

Service Innovativeness and Customer Commitment of Airlines in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between service innovativeness and customer commitment. A sample of eighty-six (86) air travelers was selected for the study using the judgmental sampling method. 86 copies of questionnaires were distributed to respondents and returned as usable. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson product-moment correlation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0. The study findings revealed that there exists a strong positive relationship between service innovativeness and customer commitment of airlines in Rivers State. The findings indicate that the level of attention these airlines give to innovativeness directly influences the extent of air travelers' commitment. Therefore, we recommend that airlines prioritize service innovativeness by utilizing modern, relevant technology.

Keywords: service innovativeness, customer commitment, repeat purchase

1.0 Introduction

Airlines are air travelers' carriers meant to take people from one locality to another, either locally or globally, at a cost that is reflected on the flight ticket. The first flight landed in Nigeria in 1925, but commercial flights commenced in the early 1930s,

shuttling between Lagos and Warri (Adeniran & Gbadamosi, 2017). Air transport has enormously contributed to the global economies (Botton, 2006; Mandina & Karisambudzi, 2016; Nwaogbe, Wokili, & Omoke, 2013) by linking foreign businesses and promoting tourism that boosts home and foreign trade (Adeniran & Gbadamosi, 2017; Rahim, 2016) and overhauls a nation's economy (Ofori-Okyere & Atanga, 2016) and socio-economic growth (Cooper, 2017). To add credence, in 2012, the International Air Transport Service Association (IATA) projected 82 million jobs accompanied by 6.9 trillion economic value by 2030 (Akpoymare, Kuunle & Ganiyu, 2016).

Nigerian airline operations have a dissatisfactory historical birth by service ills (Daramola, 2014), evident in unsafe flights and poor service delivery (Awa & Nwobu, 2020). This destroys airlines' image, resulting in some customers switching to attractive alternative airlines (White & Yanamandrum, 2007).

Service innovativeness reduces and retains aggrieved customers by preventing them from exhibiting negative behavior afterward (Senbabauglu, 2017; Diaw & Gideon, 2018; Roper & Burke, 2016). They stress that innovativeness is a relationship commitment tool.

Dearth of innovation and service mishap affect customers' commitment adversely (Senbabauglu, 2017). Globally, airlines experience stiff competition, and operators struggle to attract and keep customers committed by adopting varying techniques (Ogbuji & Tula, 2016).

This paper focused on ascertaining how service innovativeness can induce buyers' relationship commitment by leveraging the available technology, tools, resources, and human factors accumulated at the disposal of airports to engender air travelers' commitment. Innovation-motivated air passengers' convenience enhances commitment mostly in the service industry and boosts long-tenure commercial bonds (Ogbuji & Tula, 2016). Despite government involvement and air passengers' outcry based on aviation service disappointments, passengers are still facing abysmal service experiences.

There are indications that the provision of poor service delivery by airlines at Rivers State Port-Harcourt Airport could be as a result of the non-adoption of need-satisfying innovation (Roper & Burke, 2022). They assert that goodness of service and its delivery are functions of innovativeness, which serves as an indication of better service creation that makes buyers' resilience. Innovativeness boosts corporate image and earns a competitive edge in an industry rocked with competition (Mandina & Kraismabudzi, 2016). It is the key to enthroned commitment (Storey & Larbig, 2018; Roper & Burke, 2013). The volume of repeat purchases and buyers' commitment is determined by the extent of a product's

innovativeness (Roper & Burke, 2022). Defective service innovation such as sub-standard quality of in-flight services and aircrafts affects commitment considerably (Ogbuji & Tula, 2016). Based on this, we are inclined to believe that service innovativeness will direct customer commitment.

2.0 Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses

2.1 Service Innovativeness

George C. Homans (1961), in an effort to explain the determinants of human behavior, proposed the social exchange theory. This theory posits that customer behavior is shaped by an evaluation of the benefits and costs associated with an exchange relationship (J. J. Sierra & Shaun McQuitty, 2005). The central premise is that the difference between perceived benefits and incurred costs, such as money, time, and effort, determines the level of commitment within a commercial relationship. Consequently, lower perceived benefits result in weaker commitment, whereas higher rewards foster stronger affective commitment, which may evolve from initial calculative commitment (Nasir, 2015).

Service innovativeness plays a critical role in strengthening the commercial relationship between sellers and buyers, particularly in highly competitive markets (Mandina & Kraissamabudzi, 2016). The social exchange theory further suggests that mutually beneficial exchanges encourage customers to maintain brand relationships through positive emotional attachment (Sierra & McQuitty, 2005).

Drawing on George C. Homans' social exchange theory, this study explains customer behavior and loyalty within exchange relationships. The theory implies that, for businesses to remain competitive and profitable, they must continuously provide innovative and need-satisfying products and services that sustain customer commitment.

Senbabauglu (2017) examined the effect of service innovativeness on buyers' perceived total service uniqueness and corporate image value and found that service innovativeness serves as a window that induces customers' commitment and earns positive behavioral intention. Ogbuji & Tula (2016) opine that all forms of business quest for buyers' commitment, but the provision of a competitive edge, novelty technique, as well as goods and/or services is an issue of concern.

In the same vein, Pilawa, et al. (2022) empirically analyzed service innovative attractiveness in the retailing business and revealed that it earns a rival edge, repeat patronage, and commitment.

2.2 The Concept of Consumer Commitment

Commitment is a sacrificial pledge to keep a beneficial exchange partnership (Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005). They added that this strengthens a bond that yields continuous loyalty even if there is a decline in satisfaction level. Evanschitzky, et al. (2006) define commitment as an economic, emotional, and psychological value placed on a relationship. CC is an enduring drive or motivation to keep a valued exchange partnership afloat with a seller (Rasheed, Olanipekun, & Adetunji, 2015). They adduced that committed buyers insert conscious effort to maintain exchange ties. CC is driven by the economic value to be tapped by the parties involved. CC is a long-term desire in a customer for an offer, an object, or a brand name geared towards keeping a profitable relationship (Marina et al., 2016). They describe it as a notable determinant of relationships. Relationship commitment is a product of social, economic, moral, personal, or structural commitment or a selected blend (Nasir, 2015). A customer is committed morally when the fellow feels it is obligatory to do so. Is a bond maintained in spite of associated barriers because of an individual's sense of good and bad (Peelen, 2005)? This study, however, adopted repeat purchase as a proxy of customer commitment.

2.2.1 Repeat Purchase

Repeat purchase is the patronage frequency of a brand over a period (Ogbuji & Azuma, 2014). Buyers repeatedly purchase a brand that satisfies them emotionally, intellectually, and physically (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015). Repeat buying is often based on a delighted experience occasioned by a novelty offer (Alshurided, 2014; Senbabauglu, 2017). It is believed that repeat purchase is a signal of product treatment acceptance.

Repeat purchase is based on previous buying experience, recommendation, and positive word of mouth (Zygiaris, Mammed, Alsshubabaie, & Rehman, 2012). Customers make voluntary repeat buys because of the benefits experienced from previous purchase episodes (Mauluna & Craig, 2003), mostly in the service industry (Alshurided, 2014), but it is enhanced through reliability birthed by innovativeness (Zygaris et al., 2022). Repeat buy has remained one of the most reliable tools for measuring commitment in the service domain (Alshurided, 2014). Awa et al. (2014) and Ogonu et al. (2019) scholarly proved that repeat purchase is the major indicator of behavioral commitment. Buyers' commitment is a sacrificial concern of every commercial venture that wants to remain in business, especially in the face of rivalry (Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005). Customer commitment determines the profit frame of a business organization, either small or large.

2.3 Service Innovativeness and Customer Commitment

Innovativeness indicates attractiveness of an offer due to its need-satisfying value (Senbabaoglu, 2017). It determines the extent of an offer's attractiveness. Innovativeness in the service firm enhances its survival and growth, which is a product of buyers' satiation that boosts sales and reduces complaint and defection threats (Baumol, 2002). The quest for innovativeness creates room for technological advancement that facilitates the goodness of an offer and better value creation that makes buyers resilient (OBCD, 2006; Roper & Burke, 2022). Innovativeness is limited to government and/or organizational culture (Roper & Burke, 2022). Innovativeness may lead to fairness in pricing (Roper et al., 2015).

It is the key in stimulating patronage and loyalty (Storey & Larbig, 2018; Roper & Burke, 2022). Innovativeness fosters buyers' sustenance (Storey & Larbig, 2018). The volume of repeat purchases and buyers' commitment is determined by the extent of innovativeness (Roper & Burke, 2022). However, innovativeness may not attract buyers' commitment based on their status quo because clients' evaluation of innovation may lead to defection (Heidereich, Kraemer, & Handrich, 2016). Innovativeness bridges the gap between expectation and satiation as well as attitudinal behavior (Yeboah-Asiamah et al., 2016). In contrast, innovation may sometimes not be attractive or satisfactory based on the perception of the target market (Diaw & Gideon, 2018). Based on the above, we hereby hypothesized as follows:

H01: The relationship between service innovativeness and customer commitment in Rivers State is not significant.

H02: The relationship between service innovativeness and repeat purchase in Rivers State is not significant.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts the realistic approach to ontology backed up by positivist epistemology, a relatively deterministic methodology. To test the hypotheses, primary data were generated through the field survey questionnaire administered randomly to eighty-six (86) air passengers within the economic population in Rivers State who had at least three years of air travel experience. Hence, the study sample size is 86. The study instrument was validated by experts in the field of marketing. The internal consistency was determined using the Cronbach Alpha formula, and the results yielded above 0.7, which shows instrument reliability. The judgement sampling method was used to select the sample units for this work. Pearson Product

Moment correlation was used to test the hypotheses with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0.

4.0 Analysis

Eighty-six (86) were administered to the respondents and retrieved usable

4.1 Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between service innovativeness and customer commitment of airlines in Rivers State.

Table 4.1: Correlation Analysis on Service Innovativeness and customer commitment

Correlations			
		Innovativeness	Customer Commitment
Innovativeness	Pearson Correlation	1	.869
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Customer Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.869	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2023

The PPMCC(r) value of 0.869 and probability value of 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) were observed in Table 4.1 above. The presented research suggests a statistically significant and robust positive correlation between innovativeness and consumer loyalty towards airlines in the Rivers State. This indicates a significant and robust correlation between innovativeness and customer commitment towards airlines in the Rivers State. Based on the criteria of a significance level of less than 0.05 and a correlation coefficient of more than 0.5, the null hypothesis was rejected.

4.2 Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between innovativeness and repeat purchase towards airlines in Rivers State.

Table 4.2: Correlation Analysis on Innovativeness and Repeat Purchase

Correlations			
		Innovativeness	Repeat Purchase
Innovativeness	Pearson Correlation	1	.877
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Repeat Purchase	Pearson Correlation	.877	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2023

The PPMCC(r) value of 0.877 and the associated probability value of 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) were seen in Table 4.23 above. The available information suggests a statistically significant and robust positive correlation between innovativeness and repeat purchasing behavior in the context of airlines in Rivers State. Thus, it is inferred that there is a significant positive relationship between innovativeness and repeat purchase intention. Based on the statistical criteria of a significance level of less than 0.05 and a correlation coefficient of more than 0.5, the null hypothesis two was rejected.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The test hypothesis Ho1 revealed that service innovativeness is positive and significantly related to customer commitment. The result obtained from the analysis showed that the increase in service innovation would lead to customer commitment. In line with these findings, Senbabauglu (2017) and Pilawa et al. (2022), who studied the effect of service innovativeness on perceived value and buyers' attractive conduct, respectively, revealed that innovativeness of service boosts commitment and repeat buying in the retail business (Turkey) and the same business domain (Sweden). On the contrary, Diaw & Gideon (2018) posit that innovation may sometimes not be attractive nor satisfactory.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides empirical and statistical evidence on the relationship between service innovativeness and customer commitment of airlines in Rivers State. The study concludes that service innovativeness has a positive and significant impact on customer commitment.

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. For airlines to attract and keep customers committed, it is important that they focus on service innovativeness using modern relevant technology.
- ii. Air companies should elicit customer feedback to discover how their customers feel about their numerous services and find appropriate ways of increasing brand attractiveness, acceptance, and repeat patronage.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE ON
 SERVICE INNOVATIVENESS AND CUSTOMER COMMITMENT**

Instruction: Please tick the appropriate option.

- (1) What gender are you? (a) Male (b) Female
- (2) What is your marital status? (a) Single (b) Married (c) Divorce/Separated (d) Widowed/ Widower
- (3) What is your age category? (a) 18 - 25yrs (b) 26 - 35yrs (c) 36 - 45yrs (d) 56 – 65yrs
- (4) What is your educational background? (a) O’Level (b) OND/ND (c) HND/B.Sc/ B.ED (d) Masters (e) Ph.D
- (7) How many years have you travelled by air till date? (a) 1-5yrs (b) 6-10yrs (c) 11-15yrs (d) 15yrs and above
- (8) How often do you travel by air? (a) weekly (b) monthly (c) quarterly (d) yearly

Instruction: Please note that assigned weights are given to responses below as filling guide.

- Strongly agree (SA) = 5
- Agree (A) = 4
- Neutral (N) = 3
- Disagree (D) = 2
- Strongly disagree (SD) = 1

S/NO	INNOVATIVENESS (Roper & Burke, 2022)	5	4	3	2	1
CI1	Continous unique service delivery renew exchange bond.					
CI2	Airline innovativeness serves as persuasive appeal.					
CI3	Airline’s perceived competitiveness is based on their innovativeness.					

CI4	Service attractiveness earns referrals (Pilawa et al., 2022).					
CI5	Airline personnel interactive skills make me a loyal customer (Pilawa et al., 2022).					

S/NO	CUSTOMER COMMITMENT (Ang & Buttle, 2006)	5	4	3	2	1
COI1	Fair flight tickets do bind airline and passengers.					
COI2	Airlines personnel's performance policy is pleasing.					
COI3	Does adequate compensation help consumers to build confidence with an airline?					
COI4	I would recommend firm with clean reputation and stable (Chung et al., 2015).					
COI5:	I would like to patronize firm that is trustworthy and open to customers (Chung et al., 2015)					

S/NO	REPEAT PURCHASE (Komunda&Osarenkhoe, 2012)	5	4	3	2	1
COI1	I am committed to an airline that meets my flight need.					
COI2	I always book airline based on perceived price fairness.					
COI3	Confidence in baggage handling security affects repeat purchase.					
COI4	Perceived fairness in flight operations affect continues rebuy.					
COI5:	Airline's dependibility induces repeat purchase (Namukasa, 2013).					