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A Review of Literature On Service Quality, Safety Perception, and Customer Satisfaction in the Airline Industry

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ABSTRACT

The continuous growth, profitability and scalability of any business is highly dependent on Service quality. It is therefore a prime issue among airlines globally and in Nigeria in particular. Consumer or customer's perception of service quality in the airline industry rests on a number of factors. This article reviews literature on service quality in the airline industry and identified cogent parameters used to measure same. Passenger satisfaction, safety perception and theoretical antecedents and underpinnings associated with the subject matter were examined. We conclude by identifying gaps in service quality with a view to initiate a research the seeks to fill the identified gaps.

Keywords: Service Quality, Airline Industry, Customers, Satisfaction, Gaps, Passengers

I. INTRODUCTION

This article presents the summary, interpretation and evaluation of existing literature on the subject of service quality, safety perception and customer satisfaction. Information for this purpose was collected from review of associated literature to include findings, model and theories all gathered from textbooks, journal articles and other relevant sources.

I.1 Concept of Service Quality

There is general consensus amongst researchers and practitioners that service quality is an elusive and abstract concept that is difficult to define and measure (Bateson & Hoffman, 2011:324; Kasper et al., 2006:175; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010:272; Parasuraman et al., 1985:41; Sower, 2011:8). What is also apparent, is the fact that increases in quality have numerous benefits and can have a dramatic impact on a business's survival (Bateson & Hoffman, 2011:326; Baumann et al., 2007; Ehigie, 2006; Hollensen, 2010:395;

Kasper et al., 2006:176; Kassim & Souiden, 2007; Kelkar, 2010:421; Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008:67; Talib & Rahman, 2010:363; Von Freymann & Cuffe, 2010:406, Wiles, 2007:27).

It is mainly for this reason that ongoing research and much debate is done in the field of service quality and in service quality measurement. The debate revolves mainly around two competing perspectives, termed the Nordic (Scandinavian or European) and the American schools. The Nordic school defines service quality using overall categorical terms that include the aspects of technical- and functional quality.

The American school on the other hand, uses descriptive terms and includes inter alia the five dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Brady & Cronin, 2001:44; Pollack, 2009:42). Although both schools of thought highlight important aspects of service quality, it still seems from the literature that there is no consensus that these definitions fully capture the essence of the construct. For this reason, it is important to review several different perspectives, both old and new, and from several different conceptual and empirical approaches.

Definitions of service quality in the literature focus primarily on meeting customers' needs and requirements and how well the delivered service meets customers' expectations (Bateson & Hoffman, 2011:327; Berry et al., 1985:46; Grönroos, 1984:36; Kasper et al., 2006:183; Yoo & Park, 2007:912; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990:2). These definitions are in line with the user-based approach discussed in section 2.4.1.3. Differences between expected and perceived performances give rise to disconfirmation, which can be either positive or negative.

This is often termed the "disconfirmation 64 paradigm". Expectations in this context are based on individual norms, values, wishes and needs and are therefore very individualistic (Kasper et al., 2006:184). Customer expectations are beliefs about the service that serve as standards or reference points against which quality is judged (Wilson et al., 2008:155). Whether or not these expectations are met by the service provider will have a crucial bearing on their perceived service quality (Bateson & Hoffman, 2011:327; Kasper et al., 2006:183).

It should be noted though, that the expectations between two individuals are not necessarily identical, even if the service delivery is absolutely identical. The perceived service quality of the service is therefore also not necessarily identical (Kasper et al., 2006:184). Changing personal circumstances such as income levels, educational achievement, or increasing aspiration levels may also change an individual's expectations over time. Expectations are also affected by the interaction of a person with, for instance, the media, the service provider, other customers, and observation of specific situations (Kasper et al., 2006:184).

Concerning the services provided by the landlord to small business tenants in shopping centers, these "personal circumstances" mentioned above, may play a minor role in the perceived service quality the small business tenants receive from their landlords. The small business tenants' circumstances, experiences, and needs may be quite similar to one another. They are all leasing from the same landlord and are all "small" businesses with their own unique needs and challenges.

Grönroos (1984:36; 1988:10) was among the first researchers who called for conceptual models of service quality to understand the concept better. He believes that these models will show how the quality of services is perceived by customers. He argues that it will subsequently be possible for the service provider to manage perceived service quality evaluations by customers if they understand how the services will be evaluated by them.

Conceptual service quality models can be very useful as they provide an overview of the factors that have the potential to influence the service quality of a business and to identify quality shortfalls (Ghobadian, Speller & Jones, 1993:56; Philip & Hazlett, 1997:263; Seth, Deshmukh & Vrat, 2005:914). A model will attempt to show the relationship that exists between prominent variables and can be seen as a simplified description of the reality (Ghobadian et al., 1993:56; Seth et al., 2005:914). Over the past approximately 15 years, at least 30 industry-specific scales and models of service quality 65 have been published in the literature on service quality (Ladhari, 2008:65).

These conceptual models and scales were used by several authors in an attempt to define and describe service quality, including, among others, Abdullah, Suhaimi, Saban and Hamali (2011), Boulding et al. (1993), Brady and Cronin (2001), Cronin and Taylor (1992), Dabholkar et al. (2000), Gaster and Squires (2003), Grönroos (1984, 1988), HaywoodFarmer (1988), Kang and James (2004), Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991), Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1986, 1988), Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991a), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra (2005), Rust and Oliver (1994), Philip and Hazlett (1997), Rust Zahorik and Keiningham (1995), Santos (2003), Senthilkumar and Arulraj (2011), Speller and Ghobadian (1993b), Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra (2002) and Zhu, Wymer and Chen (2002).

2. DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

The purpose of this section is to identify those important factors (variables) that can be used to measure service quality. Therefore, previous studies in this field will be reviewed, and a model of service quality will be developed. As service quality has become increasingly important to producers'/suppliers' strategies its assessment has become increasingly critical. Several attempts have been made to measure it. Explication and measurement of quality present problems for researchers. Poor service quality is a familiar experience for many of us as consumers and managers and the need to improve its measurement and control is a common theme of the service management literature. In a recent survey of current practices in service quality, Kellog et al., (1991) found that 73% of the firms strongly agree that measurement is important.

2.1 Service Quality in the Airline Industry

For airline companies, delivering high service quality has become a marketing requisite as competitive pressures increase (Doganis, 2006). Among competitive variables for airlines such as fares, frequency, equipment, service quality, market access, and advertising, service quality is the most highly emphasized competitive variable (Aksoy, Atilgan, & Akinci, 2003). It is the service quality given to customers that differentiate an airline from its competitors, determine market share, and ultimately profitability (Martin, Roman, & Espino, 2008). Most major traditional airlines have taken this approach (Witt & Muhlemann, 1994). However, to deliver better services, airlines need to understand passenger needs and expectations (Aksoy et al., 2003) because customers' expectations provide a standard against which they judge performance (Walker & Baker, 2000).

Service quality has been recognized as an imperative factor of a firm's success that leads to the achievement of competitive advantage (Ennew, Reed, & Binks, 1993; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). In particular, it is closely linked to business profitability through repeated customer patronage and market share expansions (Morash & Ozment, 1994). Therefore, it has received much attention in the service marketing literature and is widely discussed by many researchers because of its substantial effects (Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007; Wu & Ko, 2013). Further, Service Quality is widely admitted as a key determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty (e.g., Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Markata, 2002; Boulding, Karla, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994).

This chain relationship that is improving service quality leads to increasing level of customer satisfaction; and customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty is widely identified (Heskett, Jones, Loveman & Earl Sasser, 1994). Also, several researchers have empirically supported this relationship in the airline context (An & Noh, 2009; Chang & Yeh, 2002; Subha & Archana, 2012; Ostrowski, O'Brien, & Gordon, 1993).

Service quality assessment from the airline customers' viewpoint first appeared in the dissertation of Keanery (1986), and the first publication on airline service quality appeared in 1988 by Gourdin (Young, Cunningham, & Lee, 1994). Fick and Ritchie (1991) measured perceived service quality within several service industries, including the airline industry, using the SERVQUAL instrument while Gourdin and Kloppenborg (1991) used industry-based service quality measures. However, low-cost airlines do not offer high-quality service to customers, thereby minimizing their operating costs and offering low fares.

In other words, these airlines are not using service quality for competitive advantage (Jarach, 2004). Airlines started to focus on how improvements in service quality affect profitability, also to examine whether perceived service quality is a prime driver for customer satisfaction and loyalty. Airline managers need to know which factors affect passenger choice of airlines and which attributes matter to satisfaction and loyalty (Martin et al., 2008).

2.2 Concept of Safety Perception

The air transport sector is an essential provider of a wide range of services, and is a fast-growing industry faced with a large number of challenges when it comes to generating benefits, due to the numerous events and trends that influence it, both social and economic (IATA, 2014; ATAG, 2014). Within the large variety of circumstances that have an influence on the air transport sector, a key element is offering operations with a high level of safety and efficiency to passengers on a global level (ICAO, 2015), as well as ensuring the safety and security of the people who work around the aircraft and the safety of the aircraft themselves (AERTEC, 2013).

Safety refers to circumstances related to incidents and accidents, and efforts that ensure that an airplane can be free from problems that could lead to a loss or fatality (Boeing, 2016), especially related to human performance and technical reliability (Pettersen and Bjørnskau, 2015). Improved safety standards have always been one of the main priorities in the sector, if not the top priority (Liou, Yen & Tzeng, 2008).

There is little doubt that it is a concept that plays an essential role and its improvement has become a topic of growing interest in the field of operation management (McFadden & Hosmane, 2001). The air transport industry is also known for its efforts and the unending challenge of always wanting to be known for its high level of safety and security, therefore reducing the number of accidents and incidents (Shappell, Detwiler, Holcomb, Hackworth, Boquet & Wiegmann, 2007; Liao, 2015).

In general, air travel is perceived to be riskier than any other services (Ringle, Sarstedt, & Zimmermann, 2011). According to Hussaini, (2013), the concept of safety differs, depending on the perspective being adopted. Some categorize it as maintaining zero incident/accident occurrences, reducing hazards, and mitigating risks of malfunctions or errors. In the field of customer behavior, the perception of safety is theorized as overlapping emotions of nervousness, concern, and fear. This is stimulated in anxiety-producing situations such as air travel (Berkman, Chusmir, Gitlow, & Hertz, 1982; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

In marketing literature, perceived risk is termed as a subjective expectation of loss (Sweeney, Soutar, & Johnson, 1999) and is likely to generate feelings of uncertainty and discomfort (Dowling & Staelin, 1994). Cox (1967) claimed that customers high in perceived risk have more tendency to vigorously search for information about the safety of a service/product. Thus, it leads to avoiding the purchase of a product/service. Notwithstanding, passengers are aware that airlines are making every effort to reduce the risks of air travel. While they do not know the exact measurement of real safety levels, they are likely to make assumptions about flight safety based on the aircraft's appearance (Rhoades & Waguespack, 1999, 2008).

3. CONCEPT OF PASSENGER SATISFACTION

The term satisfaction has its origins in the Latin language. It is derived from the two words 'satis', which means enough, and 'facere', which can be translated as to do or make (Oliver, 2010). In this sense, products or services that are satisfying the customer are able to provide what the customer thinks to be enough (ibid.). Other researchers define customer satisfaction as "(...) the overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time" (Leong et al., 2015, p.6623), as "(...) the feeling of pleasure or disappointment when a customer compares a product's perceived performance with his or her prior expectations" (Jiang & Zhang, 2016, p.81) or as "(...) consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectation and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption" (Suhartanto & Noor, 2012). The last two definitions have in common that consumers compare expectations and perceptions, which is also the basis assumption of the expectancy-disconfirmation model.

Customer satisfaction can also be defined as a measurement that determines how happy customers are with a company's products, services, and capabilities. Customer satisfaction information, including surveys and ratings, can help a company determine how to best improve or change its products and services. In theory, if a customer is satisfied with the service or product provided, he will be loyal to use the product and even tell others the benefits of the product or service (Warnock-Smith & Morrell, 2008). Satisfied customers will continue to buy the product again (Surapranata & Iskandar, 2013). Althou

gh customer satisfaction is not the main goal, customer satisfaction is the key to the success of a company to maintain the quality of product/service and maintain the image of the company's brand so that customers will repurchase. That is why the company must provide superior service quality to win the business competition among Airlines (Setyowati, 2015).

Customer satisfaction has been gaining increasing attention from researchers and practitioners as a recognized field of scholarly study and is a fundamental tool used by the service industry for enhancing customer loyalty and ultimately organizational performance and profitability. The importance of customer satisfaction cannot be dismissed because happy customers are like free advertising. A company would be wise to measure customer satisfaction regularly because one key to customer retention is customer satisfaction (Jessi Hempel, 2006). A highly satisfied customer generally stays loyal longer, buys more as the company introduces new products and upgrades existing products, talks favorably to others about the company and its products, pays less attention to competing brands and is less sensitive to price, offers product or service ideas to the company and costs less to serve than new customers because transactions can become routine.

Therefore, marketing literature has focused on the improvement of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is defined by different studies in different ways. Hansemark & Albinsson (2004) argued that “satisfaction is an overall customer attitude towards a service provider, or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers expect and what they receive, regarding the fulfilment of some need, goal or desire”. Customer satisfaction is the collective outcome of the customer’s perception, evaluation, and psychological reaction to the consumption experience with a product or service (Khalifa & Liu, 2003). It leads to repeat purchase, retention, loyalty, positive word of mouth and increased long term profitability for the organization (Wirtz, 2003).

Customer satisfaction has become a key intermediary objective in service operations due to the benefits it brings to organizations (Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003). The importance of customer satisfaction is derived from the generally accepted philosophy that for a business to be successful and profitable, it must satisfy customers (Shin and Elliott, 2001). Previous research has demonstrated that satisfaction is strongly associated with re-purchase intentions (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Fornell, 1992).

Customer satisfaction also serves as an exit barrier, helping a firm retain its customers (Fornell, 1992; Halstead and Page, 1992). Several studies have concluded that it costs more to gain a new customer than it does to retain an existing one (Blodgett, Wakefield, and Barners, 1995; Gummesson, 1994). In addition, customer satisfaction also leads to favorable word-of-mouth publicity that provides valuable indirect advertising for an organization (Halstead and Page, 1992; Fornell, 1992).

In many industries, having satisfied customers also means that the organization receives fewer complaints (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, and Bryant, 1996; Spreng, Harrell, and Mackoy, 1995), hence reducing costs in handling failures. Researchers also maintain that satisfied customers are willing to pay more for the benefits they receive and are more likely to be tolerant of a price increase (Fornell et al., 1996; Anderson, Fornell, and Lehmann, 1994). Shin and Elliott (2001) concluded that, through satisfying customers, organizations could improve profitability by expanding their business and gaining a higher market share as well as repeat and referral business.

Deciding on relevant drivers to increase customer satisfaction in this strongly service-oriented industry requires specific knowledge of its key antecedents from the customers’ perspective (Höck, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2010). Anderson, Pearo, and Widener (2008) made an important contribution to the field by discovering that overall satisfaction is a function of passenger partial satisfaction with core service elements (consisting of satisfaction with the flight and its punctuality) and peripheral service elements (consisting of satisfaction with the aircraft, the personal space available in it, the food provided, and interactions with airline staff). The authors also point out that overall satisfaction is not formed homogeneously. Instead, individual passenger characteristics (e.g., gender, age, income, the number of trips taken in a given period, and the travel class booked) moderate the driving constructs’ influence on customer satisfaction.

Customer service and satisfaction play an essential role in the passenger air transport industry, as it relates to business growth in airline companies (Mehta & Rice, 2016). According to Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, and Bryant (1996) firms with a higher level of customer satisfaction tend to have higher market share and profit margins compared to their competitors. Therefore, delivering quality service becomes a core marketing instrument amongst airlines to gain a competitive advantage (Ostrowski, O’Brien, & Gordon, 1993).

3.1 Components of Passenger Satisfaction

Two components are representing customer satisfaction: cognitive and affective elements (Alotaibi, 2015). The cognitive component includes the comparison between expectations that the customer made in advance and the perceived performance of the good or service (Loureiro & Fialho, 2017). Thus, it encompasses the expectancy-disconfirmation theory as described before. Affective components, on the other hand, involve emotions as a basis for evaluation (Loureiro & Fialho, 2017). Satisfaction depends on whether the customer has a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the outcome of the consumption (Alotaibi, 2015). Affective satisfaction is more subjective than cognitive satisfaction.

3.1.1 Service Quality and Passenger Satisfaction

To achieve a high level of customer satisfaction, most researchers suggest that a high level of service quality should be delivered by the service provider as service quality is normally considered an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Cronin, Brady, and Hult, 2000; Anderson et al., 1994; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). However, the exact relationship between satisfaction and service quality has been described as a complex issue, characterized by debate regarding the distinction between the two constructs and the causal direction of their relationship (Brady, Cronin, and Brand, 2002).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994) concluded that the confusion surrounding the distinction between the two constructs was partly attributed to practitioners and the popular press using the terms interchangeably, which makes theoretical distinctions difficult. Interpretations of the role of service quality and satisfaction have varied considerably (Brady et al., 2002; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988). Parasuraman et al. confined satisfaction to relate to a specific transaction as service quality was defined as an attitude. This meant that perceived service quality was a global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service.

Cronin and Taylor (1992) argued against Parasuraman et al.'s categorization. Cronin and Taylor (1992) found empirical support for the idea that perceived service quality led to satisfaction and argued that service quality was an antecedent of consumer satisfaction. Cronin and Taylor (1992) asserted that consumer satisfaction appeared to exert a stronger influence on purchase intention than service quality and concluded that the strategic emphasis of service organizations should focus on total customer satisfaction programs. The authors reasoned that consumers may not buy the highest quality service because of factors such as convenience, price, or availability and that these constructs may enhance satisfaction while not affecting consumers' perceptions of service quality.

Cronin and Taylor (1994) later conceded that the directionality of the service quality/satisfaction relationship was still in question and that future research on the subject should incorporate multi-item measures. The authors suggested restricting the domain of service quality to long-term attitudes and consumer satisfaction to transaction-specific judgments. However, Bitner and Hubbert (1994) determined that service encounter satisfaction was quite distinct from overall satisfaction and perceived quality. The authors concluded that the constructs exhibited independence.

Adding to the debate about the distinction between service quality and satisfaction, customer satisfaction has also been operationalized as a multidimensional construct along the same dimensions that constitute service quality (Sureshchandar, Rajendran, and Anantharaman, 2002). Despite strong correlations between service quality and customer satisfaction in their study, the authors determined that the two constructs exhibited independence and concluded that they were different constructs, at least from the customer's point of view.

Brady and Cronin (1992) endeavored to clarify the specification and nature of the service quality and satisfaction constructs and found empirical support for the conceptualization that service quality was an antecedent of the superordinate satisfaction construct. In addition, the authors found that explained a greater portion of the variance in consumers' purchase intentions than service quality. A reverse causal relationship has also been hypothesized between the two constructs. Rust and Oliver (1994) maintained that while quality was only one of many dimensions on which satisfaction was based, satisfaction was also one potential influence on future quality perceptions.

3.1.2 Safety Perception and Passenger Satisfaction

In the airline business, safety is the top priority for both travelers and airline management. Safety is regarded as an important consideration in passenger airline choice (Gilbert & Wong, 2003; Wessels, 2006). The observed declines in air passenger numbers following the September 11 attacks in the US also confirm the influence of safety on consumer behavior. Also as alluded to by Ringle, Sarstedt, Zimmermann (2011), airline disasters receive extensive media coverage, implying public awareness of such events.

Examining the impact of an airline's safety perception therefore becomes an important consideration in the context of developing long-term customer relationships given the potential destabilizing effect safety failures may have on airline selection. Despite the airline industry's claim that safety "has always been the top priority" of the industry and the various measures being put in place to ensure increased passenger safety (IATA, 2014), the occurrence of air accidents cannot be eliminated as witnessed by three major airline disasters in 2014 involving Malaysia-based airliners.

An airplane crash does not happen frequently, but if so, it triggers a lot of media attention. After an accident people often ask themselves if flying is a safe thing to do. However, commercial aviation is one of the safest forms of transport and statistics show that it has become even more safe over the last decades. The 2011 global accident rate was 0.37, the equivalent of one accident every 2.7 million flights. This represented a 39% improvement compared to 2010, when the accident rate was 0.61, or one accident for every 1.6 million flights (IATA, 2012). Statistics also show a downward trend over the last few years. The trend easily becomes disturbed when an accident does happen, as the trend is only based on a very small number of accidents, just as the little chance of an aircraft accident the survivability increased significantly.

In the United States for example there is a one in two million chance that one will be caught in an aircraft crash when you board an aircraft. But if this happens, the chances of survival are calculated to be 60%. The reason for the small number of accidents is a consequence of the learning organizations in the system, where improvements take place after every accident in order to prevent an identical accident from happening again. What also contributes to the low number of incidents are the improved training methods of airline crews and air traffic controllers.

Although flying has become safer and safer, the gap between facts and passenger perception is growing continuously. This seems to be caused by the fact that the accidents are of such that complex nature that journalists do not have enough knowledge and experience to cover the news factually. In addition, the media seem to be more interested in trying to find the one who is guilty of the accident, rather than the question of how a similar accident can be prevented from happening. Based on the media coverage the passenger safety perception of aviation safety is likely to decrease.

Airline passengers are known to regard safety as the most important criterion when choosing an airline (Atalik and Özel 2007; Gilbert and Wong 2003). Furthermore, it has been well established that customers' perceived risk generally lowers their satisfaction (Johnson, Garbarino, and Sivadas 2006). The declines in passenger numbers in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks indicate that risk perceptions do influence consumer behavior in air travel. Safety can be assumed to influence customer satisfaction and to be similarly moderated by personal characteristics, especially by the purpose of a trip, as the safety perceptions of business travelers differ from those of travelers for pleasure (Siomkos 2000).

3.1.3 Service Quality and Safety Perception and Passenger Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction in airline operations has become critically important and Dennett et al., (2000) suggest that as competition created by deregulation has become more intense, service quality in the airline industry has also received more attention. The delivery of a high level of service quality by airline companies became a marketing requisite in the early 1990s, as competitive pressures continued to increase. Perceived safety can be a comforting thought. The perception that no harm will come to you, colleagues or loved ones provides a sense of peace and security. For operators in high-risk industries such as aviation including both commercial and business aviation aspects, perceived safety by the patronizing public can bolster business and improve image.

Airline safety is a very interesting concept in terms of perceptions, particularly from the traveling public's point of view. Many people would not consider flying on a particular airline right after a major accident because they perceive it as too risky. Other people feel that if an airline has not had a major accident, then it must be safe. Interestingly, the reverse may be true. Some of the safest airlines in the world may be the ones that have recently experienced an accident. Reactively, this is what it may take for the airline to get a "wake up call," although many times this wake up call can be short-lived. On the other hand, airlines that have not had a major accident may be the most vulnerable. The main reason for this is that a certain amount of complacency may develop. This in turn may cause a breach in the safety system

4. REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Empirical studies by (Choi et al 2004, Nark et al 2010, Belas et al 2014, Belas J., and Gabcora L. 2011) indicated that providing quality service leads to overall customer satisfaction. Additionally, many researchers presented that there exists a close correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction. Kadir et al. 2011 stated that service quality is essential to measure customer satisfaction, and providing high-quality services could maintain customer satisfaction; Judging whether a company could provide quality services or not, could be based on the customer's perception of getting satisfaction when consuming the services. In addition, higher levels of quality lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Agbor J.M. 2011).

Service quality normally is regarded as a prerequisite for customer satisfaction (Shank M.S. 2012). It is generally agreed that increasing the possibility of customer satisfaction with improvement of service quality. Steven et al. 2012 stated this relationship that could help to identify the optimum efficiency point for a company to earn maximum profit, and lead to increase customer satisfaction (Behn B.K., & Bley Jr. 1991, Snyder D.J. 2014, Sim et al 2010). Therefore, service quality has a positive impact to customer satisfaction (Shank M.S. 2012, Gilbert G.r., Veloutsou C. 2016, Hussain R. 2016)

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. The theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. The theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. In service quality, the dominant theory is the SERVQUAL theory developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry

4.2 The SERVQUAL

The Service Quality Model or SERVQUAL Model was developed and implemented by the American marketing gurus Valarie Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman , and Leonard Berry in 1988. It is a method to capture and measure the service quality experienced by customers. One of the important contributions in measuring service quality is the work done by Parasuraman et al., (1985; 1988).

Parasuraman et al., (1985) propose that service quality is therefore a function of the magnitude and direction of the (expected service - perceived service) gap. This study shows that the criteria used by consumers in assessing service quality incorporate five dimensions. These dimensions (as shown in Table 2.1) are: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Table 1: Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry Dimensions of Service Quality

Dimension	Evaluation criteria
Reliability	Providing services as promised. Dependability in handling customers' service problems. Performing services right the first time. Providing services at the promised time.
Responsiveness	Keeping customers informed about when services will be performed Prompt service to customers Willingness to help customers
Assurance	Employees who instill confidence in customers Making customers feel safe in their transaction Employees who are consistently courteous
Empathy	Giving customers individual attention Employees who deal with customers in a caring fashion Convenient business hours Employees who understand the needs of their customers
Tangibles	Modern equipment Visually appealing facilities Employees who have a neat, professional appearance.

Source: Parasuraman et al., (1994).

The expectation under the SERVQUAL battery model is that customers will be happy with the services delivered to them. Therefore, in this study the SERVQUAL were deployed to appraise the effect of service quality on passenger's satisfaction of airline at the Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport, Abuja.

4.3 Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

There are many different theories to describe customer satisfaction, for example the expectancy-disconfirmation theory, the equity theory or the comparison-level theory (Suhartanto & Noor, 2012). The model that has received the widest acceptance is the expectancy-disconfirmation theory. According to this model, the customer forms expectations, which can be defined as “(...) pre-consumption perception[s] associated with goods and services (...)” (Suhartanto & Noor, 2012, p.2) before the consumption of the offerings. After the consumption, the customer perceives the goods or services performance, which can be described as the “(...) basic of the customer’s perception of goods and services” (Suhartanto & Noor, 2012, p.2). The main assumption of the expectancy-disconfirmation theory is that the customer forms expectations which are then disconfirmed through performance comparison. The disconfirmation is caused by the discrepancy between the expectations and actual performance that a customer perceives through the consumption of goods and services (ibid.). When the customer’s expectations are not met, the service quality is considered unacceptable and the customer feels dissatisfied (Ringle, Sarstedt & Zimmermann, 2011). Nonetheless, there are situations in which it is impossible for the customer to form expectations, evaluate the performance or compare those two elements (Alotaibi, 2015).

5. LITERATURE GAP

Robin Valkenburcht (2013) stated that tangible is the only item of service quality that has a significant relationship with safety perception with a beta of 0.446 and a t-value of 5.938 it may be concluded that this is a very significant relationship. While in Anderson, Pearo, and Widener’s (2008) model, safety is not considered a driver of overall satisfaction. The absence of safety issues in this model is somewhat surprising. Particularly, airline passengers are known to regard safety as their most important criterion when choosing an airline (Atalik and Ozel 2007; Gilbertt and Wong 2003).

Furthermore, it has been well established that customers’ perceived risk generally lowers their satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2006). The declines in passenger numbers in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks indicate that risk perceptions do influence consumer behavior in air travel. According to Siomkos 2000, safety can be assumed to influence customer satisfaction and to be similarly moderated by personal characteristics, especially by the purpose of a trip as the safety perceptions of business travelers differs from those of travelers for pleasure. As the survey was conducted after this process had been completed, the results are possibly subject to hindsight bias, and parts of service delivery process can potentially suffer from halo effects while Hasisi and Weisburd (2011) found that safety checks contributed positively to passenger safety feeling during flights, while studies have shown that increased screenings have potential to affect passenger waiting times, level of passenger satisfaction with the screening process and its consequent effect on a passenger perception of screening safety Gkritza et al., 2006.

Complementing the results of these studies, Beck et al., (2016) show that passengers prefer shorter times at check points and Alards Tomalin et al., (2014) found that those who perceived higher level of threats to their dignity has lower level of safety feelings and those who perceived higher levels of professionalism of the airport security officers has higher levels of safety feelings and flight intentions. Meanwhile (Christian et al., 2011) said that perceived safety has a significantly greater impact on the overall customer satisfaction of people who travel for pleasure than that of business travelers. They also viewed perceived safety based on the following indicators which are perception of security checks at the airport, perceived safety during flight, appearance of the aircraft and competence of the cabin crew. They also stated that the air travel experience is a multistage process during which there are usually several hours between checking in and claiming baggage.

By bridging this gap on the existing research, the current study will work towards overcoming this limitation by asking passengers for their evaluations at several points during the process of boarding, landing and after claiming baggage. Service quality, including pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services, can be divided into process quality and outcome quality (Osaki and Kubota, 2016). Outcome quality refers to terms such as punctuality, while process quality is related to staff correspondence as a general factor, and to premium services, such as check-in service, lounge access, deplaning, etc. (Osaki and Kubota, 2016). Customer expectations depend on the service quality offered by an airline (Jeeradist et al., 2016) and they consequently have an influence on customer

6. CONCLUSION

According to the literatures reviewed, both service quality and safety have an influence on customer perceptions (Jeeradist et al. 2016). Positive customer perceptions, meaning a higher service perception than expectation, will have an effective outcome on customer satisfaction (Jeeradist et al. 2016; Norazah, 2014; Chen, 2008; Kim, 2015) and this, besides generating loyalty and product purchase intention, likewise creates positive word of mouth (Norazah, 2014; Liu and Lee, 2016; Kim and Lee, 2011) and behavioral intention (Chen, 2008; Kim and Lee, 2011; Park et al. 2004).

In conclusion, the reviewed literatures also showed that only a few authors considered the relationship between safety and quality as an important link (Hunter and Lambert, 2016), therefore this study aimed at assessing the effects service quality and safety percept have on passenger satisfaction which is the gap that will be analyzed in this study.

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