

## AIRLINES BRAND ATTRIBUTES AND PASSENGERS' LOYALTY IN RIVERS STATE NIGERIA

Joseph Sunday Etuk

Ifeanyi Gospel Akaya

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management

University of Port Harcourt

joseph.etuk@uniport.edu.ng

### Abstract

Despite the marketing efforts of airlines to differentiate and position their organizations for successful operations in the competitive aviation industry, however, maintaining passengers' loyalty appears to be a growing concern and challenge to managers in the sector in Nigeria. This study therefore assessed the effect of airlines brand attributes on passengers' loyalty at 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 only safety and baggage handling had a positive and significant effect on passengers' loyalty to airlines at Port Harcourt International Airport, Rivers State. However, punctuality/reliability of flights did not have a significant effect on passenger loyalty. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that airline brand attributes had a varying level of effect on passengers' loyalty. The study recommended minimization of flight delays and unnecessary flight cancellations as they do not induce passengers' loyalty.

**Keywords:** Safety. Baggage Handling. Punctuality/Reliability of Flight. Passengers' loyalty.

### Introduction

Air passengers of whatever class category, are the customers of airlines, and therefore, constitute an important market segment for the short-term and long-term profitability and economic sustainability of the aviation sector in any economy (Kestoni, 2021). Thus, it is not surprising that most of the airlines' marketing operations and efforts are directed at the passengers. Accordingly, passengers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with airlines services determine their loyalty to the brand or switching behaviour to the competitors (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2010). However, research reports suggest growing air passengers' dissatisfaction with airline services at airports especially in underdevelop

countries due to service failures arising from the very nature of service, which in itself, is inevitable and the airlines' service attributes that have been reported to affect loyalty and referrals (Halpern & Mwesumbe, 2020).

Airline operations constitute the major activities at the airports and are characterized by competition. Consequently, marketing strategies have been adopted by airlines to combat competitors or stay a head of rivals (Sonari-Otobo & Ekeke, 2020). One of the strategic marketing adopted by airline to differentiate their offerings for from rivalry for competitive advantage is branding.

Branding is the process of creating a distinct identity in the mind of passengers in the airline industry. Branding is a name, term design, symbol, service or any other feature that identifies an airline as distinct from those of other competitors (Dona, 2016). Viewed from this standpoint, branding is a known identity of an airline in terms of what products and services they offer but also the essence of what the airline represents in terms of tangible and intangible offerings. Branding in the airline industry leaves a mental picture of the brand's identity in the mind of the passengers (Burnett, 2019). Branding creates an emotional bonds with passengers and creates perceived value for passengers through its personality in a way that makes it stand out from competitors.

Marketing literature reveals some instances of brand attributes to include performance (functionality), price or product affordability, product/service innovativeness, trust and quality of offerings (Kefallonitis, 2017). In the aviation industry, brand attributes represent the essence of the brand, the organizational offers or value creations communicated through appropriate messages to the target markets. Viewed from this perspective, brand attributes become a differentiation strategy for airlines in a competitive environment for customers (passengers) attraction retention through positive travel experience (Jiang & Zhang, 2016).

Research suggests a correlation between brand attributes and consumer behaviour in the manufacturing sector (Bristovic & Miella, 2018), banking services (Ekeke, 2016), telecommunication (Suamek & Jaise, 2014) etc. However, the extent to which brand attributes predict or explain passengers' loyalty to airline brands in the Nigerian aviation sector context has not been empirically validated. Given, the contribution of the travel sector to the socio-economic development of any economy and the growth of global tourism market, service marketing scholars have advocated for more empirical studies in the aviation sector in other geographical regions, especially in developing economies. In compliance to the clarion empirical call, this study, was, therefore, designed to evaluate the effect of airline brand attributes on air passengers' loyalty in the Nigerian context, drawing our empirical analysis from air passengers at Port Harcourt International Airport, Rivers State.

---

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Foundations

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, ILoamaeke 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.

#### 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.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Airline Brand Attributes**

Park, Lee and Nicolau (2020) conceptualized airline brand attributes as the inherent and defining characteristics of an air carrier which passengers use in evaluating the overall quality of services of an airline relative to competition. Ding and Tseng (2017) posit that brand attributes encompass many tangible and intangible qualities that collectively shape a brand's identity. This view suggests that brand attributes go beyond surface-level elements and delve into the core values, features, and characteristics that make a brand unique.

Marketing literature reveals some instances of brand attributes to include performance (functionality), price or product affordability, product/service innovativeness, trust and quality of offerings (Kefallonitis, 2017). In the aviation industry, brand attributes represent the essence of the brand, the organizational offers or value creations communicated through appropriate messages to the target markets. Viewed from this perspective, brand attributes become a differentiation strategy for airlines in a competitive environment for customers (passengers) attraction and retention through positive travel experience (Jiang & Zhang, 2016).

Three types of brand attributes have been identified in the literature. The first is functional attributes which pertain to the tangible and practical features of a product or service, such as durability, speed, or price. The second is emotional attributes with emphasis on the feelings and emotions that a brand evokes in its customer group or segment, which may include trust, happiness, or a sense of belonging. Symbolic: encompass the symbolic meaning

---

associated with a brand. They can represent status, identity, or lifestyle (Alotaibi, 2015; Abouseada et al, 2023).

### **Dimensions of Airlines Brand Attributes**

**Safety:** Swinderman (2018) opines that safety is the state in which the risk of harm to persons or property damage is reduced and maintained at or below an acceptable level through a continuing process of hazard identification and risk management. In the context of the aviation sector, Maxwell and Bright (2016) opined that safety is “the state in which risks associated with aviation activities, related to, or in direct support of the operation of aircraft, are reduced and controlled to an acceptable level”.

They further stated that 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 (Maxwell & Bright, 2018), especially as related to human performance and technical reliability.

Boo (2016) asserts that safety in the airline industry is a top priority for airlines, regulatory organizations, and the aviation industry as a whole. It is for this reason that numerous measures and protocols are in place to ensure the safety of passengers, crew members, and aircraft. Gures et al (2017) noted that airlines adhere to strict maintenance schedules and procedures to keep their aircraft in optimal condition. They also observed that regular inspections, maintenance checks, and repairs are conducted by trained technicians to ensure that all systems are functioning correctly. However, Gures et al (2017) have argued that the safety maintenance practices vary depending on the operating and regulatory environment of the airline.

**Baggage Handling:** Baggage or luggage consists of bags, cases, and containers which hold a traveler’s articles during transit (Suki, 2014). The modern traveler can be expected to have packages containing clothing, toiletries, small possessions, trip necessities, and on the return-trip, souvenirs. For some people, luggage and the style thereof is representative of the owner's wealth (Jervis, 2011). Baggage handling is the expertise of an airline to develop fast and smooth baggage delivery without delay. Most airlines experience problems in their baggage delivery time.

Baggage handling in airlines refers to the process of managing passengers' luggage from the time it is checked in at the departure airport to its delivery at the destination airport. Passengers bring their luggage to the airline's designated check-in counters at the departure airport. At this stage, the airline staff checks the weight and size of the bags to ensure compliance with the airline's baggage policies (Bozogan & Hurna., 2018). They also verify the passenger's identification and provide baggage tags or receipts that contain unique identification codes and destination information. Once checked in, the bags are sorted based on their destination. Airlines have sophisticated baggage handling systems



---

that use conveyor belts, barcode scanners, and computerized tracking systems to sort and route the bags to the correct flights.

**Punctuality/Reliability of Flight:** Punctual/reliable flight is defined as the ability to perform a promised service consistently and precisely (Bezerra & Gomes, 2015). Being punctuality means that flight arrive at the gate of their destination airport earlier, exactly on-time or no more than 15 minutes later than scheduled. Timely, reliable flight schedules ensure passengers reach their destinations on time, build customer confidence and allow the industry to make optimum use of available capacity. Similarly, punctual/reliable flight is concerned with the delivery of the service in an appropriate condition on time (Brilliana, 2018). Punctual/reliable flight is translated into the ability of the service provider to execute the service in a safe and efficient manner (Alotaibi, 2015). It depicts the consistent performance, free on compliance, in which the passenger can trust. Punctuality and reliability are important factors when it comes to flight operations. They refer to the ability of an airline or flight to depart and arrive at the scheduled times consistently. Punctuality in flight operations means that flights depart and arrive according to the published schedule. Airlines strive to maintain punctuality to minimize delays and inconveniences to passengers. Factors such as weather conditions, air traffic control, and mechanical issues can sometimes cause delays or disruptions in the schedule (Ceccato & Masci, 2017).

### **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.

---

## **Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **Safety and Passenger Loyalty**

Briliana (2018) investigated the relationship between consumer satisfaction and airline passenger loyalty: antecedents and outcomes. The finding showed a strong correlation between safety, satisfaction and loyalty as safety was regarded as an important consideration in passenger airline choice and future travel intentions.

Mantey and Naidoo (2017) investigated the interplay between air passengers' service quality, satisfaction, loyalty and loyalty programmes in South African owned airlines.

The study adopted research design is the survey method. The result of hypothesis test shows that airline safety exhibited significant relationship with passengers' loyalty. Ceccato and Masci, S (2017) researched into airport environment and passengers' satisfaction with safety. The findings revealed that airport employees and passengers perceived safety as a very important driver of passengers and workers satisfaction and patronage.

Güreş, Yılmaz, Arslan, Durmuşçelebi, Yüksel and Ünsal (2017) researched the satisfaction levels of passengers for security services at airports. The finding showed that passengers' perception of safety and security correlated with airline brand loyalty.

Bezerra and Gomes (2015) evaluated the effects of service quality dimensions and passenger characteristics on passenger's overall satisfaction with an airport. The study found that safety was the first attribute passenger considered before travelling.

So far, there is limited knowledge in previous studies regarding the nexus between safety and passenger loyalty in the Nigerian aviation sector. Many scholars have advocated for more empirical validations of the interaction between the two variables in other industrial and geographical contexts given the variation in level of socio-economic and technological development. Therefore, we state our first hypothesis thus:

HA1: Air safety has a significant effect on passengers' loyalty at Port Harcourt international airport, Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Punctual/Reliable Flights and Passenger Loyalty**

Sonari-Otobo and Ekeke (2020) investigated airport marketing attributes and passengers' word-of-mouth communication in Rivers State. One of the findings of the study was that airlines with low record of flight cancellations enjoyed positive word-of-mouth from passengers which they consider important to travel behavioural outcomes.

Kim and Park (2017) conducted a research on the perceived importance of airline selection attributes by airline type: An emphasis on the difference of opinion between Korean and overseas aviation experts. The findings showed, among other things that punctuality and compliance with established flight scheduling was perceived by both groups as important selection criteria for airline brand choice and loyalty.

Jiang and Zhang (2016) conducted an empirical assessment of passenger experience at Melbourne Airport, Australia. researched on the relationship between punctual/reliable flights and passenger loyalty in Turkey. The findings showed that adherence to regular

flight schedule and reliability of flights were important drivers airline brand choice and patronage.

Nevertheless, extant research suffers from empirical inadequacy concerning service punctuality/reliability and brand loyalty in the Nigerian aviation sector. Thus, the validation of the two constructs in air transportation context has been advocated. The present study, therefore, proposes the underlying hypothesis:

HA2: Punctuality/reliability of flights has a significant effect on air passengers' loyalty

### **Baggages Handling and Passenger Loyalty**

Kisioya and Moronge (2019) examined the influence of baggage handling practices on performance of large scale processing firms in Nairobi County, Kenya. The analysed data established that most of the baggage handling practices indicators have positive impact on performance of the firm. The study found that material packaging elements have an impact in overall performance of the manufacturing firms calling for the need to research on more variables of baggage handling.

Bozogán and Hurná (2018) investigated the use of modern technologies at baggage tracking and its impact on airline revenue. The findings showed that proper handling of passengers' baggages plays a major role in passengers' choice of airline. Kathurima et al (2016) did a study on the effects of baggage handling systems on performance of cement manufacturing firms in Machakos County. The study found out that there was a positive and significant effect of automating baggage handling systems on performance.

Amba and Jonathan (2013) conducted an empirical appraisal of the Nigerian Transport Sector: a comparative study of railway and aviation sub-sectors. One of the key findings of the study was that baggage and haulage handling was crucial to passengers satisfaction and repeat business.

Suki (2014) investigated passenger satisfaction with airline service quality in Malaysia adopting the structural equation modelling approach. One of the major findings of the study indicated that baggage handling and passengers' satisfaction were correlated.

Despite the contributions of the previous studies' findings, little is known about the phenomena of baggage handling and passengers' loyalty in the Nigerian aviation context. To replicate the study in the Nigerian aviation sector, we wish to test the hunch that:

HA3: Baggages Handling has a significant effect on air passengers' loyalty.

### **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 constitute 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 (Nunally, 1978). The reliability test was aided by statistical package for social science (SPSS version 21). The result obtained was an acceptable reliability value of 0.899 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
.899	.859	16

**Table 2 Composite Reliability Analysis**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Safety	.813
Punctual/Reliable Flight	.751
Baggage Handling	.732
Baggage Handling passenger' loyalty.	.815

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 of each dimension of airline brand attributes on passenger' loyalty.

### 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
3	Marital status		
	Single	77	
	married	40.10	
		115	
	Total	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 3 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 Brand Attributes and Passengers' Loyalty**  
**Univariate Analyses (Aggregate Mean Scores)**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Safety	192	3.3320	1.23061
Punctual/Reliable flights	192	2.0042	1.26142
Baggage Handling	192	3.4101	1.29588
Passenger' Loyalty	192	1.4319	1.17902
Valid N (listwise)	192		

As Table 4 shows, All the mean scores on the three indicators of airline brand attributes(safety, punctuality/reliability of flights and baggage handling) 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 passengers' loyalty was low (1.4319) 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 brand attributes on passenger loyalty.**

**Table 5 Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.581 <sup>a</sup>	.338	.316	.25886

a. Predictors: (Constant), Punctuality of Flights, Baggage Handling and Safety

**Table 6 ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

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

a. Dependent Variable: Passenger Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant) Baggage handling, Punctuality of Flights and Safety.

**Table 7 Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.194	.061		-3.180	.002
	Safety	-.216	.098	-.203	-2.209	.000
	Punctuality of Flights	.323	.105	.106	6.857	.541
	Baggage Handling	.152	.075	.147	2.014	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Passenger Loyalty

For this study, the multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the explanatory powers (extent of effect) of each of the three independent factors of airline brand attributes (safety, punctuality of flights and baggage handling) on passengers' loyalty (dependent variable).

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 brand attributes. This suggests that other factors not captured in the model might explain the 66.2 variances in the dependent variable. 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  $F = 672.451$  &  $pv = .0003 < 0.05$ , indicating a significant interaction between the airline service attributes and passenger loyalty.

The result of the regression analysis (Table 7) shows that only two indicators of airline brand attributes (safety and baggage handling) made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable (passengers' loyalty. Punctuality/reliability of flights did not significant contribution. The most significant predictor was safety (SFT) ( $B = .203$ ;  $p = .000 < 0.05$ ). The second predictor was baggage handling (BGH) ( $B = .147$ ;  $p = .001 < 0.05$ ) while the third predictor was punctuality/ reliability of flight (PRF), ( $B = .106$ ;  $p = .541 > 0.05$ ). ) with insignificant effect on passengers' loyalty. Therefore, two null hypotheses were rejected while one null hypothesis was accepted.

## Discussions

This section discusses the findings of the study. It indicates how this study and previous studies are related or differ in certain respects.



The findings of this study show that safety had a positive and significant influence on passengers' loyalty in the airline industry in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B = -.203$ ;  $p = .001 < 0.05$ ). The result is consistent with previous studies such as Brilliana (2018); Mantey and Naidoo (2017); Gures et al (2017) who found that safety was considered a differentiator by respondents in their travel choice of airlines in the country. This finding is not surprising because proactive passenger and staff safety measures are very important for successful airline operations due to the activities of terrorists within the country and outside its borders.

The test result further indicated that punctual/reliable flights had a positive but insignificant influence on passenger loyalty in the airline industry in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B = .106$ ;  $p = .541 > 0.05$ ). The result is inconsistent with Kim and Park (2017); Jiang and Zhang (2016) who found that punctuality and reliability of flights actually characterized the operation of flights and supported passengers' loyalty in their own context. However, what our test result implies is that punctuality and reliability of flights in terms of sticking to normal take-off schedule and landing is a challenge to most of the airlines and therefore cannot drive passengers' loyalty to a particular airline. Thus, unpunctual or unreliable flight services promote switching behaviour, which in turn, breeds disloyalty. Our result succinctly captures air passengers' experience at the Port Harcourt International airport: the common knowledge that Nigerian travellers are constantly in agony over flight cancellations and delays.

The multiple regression result as shown in table 4.4 revealed that baggage handling had a positive and significant influence on passenger loyalty in the airline industry in Rivers State, Nigeria ( $B = .147$ ;  $p = .001 < 0.05$ ). The implication is that efficient handling of passengers' baggage handling with zero damage or absence of missing luggages/tampering will induce passengers' trust in the airline. The reverse will promote passengers' dissatisfaction with attendant negative effect on loyalty. Therefore, the result is consistent with previous studies such as Kisioya and Moronge (2019); Bozogan and Hurna (2018); Suki (2014). The low value of the standardized coefficient (.147), suggests that airlines in Nigeria needs improvement in baggage handling for airline passengers.

### Conclusions and Implications

The main objective of the study was to determine the effect of airline brand attributes on passengers' loyalty within the context of airlines operating in the tourism sector of Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, the Airline Brand Attributes-Passenger Loyalty (ABA-PL) model was developed and empirically tested at the Port Harcourt International Airport, Rivers State. Our research revealed that two dimensions of airline brand attributes (safety and baggage handling) were significant predictors of passengers' loyalty. Punctuality/reliability of flight did not make significant contribution to explaining passenger loyalty and passengers did not always patronize the same airline. The implication is that there is an interaction between airlines brand attributes and

passengers' 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 brand attributes and passengers' loyalty within the context of airlines operations at the Port Harcourt international airport, Omagwa in Rivers State. 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 brand service attributes in terms of safety, punctual/reliable flights and baggage handling are important determinant 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. However, passengers' loyalty to a particular airline brand in Nigeria will continue to be a mirage unless there are significant improvements in their service attributes.

Another implication is that the federal government can continue to review their safety and security measures for the airlines and the airport environment. In the same vein, Airlines and Airport management team can be proactive in scheduling flights. Therefore. efforts should be made to reduce flight cancellations. Similarly, 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.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

The study provides an example of using the Airline Brand Attributes-Passenger Loyalty (ABA-PL) model to empirically test the effect of airline brand 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 principal dimensions of airline brand attributes (safety, punctual/reliable flights, baggage handling, affordability in a single model.

---

### 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 brand 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.

### References

1. Abouseada, A. A. H., Hassan, T. H., Saleh, M. I., & Radwan, S. H. (2023). The power of airport branding in shaping tourist destination image: Passenger commitment perspective. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 47(2), 440–449. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.47210-1042>
2. Adiele, K. C. & Etik, S. G. (2018). Perceived airfare fairness and patronage of domestic airlines in Nigeria. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 7(1), 1-11
3. Alotaibi, M. M. (2015). Evaluation of "AIRQUAL" scale for measuring airlines service quality and its effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Unpublished PhD Thesis, School of Aerospace, Transport and Manufacturing Centre for Air Transport Management, Cranfield University
4. Amba, D. A., & Jonathan, D. (2013). An appraisal of the Nigerian Transport Sector: Evidence from the railway and aviation sub-sectors. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4 (10), 161–171.
5. Asley, W.O. (2019). Hospitality marketing attributes and customers' choice of luxury hotels in Abuja. *Journal of Event Management and Development*, 4 (8), 95-103
6. Bezerra, G. C. L. & Gomes, C. F. (2015). 'The effects of service quality dimensions and passenger attributes on passenger's overall satisfaction with an airport', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 44, 77-81.
7. Bristovic, C. C. O. & Miella, H. (2018). Product attributes and consumer behaviour towards noodle packs in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 8 (6), 23-36.
8. Boo, J. (2016). Enhancing a flight dispatcher display for safer flight operations. Open Access Theses. 751. [https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open\\_access\\_theses/751](https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open_access_theses/751)
9. Bozogáň, M. & Hurná, S. (2018). Use of modern technologies at baggage tracking and its impact on airline revenue. In *EAI International Conference on Smart Cities within SmartCity360° Summit*, 73-111. Springer,
10. Briliana, V. (2018). 'Consumer satisfaction on airline passenger loyalty: antecedents and outcomes', *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, 16(5), 1–9.
11. Ceccato, V. & Masci, S (2017). Airport environment and customers' satisfaction with safety. *Journal of Applied Security Research*, 12(3), 356-373, DOI: 10.1080/19361610.2017.1315696

12. Ekebong, W. L. (2016), Banking service marketing attributes and customer behavioural intentions in Akwa Ibom State. *International Journal of Financial Services and Development*, 6 (12) 103-112.
13. Güreş, N., Yılmaz, H., Arslan, S., Durmuşçelebi, C Yüksel, C., & Ünsal, H.H. (2017). Researching the satisfaction levels of passengers for security services at airports. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*; 9(5), 125-134.
14. Halpern, N. & Mwesiumo, D. (2021). Airport service quality and passenger satisfaction: The impact of service failure on the likelihood of promoting an airport online. *Research in Transportation Business and Management*, 4 (8) 21-34
15. Iloamaeke, U.O. & Nzube, H. (2022) Product attributes influencing consumers' choice of retail outlets in the fast- moving consumer goods sector in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. *Journal of Consumer Research and Innovation*, 6 (12) 198-216.
16. Jiang, H. & Zhang, Y. (2016). 'An assessment of passenger experience at Melbourne Airport', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 54, 88-92.
17. Kattara, H. S., Weheba, D., & Anmed, O. (2015). The impact of employees' behaviour on customers' service quality perceptions and overall satisfaction, *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism, and Leisure*, 4(2), 1 – 9.
18. Kefallonitis, E. G. (2017). Country-of-origin and airline brand effects: A study of brand associations. In *Strategic Innovative Marketing*. 747-752). Springer, Cham.
19. Kestoni, A. G. (2021). Airline service marketing and organizational performance: A study of Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja. *International Academic Journal of Service Marketing*. 12 (10), 231-250.
20. Kim, S-B. & Park, J-W. (2017). A study on the importance of airline selection attributes by airline type: An emphasis on the difference of opinion in between Korean and overseas aviation experts. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 60, 76-83.
21. Kotler, P., Bowen, J. T. & Makens, J.C. (2010). *Marketing for hospitality and tourism*. New Jersey: Pearson-Prentice-hall.
22. Mantey, N.O. & Naidoo, V. (2017). Interplay between air customers' service quality, satisfaction, loyalty and loyalty programmes in South African owned airlines', *Acta Commercii* 17(1), a448.
23. Mash, Z.H., & Helmi, A. (2017). The influence of brand equity and price fairness on brand switching behaviour. case study on Pertamina customer in Jakarta. *Journal of Ekonomidan Bisnis Terapan*, 13(2), 1-18.
24. Maxwell, S. & Bright, M. (2016). An investigation into the impact of service quality, frequent flier programs and safety perception on satisfaction and customer loyalty in the airline industry in Southern Africa. *South East European Journal of Economics and Business*, 11(1), 41-53. DOI:10.1515/jeb-2016-0006
25. Nkwema, L. M. & Ushie, G. P. (2018). Product attributes and consumers choice of mobile phones in Lagos. *Academic Journal of Consumer Research and Innovation*, 4. 26-32.

- 
26. Park, S., Lee, J. S. & Nicolau, J. L. (2020). Understanding the dynamics of the quality of airline service attributes: Satisfiers and dissatisfiers. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104163.
  27. Suamek, Z. O. & Jaise, J. F. (2014). Quality of telecommunication network service delivery and customer satisfaction in Abuja business district. *Metro Digest*. 4, 15-22
  28. Sonari-Otobo, V. F. & Ekeke, J. N. (2020). Airport marketing attributes and customers' word of mouth communication. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research (Social and Management Sciences)*, 6(12), 177-192. DOI: 10.46654/ij.24889849
  29. Suki, N.M. (2014). Passenger satisfaction with airline service quality in Malaysia: A structural equation modeling approach. *Research in Transportation Business & Management* 10, 26–32.
  30. Swinderman, R. T. (2018). The Economics of workplace safety: Putting a price on material handling mishaps. *Coal Age*, 123(3), 28–31.
  31. Wushishi, O. & Tahiru, V.S. (2016). Developing effective banking service attributes for customers patronage and loyalty in Nigeria. *Financial Service Review*, 4(21) 187-199.