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Airlines Marketing Attributes and Customers 'Loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria: An Empirical Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Despite the efforts of airlines to differentiate and position their organizations for successful operations in the competitive aviation business, however, maintaining customers' loyalty appears to be a growing concern and challenge to managers in the sector in Nigeria. This study therefore assessed the effect of airlines marketing attributes on customers' loyalty at the Port Harcourt International Airport, Rivers State. This study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design whereby primary data were obtained from 246 passengers of functional airlines at Port Harcourt International Airport through the questionnaire method. The data were analysed using simple percentage, mean score, standard deviation and multiple regression aided by statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that airlines' marketing attributes dimensions (affordability, staff friendliness and online booking) were not well perceived by passengers and therefore not significant enough to earn passengers' loyalty. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that all the dimensions of airline marketing attributes did not have a significant effect on customers' loyalty. The study recommended reduction in air fare, improvement in air travel processes at the airport and better customer relationship management strategies for customers' retention.

Keywords:

Marketing attributes. Affordability. Staff Friendliness. Online Booking. customers' loyalty

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1. Introduction

The aviation industry is an important component of the broad transportation system of any economy. As a key player in the tourism industry, it accounts significantly for tourism growth through air transportation of domestic and foreign visitors from one place to another destination, generation of direct and indirect employment and profitability as well as contributing to the global trillion dollar tourism market (Ekeobong, 2021). Accordingly, competition in the industry has reached a feverish pitch, with airlines' management adopting various marketing tools and strategies aimed at gaining visibility, combating rivalry and courting passengers for sustainable business operations. In this cut-throat competitive business arena, customers are the target of most of the airlines' marketing strategies. Generally in aviation sector, marketing techniques in products/ services, pricing, promotion, place, processes, people and physical evidences are deployed for passengers' acquisition, satisfaction and retention. The premise for the adoption of aviation service marketing tools and techniques is to gain competitive advantage over identified rivals.

However, the quality of the airlines' marketing offerings carries some inherent features or attributes which passengers use in evaluating the airlines to determine their satisfaction and travel behavioural outcomes. An airline succeeds and thrives over time when passengers reinforce their brand choice through patronage and eventually loyalty. Viewed from this perspective, airline passengers' loyalty drives an airline's organizational revenue and profit through satisfaction (Mordick, 2017).

Air passengers' loyalty is a deeply held commitment to return or patronize the same airline brand in the future based on past satisfying experience (Marina et al, 2018). A satisfied passenger does not only stick to the brand but also spreads positive words-of-mouth about the brand to others, which is crucial the airline's short-term and long-term success. An airline that fails to recognize passengers' satisfaction and loyalty as important to corporate sustainability is only courting failure in the long run, especially as competition becomes fiercer and stiffer.

Several studies have associated marketing attributes with certain positive outcomes in several industrial sectors (Jamshed et al, 2023; Kestoni, 2021; Bristovic & Miella, 2018; Garga & Bambale, 2016). Therefore, it stands to reason that marketing attributes might also produce some positive outcomes in the air transportation sector of the tourism industry in Nigeria. However, there is limited knowledge in the literature on the effect of airline marketing attributes on customers' loyalty in the Nigerian aviation industry context, especially in the post COVID-19 and oil subsidy removal era characterized by a slump business performance in many sectors. Consequently, this has created a gap in the literature that should be bridged. Therefore, this study rectifies this shortcoming by empirically evaluating the effect of airlines marketing attributes on passengers' loyalty at the Port Harcourt International Airport, Omagwa, Rivers State.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This work is anchored on two theories, namely, attribution and expectancy - disconfirmation theories

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory was propounded by Fritz Heider in 1958. The theory attempts to explain how people attribute the causes of events or behavior and to analyze the impact of such attribution on their future behavior. Attribution theory is a psychological framework that helps explain why people act the way they do in different situations. Attribution helps businesses understand the customer journey, including which touchpoints are most effective in driving or predicting purchase behaviour (Kestoni, 2021). Attribution theory had been applied in previous studies on brand attributes (Asley, 2019; Nkwema & Ushie, 2018, Wushishi & Tahiru, 2016). Recent research has also adopted the theory in the study of product attributes to predict purchase behaviour, for example, Iloamae and Nzube (2022) applied attribution theory in their study on attributes influencing consumers' choice of retail outlets in the fast-moving consumer goods sector in Awka.

Attribution theory is relevant and useful in this study as it explains that passengers will be more easily persuaded and convinced by the airline marketing attributes that define the organization's offerings at service touch points and processes, if they are perceived as favourable from the standpoint of the customer, and vice versa. For the purpose of the present study, the application of the attribution theory is that the outcome is represented by passengers' loyalty, while the causal attributions or factors refer to the airlines marketing attributes, which in the context of this study have been operationalized as affordability, staff friendliness and on-line booking.

2.1.2 Expectancy - Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980)

Expectancy disconfirmation theory was propounded by Oliver in 1980. The theory suggests that customer satisfaction is determined by the extent to which a product or service meets or exceeds customer expectations. According to this theory, consumers form expectations regarding the performance or quality of a product or service based on various factors such as prior experiences, word-of-mouth recommendations, and advertising. When the actual performance of the product or service matches or exceeds these expectations, customers experience a sense of satisfaction. On the other hand, if the actual performance falls below their expectations, customers may feel dissatisfied. The theory suggests that satisfaction is a result of the perceived discrepancy between expectations and actual performance, rather than being solely determined by performance alone (Mash & Helmi, 2017).

Furthermore, the theory proposes that customer satisfaction is influenced by two factors: confirmation and disconfirmation. Confirmation occurs when the actual performance of a product or service matches customers' expectations. Disconfirmation, on the other hand, occurs when there is a difference between expectations and actual performance. When there is positive disconfirmation, meaning that the product or service exceeds expectations, customers tend to experience higher levels of satisfaction (Mantey & Naidoo, 2017). Negative disconfirmation, where the product or service falls short of expectations, can lead to dissatisfaction. If the performance matches the expectations, it is referred to as a confirmation.

Expectancy – confirmation theory is relevant to this study because passengers have high expectation regarding safety and other attributes when they choose an airline. If an airline consistently meets or exceeds safety standards, it confirms customers' expectations and contributes to their loyalty and satisfaction. Passengers also expect airlines to adhere to

schedules and minimize delays. When an airline consistently meets or exceeds on-time performance, it confirms customers' expectations and enhances satisfaction. On the other hand, if an airline frequently experiences delays or cancellations, it can lead to negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction. Airlines that offer comfortable seating, ample legroom, entertainment options and other amenities can positively influence passenger loyalty. When these attributes meet customers' expectations, it confirms their expectations and enhances satisfaction.

2.2 Conceptual Clarification

Airline Marketing attributes

Marketing attributes are the inherent and defining features of a brand (Abouseada, Hassan, Saleh & Radwan, 2023). In the same vein, Sonari-Otobo and Ekeke (2020).(2017) opine that marketing attributes encompass many tangible and intangible qualities that collectively shape a brand's identity. The scholars also aver that marketing attributes go beyond surface-level elements and delve into the core values, features, and attributes that make a brand unique in a dynamic and competitive business environment.

From the foregoing, we conceptualize an airline's marketing attributes as the properties that are used by their customers, including air passengers to define or evaluate any marketing effort of the organization. Some common examples of marketing attributes include product quality, price, functionality, trustworthiness, and innovation, etc. (Kotler et al., 2010).

2.2 Dimensions of Airlines Marketing attributes

Affordability: Ogonu and Ihunwo (2022) opined that affordability is the customer's give-up value for an offer on the premise that it is capable of satisfying identified need. They posited that affordability comprises of monetary price, objective price and sacrifice. Adiele and Etik (2018) view affordability as the trade-off between the price paid and quality experience gotten from consumption. Perceived affordability determines the extent a customer values a product. Nazaria et al. (2017) view it as the outcome or a process of attaining acceptable affordability.

Affordability in the airline industry refers to the accessibility and reasonable cost of air travel for passengers. It is the ability of individuals to purchase airline tickets at a price that is within their budget and represents a fair value for the services provided (Marsh & Halmi, 2017). Competition among airlines plays a significant role in determining ticket prices. When multiple airlines operate on the same route, they often engage in price competition to attract passengers. This can lead to lower fares and increased affordability for travelers.

Staff Friendliness: Staff friendliness is the tendency or predisposition of an employee in a service firm to meet customers' need within the prescription of the job (Kattara, Weheba & Anmed (2015). Purchase intentions attainment by employees' behaviour is tied to market orientation that enhances customer familiarity.

Staff friendliness in the airline industry refers to the demeanor, helpfulness, and overall positive attitude displayed by airline personnel towards passengers. It encompasses the interactions between airline staff and passengers throughout various touchpoints, including check-in, boarding, in-flight service, and customer assistance. According to Siddigi et al (2020) friendly and welcoming staff contributes to overall customer satisfaction. Passengers appreciate being treated with respect, kindness, and professionalism. Positive interactions

with staff can enhance positive guests and travel experience, create a sense of comfort, and leave a lasting impression on passengers.

Online Booking: Online booking, also known as electronic booking (e-booking) in the airline sector, has become the primary method for customers to search and find the potential airlines firms of their choices for their usage (Fei, Hui & Yongzhong, 2017; Akinyede, Temitayo & Iwasokun, 2017). In addition, online booking has become more common in recent years, compared to traditional booking or booking directly at the counter. Online booking usually was conducted via smartphone application when the customers make the car seat reservation (Oloyede, Alaya & Adewole, 2014). IT-based bus ticketing and payment system is synonymous to an online booking system, online reservation system or computer reservations system (CRS) or central reservation system (Wikipedia, 2011). Online bookings is a computerized system used to store and retrieve information and conduct transactions related to bus/taxi travel (Eze et al., 2012). According to Kevin (2012) online booking is a generic web portal application that aids airlines firms' customers to reserve a seat in a certain airlines company anytime and anywhere and variety of buses/taxi that satisfy the customer's requirements are provided.

Passenger Loyalty

Loyalty can be conceptualized as the biased behavioral response, expressed over time, by some decision-making unit with respect to one airline out of a set of airlines, which is a function of psychological processes resulting in brand commitment (Aloitabi, 2015). Loyalty is what it is all about when we talk about airline choice. Hence, a loyal passenger returns to the airline and therefore is a stable and continuous source of income. Passenger loyalty is an important element of organizational success and profitability, because consumers that demonstrate the highest levels of loyalty towards a service are more inclined to repurchase the service more often and spend more (Ceccato & Masci, 2017).

Briliana (2018) views air passenger loyalty in terms of behavioral manifestation representing patronage of the same airline every time by the same passenger. Also, as alluded to by Bezerra and Gomes (2018), loyal passengers are more attractive for firms because they tend to be less price-sensitive and do not require much effort to communicate with than people with no prior experience with the company. Adiele and Etik (2011) identified five dimensions of loyalty from services literature: namely, repeat purchase of a service, resistance to switching, provision of positive word-of-mouth, identifying with a service and preference for a particular service provider.

2.3 Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

Affordability and Passenger Loyalty

Ogonu and Ihunwo (2022) conducted an empirical study on price fairness and customer loyalty of food and beverage industry in Port-harcourt. The findings showed a positive relationship between perceived fair price and customers' loyalty. Similarly, Riorini and Widayati (2018) examined customer satisfaction low cost carrier: stimulus and its consequences. The findings suggested a significant correlation between affordability and customers' loyalty. Mash and Helmi (2017) ascertained the influence of brand equity and price fairness on brand switching behaviour. case study on Pertamina customer in Jakarta. One of

the findings of the study was that perceived price fairness induced favourable purchase behaviour.

Nazwirman and Kom (2015) investigated the influence of perceived service performance and price fairness toward repurchase through customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth. The finding suggested a strong and positive effect of price fairness on satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth. Nazaria, Hosseinib & Kalejahic (2014) assessed the impact of price fairness on price satisfaction, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in Iran telecommunication market. The study revealed that fair price and satisfaction correlated positively and significantly. However, the extent to which this pertains to the Nigerian aviation sector has not been empirically validated, thus creating a void in the literature that should be bridged through further empirical validation. In view of the above, we formulate the following hypothesis:

HA1: Affordability has a significant effect on air customers' loyalty at the Port Harcourt International airport, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Staff Friendliness and Passenger Loyalty

Jamshed, Rab, Muhammad and Muhammad (2023) studied the effects of marketing attributes on word of mouth: Mediating role of brand trust and brand love. One of the major findings was that warm reception played a significant role in brand trust and brand love. Morison (2018) examined the influence of staff friendliness on customers' loyalty in aviation industry in Ethiopia.. The study found that staff friendliness contributed significantly to customers' loyalty.

Bogicevic, Yang and Bilgihan (2017) examined the visual data mining: Analysis of airline service quality attributes. The findings suggested that staff friendliness was important in repeat travel behavior and airline reuse. Alotaibi (2015) conducted an empirical evaluation of "AIRQUAL" scale for measuring airlines service quality and its effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty. It was found in the study that contact personnel attitude, customer satisfaction and loyalty were correlated.

Kattara, Weheba and Anmed (2015) assessed the impact of employees' behaviour on customers' service quality perceptions and overall satisfaction. A key finding indicated a significant impact of employees' behavior on customers' service quality perceptions and overall satisfaction. In the same vein, Turkay and Sengul (2014) investigated employee behaviours in creating customer satisfaction among hotel guests. The study revealed that contact personnel behavior significantly affected hotel guests' satisfaction and revisit intention.

Amba and Jonathan (2013) did an appraisal of the Nigerian Transport Sector, drawing empirical evidence from the railway and aviation sub-sectors of the economy. The study revealed among other things, that customer relation was important to the operations of the two transport sectors. However, more empirical validations in the aviation sector have been advocated. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

HA2: Staff Friendliness has a significant effect on air customers' loyalty at the Port Harcourt International airport, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Online Booking and Passenger Loyalty

Kim, Jin and Swinney (2019) conducted an empirical study to determine the role of e-tail quality, e-satisfaction and e-trust in online loyalty development process. It was found in the study that e-tail quality was crucial to e-satisfaction and e-trust which in turn could drive e-trust. Akinyede, Temitayo and Iwasokun (2017) investigated the design and implementation of an online booking system for cinema house in Lagos State, Nigeria. The finding showed that online booking had a strong positive correlation with customers' loyalty. Fei, Hui and Yongzhong (2017) empirically optimal online channel strategies for a hotel considering direct booking and cooperation with an online travel agent. The finding showed that online booking had a positive relationship with hotel guests' satisfaction and loyalty.

Oloyede, Alaya and Adewole (2014) investigated the development of an online bus ticket reservation system for a transportation service in Nigeria. An important finding of the study was that effective online bus ticket reservation system and customer satisfaction and loyalty were critical antecedents of sustainable transport services in Nigeria.

Eze, Okeudo and Amadi (2012) examined the contemporary approach to enhanced road transport system in Nigeria through the application of it-based (online) bus ticketing and payment system. The findings suggested that effective on-line booking can enhance passengers satisfaction and loyalty for profitable transportation business. Nevertheless the usefulness of their findings, more empirical validations are needed in other organizational and geographical contexts. Therefore, our last proposition is stated thus:

HA3: Online booking has a significant effect on customers' loyalty at the Port Harcourt International airport, Rivers State, Nigeria.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design, using a quantitative research approach to facilitate data collection and analysis in order to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses of the study. The target population of this study consists of air passengers (domestic and international) that patronized the airlines at the Port Harcourt International airport. An online database shows that the accessible population comprised 27 airlines operated at the Port Harcourt International Airport. Documented record of actual number of functional airlines at the Port Harcourt International Airport indicates that all the 27 listed airlines are functional and operational at the Port Harcourt International Airport.

The actual population of the study consisted of passengers that patronized the various airlines operating at the Port Harcourt International airport which is infinite and transient.

What this implies is that 246 passengers constituted the sample size of the study. However, a sample size of 246 was statistically determined. Consequently, the purposive sampling technique was used to select 246 passengers from 11 airlines operating in Port Harcourt International Airport on whom copies of questionnaires were administered based on availability and willingness of passengers to participate in the study. The questionnaire was structured on 5-point Likert scale, namely, Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Undecided (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5). Expert opinion was used to validate the instrument. Reliability of the instrument was determined through the Cronbach Alpha whose coefficient was 0.89 and greater than 0.70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978). The reliability test was aided by

statistical package for social science (SPSS version 21). The result obtained was an acceptable reliability value of 0.856 as the overall reliability (Table 1). All the constructs (Composite reliability Table 2) had Cronbachs Alpha above the minimum acceptable reliability coefficient of 0.7 and thus considered all the variables reliable accepted for investigating purpose.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.856	.814	16

Table 2. Composite Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Affordability	.781
Staff Friendliness	.803
Online Booking	.715
Passenger Loyalty	.873

Univariate analysis was performed using mean scores and standard deviation whereas the multiple regression was adopted for hypotheses tests, which was to determine the effect of each dimension of airline marketing attributes on passenger' loyalty.

4. Analysis and Results

In this study, a total of two hundred and forty six (246) copies of questionnaire were administered on air passengers at the Port Harcourt International Airport. Of this number, one hundred and ninety two (192) copies were duly completed and returned to the researchers, thus representing a response rate of 78%.However, fifty four (54) (28%) copies distributed questionnaire were not returned. Data analysis was based on the retrieved 192 copies.

Table 3: Demographic profile of respondents

S/No	Demographic variables	No	Percent
1	Gender		
	Male	102	53.13
	Female	90	46.86
	Total	192	100.0
2	Age		
	18 – 29 years	32	16.67
	30 – 39 years	58	30.21
	40 – 49 years	55	28.65
	51 and above	47	24.47
	Total	192	100

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3	Marital status		
	Single	77	
	married	40.10	
		115	
		59.90	
	Total	192	100
4	Occupation		
	Student	37	19.27
	Self-employed	49	25.52
	Private sector	40	20.83
	Government	39	20.32
	Retired	27	14.06
	Total	192	100
5	Academic/Educational Qualification		
	SSCE	28	14.58
	ND	37	19.27
	B.Sc/HND	50	26.04
	M.Sc	45	23.44
	Ph.D	32	16.67
	Total	192	100
6	Frequency of travel		
	First time	56	29.17
	Second time	74	38.54
	Regular	62	32.29
	Total	192	100
7	Purpose of travel		
	Business	53	27.60
	leisure	54	28.13
	others	85	44.27
	Total	192	100

Table 3 above shows the information on gender. The table revealed that (102) respondents (53.13%) were male while (90) respondents (46.86%) were female. This implies that male respondents were of the majority.

The information on age brackets of the respondents in section 2 of Table 3 above shows that 32 respondents (16.67%), were within 18 – 29 years, 58 respondents (30.21%) were within 30–49 years, 55 respondents (28.65%) were within 40–49 years while 47 respondents (24.47%) were 50 years and above. This information shows that majority of the respondents were within 30-39 years.

Section 3 of Table 3 shows the relationship status. 77 respondents (40.10%) were single, 115 respondents (59.90%) were married. This information implies that majority of the respondents are married.

Section 4 of Table 3 above shows information on the respondents' occupation. Student (37) (19.27%), self employed (49) (25.52%), private sector (40) (20.83%), government (39) (20.32%), retired (27) (14.06). from the information, those that are self employed are of the majority.

Section 5 of Table 3 above shows information on the respondents' level of education SSCE (28) (14.58%), ND (37) (19.27%), BSC/HND (50) (26.04%), M.SC (45) (23.44%), PHD (32) (16.67). From the information it shows that respondents with B.SC/HND are of the majority.

Section 6 of Table 4.2 shows the frequency of travel. First time (56) (29.7%), second time (74) (38.54%), regular (62) (32.29). This information implies that majority of the respondents are using the airline for the second time.

Section 7 of the Table 3 shows the purpose of travel. Business (53) (27.60%), leisure (54) (28.13%), others (85) (44.27%).

Univariate Analysis

The elements in the study were individually analysed with the use of descriptive statistics as shown below:

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on items of Marketing attributes and Customers' Loyalty

Univariate Analyses (Aggregate Mean Scores)			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affordability	192	2.4146	1.32135
Staff Friendliness	192	2.0420	1.10231
On-line Booking	192	3.2061	1.23217
Passenger' Loyalty	192	1.3319	1.17902
Valid N (listwise)	192		

As Table 4 shows, all the mean scores on the three indicators of airline marketing attributes (affordability, staff friendliness and on-line booking) were less than the threshold of 3.9. In the same vein, the standard deviations were quite low indicating that the responses were not far from each other. Furthermore, the mean score value of customers' loyalty was low (1.3319) implying that most of the passengers did not use the same flight always. This is an indication that respondents' perception of the items were not favourable.

Bivariate Analysis

Table 5-7 Multiple Regression Analysis showing the effect of airline marketing attributes on passenger loyalty.

Table 5. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.581 ^a	.338	.316	.25886

a. Predictors: (Constant), Affordability, Staff friendliness and online booking

Table 6. ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	315.415	7	45.059	672.451	.003 ^b
	Residual	12.329	184	.067		
	Total	327.745	191			

a. Dependent Variable: Passenger Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant),

Table 7 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.194	.061		-3.180	.002
	Affordability	-.136	.111	-.132	-1.220	.059
	Staff Friendliness	-.045	.091	-.046	-.496	.073
	Online Booking	.020	.113	.020	.176	.061

a. Dependent Variable: Passenger Loyalty

For this study, regression analysis was performed to predict the level of customers' loyalty based on three independent factors of airline marketing attributes. The three independent factors/dimensions of airline marketing attributes are: affordability, staff friendliness and on-line booking.

The Table 5 shows that R is .581, R Square is .338 and adjusted R square is .987. This is an indication that 33.8% of the variance in passenger loyalty can be explained by the changes in independent variables of airline marketing attributes. As a general rule, this model is considered as not being a 'good fit' as this, multiple regression model is not able to explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: passenger loyalty (Moosa & Hassan, 2015). The ANOVA Test in Table 6 shows that $F = 672.451$ & $p = .0003 < 0.05$, indicating a positive interaction between the airline service attributes and passenger loyalty, but insignificant effect of the former on the later.

The result of the regression analysis (Table 7) shows that all the three indicators of airline marketing attributes' explanatory contributions to the dependent variable (customers' loyalty) were positive but insignificant. The first was affordability (AFD), ($B = -.132$; $p = .059 > 0.05$). The second was predictor was staff friendliness (SF) ($B = -.145$; $p = .073 > 0.05$) while the third variable (online booking) though positive, (OB) ($B = .020$; $p = .061 > 0.05$) was not a significant predictor of customers' loyalty. Therefore, the three null hypotheses were accepted.

5. Discussions

The multiple regression result in Table 7 shows that affordability had a positive but insignificant effect on passenger loyalty in the airline industry in Rivers State, Nigeria ($B = -.132$; $p = .059 > 0.05$). The result suggests that affordability and passengers' loyalty are related. However, the interaction is inverse; implying that high air fare charged by the airlines cannot induce customers' loyalty. This is because most passengers would prefer airlines with low or moderate air fares. The result is a sad reminder of the constant upward review of flight tickets in Nigeria. The result is consistent with Kotler and Armstrong (2010) who asserted that price of a product/service was pivotal to business survival based on its revenue generating value for organisations, but has capacity to retain customers or turn them off. The later may be the case in Nigeria as depicted by the low value of the standardized coefficient ($-.132$) in Table 7 suggesting that very few people who can afford the high flight tickets travel by air in the country.

Our test result further revealed that airline contact personnel friendliness had a positive but insignificant influence on passenger loyalty in the airline industry in Rivers State, Nigeria ($B = -.046$; $p = .073 > 0.05$). The result is inconsistent with previous studies such as Kattara, Weheba and Anmed, (2015); Suki (2014); Turkay and Sengul (2014); who found that that courtesy of employees was found to be very important. This implies that airlines with friendly contact personnel characterized by courtesy and empathy will draw and retain more passengers for their organizations than those that treat passengers with contempt and ignomy. However, the unfriendly attitude of airline workers in Nigeria is alarming which can never drive passenger loyalty. As gleaned from the mean score and standard deviation in our univariate analysis in Table 4. and the low point of the standardized coefficient (.046) beta value in our bivariate analysis in Table 7., the unfriendly predisposition of most airlines contact personnel is not good for a service environment like airline marketing where important personalities constitute the target market.

Finally, findings from the multiple regression result of the study indicated that online booking had a positive but insignificant effect on passenger loyalty in the airline industry in Rivers State, Nigeria ($B = .020$; $p = .061 > 0.05$). The result is inconsistent with previous studies such as Kim and Swinney (2019); Akinyede et al. (2017); Fei et al (2017). What our multiple regression result implies is that although on-line booking could be a facilitative travel procedure, however, it did not have a significant effect on customers' loyalty to the airlines in our own context. This is because passengers who cannot do online booking, perhaps due to internet technical hitches, have the option of physical on-site booking at the airlines' airport offices or travel agencies' offices. Viewed from this perspective, it stands to reason that on-line booking may not be a significant driver of airline brand loyalty. Furthermore, the low standardized coefficient, beta value (.020) implies deficiency in the online domain and the difficulties Nigerians encounter with online transactions due to network problems. The foregoing suggest that the online booking mechanism will not be able to replace travel intermediaries in Nigeria.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The main objective of the study was to determine the effect of airline marketing attributes on customers' loyalty within the context of airlines operating in the tourism sector of Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, the Airline Marketing attributes-Passenger Loyalty (ABA-PL) model was developed and empirically tested at the Port

Harcourt International Airport, Rivers State. Our research revealed that the dimensions of airline marketing attributes (affordability, staff friendliness and on-line booking) were insignificant predictors of customers' loyalty. Although there is an interaction between airlines marketing attributes and customers' loyalty, however, their low rating by respondents as gleaned from the mean score values in our univariate analysis in table 4.2 and the low standardized coefficients (beta values) in our bivariate analysis in table 4.4 suggest that a lot of improvements are required in those areas.

A very important finding of the study is the fact that statistical analysis of the interaction between airline marketing attributes and customers' loyalty within the context of airlines showed that the coefficient of determination is 33.8 %. This value is not good for airlines in a study involving three attributes of a service brand. The reason may not be far-fetched, as it could be ascribed to the fact that customers of airline services are mindful of airline attributes. It is therefore safe to conclude by stating that the outcome of the research indicates that airline marketing attributes in terms of affordability, staff friendliness and online booking are important determinants of passengers loyalty in the airline industry. It is very important for entrepreneurs and managers of airlines in Nigeria to develop a winning service brand marketing strategy capable of enhancing passenger loyalty.

Another implication is that the federal government can do a downward review of their flight tickets in line with the changing socio-economic realities in Nigeria today. Where an upward review is necessary, the amount charged for flights should reflect the quality of service rendered. The findings of the study also imply that Airline owners and managers have to train their service employees on how to develop and implement customer service strategy that is capable of delighting passengers. Another implication is that Airlines are expected to build world-class online infrastructure that will help to enhance online transactions with their target market and ensure that services rendered reflect value for money spent by passengers.

7. Contribution to Knowledge

The study provides an example of using the Airline Marketing attributes-Passenger Loyalty (AMA-PL) model to empirically test the effect of airline marketing attributes on passenger loyalty within the context of airlines operating at the Port Harcourt international airport, Omagwa, Rivers State Nigeria. Another major contribution to knowledge is that the empirical research effort captured three dimensions of airline marketing attributes (affordability, staff friendliness, online booking) in a single model.

8. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Only passengers of airlines at the Port Harcourt International Airport participated in the study. We failed to extend our empirical analysis to other airports in the country. Future research efforts should ascertain passengers' evaluation of airline marketing attributes and loyalty at other airports in the country. Furthermore, future research should focus on the attributes of other brands like hotels and Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) and their interactions with consumer behavioural outcomes with a view to deepening insights.

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