Ekonomika Economics
Management Management
Inovace Innovation

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY: A STUDY OF AIR TRAVELLERS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Perception of service quality is highly contextual and differs significantly according to consumer socio-demographics characteristics. This study examined perceptions of service quality and socio-demographic characteristics among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria. Cross sectional survey research design was used to survey 503 air passengers selected through convenience sampling approach. Data obtained were analyzed with Anova, t-test, and hierarchical regression analysis. Based on the analysis carried out, service quality perceptions was found to be significantly related to gender; while other socio-demographic characteristics such as age, marital status, level of education, type of occupation, and income were not significantly related to perceptions of service quality. The result of hierarchical regression analysis revealed that when gender is controlled for, the beta coefficient for other socio-demographic characteristics (age, marital status, level of education, occupation, and income) are non-significantly with respect to perception of service quality. The study concluded that stereotyping along gender identity may be inappropriate. Therefore, airline management should ensure that air passengers are treated individually and have their needs met accordingly. The study recommended that it is important for airline operators to understand customers' expectations in term of service quality and relentlessly assess how they are performing, so as to identify gaps in service delivery and how best to remedy the shortfall.

Keywords: service quality, socio-demographic characteristics, perception, airline travelers, airline industry.

1.1 Background to the Study

This study investigates perceptions of service quality and socio-demographic characteristics of air passengers in Lagos state, Nigeria. The Nigeria airline industry has transformed progressively over the last three decades and a major impetus of this change has been the rising trend of the commercialization of airports services (Oluwakoya & Olufemi, 2011). Between the year 2000 and 2011, commercial airline operations in Nigeria have expanded considerably with a projected annual growth rate of 9-10% (Oxford Economics, 2010). Across the globe, air travellers from diverse personality and with different socio-demographic backgrounds such as age, gender, income, occupation, marital status, and level of educational attainment among others patronize airline services. The dissimilarities in these backgrounds can affect thought, feelings, behavior and by implication their assessment of quality (Anthony, 2018). The notion of service quality and customer perception of quality of service offered by business organization has become a topical issue that has dominated service marketing literature and marketing discourse for decades. The provision of excellent service to air passengers is a profitable business approach because; it provide a basis for acquiring and nurturing customers for business growth and competitiveness (Chilembwe, 2014; Tae-Hong, & Timothy, 2016). Across the globe, the airline industry boosts the economic takeoff of nations by enabling the movement of people and goods from one location to another. Air transportation in both developed and developing nations is a great enabler that joined together the world economy without which the global economy will be less

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

competitive (Oxford Economics, 2010). In line with the growing recognition of service quality, airline operators have realized the need to redefine their business thinking in the face of competition and rapidly changing needs and expectations of air passengers to sustain business performance (Chikwendu, Ejem, & Ezenwa, 2012). The demand trend for air transportation all over the world has also matured and in line with the changes, the expectations of the air travellers have also grown and become more complicated (Deillon, 2013). One of the landmark changes in the airline market is the growth of low-cost carriers (LCC) in Europe and North America that have penetrated significant fragments of the markets and impacts on the market share of full-service airlines-FSAs (Doganis, 2006).

Over the years, there has been a sustained research attention and effort on the conceptualization and measurement of service quality, leading to development of several models and approaches for investigating the dimensionality of service quality. In the opinion of Cudjoe, Anim, and Nyanyofio (2015) and Railya (2016), SERVQUAL has become a long-standing model for evaluating service quality in a number of industries. SERVQUAL is an umbrella model for evaluating service quality first introduced into the research community in 1985 and subsequently revised in 1988 by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985; 1988). The initial dimensions consist of ten elements: access, communication, competence, courtesy, credibility, reliability, responsiveness, security, tangibles, understanding and knowing clients. These dimensions were later regrouped into five: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles and empathy. To accommodate the contextual nature of airline industry, Gilbert and Wong (2003) reclassified SERVQUAL dimensions into seven: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, customization, employee, facility, and flight patterns. The stiff competition in the airline industry has propelled the operators to struggle towards providing service that can be adjudged as excellent in line with the quality of services anticipated by air passengers. Air passengers have increased their expectations regarding the quality of service they receive and as such, airline operators must struggle to meet and exceeds their anticipations (Gilbert & Wong, 2003; Jin-Woo, Rodger, & Cheng-Lung, 2005). In practice, airlines measure passenger perceptions of their service quality to understand their performance levels, hence, the success of airline business center upon its knowledge of its customers and capability to meet and exceed their needs. According to Randheer (2015) and Abdul Khader and Madhavi (2017), a thorough knowledge and identification of the most important service quality dimensions from customers' point of view will offer basis for harnessing resources and competence to foster customer satisfaction and loyalty among other important benefits associated with superior service quality.

Paramount issue connected to consumer buying behavior is socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, income, marital status, occupation, and education level among other factors. Socio-demographics refer to the study of people in society (Anderson & Morris, 2000; Wilfred, Mobolaji, Christopher, Callistus, & Edem, 2012). In every societal setting, there are different age groups, gender identity, levels of education and income, hence, these socio-demographic characteristics exert significance effects on people's needs/expectations and by extension the way and manner service delivery is evaluated. According to Lewis (1981), demographic variables are the basis for customer's profiling, positioning, and segmentation. As expressed by Edlira and Lisa (2004), socio-demographic characteristics are essential factors in the formation of consumer preferences and values. Lucyna (2016) maintains that demographic characteristics influence customers' preference and choice decision. In the opinion of Chang and Yee (2002), air travellers' perception of service quality echoes customers' personal preferences, attitudes and future patronage. As expressed by Tareq and Farah (2017), poor understanding of customers' expectations of service quality could pose challenges in service delivery process. Similarly, complication of service quality expectations of customers and how businesses appraise it could be responsible for poor perception of quality of service (Tegambwage & Ame, 2016). Service quality dimensions and evaluation differs remarkably, because, individual consumers perceive service differently and diverse customer segments assign disparate degree of importance to the dimensions of service quality (Scott & Sheiff, 1993; Aan, Tatik, Siti, & Muhammad, 2017). However,

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

consumer who anticipated high level of service quality is likely to be more demanding and displayed less understanding if service level fall short of expectation (Douglas & Connor, 2003).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The drastic changes in the airline industry and expectations of the air passengers have alter the way airline operators need to approach service delivery (Alamdari & Mason, 2006). Therefore, the basis to successful segmentation of air travellers lies in the selection of the measures on which the partitions are founded. The approach used to segment passengers (using purpose of trip and frequency of travel) no longer offer satisfactory insights into the passenger experience (Harrison, Popovic, & Kraal, 2015). Businesses can exert control on product attributes, price, promotion, and choice of distribution channel among others, but consumer socio-demographic characteristics in addition to socio economic, cultural, geographical and psychological factors etc. are beyond the direct influence of marketers (Vani, Ganesh, & Panchanatham, 2011). On this note, marketers must develop strategies to develop understanding of these important issues with a view of developing their offering in line with customers' needs. Empirical studies regarding socio-demographic characteristics and perception of service quality in the airline industry have been very prolific; however, most of these studies have focused on limited factors such as gender, age and income (Faheed, 1998; Tolpa, 2012; Palli & Mamilla, 2012; Rahim, 2015). In addition, some of these studies examined socio-demographic variables as a control or secondary objectives.

Review of previous studies revealed that bulk of the existing research that investigates the relationship between service quality and socio-demographic variables focuses on firm as against industry level analysis (Imam, 2013; Krishnamoorthy, 2016). Likewise, the evidence of the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and perceptions of service quality has been contradictory and misconstrued, leaving the direction of their association largely conflicting (Sein & Chey, 2013; Rahim, 2015). In other words, individual study findings varied widely in terms of statistical significance, direction, and magnitude. Similarly, efforts to integrate findings across socio-demographic variables in a single study have gained scant research attention in the context of the Nigerian airline industry.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate perceptions of service quality and socio-demographic characteristics among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study are: (1) to investigate the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics (such as gender, age, marital status, level of education, occupation and income level) and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria, (2) to determine whether other socio-demographic characteristics (such as age, marital status, level of education, occupation and income level) significantly influence perception of service quality after controlling for gender differences among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

1. Socio-demographic characteristics (such as gender, age, marital status, level of education, occupation and income level) are not significantly related to perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

This hypothesis was broken down into six sub-hypotheses as follows:

i. No significant difference exists between gender (male/female) and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.
ii. No significant difference exists between age and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

iii. No significant difference exists between marital status and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.
iv. No significant difference exists between level of education and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.
v. No significant difference exists between occupation and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.
vi. No significant difference exists between level of income and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

2. After controlling for gender differences, other socio-demographic characteristics (such as age, marital status, level of education, occupation and income level) will not significantly influence perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

2.0 Theoretical and Literature Review

2.1 Service Quality Theories

Service marketing literature is replete with numerous service quality theories and models developed by researchers to evaluate service quality (Yousapronpaiboon, 2014). Some of these theories or models include: ideal value model of service quality, synthesized model of service quality, performance only model, and antecedents and mediator model to mention a few. Out of these multitude of service quality models, SERVQUAL five dimensional model developed by Parasuraman *et al*. in 1988 is the most widely known and used model in service marketing research (Tegambwage & Ame, 2016). The SERVQUAL framework consist of five dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy and responsiveness have been widely critiqued. A number of scholars such as Cronin and Taylor (1992), Gilbert and Wong (2003) and Pakdil and Aydin (2007) have challenged this model. These scholars alleged that SERVQUAL model is not reliable and valid enough to measure service quality across diverse industry.

Consequently, they proposed the need to modify its dimensions for wider generalization. Others approved the principle of SERVQUAL dimensions and scales, but they suggest that no single measurement approach can be considered universal to evaluate service quality for all types of companies in the service sector (Gilbert & Wong, 2003). Consequently, numerous SERVQUAL variants have been promoted in service marketing literature in the past decade (Randheer, 2015). For instance, Cronin and Taylor (1994) came up with performance-based scale of service quality measurement called SERVPERF, which evaluates how a service is being delivered. Robeldo (2001) questions the validity and reliability of SERVPERF as service quality measurement model and suggests SERVPEX along two continuum of “much worse than expected” to “much better than expected”. Boulding, Kalra, Stealin and Zeithaml (1993) proposed dynamic process model to evaluate service quality. Gronroos (1998) promotes technical and functional quality model. Haywood-Farmer (1988) offers attribute service quality model. Teas (1993) suggested evaluated performance and normed quality model. Mattsson (1992) recommends ideal value model of service quality. Philip and Hazlett (1997) promoted pivotal, core and peripheral attribute model. The growing recognition and importance of service quality have also led to the development of other specific measurement models that are peculiar to some industry context. Some of these models are listed in Table 1 below.

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

Table 1: Some Notable Service Quality Measurement Models

Authors	Models	Context
Mei, Dean & White, 1999 Knutson, Stevens & Patton, 1991 Halir & Hussain, 2005	HOLSERV LODGSERV HOTELZOT	Hotel
Theodorakis, Kambitis, Laios, & Koustelios, 2001 O'Neill, Williams, MacCarthy & Grovers, 2000, Kahn, 2003	SPORTSERV DIVERPERF	Sport, Recreation & Tourism
Steven, Knutson, & Patton, 1995 Ryu & Jang, 2008 Autun, Frash, Costen, & Runyan, 2010	DINESERV DINESCAPE DinEx-scale	Restaurants
Abdullahi, 2006 Mahapatra & Khan, 2007	HedPERF EduQUAL	Education
Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005 Yoo & Donthu, 2001	E-S-QUAL SITEQUAL	Information Technology
Avkiran, 1994 Pal & Choudhury, 2009	BANKSERV TOPSIS	Banking
Cock, Adams, Ibbetson & Baugh, 2006	REFERQUAL	Hospital
Papadomichelaki & Mentzas, 2012 Sigala, 2004	e-GovQual ASP-Qual	Government
Seyed, Munijeh, & Alireza, 2013 Tanomsakyut & Thawesaengskulthai, 2010	MS-Qual SQM-ME	Telecommunications

Source: Compiled by the author from literature review

2.2 Defining Service Quality

According to Daniel, Alexander, and Evans (2018), the notion of service quality is a dynamic, multifaceted, and integrates a number of facets of both past and present service experiences. Many scholars have expressed views that service quality is difficult to define and measure (Parasuraman *et al*., 1988; Zeithaml, 2000; Ladhari, 2008). As expressed by Lee, Moon, Kim, and Yi (2014), quality is accomplished through an understanding of the dissimilarity between customer expectations and service performance delivery of the organization. In the opinion of Kao and Lin (2016), if consumer perceptions exceeded expectations, the service delivery is high, and the consequence is customer satisfaction and loyalty. According to Parasuraman *et al*. (1985), quality can be categorized into objective and perceived quality. Objective quality is the assessment of the product founded on physical features; while perceived quality reflects on subjective symbolization which relate to consumer appraisal of the product based on characteristics such as store image, and brand name among others. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) categorized service quality into two dimensions. The first is referred to as "outcome quality" and the second "technical quality". According to these scholars, the first dimension focuses on service delivered, while the second centers on how the service is delivered. Parasumaran *et al*., (1985) maintained that service quality is the customer assessment of service outcome and service process and the extent it meets their expectations. Eshghi, Roy, and Ganguli (2008) viewed service quality as the overall evaluation of a service by the customers. The conceptualization of service quality varies; however, the definitions are all articulated from the customer viewpoint: that is, the dimensions of quality as perceive by customers (Lewis, 1989).

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
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2.3 A review of Socio-demographic Characteristics

There are numerous demographic factors that influence consumer buying decision and their perception of products/service quality. Some of the major socio-demographic characteristics are discussed as follow.

Gender

Gender in term of sex (male or female) distinguishes consumer consumption pattern and general behavior. As stated by Dorota (2013), men and women carry out different roles in every household; therefore, they tend to exhibit diverse demand pattern for products/service and behave differently in the process of searching, consuming and evaluation of post purchase decision. For instance, female are more emotionally expressive and easily glued to advertising message than men (Imam, 2013). According to Fatimoh, Malgorzata, Agata, and Barbara (2013), women search for detailed information prior to purchase than men. Similarly, Mattila, Gradey and Fisk (2003) opined that women often exhibit high level of expectations than men and react swiftly to employee misconduct with high emotional countenance. According to Ignatov and Smith (2006), consumer reaction to price prior to purchase decision differs with respect to gender.

Age

According to Dorota (2013), changes in consumer behavior manifest through age. The more mature the person, the added purchasing experience they have compare to the younger one. Therefore, age is a dominant factor that influence consumer behavior and by extension other varieties of consumer situations such as: comforts, feeling of security, perceptions tastes, emotional stability, purchasing capability, political inclinations, and risk behavior (Neal, Quester & Hawkins, 2002). For instance, in a dissonance situation, older consumer deliberates on possibility of diversifying through the experience they have acquired over time, while younger ones with fewer experience rely on brand, and are easily influenced by brand image/price (Paul, Trun, & Alan, 1996). Older air travellers, according to Callan and Bowman (2000) attached significant importance to airline staff attitude and behavior; and appreciate friendly, courteous and thoughtful service (Carner, 1988). On the contrary, younger air passengers may be more fascinated with the quality of the physical environment compared to elderly air travellers (Callan & Bowman, 2000). In the opinion of Homburg and Giering (2001), the dissimilarities in service quality perceptions among customers of diverse age groups, may be attributed to the fact that older people have constrained information processing abilities and that information process declines with age which make elderly people less consistent in their judgments.

Income

Income has largely been acknowledged as foremost determining factor influencing consumer behavior (Dorota, 2013). For instance, a consumer with high income have high tendency to purchase expensive product and those with relatively lower income prefer to buy product with lower price (Paul, *et al*., 1996). According to Scott and Sheiff (1993), consumers with different income levels have been discovered to have dissimilar perceptions of service quality. For instance, it is commonly believe that people with higher income display high tendency for educational attainment (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2017; Anthony, 2018), and seek more information prior to purchase decision (Schaninger & Sciglimpaglia, 1981).

Marital status

Owing to natural and historical believe, different strata of human society have distinctive pattern of marital status (married, bachelor, spinster, divorced, widower or cohabitation). The United Nations defined marital status as a deed, ceremony through which the legitimate relationship of husband and wife is established through civil, religious or other approaches as acknowledged by the laws of each country (United Nations, 2001). Marital status is one of the vital demographic factors which can have an

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

influence on consumer purchase behavior. According to Srinivasan, Srivastava, and Sandeep (2015), people of diverse marital status can react differently to the numerous attributes of brands and might engage in purchase from diverse places or look for dissimilar dimensions of attributes. As expressed by Srinivasan, Srivastava, and Bhanot (2014) uniqueness can be articulated differently on the basis of demographic factors one of which is marital status. Research study conducted by Wilfred *et al*. (2012) reported that marital status is one of the significant variables that influence the choice of airline.

Level of Education

The level of education attained by people has been generally observed as one of the most important socio-economic determinants of his/her purchase decision. There is also substantial proof that lower level of educational accomplishment is strongly connected and affects consumer purchasing behavior in a number of important ways, such as lifestyle, social connections, leadership effectiveness, nature of occupation and earning (Elo & Preston, 1996). Similarly, Schaninger and Sciglimpaglia (1981) have proved that individual with higher level of education will most likely earn more income and engage in thorough information processing prior to purchase decision.

Occupation

There are important features of occupational characteristics such as (part-time/full time work, private/public sector employees, professional/unskilled workers etc.) that will perhaps exert significant effect on the frequency of travel, flight class, purpose of travel and by extension how these manifest into perception of service quality (Faheed, 1998). Likewise, there is tendency for heterogeneity of specific occupational segregation within some sectors than in others; hence, overall profiles might conceal vital differences among different occupational strata (Goldberg, Sweeney, Merenda, & Hughes, 1998). In addition, there are confounding variables with some occupations, which need to be taken into account when analyzing people profiles, for instance, men/female predominant jobs.

2.4 Socio-demographic Characteristics and Perceptions of Service Quality

According to Lucyna (2016), socio-demographic characteristics are the most popular and well accepted basis for market segmentation and customers profiling. Service quality is perceived differently by consumers according to their socio-demographic background. Robin and Rhea (2007) noted that the difference in socio-demographic characteristics is fundamental to perceive value of certain market offering; which influence behavioral intention (Robinson & Smith, 2002). Socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, income, marital status, education, and occupation have long been identified in the literature as having a significant influence on the perception of service quality (Michael, Christopher, Tzu-Hui, & Michelle, 2008; Sein & Chey, 2013). An understanding of the effect of key socio-demographics variables on customer perceptions of service quality is important and plays a major role in the delivery of service (Oyewole, 2001). According to Sein and Chey (2013), the relationships between socio-demographic variables and service quality revealed diverse research findings (from non-significant relationship, to partial relationship and to full relationships. Ayub, Ayub, and Sowmya (2014) conducted a research to examine customer perception of service quality offered by banks and reported that gender and marital status influence customers' perception of service quality. Webster (1989) documents that age, gender and income were significantly connected to service quality expectations for professional services. Oyewole (2001) examines the effect of socio-demographic variables on customer satisfaction in airline industry. He reported that professional (managers of enterprises), marital status (married passengers), gender (men), and education (less educated passengers) significantly influence customer satisfaction, while age and income exert no influence on passenger's satisfaction. A mixed result was documented by Genesan-Lim, Russell-Bennett and Dagger (2008) who discovered that age was a significant factor in the perception of service quality, but gender and income were not found to be significant. Westwood, Pritchard, and Morgan (2000) documented the outcome of a survey conducted

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

by British Airways and reported that women have the belief that flying was made enjoyable and satisfying for men as a result of advantaged opportunity of men to interact with female airline crew.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. To achieve the research objectives, an empirical technique of research strategy was adopted because it focuses on providing answers to the underlined research hypotheses. Descriptive survey research design is mostly used when the objective of the study is to describe the features and segment of people in a particular population who behave in a certain way for the purpose of predictions (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005).

3.2 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Method

The population of this study comprised all air travellers departing from two airport terminals in Lagos state – Murtala Muhammed Terminal One and Murtala Muhammed Airport Two in Lagos State. The sample of the study consists of 800 air travellers using Arik Air, Aero Contractors, First Nations Airways, Overland Airways, Dana Air, Med-view Airline, Discovery Airline and Azman Air Services Limited (that's 100 air passengers per airline). The study adopted convenience sampling technique to select the respondents. This approach was taken to save time and costs. The survey was conducted at different times of the day, on every day of the week, over a three weeks period to enhance the representativeness of the sample.

3.3 Instrumentation, Pilot Testing and Data Analysis Technique

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data from passengers waiting to travel to different location from the two airport terminals in Lagos State, Nigeria. Questionnaire items were developed in line with seven dimensional structure of service quality consisting of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, customization, employee, facilities, and flight patterns proposed by Gilbert and Wong (2003). The seven dimensional elements of service quality have been validated in the context of the Nigerian airline industry (Rahim, 2016). Questionnaire response choices were presented in a 7 - point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Prior to the pilot study, the questionnaire was checked by three marketing scholars in the department of Business Administration, University of Lagos to evaluate its face validity. After amending the questionnaire as suggested by them, a total of 30 air passengers who have benefitted and used airline services were used in the pilot survey. All the variables have satisfactory coefficient alpha of α=0.60 and above; which indicate that the instrument is reliable (Wright, Naar-King, Lam, Templin, & Frey, 2007). The statistical analyses included descriptive statistics (such as frequency, mean and standard deviation) and the hypotheses were tested using Anova, t-tests statistics and hierarchical regression analysis.

4.1 Results of Hypotheses Testing and Discussion

The responses of the survey air travellers to perceptions of service quality statements are shown in Table 2. Perception of service quality, the independent variable, comprised of seven dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, customization, employee, facilities, and flight patterns. The responses ranged from 2- the lowest to 5-the highest. The mean ranged from 3.15 to 3.36, while the standard deviation ranged from .387 to.597. Mean value scale was constructed to guide the interpretation of respondents evaluation of the statements. The verbal descriptions and points awarded are as follows:

Extremely poor	=	0 – 0.99
Very poor	=	1 – 1.99

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

Poor	=	2 – 2.99
Average	=	3 – 3.99
Above average	=	4 – 4.99
Good	=	5 – 5.99
Very good	=	6 – 6.99

The mean value of all the statements as evaluated by air travellers indicated that that the performance of the airline operators along all the seven dimensions is on the average.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the participants' responses to perceptions of service quality questions.

Service Quality Perceptions	Min	Max	Mean	Sd.
Reliability				
The airline performs its services right at the first time.	2	5	3.17	.559
The service of the airline is very consistent.	2	5	3.17	.479
The check-in process of this airline is efficient.	2	5	3.18	.530
The reservation and ticketing of this airline is prompt.	2	4	3.20	.523
Responsiveness				
This airline has capacity to respond to emergency situations (i.e. cancelled or delayed flights).	2	5	3.22	.540
This airline provides information about when services will be performed.	2	4	3.18	.399
This airline responds promptly to customer complaints.	2	4	3.25	.533
Employees of the airline displays thorough understanding of the specific needs of passengers'.	2	4	3.20	.523
Assurance				
Safety performance of the airline is very impressive.	2	5	3.22	.549
Employees attitude to passengers' complaints instill confidence.	2	4	3.17	.387
Employees are sympathetic and re-assuring when there is a problem.	2	4	3.24	.528
I feel safe in my interactions with the airline.	2	4	3.18	.512
Customization				
Employees of this airline displays concern for my needs.	2	5	3.40	.556
Employees of this airline have passengers' best interests at heart.	2	4	3.32	.470
The flight schedule of the airline is very convenient for me.	2	5	3.34	.597
The attitude of the employees of this airline demonstrates their willingness to help when needed.	2	5	3.35	.540
Employees				
Employees of the airline can speak in local and foreign languages.	2	5	3.36	.553
Employees of the airline are well dressed and appear neat.	2	4	3.31	.475
Employees of the airline are courteous	2	5	3.29	.589
Employees of the airline have professional knowledge to meet my needs.	2	5	3.31	.538
Facilities				
The services of this airline are based on superior technology (air conditioners, lighting, music etc).	2	5	3.17	.559
The airline has visually appealing facilities.	2	5	3.22	.509
This airline offers variety and choices of in-flight entertainment facilities (i.e. refreshment, books, magazines, newspapers etc).	2	5	3.19	.536

EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

The airline has comfortable facilities (e.g. seating comfort, spacious bulk head for luggage, leg room etc).	2	4	3.20	.523
Flight Patterns				
The airline operates many flight schedules (e.g. morning, afternoon and evening).	2	4	3.17	.500
The airline operates non-stop flight.	2	5	3.16	.461
The airline covers many routes to the delight of passengers.	2	5	3.16	.517
The airline often adjusts flight frequency during peak period to accommodate increased patronage.	2	4	3.15	.491

Hypothesis One - (i)

No significant difference exists between gender (male/female) and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics – Gender and perceptions of service quality

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	308	3.20	.300	.017
Female	195	3.28	.396	.028
Total	503			

Table 4: Independent Samples Test - Gender and perceptions of service quality

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig	T	Dt	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	15.931	.000	-2.616	501	.09
Equal variances not assumed			-2.461	333.061	.14

As shown in Table 3, the descriptive statistics as indicated by means values suggest that female air travellers perceived service quality slightly higher than male passengers'. To confirm whether the difference is significant, independent T-test was conducted. As indicated in Table 4, F-value is 15.931, t = -2.461, p-value was equal to .09, which indicates that $p<0.05$. The above result shows that perceptions of service quality differ significantly with gender (male of female). Based on the above statistics, sub-hypothesis one (i) which states that no significant difference exists between gender (male/female) and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria is not supported by the finding of this study; hence, the study concludes that significant difference exists between male and female as regard perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria. Furthermore, the low Eta squared value of 0.001 was considered small; which reveals that the results is independent of sample size effects and provides further evidence for the rejection of sub-hypothesis one (i) . This finding is line with that of Palli and Mamilla (2012) and Micheal *et al*., (2008) who reported significant difference between male and female towards perception of service quality. On the other hand, the finding of this study contradicts that of Tolpa (2012) who claims that no significant different exist between male and female in respect of service quality perception.

Hypothesis One - (ii)

No significant difference exists between age and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

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ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
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Table 5: Descriptive statistics – Age and perceptions of service quality

Age groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
18 – 25 years	28	3.30	.389	.074
26 – 35 years	58	3.22	.308	.040
36 – 45 years	187	3.25	.356	.026
46 – 55 years	138	3.23	.344	.029
56 – 65 years	74	3.19	.316	.037
66 years and above	18	3.15	.320	.076

Table 6: ANOVA - Age and perceptions of service quality

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.458	5	.092	.781	.564
Within Groups	58.297	497	.117		
Total	58.755	502			

Table 6, shows that perceptions of service quality is not significantly related to age F (5, 497) = .781, p-value was equal to .564, which indicates that p>0.05. Although the means scores across the age group (as shown in Table 5) varies slightly, Post-hoc honestly significant difference (HSD) comparisons indicated that the mean score among the age groups did not significantly differ. From the above results, sub-hypothesis one (ii) which states that no significant difference exists between age and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria is supported by the finding of this study. Furthermore, the low Eta squared value of 0.008 was considered small; which reveals that the results is independent of sample size effects and provides further evidence for the acceptance of sub-hypothesis one (ii) . The finding corroborates the result reported by Oyewole (2001), but contradicts the finding reported by Webster (1989) and Micheal *et al*., (2008).

Hypothesis One - (iii)

No significant difference exists between marital status and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics – Marital status and perceptions of service quality

Marital status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Single	149	3.27	.346	.028
Married	309	3.21	.334	.019
Divorced/seperated	33	3.25	.327	.057
Widowed	12	3.24	.518	.150

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Table 8: ANOVA – Marital status and perceptions of service quality

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.350	3	.117	.998	.393
Within Groups	58.404	499	.117		
Total	58.755	502			

Table 8, reveals that perceptions of service quality is not significantly related to marital status F (3, 499) = .998, p-value was equal to .393, which indicates that p>0.05. Although the means scores across the marital status group (as shown in Table 7) varies slightly, Post-hoc HSD comparisons showed that the mean score among the marital status groups did not significantly differ. The above results, implies that sub-hypothesis one (iii) which states that no significant difference exists between marital status and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria is supported by the finding of this study. Furthermore, the low Eta squared value of 0.006 was too small; which reveals that the results is independent of sample size effects and provides further evidence for the acceptance of sub-hypothesis one (iii) . This finding corroborates Krishnamoorthy (2016) position which advocates that policyholders do not differ significantly with respect to marital status on the basis of their perception of service quality of Life Insurance Companies. The finding of this contradicts the finding documented by Micheal *et al*., (2008), Ayub *et al*., (2014) and Madeline, Mohd, and Yanti (2014) studies that reported significant dissimilarity in the perception of service quality with respect to marital status.

Hypothesis One – (iv)

No significant difference exists between level of education and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics – Level of education and perceptions of service quality

Educational attainment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Secondary or below	16	3.34	.444	.111
Diploma or equivalent	112	3.23	.372	.035
B.Sc. or equivalent	235	3.23	.327	.021
M.Sc., MBA or equivalent	134	3.23	.330	.029
Doctorate degree	6	3.04	.315	.129

Table 10: ANOVA - Level of education and perceptions of service quality

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.411	4	.103	.877	.477
Within Groups	58.343	498	.117		
Total	58.755	502			

As shown in Table 10, perceptions of service quality is not significantly related to the level of education F (4, 498) = .877, p-value was equal to .477, which indicates that p>0.05. With the exception of passengers who hold Doctorate degree, and those with school certificate holders or below, the mean scores for other levels of education are equal (as shown in Table 9). Furthermore, Post-hoc HSD comparisons showed that the mean score for all the levels of education did not significantly differ. Based on the above results, sub-hypothesis one (iv) which states that no significant difference exists between

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the level of education and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria is supported by the finding of this study. Furthermore, the low Eta squared value of 0.007 was too small; which reveals that the results is independent of sample size effects and provides further evidence for the acceptance of sub-hypothesis one (iv) . The finding of this study contradicts the result reported by Oyewole (2001).

Hypothesis One – (v)

No significant difference exists between occupation and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria

Table 11: Descriptive statistics – Occupation and perceptions of service quality

Occupation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
College students	19	3.34	.416	.095
Self-employed	121	3.26	.355	.032
Government employee	47	3.26	.337	.049
Private sector employee	142	3.21	.306	.026
Professional or related	124	3.21	.338	.030
Retired	42	3.22	.334	.051
Other	8	3.25	.658	.232

Table 12: ANOVA - Occupation and perceptions of service quality

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.449	6	.075	.637	.700
Within Groups	58.305	496	.116		
Total	58.755	502			

Table 12 shows that perceptions of service quality is not significantly related to occupation F (6, 496) = .637, p-value was equal to .700, which indicates that p>0.05. The mean score for college students is slightly higher than other occupational groups (as shown in Table 11), however, Post-hoc HSD comparisons showed that the mean score for the passengers occupational category did not significantly differ. From the above results, sub-hypothesis one (v) which states that no significant difference exists between occupation and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria is supported by the finding of this study. Furthermore, the low Eta squared value of 0.008 was too small; which reveals that the results is independent of sample size effects and provides further evidence for the acceptance of sub-hypothesis one (v). The finding of this study contradicts the study conducted by Micheal *et al*., (2008).

Hypothesis One – (vi)

No significant difference exists between level of income and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Table 13: Descriptive statistics – Income and perceptions of service quality

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Income Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Less than N500,000	199	3.24	.340	.024
N500,000 – N1,000,000	143	3.24	.341	.029
N1,001,000 – N2,000,000	129	3.21	.347	.031
N2,001,000 and above	32	3.28	.350	.062

Table 14: ANOVA - Income and perceptions of service quality

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.160	3	.053	.455	.714
Within Groups	58.594	499	.117		
Total	58.755	502			

Table 14 shows that perceptions of service quality is not significantly related to income F (3, 499) = .455, p-value was equal to .714, which indicates that p>0.05. As shown in Table 13, the mean scores for all other income category, with the exception of passengers in the 4th income category did not differ much. Likewise, Post-hoc HSD comparisons test showed that the mean scores among the income groups did not significantly differ. From the above results, sub-hypothesis one (vi) which states that no significant difference exists between income and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria is supported by the finding of this study. Furthermore, the low Eta squared value of 0.003 was too small; which reveals that the results is independent of sample size effects and provides further evidence for the acceptance of sub-hypothesis one (vi) . The finding of this study corroborates the result documented by Oyewole (2001), but contradicts Webster (1989), and Micheal *et al*., (2008) findings.

Hypothesis Two

After controlling for gender differences, other socio-demographic characteristics (such as age, marital status, level of education, occupation and income level) will not significantly influence the perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Table 15: Hierarchical Regression Analysis predicting Perceptions of Service Quality

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	3.120***	3.220***
Gender	.116***	.112*
Age		-.043
Marital status		-.011
Level of education		.007
Occupation		-.053
Income		-.004
F	6.841***	1.664*
R^2	.013***	.020
ΔR^2	.013***	.008

N = 503, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the predictive power of gender on perceptions of service quality, after controlling for the influence of other socio-demographic characteristics (age, marital status, level of education, occupation, and income). Preliminary analysis carried out revealed no violation of assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and

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homoscedasticity). As shown in Table 15, Model 1 of the analysis revealed significant difference on the perception of service quality with respect to gender (male and female). The results imply that gender is significantly associated with perceptions of service quality (β = .116, t=2.616, p<0.01, ΔR^2 = .013).

As indicated in Table 15, Model 2, when gender is controlled for, the beta coefficient for other demographic characteristics are insignificant: age (β = -.043, t= -.852, p=.395), marital status (β = -.011, t=-.235, p=.814), level of education (β = .007, t=.139, p=.890), occupation (β = -.053, t=-1.037, p=.300), and income (β = -.004, t=-.081, p=.935). Within this block, only gender demonstrated a positive significant association with perceptions of service quality (β = .112, t=2.507, p< 0.10, ΔR^2 = .008). From the above analysis, the interaction established in Model 2, other socio-demographic variables are not significant after controlling for the effect of gender as indicated by ΔR^2 value in Model 1 and Model 2 of the hierarchical regression. Based on the above results, hypothesis two which states that after controlling for gender differences, other socio-demographic characteristics (such as age, marital status, level of education, occupation and income level) will not significantly influence the perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos state, Nigeria is supported.

5.1 Conclusion and Implications

This study examined socio-demographic characteristics and perceptions of service quality among air travellers in Lagos State, Nigeria. Finding of this study indicates that only gender identity (male/female) is significantly related to perception of service quality in the Nigerian airline industry, other socio-demographic characteristics such as age, level of education, marital status, occupation, and level of income are not significantly related to service quality perceptions. The performance of the airline operators along the seven service quality dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, customization, employee, facilities, and flights pattern is on the average. This indicates the need for airline operators to develop strategies and commit more resources towards improving the service quality performance. This is so because, consumer choice decision is connected to firm's marketing initiatives which are predisposed by the capability of a product or service to meet the distinctive need and expectations of the target market (Lucyna, 2016). According to this author, consumer socio-demographic characteristics will also exert significant impact on their choice decision. The assertion that consumer behavior change with ages and other notable characteristics (such as income, level of education, and occupation among others) is not a mistake and has become a basis for important marketing decision (Abhijeet, 2017; Sanjay, & Gurmeet, 2018). Therefore, the insignificant results of age, level of education, occupation, and income in relation to perceptions of service quality documented in this study does not in any way reflect that those socio-demographic variables are completely insignificant towards perceptions of service quality. Perhaps, the findings may be pointing to the market dynamics which necessitate the need for more innovative and value added services that will satisfactorily meet and exceeds the diverse needs, expectations and preferences of the Nigerian air travellers. Airline operators need up-to-date information about preferences, personality, and socio-economic background of air travellers in diverse customer segments in order to be able to target these clusters more efficiently when it comes to bundling product and service offerings that match their expectations. Such measures may assist the operators to overcome the tendency of commodification of air travel with a view of enhancing customer retention.

Growing changes of demand pattern in the airline industry and expectations of air travellers have altered how the operators should seek understanding of customers' needs and expectations beyond frequency and purposes of travel among others (Harrison *et al*., 2015). As a result, there is need for more research attention on how best to connect changing consumer dynamics and competitive landscape to air travellers' behavior and choice decision (Livingstone, 2014). To effectively accomplish this goal, it is important to assess the quality of services offered to air passengers from their perspectives, rather than firm's own viewpoint so as to develop better understanding, and deployment of resources to serve them better. The significance of how customers perceive service quality in the airline

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industry is vital to the competitiveness of the operators and the level of customer contact require to enhance customer life time value. The success of airline operators hinges on its knowledge of customers and its capability to offer service quality in line with the expectations of the target market. Often times, consumers engage in both pre and post evaluation of service delivery performance to secure and evaluate service from diverse firms. Therefore, to craft effective service delivery procedure, airline operators may develop information based on feedback obtain from customers to improve productivity, and effectiveness of their service delivery process (Turner & Shockley, 2014; Kelly, Lawlor, & Mulvey, 2017). In the opinion of Witt (2001), consumption symbolizes a set of economic accomplishments on the market, and the behavior of economic agents. On this note, marketers should take into consideration consumers' socio-demographic characteristics when designing marketing strategies.

The finding of this study offer several implications for airline operators. The results advocate that management of the airline industry need to take closer views of some socio-demographic factors into account if they want to maximize perceived service quality. Therefore, socio-demographic variables can offer a means of determining market segments that are feasible and profitable in terms of accomplishing greater market penetration. Against the aforementioned backdrop, it is important for airline management to know what customers expect in term of service quality and to constantly evaluate how they are doing, so as to identify service performance gaps and how best to remedy the shortfall. The findings of this study contribute to both academia and business practice. As regard academia, this study builds on earlier research on the relationships of socio-demographic characteristics and perceptions of service quality. This will perhaps fill an important research gap on the link between the two variables under investigation. With respect to business practice, the study offers an important insight for airline operators on the use of socio-demographic variables for prioritizing service quality improvement efforts and deployment of resources to retain air travellers for profitable growth.

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EMI, Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2018
ISSN: 1804-1299 (Print), 1805-353X (Online)
www.emijournal.cz

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