otherwise called test-retest reliability, are ideal for this study because the outcome of the research instruments (questionnaires) could fall into any of these categories.

The reliability of the research instrument was based on the adoption of the multiple regression models from a previous study done by Psomas (2020) in the study “Determining the impact of service quality on citizens’ satisfaction and the role of citizens’ demographics: The case of the Greek citizen’s service centres,” where similar questions with some modifications were obtained.

3.4 Model Specification

This study utilized multiple regression model as adopted from the work of Psomas (2020) in the study determining the impact of service quality on citizens’ satisfaction and the role of citizens’ demographics. Psomas model is captured as follows.

$$CS = f(ASS, REL, EMP, TAN, RES) \dots\dots\dots (3.1)$$

Where

- CS= Citizen Satisfaction
- ASS = Assurance
- REL = Reliability
- EMP = Empathy
- TAN = Tangibles
- RES = Responsiveness

In this study, equation 3.1 is modified to suit this research study, and to have the following functional equation:

$$CRT = f(RES, REL, ASS, EMP) \dots\dots\dots (3.2)$$

However, the linear equation of the model in 3.2 is specified as:

$$CRT = \beta_0 + \beta_1 RES_{t-1} + \beta_2 REL_{t-2} + \beta_3 ASS_{t-3} + \beta_4 EMP_{t-4} + \epsilon_t \dots \dots \dots (3.3)$$

Where

CRT= Customer Retention (proxy for performance)

RES= Responsiveness

REL= Reliability

ASS= Assurance

EMP= Empathy

$\beta_0 - \beta_4$ = Coefficients

= Error Term

3.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The method of data analysis adopted for this study was descriptive statistics and the multiple linear regression model as estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) technique. In describing the characteristics of the sample respondents, the distribution showed that 57% of the respondents were male while the balance of 43% were female. Additionally, 76% of the respondents were between the ages of 25 to 50 years while 19% of the respondents were between the ages of 51 to 70 years. A negligible 5% of the respondents were below 25 years. This distribution reflects that majority of the respondents are in the working-class category. A five-level likert item scale was adopted using measurement of 5 to 1 as follows: 5 = Extremely satisfied, 4 = Very satisfied, 3 = Somewhat satisfied, 2 = Not so satisfied, 1 = Not satisfied at all.

Three hundred and eighty-four (384) structured questionnaires were administered electronically to residents and workers in Nigeria where the selected airlines are operational. Three hundred and fifty (350) representing 91.1% of the total questionnaires were deemed valid and subsequently analyzed, while thirty-four (34) questionnaires, representing 8.9%, were invalid. The following are the breakdown of both the valid and invalid responses from the different airlines:

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaires

Nigeria Airlines	Distributed Questionnaires	Invalid Questionnaires	Valid Questionnaires	Percentage Valid %
Air Peace	120	3	117	30.4
Max Air	39	3	36	9.4
Aero Contractors	36	6	30	7.8
Arik Air	84	6	78	20.3
Dana Air	105	16	89	23.2
Total	384	34	350	91.1

Source: Field Survey, 2022

From table 1 above, a total of thirty-four (34) responses were invalid, leaving only three hundred and fifty (350) responses valid for descriptive analysis of the questionnaires. All valid responses

totaling three hundred and fifty (350) were collated on an excel spreadsheet from where they were exported to the E-view software adopted as the statistical tool of analysis.

Table 2 Gender Distribution of Respondents

Male	200	57.0
Female	150	43.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 discloses that two hundred (200) respondents, representing 57% of the three hundred and fifty (350) total numbers of respondents are males, while one hundred and fifty (150) respondents, representing 43%, are females. This shows that there were more male respondents than female respondents, a distribution not expected to strongly influence the research questions as the questions are not gender sensitive.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Below 25 Years	14	4.0
25-50 Years	274	78.0
51-70 Years	62	18.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 3 shows that 78% of respondents, which are the majority, were within the age bracket of 25 – 50 years. This distribution implies that most of the respondents are working class. It is expected that this distribution may influence the pattern of response to the questionnaires and ultimately the research questions, as the group have more regular income and are expected to be more frequent flyers than those below 25 years.

Table 4: Abstract of questionnaire distributed to respondents

Questions	Domain	Category
How often do we keep to scheduled flights?	Reliability	Service Quality
How quickly do we attend to your request for rescheduling flights?	Responsiveness	Service Quality
How polite are our staff in discharging their duties?	Assurance	Service Quality
How often do our staff give your request special attention?	Empathy	Service Quality
How likely are you to purchase our airline ticket?	Customer Retention	Performance

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 5 Assessment of Reliability

Items	5	4	3	2	1
How often do we keep to scheduled flights?	25 (7.1)	103 (29.4)	151 (43.1)	71 (20.4)	0 (0)
How often do we handle and resolve your complaints?	59 (16.9)	75 (21.4)	131 (37.4)	77 (22.0)	8 (2.3)
How often do you Communicate Delays and Flight Cancellations in Advance?	61 (17.4)	127 (36.3)	95 (27.2)	67 (19.1)	0 (0)

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 6 Assessment of Responsiveness

Items	5	4	3	2	1
How willing are our staff to assist you when you make enquiries?	56 (16.0)	144 (41.1)	120 (34.3)	30 (8.6)	0 (0)
How quickly do we attend to your requests for refunds for cancelled flights?	22 (6.3)	89 (25.4)	156 (44.6)	72 (20.6)	11 (3.1)
How quickly do we attend to your requests for rescheduling of flights?	31 (8.8)	134 (38.3)	141 (40.3)	44 (12.6)	0 (0)

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 7 Assessment of Assurance

Items	5	4	3	2	1
How competent do you find our staff in the discharge of their duties?	30 (8.6)	144 (41.1)	140 (40.0)	36 (10.3)	0 (0)
How polite is our ground staff when attending to your requests?	25 (7.1)	134 (38.3)	134 (38.3)	52 (14.9)	5 (1.4)
Do you feel comfortable interacting with the ground staff?	25 (7.1)	134 (38.3)	134 (38.3)	52 (14.9)	5 (1.4)

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 8 Assessment of Empathy

Items	5	4	3	2	1
How friendly are our ground staff?	25 (7.1)	100 (28.6)	178 (50.9)	47 (13.4)	0 (0)
How often do our staff give your requests special attention?	25 (7.1)	100 (28.6)	178 (50.9)	47 (13.4)	0 (0)
How Cordial is our Cabin Crew during, before and after your Flight?	39 (11.1)	200 (57.1)	95 (27.1)	16 (4.7)	0 (0)

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 9 Assessment of Retention

Items	5	4	3	2	1
How likely are you to purchase our airline tickets again?	36 (10.3)	156 (44.6)	92 (26.3)	58 (16.5)	8 (2.3)

Source: Field Survey, 2022

4.0 Data Analysis

The ordinary least square regression results coefficients are presented below at equation 4.1

$$\begin{aligned}
 CRT = & -0.018 + 0.524RES + 0.612REL + 0.427ASS - 0.530EMP \dots\dots\dots (4.1) \\
 T\text{-stat.} & (-0.226) \quad (6.966) \quad (8.112) \quad (5.844) \quad (-6.315) \\
 Prob. & (0.821) \quad (0.000) \quad (0.000) \quad (0.000) \quad (0.000)
 \end{aligned}$$

R-squared	0.870107	Mean dependent var	3.440000
Adjusted R-squared	0.868601	S.D. dependent var	0.960897
S.E. of regression	0.348316	Akaike info criterion	0.742769
Sum squared resid	41.85679	Schwarz criterion	0.797883
Log likelihood	-124.9846	Hannan-Quinn criter.	0.764706
F-statistic	577.7570	Durbin-Watson stat	0.183317
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000		

Source: Authors’ Computation, 2022 (See Appendix C)

The F-statistic which was used to examine the overall significance of regression model revealed that the result is significant, as indicated by the value of F-statistic above in equation 4.1, which is significant at the 5.0 percent level. That is, the F-statistic P-value of 0.000000 is less than 0.05. The adjusted R-square value of 0.868601 revealed that service delivery has a good fit on the performance of the Airlines in Nigeria. It indicates that 86.8 percent of the variation in the performance of the Airlines in Nigeria was caused by service delivery while the remaining unaccounted variation of 13.2 percent is captured by the white noise error term.

Similarly, by holding REL, ASS and EMP variables constant, a percentage increase in the responsiveness (RES) will lead to about 0.524 (52%) percent increase in the performance (proxy customer retention) by the Airlines in Nigeria. It implies that responsiveness has a positive and significant effect on customer retention by the Airlines in Nigeria.

By holding RES, ASS and EMP variables constant, a percentage increase on reliability (REL) will lead to about 0.612 (61%) increase in the performance (proxy customer retention) by the Airlines in Nigeria. It implies that reliability has a positive and significant effect on customer retention by the Airlines in Nigeria

Holding RES, REL and EMP variables constant a percentage increases in assurance (ASS) will lead to about 0.427(43%) increase in the performance (proxy customer retention) by the Airlines. It implies that assurance has a positive and significant effect on customer retention by the Airlines in Nigeria.

Finally, by holding RES, REL and ASS variables constant, a percentage decrease in empathy (EMP) will lead to about -0.530 (53%) decrease in the performance (proxy customer retention) by the Airlines in Nigeria. It implies that empathy has a negative and significant effect on customer retention by the Airlines in Nigeria.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study revealed that responsiveness, assurance, and reliability had positive significant effect on customer retention by the airlines in Nigeria. This agrees with Jan (2012) whose findings shows that these constructs had positive significant relationship with airline performance in Malaysia.

It further confirms the findings of Psomas et al. (2020) that the constructs of assurance, reliability and responsiveness showed a high influence on performance of the Greek Citizens Service Centres and that of Akdere et al. (2018), that high level of service quality was linked to assurance, reliance and responsiveness.

With regards to the construct of responsiveness, the positive and significant effect on customer retention could be linked to the quick turnaround time in attending to requests and inquiries of customers on different complaints such as rescheduling of cancelled flights, refunds, and the willingness of staff to respond to other inquiries as relates to flight schedules and destinations during the study.

The positive and significant effect of reliability on customer retention, could be associated with the airlines' approach of keeping to their promises in their functions such as ensuring that flights leave as scheduled, informing customers of delays and cancellations well in advance to help them make alternative arrangements, or rather make such alternative arrangements by forming alliances with other organizations.

The construct of assurance also showed a positive and significant effect on customer retention based on the competence of the airlines' staff, the confidence they showed in the discharge of their duties and the trust that customers had in them. Furthermore, the attitude of politeness on the part of the airlines' staff made the customers feel very comfortable relating with them during the period of this study.

Finally, findings from the study also show that empathy has negative and significant effect on customer retention by the Airlines in Nigeria. This is contrary to the study of Psomas *et al.* (2020), whose findings show that empathy has significant impact on citizen's satisfaction in Greek citizens' service centres, but it is in line with Akdere *et al.* (2020), whose study of Turkish hospitals revealed that high level of service quality was linked to the other three constructs of assurance, reliability and responsiveness, rather than empathy. This observation shows that

customers are generally more interested in getting quality service or product or getting to their destination on schedule in the case of airlines, rather than how friendly or cordial the employees of the organization might be. This is not to say that empathy is not an important dimension of service quality as it will be a basis for making choices if customers have an alternative to the product or service provided by a particular organization.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that service delivery has a significant effect on performance of airlines in Nigeria. The outcome of quality service delivery because of responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy constructs are increased market share, increased profits, increased customer satisfaction, increased purchase intention and increased customer retention. Firms with superior quality products and services will always outperform firms with inferior products and services. The policy recommendations for this study are:

- i. Airline managers should develop strategies for service quality such as suggestion boxes, live chats, and dedicated telephone lines for customers which will boost the airlines' image, retain existing customers and attract new customers from their competitors.
- ii. Nigeria airlines should increase promptness in their service delivery by being proactive rather than reactive, to reduce customers' waiting time and increase retention. This will involve using current data at their disposal to predict and avert future occurrences of delays.
- iii. Airlines invest in capacity building for employees to increase job knowledge and enrichment and portray trust and confidence of the employees as perceived by their customers.
- iv. The empathy construct is a critical dimension as customers may have to rely on it where there are alternatives to a product in the face of stiff competition. To improve on the empathy, airlines should study the needs and priorities of their customers and what satisfies those needs. Strategic alliances and joint ventures may be formed to have other travel related partners for example car rentals companies, hotel accommodation and travel insurance
- v. A synergy of factors from both public and private organizations such as affordability of services from public organizations and effectiveness of the delivery from private organizations.

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