Perception of Travelers on the Nigerian Airline Communication Technique: A Study of Selected Airlines

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ABSTRACT: Communication is an essential human requirement. It involves the expression of one's thoughts, ideas, and opinions in an understandable manner. Communication could be verbal or non-verbal, and it is an essential aspect of successful organisations. Effective communication in organisations builds employees' confidence in their employers; it helps employees better understand the vision and mission statement of their organisation, and it promotes internal relationships among staff. Therefore this study seeks to assess airline communication issues and the Nigerian airline travelling experience.The study adopted the use of questionnaire (quantitative). The study concluded that when it comes to responding to requests on Twitter, Arik and Dana are the best in the country, typically responding in under five minutes. The study concluded that Twitter is a great way for passengers to stay informed because it is simple to use and create, read, and respond to tweets takes little time, that the aviation industry is encouraged to invest more in the latest iterations and innovations in digital communication since they contribute positively towards passenger facilitation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication in the aviation industry is corporate, and it could be either formal or informal. Adelekan and Onuche (2021) see corporate communication as to how businesses and organisations communicate with their various internal and external publics. These publics include customers and potential customers, employees, key stakeholders (such as the c-suite and investors), the media and general public, government agencies and other third-party regulators. Furthermore, Ajeyalemi and Olarewaju (2020) explain that organisations can use any communication techniques depending on the public being addressed. For instance, communication materials and outlets such as emails, internal memos, in-house newsletters/journals, staff meetings, and others are utilised within an organisation. When communicating with the external public, different techniques are used to decide internal and external reports, advertisements, company website, promotional materials, press releases, press conferences, interviews, photographs, illustrations, infographics, among others.

The modern aviation system operates as a communication structure created, planned, regulated and executed through human actions. For instance, in 2004, the Federal Aviation Administration reported that about 60-80% of accidents resulted from human error. Most of these incidents and dysfunctions were shown to be closely related to communication. Also, an excerpt from the Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) shows communication as an important area that requires training besides knowledge, other skills, and attitudinal development in the aviation industry (FAAN, 2014).

A breakdown in aviation communication has resulted in two major Nigerian airlines' system failures resulting in several flights cancellations and delays (Umar &Sha'awa, 2016; Asquith, 2020). Thus, leaving a large number of passengers stranded or inconvenienced. Asquith (2020) explains that the average on-time performance of airlines in Nigeria hovers over 60%. That means nearly one out of five flights is late to takeoff. Some causes, as pointed out by the author, could be the weather, mechanical delays, air traffic control and people.

An important aspect of the aviation industry is the passenger experience side of the story. Communication between airlines and their passengers needs to be happening almost in real-time as different situations unfold in the organisation. Also, as airlines adapt to the changing trends in the industry, such as the utilisation of robots, removal of liquid rules, biometrics, customised security, cloudification and so on (Faajir&Zidan, 2016); passengers' expectations are also evolving, and they expect a piece of more detailed and accurate information. Airlines' interactions with their customers were traditionally focused on booking reference numbers that contain essential data about an individual flight but little information about the person flying. However, these interactions have evolved to include passengers' private data such as work, occupation, and next of kin, amongst others. According to the Federal Airport Authority (2017), The Nigerian airline sector is facing a decline in operations, evidenced by the low number of landings and departures. The majority of the domestic airlines in Nigeria are on the verge of meeting the demands of their workers (Faajir&Zidan, 2016). This study seeks to uncover the perception of the Nigerian airline traveling experience, theeffectiveness of the airline techniques, how it contributes to the passengers travelling experience, the type of communication techniques used by the selected airlines, what causes communication mishaps in the industry. To achieve meaningful findings, two airlines were used as a case study, including Dana air and Arik airlines.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The services of airlines are pertinent to the economic growth and development of any nation. The focus of this study is on the perception of travelers on the communication techniques adopted by the selected airlines and their effectiveness on travellers' experience. The aviation industry faces several challenges such as quality of service, infrastructural decay, fatal aircraft crashes/accidents, leakage of customers' data, corruption scandals, violation of passengers' rights, delay issues, overbooking or denial of boarding, reimbursement or compensation issues, re-routing issues, handling of mishaps, and most importantly, lack of adequate communication both on-ground and online (Omoleke, 2012; Gabriel-Leigh, 2020; Adeoye, 2018; Musa,2018;

Afolabi, 2018; Robinson, 2020; Rhoades, 2009) all associated with communication effectiveness. Scholars (Insley, 2018 & Cutler, 2018) discovered that communication issues are critical in the aviation industry. From literature (Cutler, 2017 &Jedick 2014), approximately 80% of airlines' crashes were caused by incomplete, late, incorrect or absence of communication between pilots and the control tower or pilot and crew member(s). Over-crowded airports, particularly at weekends in Nigeria, offer nothing but undue delays, poor service quality, cancellation of flights without notice and no compensation, lack of audible announcements, working signboards or uninformed employees with information of how long the unavoidable delay will last. Sometimes, a passengers' luggage is stolen or misplaced, and no explanation is given. The luggage is placed on a different flight when the owner boarded a different one at other times. Retrieving these items is usually a process that many people do not want to go through, especially as most of it does not yield any positive results. In cases of security risks, strikes, denied bookings or overbooking, unexpected flight safety shortcomings, and others, re-routing and reimbursement are wearisome. Yomi (2017) even suggests that meals and refreshments should be in relation to the waiting time. Arrangements for accommodation should also be made. All these make up a traveller's experience or story with an airline, and some of the issues encountered could be viewed as a violation of passenger's rights. Unfortunately, airlines do not consider that the events that occur before the trip, during and after a traveller's trip make up their subjective assessment or travel experience of the patronised airline (Ajeyalemi&Olarewaju, 2020). Thus, this study seeks to examine the impact of the publics perception of the techniques adopted by Dana and Arik airlines and the passengers (travellers) experience
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1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to assess Nigerian airlineand the Nigerian airline travelling experience. The specific objectives include:

1. To examine thecommunication techniques of the selected airline in Nigeria Aviation.
2. To investigatethe effectiveness of the selected airlines communicationtechniques on travelers experience.
3. To find out the specific travelling experiences of the selected airlines passengers.

II. Conceptual Review

Nigerian Airlines and their Challenges

The competitiveness in the aviation industry has led to a very intense need to reduce airlines' operating costs to the bare minimum. As the airlines business has meagre margins, the desire to reduce operating costs is truly understandable and a matter of survival. It is evident that airlines cannot just rely on reducing airport-related costs to drive the overall cost structure. Furthermore, certain aeronautical charges like the passenger service charge (PSC), widely known as 'Airport Tax', are paid directly by the passengers and are not borne by the airlines (Adebisi&Onakoya, 2016).

Challenges for airlines under the aviation operation for 2019 onwards would be rising fuel costs, higher interest rates, and increasing operational costs (Ming-kei&Yui-Yip, 2016; KPMG, 2019). As per the historical trend, the cyclical business is expecting a downturn in the near future. However, history has also shown us how resilient the market has been, and an upward trend will follow any downturn. Many changes are expected to happen to the aviation industry in Malaysia.

The Quality of Service (QoS) monitoring for airports has progressively been implemented since the middle of 2018. There is revenue at risk for MAHB should the airports not meet the Performance Indicators (The Star Online, 2018). Revision of the passenger service charge (PSC) for airports is expected in accordance with the Regulated Asset Based (RAB) framework, which is to be rolled out by the year 2020 (MAVCOM, 2018; Daramola&Fagbemi, 2019; Asquith, 2020).

Another major stakeholder whose requirements should have been considered is the ultimate end users of the terminal, which are the passengers. Based on MAHB records on passengers travelling experience at the klia2 terminal from the start operations on 2nd May 2014 until 31st March 2015, approximately one out of ten complaints from passengers were related to the long walking distance inside the terminal. MAHB has taken these comments seriously and added 'walkalators' to improve passengers' travelling experience (The Star Online, 2014; Meggison, 2015; Umar &Sha'awa, 2016). After the commissioning of the terminal, the addition of facilities shows the commitment to continuously meet the requirements of the operational stakeholders, in this case, the passengers (Daramola&Fagbemi, 2019; Asquith, 2020).

An organization often mirrors its stakeholders' needs and requirements via its internal departments and divisions. For example, various departments in MAHB exist to handle issues about passengers' satisfaction, investors' relations, airlines relations, authorities and regulatory requirements. During the project implementation, the project stakeholders, which consists of both internal and external stakeholders, worked together to mirror the need of the operational stakeholders, which are the operators and end-users of the terminal (Ming-kei&Yui-Yip, 2016). The main issue is whether the project stakeholders accurately conducted the emulation process of the operational stakeholders' needs.

Despite complaints from the primary airline to PAC and passengers on their experiences, such as the long walking distance, the airport was running considerably smoothly since the opening day on 2nd May 2014. The success of airport terminal projects around the world is often judged by the ability of the project team and airport operator to commission the facility without any technical glitches on its major facilities and operations (Yang and Shen, 2014; Ajeyalemi&Olarewaju, 2020). The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) results for 2014 to 2016, for the overall passengers' travelling experience of KLIA, were still consistent with previous years. It ranks in the top 20 worldwide rankings by Airport Council International (ACI).

Airline Services in Nigeria

Airline services in Nigeria can be categorized as follows:

(i) Foreign Airlines:

These airlines operate on international routes and are owned and controlled by foreigners. They operate in the four international airports of Abuja, Lagos, Kano and Port Harcourt. Examples of such airlines that have bilateral service agreements with Nigeria are: The British Airway, Air France, etc.

(ii)   Private Domestic Airlines:

These are airlines operating on the domestic scene. They are owned and controlled by Nigerians, and they operate on the 20 airports in the country, including the four international airports.

(iii)   Private Airlines (Intercontinental and Domestic):

Since the demise of Nigeria Airways Limited, some private airlines are now granted a license to fly the international routes, both at the regional level and beyond. Examples of some of these airlines are: Bellview Airline, Arik Airline, Virgin Nigeria Airways etc.

Issues of Concern in the Selected Airlines

Service quality is an essential aspect of the business, especially for a service provider. Many firms have taken this issue seriously and pay attention to long focus on service quality, affecting their relationship with their customers (Duggal&Verma, 2013). The aviation industry around the world has a variety of public and private-owned airports. The trend to move towards commercialisation and privatisation has been very high (Jimenez et al., 2013; Graham, 2018), and this poses more emphasis on the quality of operations and passengers' travelling satisfaction. Many studies have concluded a strong relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, and this has also been proven valid for the transportation industry (Eboli&Mazzulla, 2009; Mokonyama& Venter, 2013; Antonucci et al., 2014; Bezerra& Gomes, 2015).

Customer satisfaction is vital to all types of businesses and is an important business strategy. In the aviation industry, passengers' travelling experience has been linked with passengers' loyalty and repeats patronage. Passengers' satisfaction is a significant antecedent to loyalty, the foundation of all airline relationships with its clients (Bena, 2010). Past studies recognise the differences between transaction-specific satisfaction and overall satisfaction. Jones and Suh (2000) supported the concept that overall satisfaction is the summation of the previous encounter of transactions and is updated after every encounter. Their study concluded the importance of overall satisfaction in retaining customers and the complex impact of transaction-specific encounters on overall satisfaction. Previous good experiences tend to make passengers more lenient in tolerating specific, less satisfactory encounters while travelling.

Despite its broad acceptance in the aviation industry and mentioned in the literature review (Bezerra and Gomes, 2015; Gupta and Venkaiah, 2015; Fodness and Murray, 2007), it is a wonder that there is minimal academic research that has utilised the tool for further examination of the framework. (www.aci.aero).

History of Nigeria Dana Airline

Dana Airlines Limited operating as Dana Air is a fully private sector-owned carrier. The airline commenced flight operations on 10 November 2008 and has since its inauguration progressively developed a route network bringing convenience and choice to the flying public.Committed to improving the well-being of customers in all product offerings, Dana Air is focused on bringing to Nigerians, an aviation service that combines the best elements of legacy carriers – world class safety and quality on-board services coupled with latest technology (online services) and operational efficiency of new-age carriers.With superior performance, service and creativity, Dana Air is uncompromising in its commitment to excellence and safety as it is currently the only Nigerian carrier to have successfully undergone an operational audit conducted by the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority Flight Safety Group in partnership with their foreign counterparts.

History of Arik Airline

Arik Air is West Africa's leading airline operating a domestic, regional and international flight network. They operate mainly from two hubs at Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Lagos and NnamdiAzikiwe International Airport, Abuja. Arik Air's head office is the Arik Air Aviation Center on the grounds of MurtalaMuhammed International Airport in Ikeja, Lagos State.Arik Air services a network of regional and mid-haul destinations around the African continent and is currently going through an expansion phase with the order of a series of new Boeing aircraft to add to its fleet. In recent years Arik Air has won several industry awards in categories including security and crew competence and has become Nigeria's leading carrier. (Arik Air 2020)

III.   Methodology

The study adopted quantitative method of data collection by integrating questionnaires. The population of the study comprises of customers of the selected airlines. The two (2) airlines were selected based on their overall assets, size, relevance, and reputation. The motivation for choosing these airlines is because of the displayed resilience in the face of competition, and they have reported good financial standing in the last ten years. These companies are adjudged to have achieved seventy percent (70%) and above compliance with governance and travelling codes. The preference of Lagos State was focused on because of its position as Nigeria's economic nerve and centre of market activity for the airline industry.

Also, the two airlines were selected because they are the oldest working airlines in Nigeria. The copies of the questionnaire wereadministered to passengers of the selected airlines. The respondents were not required to identify themselves on the questionnaire. This anonymity and impersonality no doubt enhanced the rate of return of the questionnaire and objective response. Responses to the statements followed the four (4) point Likert scale **(**Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree**).**

The questionnaire comprised of two (2) sections. Sections' 1' consisted of respondents' profiles such as; gender, age, and marital status of the respondents, while Section '2' dealt with questions on the airline communication issues and the Nigerian airline travelling experience. The data were analyzed using a percentage table to present respondents' opinions on the issue in the research. Various questions are analyzed and interpreted as stated in the following tables.

4.1 Analysis of Demographic Data

Table 4.1: Demographic distribution of respondents

The

Variables	Staff of the Selected Airlines	Passengers of the Selected Airlines
Gender	**Percentage (%)**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	41	54
Female	59	46
Total	100	100
Age		
18-27	8	10
28-37	24	31
39-47	32	33
48-57	16	12
58-67	12	10
67 and above	8	4
Total	100	100
Marital Status		
Divorced	6	9
Married	40	55
Separated	3	5
Single	51	31
Total	100	100

gender distributionof passengers of the selected airlines (i.e.Arik and Dana).The passengers had more males than the female counterpart represented in the study. The age distribution of respondents in Table 4.1 shows that most respondents were within the peak labour force age distribution (i.e. 28-47). These age categories are blessed with the strength to furnish their skills and abilities to pursue various business transactions.

Analysis of Data

Table 4.2: The most used communication outlet by airline passengers to assess details before, during and after their journey

Communication Channel	Percentage
Magazine	14.3
Newspaper	12.0
Radio	7.1
Social Media	42.2
Television	8.1
Flight deck Documentations	9.0
Others, please specify	7.3
Total	**100**

The table above shows that the majority (42.2%) of the respondents got detailed information through social media, followed by 14.3% of the respondents got their formation through Magazine, 12% got information through the newspaper, 9% got information about the airline through flight desk documentation, 8.1% of the respondents got information through television. However, 7.3% got information through other means while 7.1% got information through radio. This indicates that the majority of the respondents got detailed information through social media.

Table 4.3: Response of travelers to information provided by the selected airlines

Options	Percentage
Positively	48.2
Negatively	22.4
Unconcerned	29.4
Total	**100**
n = 560	

Table above revealed that most (48.2%) of the respondents (i.e. passengers) respond positively. However, 29.4% of the respondents respond unconcerned, while 22.4% of the respondents respond negatively to information provided by the airline.

4.4:   Response to the communication issues faced by the airlines' passengers

Options	Percentage
Poor listening skills	17.8
Information overload	12.0
Lack of attention	7.1
Longer messages	8.4
Poor flights briefings	8.1
Poor crew coordination	9.0
Poor communication behaviors	7.3
Lack of assertiveness	18.3
Others, please specify	12.0
Total	**100**

n = 560

The table above revealed that most (18.3%) of the respondents (i.e. passengers) believed that the airline lacks assertiveness. 17.8% of the respondents believed that the airline has poor listening skills, while 12% who appeared simultaneously agreed they have both information overload and other communication issues. Moreso, 8.4% of the respondents believed that the airline had longer messages, 53(8.1%) of the respondents believed that the airline had poor flights briefing. However, 7.3% of the respondents believed that the airline has poor communication behaviour, while 7.1% believed that the airline lacks attention.

Table 4.5: The airlines disseminate appropriate messages for settling differing issues

Responses	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	10
Disagree	13
Agree	30
Strongly agree	47
Total	**100**

n =560

Table shows the response rate of respondents on whether the airlines disseminate appropriate messages for settling different issues. Starting from largest to smallest, 47% of respondents strongly agree that the selected airlines disseminate appropriate messages for settling differing issues, while 30% of respondents agree with the position. Conversely, another 13% of respondents disagree that the airlines disseminate appropriate messages for settling different issues, while 10% strongly disagree with the position. This implies that the level at which the selected airlines disseminate appropriate messages for settling different issues is commendable. This may not be surprising as this shows that the selected airlines are making an excellent attempt to create a positive impression and image. This serves as one of the most potent ways of still maintaining a relationship with the airline passengers.

Table 4.6: Management formulate messages that can be easily understood

Responses	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	11
Disagree	14
Agree	36
Strongly agree	39
Total	**100**

Table shows respondents' opinions as to whether management formulates messages that can be easily understood or not. According to findings, 14% of the respondents disagree with this position. Another 11% of the respondents strongly disagree, making a total of 25% of the respondents who do not believe that management formulates messages that can be easily understood. However, 36% of the respondents agree that management formulates messages that can be easily understood. In comparison, another 39% of the respondents strongly agree with the same position, totalling 75% who agree with the position.

Table 4.7: Management is very concern with ensuring effective communication with customers

Responses	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	9
Disagree	12
Agree	37
Strongly agree	42
Total	**100**

Table shows the response rate of respondents to how management is concern with ensuring effective communication with the passengers. 37% of respondents agree that the management is highly concerned with ensuring effective communication with the passengers. In comparison, 42% of respondents strongly agree that the management is highly concerned with ensuring effective communication with the passengers totalling 79%. Conversely, 12% of respondents disagree with this position while 9% strongly disagree, totalling 21% who are in the choice segment.

Table 4.8: Management encouraged feedback from the passengers

Responses	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	8
Disagree	13
Agree	38
Strongly agree	41
Total	**100**

Table shows whether or not management encouraged feedback from their passengers. 38% of the respondents agree that management encouraged feedback from their passengers. Similarly, 41% of the respondents strongly agree with this position, totalling 79% feedback mechanism. However, 13% of respondents disagree, meaning that management does not encourage feedback from their passengers. Also, a further 8% strongly disagree with the position, totalling 21% who believe that management does not encourage feedback from their passengers.

Table 4.9: The airline need to improve more on their communication skills with the passengers.

Options	Percentage
Yes	47.2
No	39.5
Not Sure	13.3
Total	**100**

n = 560

The table above shows that (47.2%) of the respondents think the airline needs to improve their communication skills with the customers. 39.5% of the respondents think the airline does not need to improve their communication skills with the customers. Moreover, 13.3% of the respondents are not sure whether the airline needs to improve their communication skills with the customers or not.

Table 4.10: How will you rate the airline communication skills with the travelers?

Options	Percentage
Extremely satisfied	44.2
Somewhat satisfied	15.2
Not sure	11.9
Somewhat dissatisfied	8.1
Extremely dissatisfied	9.0
Total	**100**

n = 560

Tableabove revealed that the majority (44.2%) of the respondents rate the airline communication skills with the travellers as extremely satisfied, while 15.2% of the respondents rate the airline communication skills with the travellers as somewhat satisfied. In addition, 11.9% of the respondents are not sure of airline communication skills with the travellers, 9% of the respondents rate the airline communication skills with the travellers extremely dissatisfied, while 8.1% of the respondents rate the airline communication skills with the travellers as somewhat dissatisfied.

Table 4.11: What are the possible solutions to these issues?

Options	Percentage
Effective listening	24.4
Briefing	10.2
Short messages	32.0
Effective crew communication	10.5
Information sharing	15.8
Others, please specify	7.0
Total	**100**

n = 560

Table above revealed that most (32%) of the respondents recommend that the airlines have short messages in communicating with travellers. 24.4% of the respondents recommend the airlines should have effective listening. In addition, 15.8% of the respondents recommend the airlines should have information sharing. However, 10.5% of the respondents recommend the airlines should have effective crew communication, while 10.2% of the respondents recommend the airlines should have a briefing.

CONCLUSION

The Airline industry is concerned about its image in people's eyes as it is a service industry. A single negative comment on social media could jeopardise their brand's reputation. A positive review, on the other hand, can spread positive word of mouth among the audience. It can be aggravating to learn that passengers' flight has been delayed and it can also be a nightmare when a piece of luggage is lost by an airline. Because there are so many airlines vying for business, excellent customer service is crucial. A disgruntled passenger can be communicated with immediately using social media. It has been proven that when airlines respond quickly to a customer service issue, their passengers spend up to 40% more with them. Many airlines' preferred social media platform is Twitter, where it's simple to receive complaints and questions quickly and respond as quickly as possible. When it comes to responding to requests on Twitter, Arik and

Dana are the best in the country, typically responding in under five minutes. Twitter is also a great way for passengers to stay informed because it is simple to use and create, read, and respond to tweets takes little time.

Airlines are now attempting to attract passengers' attention. Their ultimate goal is to stay on top of social media trends. Everything is on social media, whether someone has been kicked off a flight, there are issues on board, or there are engine problems. Customers are being snatched up by airlines who make an instant connection with disgruntled passengers. As a result, social media analytics can be used by airlines to assess their performance and identify flaws.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are, therefore, proffered:

1. Airlines should provide accurate information ahead of time. Management should use social media analytics to figure out what is needed right now and put together a response team. The response team can provide real-time weather updates in the event of severe weather.

2. Technology and infrastructure investment should not distract from the value of well-trained staff capable of developing and maintaining good relations with passengers, being positioned at strategic points of the airport. Therefore, staff training should include practical elements of communication, how to show courtesy to passengers, and how to present oneself when addressing a passenger.

3. Passengers and airlines can communicate instantly through social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. They can communicate and send questions on their experience before, during and after the service engagement. This service also works in conjunction with the call centre's communication channels.

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