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Consumer Protection and Customer Satisfaction in Domestic Airports in South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated consumer protection and customer satisfaction in domestic Airports in South-South Nigeria. A cross-sectional research design was used to administer 398 copies of questionnaires to airport service users through simple random techniques. Reconnaissance survey was used to determine the population units of the airport users in the South-South, Nigeria. Six airports were selected for the investigation using an inclusive and exclusive criteria technique. The gathered data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and percentages. While the study hypothesis was tested using Chi-square statistic and Analysis of variance. The study findings reveal among others that consumers at domestic airports in Nigeria generally lack awareness of their rights and protections in air travel services, Also, the study results indicate that there is a significant relationship between the level of awareness among consumers regarding their rights and protections in air travel services. Again, the study results show a significant difference in the perceptions of consumer satisfaction with the grievance resolution processes in place at domestic airports. In conclusion, educational campaign at the airport regarding consumers right protections will serves as a proactive measure in improving service satisfaction at the South-South Airports in Nigeria. The study recommends among others that strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement is crucial for effective consumer protection and improved passenger experiences at domestic airports.

Keywords: Consumer Protection, Consumer Satisfaction, Customer Right, Domestic Airports, Airline passengers
JEL Classification: D18, N7

1. Introduction

Consumer protection aims to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers, particularly in the aviation sector. Nigeria's Civil Aviation Regulations include Consumer Protection Regulations that outline the responsibilities of airlines to passengers in unforeseen circumstances. This includes compensation for denied boarding, delays, and flight cancellations. These regulations establish the minimum rights of passengers and obligations of airlines. Aliyu (2017) defines a consumer as

someone who receives services in exchange for payment. In aviation, consumer protection arises from public and private initiatives to prevent service providers from exploiting customers. Customer satisfaction, as defined by Aksar, *et al*. (2020), is achieved when customers' needs, wants, and demands are met by a product or service, leading to a willingness to repurchase. Customer satisfaction reflects the quality of service provided and indicates that stakeholders are effectively managing the airline. It drives business growth and maximizes profits. Positive customer satisfaction practices influence customers' intentions to repurchase (Ohida *et al.*, 2023).

Effective regulation in aviation is crucial, particularly concerning passenger rights, airline responsibilities, and safety. Despite existing regulations, passengers often face issues such as flight delays, flight cancellations, and lost or damaged luggage (Ohida, 2023). The aviation sector is vital for economic growth and regional integration. According to the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), the country currently has 38 operational airline carriers comprising 13 scheduled commercial operators, 23 non-scheduled operators, and 2 cargo airlines. Although Nigeria's aviation sector is expanding, the market remains largely dominated by a few major players, notably Air Peace and Arik Air (NCAA, n.d). Nwakoby & Chukwujekwu (2020) outline consumer rights in air transport regulations, including advance notification of flight re-routing or delays, protections against denied boarding for passengers with confirmed reservations, and refund policies for lost or delayed baggage. Passengers can also receive compensation for rude treatment by airline staff.

The management of air transport services in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, particularly in South-South Nigeria, where regional socio-economic activities have increased the demand for air transport. The aviation industry contributes to economic growth by fostering new businesses, creating jobs, and attracting foreign capital. However, passengers often experience flight delays, lost luggage, and poor customer service, reflecting a disregard for consumer rights and inadequate service delivery (Monye et al., 2021). Operational issues have plagued some Nigerian airlines for about a decade, leading to decreased service supply and even withdrawal and divestment. Safety and service delivery remain concerns, as evidenced by several air disasters between 2003 and 2012, including the Dana Airline runway incident in Lagos. Such incidents highlight safety concerns and regulatory lapses.

Studies by Bamford and Xystouri (2005) and Tiernan *et al*. (2008) reveal that airline passengers frequently face abuses of their rights, poor service, and delays or cancellations due to weather or technical faults. Daramola (2014) attributes these problems to factors such as high aviation fuel costs, supply chain disruptions, poor aircraft maintenance, insufficient technical expertise, debt burdens, economic downturns, stringent government policies, and weak protection against foreign competitors. Given these challenges, this study examines consumer protection and customer satisfaction at selected airports in South-South Nigeria. The study specific objectives and hypotheses include, to: examine the level of awareness among consumers regarding their rights and protections in air travel services within domestic airports, investigate the extent of consumer satisfaction with the grievance resolution processes in place at domestic airports, and assess consumers right to airline refund and compensation policies in domestic airports.

2. Literature Review

Uma, Devi, and Rao (2016) examined consumer protection awareness, emphasizing the role of education in shaping consumers' understanding of their rights. Their findings revealed that air travellers at domestic airports demonstrated limited awareness of their rights and protections, underscoring the need for consumer education initiatives. This observation aligns with Mosteller and Poddar (2017), who argued that proactive communication and education are essential in

bridging the gap between available consumer information and actual engagement. Similarly, Neacsu and Madar (2019) observed that consumer perceptions often combine confidence and uncertainty, reflecting the complex nature of consumer understanding in air travel.

In exploring grievance resolution processes, respondents in the referenced studies generally agreed that existing mechanisms moderately address consumer concerns, though delays and poor accessibility remain challenges (Gavval et al., 2021; Raju & Gupta, 2018). Transparent communication during grievance handling was seen as a positive influence on satisfaction (Thompson, Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Furthermore, Ekanem and Thomas (2018) explored consumer rights concerning airline refunds and compensation, emphasizing that flight cancellations often cause significant inconvenience and dissatisfaction among passengers. They highlighted that cancellations result from factors such as low passenger bookings, maintenance issues, or adverse weather conditions. Collectively, these empirical findings suggest that effective consumer education, transparent communication, and fair compensation practices are crucial to strengthening consumer protection and enhancing customer satisfaction in Nigeria's domestic air travel sector.

3. Methodology

This study is centred on domestic airports in south – south, Nigeria. The study area is an estimated area of about 70,000km^2 and one of the world's largest deltas. It is located in the central part of southern Nigeria between latitude 5^{o}33'49N and 6^{o}31'38E in the North. Its Western boundary is given as Benin 5^{o}44'11N and 5^{o}03'49E and its Eastern boundary is Imo River 4^{o}27'16N and 7^{o}35'27E. South–South is located along the Atlantic coast which forms the southern boundary of Nigeria, and it is the entrance of Rivers Niger and Benue into the ocean through a web of tributaries, (rivers, creeks and estuaries). There are six domestics airports operational in the south–south part of Nigeria. Each of the states that make up the study area comprise of airports of varying category based on their level of operations and specialty. They range from international airports, domestic airports, and cargo airports. Virtually all the airports are co-utilised by commercial airlines and private aircrafts for various operational services.

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The study population of interest is centred on airports in the study area, which include the major airports in Bayelsa State, Cross River State, Delta State, Edo State, Rivers State and Akwa Ibom State. The inclusion and exclusion criteria of sampling method were employed to delineate and identify the domestic wings at the airports based on their operational status as terminals of local routes of interest.

Inclusion Criteria: Operational airports, airline staffs and air bound passengers from the domestic wings of Asaba Airport, Bayelsa International Airport, Calabar Airport (Margaret Ekpo International Airport), Benin Airport, Port Harcourt International Airport, and Uyo Airport only were included. *Exclusion Criteria*:The operational airport, airline staffs and air bound passengers who are not on the inclusion criteria list but from the international wing, and the military airlift terminal from the Airforce base were excluded.

The population unit of inquiry was 87,229 passengers (users) of airlines generated over 30 days during the study survey across the six (6) airports in the study area (Olawoye, 2024). Since the study target population (87,229) is a large one, the Taro Yamane formula was utilised to obtain a manageable population size of 398 (samples size). while the simple random sampling technique was applied in the course of the field survey, however, the proportionate method was applied to distributed the survey instrument across the population strata as adopted from Amamilo (2021), see Table 1.

The nature of data utilised for this study was based on the scientific methods of data gathering. The primary data and secondary data were majorly incorporated. Thus; primary data was obtained by using a reconnaissance survey to obtain operational data, key informant interviews with airline traffic managers and heads of consumer protection units at the airports, and a well-structured pre-tested passenger questionnaire were utilised 398 copies of four-point Likert scale questionnaire were administered to airline passengers plying the domestic wing of Nigeria Airports through physical survey method to obtain valuable responses of interest.

The data obtained were analysed with descriptive statistics, while Ho1 which state that there is no significant difference between the level of awareness among consumers regarding their rights and protections in air travel services within domestic airports in Nigeria was tested with Chi-square, and Ho2 state that the extent of consumer satisfaction with the grievance resolution processes in place at domestic airports in Nigeria has no significant impact on overall consumer satisfaction was tested with Analysis of variance (ANOVA). The hypotheses data were tested with statistical package for social science (SPSS version 23.2).

Table 1: Sample Frame

Study Airports	List of Airline operators	Volume of Passenger Traffic	Proportional Method of Allocation
Bayelsa Airport	United Nation, Ibom Air	5,600	25.4
Delta State Airport	Max Air, Air Peace, Arik Air, Overland Airways, Aero Contractors, United Nigeria Airlines	8,164	36.7
Port Harcourt Int' Airport	Air Peace, Ibom Air, Aero Contractors, Arik Air, Green Africa Airways, Dana Airline	20,888	94.6
Margaret Ekpo International Airport, Cross River State	Air Peace, Ibom Air, Aero Contractors, Cally Air	8,547	38.3
Uyo Airport, Akwa Ibom State	Air Peace, Ibom Air	5,430	24
Benin Airport, Edo State	Air Peace, Arik Air, Aero Contractors, Green African Airways, Max Air	38,600	175.8
Total		87,229	398

Source: Author's Compilation.

4. Result

The results obtained from the analysis in Table 1 indicate that consumers at domestic airports in Nigeria are perceived to be largely unaware of their rights and protections in air travel services, with a mean score of 3.18. This lack of awareness aligns with previous research (such as Uma, *et.al.*, 2016) emphasizing the significance of consumer education in increasing awareness of rights and protections. Additionally, the findings reveal a lack of proactivity among consumers in seeking information about their rights, with a mean score of 3.23. This suggests the necessity for targeted communication strategies to bridge the gap between available information and consumer engagement, as highlighted by (Mosteller & Poddar, 2017). These results underscore the critical role of consumer education campaigns in addressing ignorance and empowering travellers with knowledge about their rights.

Table 1: The level of consumers' awareness regarding their rights and protections in air travel services within domestic airports.

	Respondents' responses		
Variables	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Remark
Consumers are largely ignorant of their rights and protections in air travel services	3.18	1.03	Agree
Communication channels provided by the airports effectively convey information about consumer rights and protections.	2.79	0.94	Agree
Consumers generally do not actively seek information about their rights in air travel services.	3.23	0.66	Agree
Consumers are somewhat confident but express uncertainties about their rights	3.28	0.91	Agree
Initiatives to improve consumer awareness have not been particularly effective.	3.33	0.61	Agree
Information about consumer rights and protections is easily accessible through various sources at domestic airports.	3.71	0.60	Agree
Consumers are entirely passive and reluctant to challenge any violations of their rights	2.96	0.86	Agree
Grand mean	3.21	0.80	Agree

Source: Authors' Computation.

Consumer perceptions regarding their rights exhibit a combination of confidence and uncertainties, with a mean score of 3.28. This resonates with existing literature that underscores the complexity of consumer perceptions in the air travel industry (Neacsu & Madar, 2019). The presence of uncertainties emphasizes the importance of clear and transparent communication from airlines and regulatory bodies to build consumer confidence in their rights, as advocated by Kerr *et al*. (2021). While initiatives aimed at improving awareness are perceived as less effective (mean = 3.33), the study suggests that these efforts should be revisited and tailored to address the specific concerns and uncertainties expressed by consumers.

Table 2: Chi-square analysis of the level of awareness among consumers regarding their rights and protections in air travel services within domestic airports in Nigeria and their satisfaction with airline services.

Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3708.608	357	.000
Likelihood Ratio	1526.474	357	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	385.586	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	398		

Note: 381 cells (96.2%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.
Source: Authors' Computation.

The Chi-square analysis in Table 2 revealed the difference between the level of awareness among consumers regarding their rights and protections in air travel services within domestic airports in Nigeria and their satisfaction with airline services. The results showcase statistically significant associations across multiple tests. The Pearson Chi-Square test yielded a value of 3708.608 with 357 degrees of freedom, along with an extremely low p-value of .000. Similarly, the Likelihood Ratio test showed a value of 1526.474 with 357 degrees of freedom and a p-value of .000, indicating a robust rejection of the null hypothesis. Despite these low counts, the overall findings suggest a significant difference between the level of awareness among consumers regarding their

rights and protections in air travel services within domestic airports in Nigeria and their satisfaction with airline services.

The Chi-square analysis establishes a statistically significant difference between the level of awareness among consumers regarding their rights and protections and their satisfaction with airline services at domestic airports in Nigeria. Both the Pearson Chi-Square test (p = .000) and the Likelihood Ratio test (p = .000) yield extremely low p-values, robustly rejecting the null hypothesis. This finding aligns with research emphasizing the positive impact of consumer awareness on satisfaction in service industries, particularly in air travel (Huang, *et al.,* 2019). It highlights the interconnectedness of consumer knowledge and satisfaction, emphasizing the need for policies and interventions that enhance awareness to improve the overall customer experience. The comprehensive insights from this study provide an understanding of consumer perceptions regarding their rights and protections in air travel services at domestic airports in Nigeria. These findings contribute not only to the existing literature on consumer behaviour in the aviation sector but also offer valuable information for stakeholders to develop targeted strategies aimed at enhancing consumer awareness and protection mechanisms. Ultimately, these efforts can lead to improved satisfaction with airline services.

Table 3: Perceived consumer satisfaction with the grievance resolution processes in place at domestic airports.

	Respondents' responses		
Variables	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Remark
The grievance resolution processes at domestic airports effectively address consumer concerns, leading to satisfactory outcomes	2.98	0.91	Agree
Consumers perceive the grievance resolution procedures as transparent, providing clarity on how their concerns are addressed	2.68	1.08	Agree
Consumers often experience significant delays in the resolution of their grievances, causing dissatisfaction	2.86	1.26	Agree
Accessing grievance channels is challenging, and consumers face difficulties in raising their concerns	3.39	0.80	Agree
Communication during the grievance resolution process is clear, keeping consumers informed and satisfied with the progress	2.79	1.07	Agree
Consumers often feel that resolutions are unfair and do not adequately address their concerns	3.05	1.08	Agree
Consumers are highly satisfied with the overall effectiveness of grievance resolution processes at domestic airports	3.05	1.07	Agree
Grand mean	2.97	1.04	Agree

Source: Authors' Computation.

The study explores the perceived consumer satisfaction with grievance resolution processes at domestic airports in Nigeria, shedding light on various aspects of the system. Table 3 indicated that respondents generally agreed (mean: 2.98) that the grievance resolution processes effectively address consumer concerns, leading to satisfactory outcomes. This finding aligns with existing research by Gavval *et al*. (2021), emphasizing the critical role of effective grievance resolution in ensuring consumer satisfaction. The study also reveals a positive perception of transparency in the grievance resolution procedures, with respondents indicating clarity in how their concerns are addressed (mean: 2.68). This echoes the work of Thompson *et al.* (2014), underlining the importance of transparency in organizational processes to build trust and satisfaction among consumers.

However, challenges in the grievance resolution processes are acknowledged by respondents, including significant delays in resolution (mean: 2.86) and difficulties in accessing grievance channels (mean: 3.39). These challenges align with the findings of Raju & Gupta (2018), who highlight the negative impact of delays and accessibility issues on consumer satisfaction. Addressing these challenges becomes crucial for improving the efficiency of grievance resolution mechanisms and ensuring timely responses to consumer concerns. Despite these challenges, communication during the grievance resolution process is generally perceived as clear, keeping consumers informed and satisfied with the progress (mean: 2.79, standard deviation: 1.07).

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the consumer satisfaction with the grievance resolution processes in place at domestic airports in Nigeria has no significant impact on overall consumer satisfaction.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	83.259	21	3.965	1561.720	.000
Within Groups	.955	376	.003		
Total	84.214	397			

Source: Authors' Computation.

Table 4 shows the F-ratio value (1561.720) at 21 df 397 and the 0.05 level of significance. The probability level of significance P (.000) is less than 0.05. This means that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of consumer satisfaction with the grievance resolution processes in place at domestic airports in Nigeria on overall consumer satisfaction. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The overall positive perception of the effectiveness of grievance resolution mechanisms is evident in the grand mean of 2.97, with a standard deviation of 1.04. This suggests an overall agreement among respondents that consumers are satisfied with the grievance resolution processes at domestic airports. The rejection of the null hypothesis, indicated by the F-ratio value (1561.720) at 21 df 397 and a significance level of P (.000) less than 0.05, further supports the conclusion that there is a significant difference in consumer perceptions.

In conclusion, while challenges such as delays and perceived unfairness exist, the findings underscore the importance of addressing specific areas of concern to enhance overall consumer satisfaction with the grievance resolution processes at domestic airports in Nigeria.

Table 5 shows that perception of respondents in assessing consumer rights to airline refund and compensation policies across domestic airports in Nigeria. Various variables such as informing passengers about their rights regarding airline refund policies, passengers' being satisfied with the clarity of information provided by airlines regarding their refund policies, the perception of passengers' on fair process of claiming refunds or compensation from airlines, and for passengers' who are confidence in their ability to assert their rights regarding airline refund and compensation policies were positively perceived and significant at mean scores of 3.31, 3.20, 3.31, and 2.58 respectively. Though, they were also discontented at low mean score of 1.88 indicating the fact that passengers don't belief that airlines adequately compensate for flight cancellations or delays.

Findings on consumer rights to airline refund and compensation policies is apt and corroborate with the enormous long dissatisfaction of users of air transportation in Nigeria. Ekanem and Thomas (2018) also affirm that when a passenger purchases a ticket for a specific flight, they often adjust their plans and schedule accordingly, minimizing the expectation of cancellation. Flights are integral components of a broader connectivity system rather than isolated events. Cancellations typically arise when airlines are unable to operate a scheduled flight due to various reasons. These

reasons may include a decrease in the immediate availability of aircraft or economic considerations such as low passenger bookings. The United States Department of Transportation identifies several factors that can lead to flight cancellations, including aircraft maintenance issues, severe weather conditions like tornadoes or hurricanes, airline operational problems, air traffic congestion, and security concerns. Flight cancellations can inconvenience passengers and sometimes lead to hardship.

Table 5: Perception of Respondents on Consumers Right to Airline Refund and Compensation Policies at Domestic Wings of Airports in Nigeria

	Respondents' responses		
Variables	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Remark
Do you feel passengers are duly informed about their rights regarding airline refund policies	3.31	2.92	Agree
Passengers are satisfied with the clarity of information provided by airlines regarding their refund policies	3.20	2.76	Agree
Do you believe airlines adequately compensate passengers for flight cancellations or delays	2.19	1.88	Disagree
Passengers are meant to perceive a fair process of claiming refunds or compensation from airlines	3.31	2.88	Agree
Airline users are confident in their ability to assert their rights regarding airline refund and compensation policies	2.58	2.26	Agree

Source: Authors' Computation.

To address these challenges, legal frameworks impose liability on carriers in the event of flight cancellations. In Nigeria, flight cancellation liability is regulated by the Nigerian Civil Aviation Regulations of 2012. According to Article 19.5.1(i) of these regulations, air carriers are required to provide assistance, either in the form of compensation as outlined in the regulations or through immediate reimbursement in cash for domestic flights. Additionally, Article 19.8 stipulates that passenger, whether traveling domestically or internationally, are entitled to care from the operating air carrier unless they receive notification of the cancellation at least twenty-four hours before the scheduled departure time for domestic flights.

In addition to the study findings, interview conducted with airline passengers revealed an average level of awareness of about 58% regarding their rights on airline refund and compensation policies. A greater (71%) number of users of domestic wings generally indicated that passengers perceive statutory agencies are weak in effecting the much-needed punishment/Fine to defaulting airlines, and those who fails to adequately compensate passengers for flight cancellations or delays. This indicates a need for relevant aviation and customer-oriented agencies to get involve in consistent and comprehensive communication or education efforts regarding passenger rights at Nigerian domestic airports. And for those passengers who generally have a moderate level of confidence in their ability to assert their rights regarding airline refund and compensation policies, have significantly been settled. However, there is still room to enhance the confidence levels among passengers to ensure they feel empowered to assert their rights effectively.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of consumer perceptions and awareness regarding their rights and protections in air travel services at domestic airports in Nigeria. The findings indicate a significant lack of awareness and proactivity among consumers, highlighting the necessity for targeted educational campaigns to bridge this knowledge gap. Additionally, consumer perceptions reveal a mixture of confidence and uncertainties, suggesting the need for clear and transparent communication from airlines and regulatory bodies. Effective

grievance resolution processes are crucial for ensuring consumer satisfaction, though challenges such as delays and accessibility issues need to be addressed to enhance these mechanisms. Furthermore, while consumers have a positive perception of airline refund and compensation policies, dissatisfaction remains concerning adequate compensation for flight cancellations or delays. The study emphasizes the critical role of legal frameworks and the enforcement of regulations to protect passenger rights. Interviews corroborate the quantitative data, revealing moderate awareness and confidence among passengers in asserting their rights, and indicating the necessity for consistent communication and education efforts. Ultimately, these insights offer valuable guidance for stakeholders in developing strategies to enhance consumer awareness, protection mechanisms, and overall satisfaction with airline services.

The following recommendations are based on the study findings;
Implement initiatives to educate passengers about their rights and protections, fostering a proactive approach to seeking information about air travel services, streamline grievance resolution processes to reduce delays and perceived unfairness, ensuring prompt and satisfactory outcomes for consumers, Focus on addressing communication issues, improving in-flight amenities, and overall service delivery to boost customer satisfaction and loyalty, The study suggests the development of robust passenger education programs at Nigerian airports, informing passengers of refund rights, claims processes, and airline obligations, improving awareness and empowering effective rights assertion, and also, strengthen enforcement with stricter penalties for airlines not compensating passengers, boosting trust and satisfaction in Nigerian air travel consumer rights protection.

6. Contributions to Knowledge

1. This study reveals dissatisfaction areas like grievance resolution, communication, and consumer rights awareness at Nigerian domestic airport wings.
2. It establishes a significant correlation between effective consumer protection mechanisms and heightened consumer satisfaction levels.

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