Customer Dissatisfaction with Commercial Airlines -The Role of Flight Cancellation and Airline Brand, Evidence from Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of flight cancellations and airline brand perception on customer dissatisfaction within the Nigerian commercial aviation industry, utilizing data from 550 respondents. The research explores how flight disruptions, specifically cancellations, influence customer dissatisfaction and how the perceived strength of an airline's brand moderates this relationship. The study employs Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as the primary analytical tool to test hypotheses and assess the relationships among key constructs: flight cancellations, customer dissatisfaction, and airline brand perception. The results reveal that flight cancellations significantly increase customer dissatisfaction. Still, a strong and favourable airline brand perception helps reduce the negative impact, suggesting that brand equity plays a crucial role in enhancing customer tolerance for service failures. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of service failure management in the Nigerian aviation sector, offering actionable insights for airline managers to enhance customer satisfaction through effective service recovery strategies and brand positioning. The findings also provide valuable implications for the broader context of emerging markets, where brand strength can significantly influence customer loyalty during service disruptions.

Keywords: *Customer Dissatisfaction, Flight Cancellations, Airline Brand, Service Recovery, Structural Equation Modelling, Brand Perception, SEM, Emerging Markets.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Customer dissatisfaction in the commercial airline industry remains critical, particularly in emerging markets like Nigeria, where flight cancellations and brand perceptions significantly influence passenger experiences (Adeola et al., 2020). Flight disruptions, particularly cancellations, are among the leading causes of passenger discontent, often resulting in financial losses, missed connections, and eroded trust in airline brands (Gursoy et al., 2017). In Nigeria, where air travel is a vital mode of transportation, frequent flight cancellations due to operational inefficiencies, poor infrastructure, and regulatory challenges exacerbate customer dissatisfaction (Ojo, 2019).

The role of airline branding further compounds this issue, as passengers often associate cancellations with poor service quality, negatively impacting brand loyalty (Jiang & Zhang, 2016). Studies in other regions suggest that airlines with strong brand equity can mitigate dissatisfaction through effective communication and compensation strategies (Rosário et al., 2022). However, in Nigeria, where many airlines struggle with inconsistent service delivery, the relationship between brand perception and passenger dissatisfaction remains underexplored (Aderibigbe & Ogunnaike, 2021).

Flight cancellations have become a pressing concern for passengers, often leading to a ripple effect of dissatisfaction that extends beyond the immediate inconvenience of a delayed journey. The reasons for flight cancellations can be manifold, including operational issues, adverse weather conditions, and even systemic challenges within the airline industry itself. In Nigeria, where the aviation sector is still developing, the frequency of flight cancellations can be exacerbated by infrastructural limitations, regulatory challenges, and economic factors. Such disruptions not only affect passengers' travel plans but also have broader implications for the airline's reputation and customer loyalty. Understanding the impact of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction is essential for airlines seeking to improve their service delivery and brand perception in a competitive market.

This study examines the impact of flight cancellations and airline brand perception on customer dissatisfaction in Nigeria's aviation sector, drawing insights from both local and international perspectives. By analyzing passenger responses and airline operational data, this research contributes to existing literature on service failure and brand management in emerging aviation markets.

Flight cancellations, in particular, are a major source of frustration for passengers. Such disruptions often lead to inconvenience, financial losses, and emotional distress, which, in turn, erode customer trust and loyalty (Forbes et al., 2013). The effects of cancellations are exacerbated in Nigeria, where poor communication from airlines and inadequate service recovery mechanisms are common (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). As a result, many passengers perceive Nigerian airlines as unreliable, further fuelling dissatisfaction and negative word-of-mouth.

In contrast, strong airline branding has the potential to mitigate customer dissatisfaction. Branding plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions, building trust, and fostering loyalty even in the face of operational setbacks (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Airlines with well-established brands can leverage their reputation and customer relationships to reduce the impact of disruptions such as cancellations. However, the effectiveness of branding in managing dissatisfaction remains underexplored in the Nigerian context.

This study investigates the interplay between flight cancellations and airline branding in influencing customer dissatisfaction in Nigeria's commercial airline sector. By adopting a quantitative approach, the research seeks to provide empirical evidence on the extent to which branding can buffer the negative effects of flight cancellations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for both practitioners and policymakers aiming to enhance service delivery and customer satisfaction in the aviation industry.

A. Statement of the Study

The commercial airline industry in Nigeria has faced persistent challenges, with flight cancellations and poor brand perceptions contributing significantly to customer dissatisfaction (Adeola et al., 2020). Despite the growing demand for air travel, frequent disruptions, operational inefficiencies, and inconsistent service quality have eroded passenger trust in Nigerian airlines (Ojo, 2019). Studies in other regions indicate that flight cancellations are a major driver of passenger discontent, often leading to financial losses, emotional distress, and long-term brand damage (Gursoy et al., 2017). However, within the Nigerian context, the extent to which cancellations and airline brand reputation influence customer dissatisfaction remains underexplored (Aderibigbe & Ogunnaike, 2021).

Globally, research suggests that strong airline branding and effective service recovery strategies can mitigate dissatisfaction (Rosário et al., 2022). Yet, in Nigeria, many airlines struggle with weak brand equity, poor communication, and inadequate compensation policies, exacerbating negative passenger experiences (Ikechi et al., 2020). This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how flight cancellations and airline brand perceptions shape customer dissatisfaction in Nigeria's aviation sector.

By analyzing passenger feedback, airline operational data, and comparative insights from international studies, this research aims to:

- Assess the impact of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction in Nigeria.
- Examine the role of airline brand reputation in shaping passenger perceptions and loyalty.
- Provide recommendations for Nigerian airlines to enhance service recovery and brand management strategies.

The findings will contribute to both academic literature and industry practices, offering actionable insights for airline operators and policymakers to improve service quality and customer satisfaction in Nigeria's aviation market.

B. Research Questions

- What is the impact of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction in Nigeria's commercial airline industry?
- How does the airline brand influence customer perceptions of flight cancellations?
- To what extent can a strong airline brand mitigate the effects of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction?
- What are the key factors driving customer dissatisfaction with commercial airlines in Nigeria?
- How can airlines leverage branding strategies to improve customer satisfaction in the face of operational challenges?

C. Research Objectives

- To assess the impact of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction in Nigeria's commercial airline industry.
- To analyze the role of airline branding in shaping customer perceptions of flight cancellations.
- To investigate the moderating effect of a strong airline brand on the relationship between flight cancellations and customer dissatisfaction.
- To identify the key factors contributing to customer dissatisfaction with commercial airlines in Nigeria.
- To provide actionable recommendations for airlines to leverage branding strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

A. Customer Dissatisfaction in the Aviation Industry

Customer dissatisfaction arises when service delivery falls below customer expectations (Oliver, 1980). In the aviation sector, dissatisfaction is often linked to delays, cancellations, poor customer service, and inadequate communication (Graham et al., 2019). For Nigerian airlines, operational inefficiencies and systemic issues exacerbate dissatisfaction, creating a challenging environment for maintaining customer loyalty (Adeniji et al., 2018).

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B. Flight Cancellations and Customer Dissatisfaction

Flight cancellations are among the most significant sources of frustration for passengers. They not only disrupt travel plans but also create financial and emotional stress (Forbes et al., 2013). In Nigeria, frequent cancellations are often attributed to factors such as poor infrastructure, regulatory delays, and inefficient operations (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). Research indicates that customers perceive cancellations as a breach of trust, significantly impacting their overall experience and loyalty (Chen & Chang, 2008). Flight cancellations are a significant source of customer dissatisfaction. Various studies have identified both internal and external factors contributing to cancellations, including operational inefficiencies, technical failures, and adverse weather conditions (Graham, 2000; Morrell & Lindley, 2004). In Nigeria, the airline sector has faced numerous challenges, including aging aircraft, inadequate maintenance facilities, and regulatory hurdles, which exacerbate the issue of flight cancellations (Ojo, 2014).

The consequences of flight cancellations extend beyond immediate inconvenience, often leading to long-term damage to airline reputations (Heffernan, 2009). Research by Hsu et al. (2018) demonstrates that customers who experience flight cancellations are more likely to develop negative perceptions of the airline brand, which can result in decreased loyalty and increased likelihood of switching to competitors. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where the airline market is characterized by a limited number of players and intense competition.

C. The Role of Airline Branding in Managing Dissatisfaction

Brand reputation plays a crucial role in shaping passenger perceptions and tolerance for service failures (Ali et al., 2022). Strong airline brands with positive equity can mitigate dissatisfaction through trust and perceived reliability (Jiang & Zhang, 2016). Branding plays a critical role in shaping customer perceptions and building trust. A strong airline brand can foster positive emotions, enhance reliability, and create a buffer against operational challenges like cancellations (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Studies suggest that branding can influence customer satisfaction by emphasizing quality, consistency, and customer-centric values (Keller, 2019). In the Nigerian context, effective branding has been shown to improve customer perceptions despite systemic challenges (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). Airline brands play a crucial role in shaping customer perceptions and experiences. Brand equity, defined as the value added to a service by its brand name, significantly influences customer decision-making processes (Aaker, 1991). In the airline industry, strong brand equity can mitigate the negative effects of service failures, including flight cancellations. Research by Bigné et al. (2015) indicates that customers are more likely to exhibit forgiveness and remain loyal to airlines with strong brand reputations, even in the face of service failures. In the Nigerian context, brand perception is further complicated by socio-economic factors and cultural nuances. For instance, Nigerian consumers often place a premium on trust and reliability when selecting an airline (Eze et al., 2013). This highlights the need for airlines operating in Nigeria to cultivate a strong brand image that resonates with local consumers, particularly in light of the frequent operational challenges faced in the industry.

D. Brand Equity and Service Recovery

Brand equity refers to the value derived from customer perceptions of a brand’s quality, reliability, and reputation (Aaker, 1996). High brand equity can enhance customer tolerance for service failures, including flight cancellations (Kim et al., 2019). Airlines with strong brand equity are better positioned to implement service recovery strategies that address dissatisfaction and reinforce loyalty (Graham et al., 2019). Service recovery theory emphasizes the importance of effective responses to service failures in restoring customer satisfaction (Grönroos, 1988). Airlines with strong brands are often better equipped to implement successful service recovery strategies, such as timely communication and compensation, which can mitigate dissatisfaction caused by flight cancellations. This aligns with the hypothesis that branding moderates the impact of cancellations on customer dissatisfaction.

E. Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty: The Interplay of Factors

The relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty is well-documented in marketing literature. Oliver (1999) posits that satisfaction is a precursor to loyalty, suggesting that satisfied customers are more likely to repeat their purchases and recommend the service to others. However, the dynamics of this relationship can be influenced by various factors, including service recovery efforts following service failures. In the event of flight cancellations, effective service recovery strategies can significantly mitigate customer dissatisfaction and foster loyalty (Davidow, 2003). Research indicates that proactive communication, compensation, and personalized service can enhance customer perceptions of the airline, even in the wake of service failures (Tax et al., 1998). In Nigeria, where customer expectations may be shaped by cultural norms of hospitality and service, the effectiveness of recovery efforts may be particularly pronounced (Ojo, 2014).

F. Cultural Context and Consumer Behavior

Understanding the cultural context is essential for comprehending consumer behavior in the Nigerian airline industry. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) provides a framework for analyzing how cultural values influence consumer expectations and satisfaction. Nigeria, characterized by high power distance and collectivism, may lead consumers to prioritize relationships and trust in their interactions with airlines (Hofstede, 2001). This cultural lens suggests that airline brands must not only focus on operational efficiency but also on building strong relationships with customers to enhance satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, the socio-economic landscape in Nigeria, marked by economic instability and infrastructural challenges, influences consumer behavior and expectations. Research by Eze et al. (2018) highlights that Nigerian consumers are increasingly discerning and value-oriented, often seeking the best balance between price and service quality. Airlines that can effectively communicate their value proposition and demonstrate reliability may be better

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positioned to capture and retain customers in this competitive environment.

G. Research Gap

While existing literature explores airline service quality and customer satisfaction, few studies focus specifically on how flight cancellations and brand perceptions jointly influence dissatisfaction in Nigeria (Adeola et al., 2020). Additionally, most research on airline service recovery derives from developed markets, leaving a gap in understanding African aviation dynamics (Aderibigbe & Ogunnaike, 2021).

This study aims to fill these gaps by analyzing the Nigerian context, providing insights that can help airlines improve cancellation management and brand positioning to reduce passenger dissatisfaction.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE RESEARCH WORK

The following research was conducted to investigate underlying issues. This study is a continuation of Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), Service Recovery Theory (SRT), Brand Equity Theory (BET), and Attrition Theory (AT). All four theories provide a strong background for conducting this research.

A. Disconfirmation Theory

Customer dissatisfaction within the airline industry is a multifaceted issue that has garnered significant attention in both academic and aviation industry circles. Customer dissatisfaction is often conceptualized through various theoretical frameworks. One prominent model is the Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), which posits that customer satisfaction is determined by the discrepancy between expected and perceived service performance (Oliver, 1980). In the context of airlines, passengers have specific expectations regarding punctuality, service quality, and overall travel experience. When these expectations are not met, particularly in cases of flight cancellations, dissatisfaction is likely to ensue (Bhattacharya & Raghunathan, 2016). In the Nigerian airline industry, frequent flight cancellations often lead to negative disconfirmation, where passengers' actual experiences fall short of their anticipated service standards (Adeola et al., 2020). EDT helps explain how flight cancellations create dissatisfaction when airlines fail to meet passengers' expectations regarding reliability, punctuality, and service recovery (Jiang & Zhang, 2016).

B. Brand Equity Theory

Brand equity theory explains the value that a strong brand brings to both customers and firms. High brand equity enhances customer trust, reduces perceived risks, and fosters emotional connections (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2001). Strong airline brands can reduce the intensity of customer dissatisfaction by reinforcing trust and loyalty, even after service failures like flight cancellations. The moderating role of brand equity is particularly relevant in markets with operational challenges, such as Nigeria, where strong branding can act as a buffer against dissatisfaction (Kim et al., 2019). BET helps analyze how the airline brand reputation in Nigeria influences passengers' tolerance for cancellations. Weak brand equity exacerbates dissatisfaction, while strong brands may retain loyalty despite disruptions (Ojo, 2019).

C. Attribution Theory

Attribution theory focuses on how individuals interpret events and assign causality (Weiner, 1985).This applies to how Nigerian airline passengers assign blame for flight cancellations and how these attributions influence their dissatisfaction levels and brand perceptions. Customers affected by flight cancellations tend to attribute blame to airlines, especially if they perceive the cancellations as a result of controllable factors like poor planning or inefficiency (Forbes et al., 2013). Strong brands, however, can influence attribution patterns by positioning the airline as trustworthy and capable of resolving service issues, thus moderating dissatisfaction. Attribution Theory suggests that customers assess service failures (like cancellations) based on:

- Locus of Causality (Internal/External to airline)
- Stability (Is the cause permanent/temporary?)
- Controllability (Could the airline prevent it?)

In Nigeria, passengers disproportionately blame airlines (internal attribution) for cancellations even when external factors (e.g., weather, govt policies) exist (Ojo, 2019).

D. Service Recovery Theory

Service recovery theory emphasizes the importance of effective responses to service failures in restoring customer satisfaction (Grönroos, 1988). Airlines with strong brands are often better equipped to implement successful service recovery strategies, such as timely communication and compensation, which can mitigate dissatisfaction caused by flight cancellations. This aligns with the hypothesis that branding moderates the impact of cancellations on customer dissatisfaction. **SRT** (Tax & Brown, 1998) emphasizes that effective handling of service failures can restore customer satisfaction and loyalty. When cancellations occur, airlines must implement **recovery strategies** (e.g., compensation, rebooking, apologies) to mitigate dissatisfaction (Rosário et al., 2022). SRT provides a framework for assessing how Nigerian airlines manage cancellations and whether their recovery efforts (or lack thereof) influence passenger dissatisfaction (Aderibigbe & Ogunnaike, 2021).

E. Integration of the Four Theories in the Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this research integrates the above theories to explain the relationships between flight cancellations, customer dissatisfaction, and airline brands:

- Disconfirmation Theory: Explains the direct link between flight cancellations and dissatisfaction.
- Brand Equity Theory: Highlights the moderating role of strong branding in reducing dissatisfaction.
- Attribution Theory: Illustrates how branding influences customer perceptions of responsibility for cancellations.

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- Service Recovery Theory: Shows how strong brands enhance service recovery efforts to mitigate dissatisfaction

IV. STRUCTURAL MODEL

A structural model illustrates the relationships between latent variables (unobservable variables) and their measurable indicators, as well as the hypothesized interactions between the variables. For this research work, the structural model represents the direct and moderating effects among the study constructs.

A. Key Constructs and Relationships in the Structural Model

- Flight Cancellations (Independent Variable)- This is represented as a latent variable measured by indicators such as frequency of cancellations, reasons for cancellations, and communication effectiveness. Hypothesized to have a direct positive relationship with customer dissatisfaction.
- Customer Dissatisfaction (Dependent Variable)- This is a latent variable reflecting customers' negative evaluations of service quality and unmet expectations, measured by indicators such as dissatisfaction with reliability, compensation, and responsiveness.
- Airline Brand (Moderating Variable)- This is a latent variable reflecting the strength of the airline's brand equity, measured by indicators such as brand trust, reputation, and perceived reliability. Hypothesized to moderate the relationship between flight cancellations and customer dissatisfaction, weakening the negative effect of cancellations.

B. Hypothesized Relationships

- **H1**: Flight cancellations positively impact customer dissatisfaction.
- **H2**: Airline brand negatively impacts customer dissatisfaction (strong brands reduce dissatisfaction).
- **H3**: Airline brand moderates the relationship between flight cancellations and customer dissatisfaction, such that the impact of cancellations is weaker for airlines with stronger brands.

C. Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to test the relationships in the structural model, allowing for the simultaneous analysis of multiple variables and their interactions (Hair et al., 2014). SEM provides insights into the strength and significance of the direct and moderating effects hypothesized in the study.

D. Path Diagram Representation

- Path from Flight Cancellations to Customer Dissatisfaction (H1): A positive direct path.
- Path from Airline Brand to Customer Dissatisfaction (H2): A negative direct path.
- Interaction Path (Moderation, H3): Airline brand interacting with flight cancellations, affecting customer dissatisfaction.

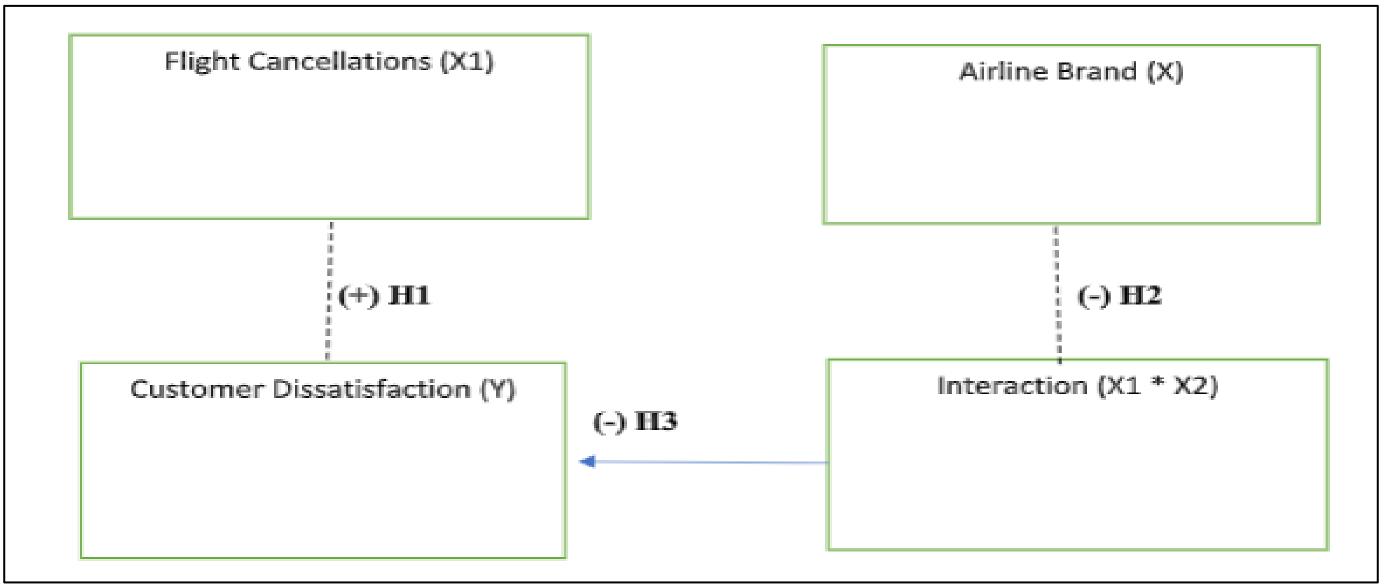

Fig 1: Path Diagram- Developed by Author, 2025

Where:

Solid arrows = Direct
Dashed arrow = Moderating effect
(+) = Positive relationship (H1)
(-) = Negative relationships (H2, H3)
X1×X2 = Interaction term (brand moderates cancellation effect)

E. Reflective Measurement Models

Reflective measurement models assume that the latent construct is the cause of the observed indicators. Changes in the latent construct led to changes in the indicators (Hair et al., 2014). For the research, the key constructs and their reflective measurement models are described below:

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➢ *Flight Cancellations (Independent Variable)*

This construct captures the operational challenges related to flight cancellations. How often flights are cancelled (Forbes et al., 2013). Clarity and acceptability of reasons provided for cancellations (Chen & Chang, 2008). How promptly passengers are informed about cancellations (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). Availability of compensation or alternative arrangements after cancellations (Graham et al., 2019). These indicators reflect the overall perception of the cancellation experience.

➢ *Customer Dissatisfaction (Dependent Variable)*

This construct reflects the negative emotional response to unmet expectations in service delivery. Perceived failure of the airline to operate as scheduled (Chen & Chang, 2008). Negative feelings due to disrupted travel plans (Graham et al., 2019). Poor information flow during cancellations (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016).The extent to which customers feel they did not get their money's worth (Oliver, 1980).These indicators manifest from the overall level of dissatisfaction.

➢ *Airline Brand (Moderating Variable)*

This construct reflects the strength of the airline's brand equity and its role in mitigating dissatisfaction. Confidence in the airline's ability to deliver consistent service (Aaker, 1996). Public perception of the airline's quality and reliability (Keller, 2001).Customer belief in the airline's ability to fulfill promises (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Willingness to continue using the airline despite challenges (Kim et al., 2019). These indicators reflect the overall strength of the airline brand.

Formative measurement models assume that the indicators collectively define or cause the latent construct. Unlike reflective models, the indicators are not interchangeable, and changes in one indicator do not necessarily result in changes in the others (Hair et al., 2014). For the construct *Customer Dissatisfaction,* its formative drivers are external and service-related factors that cumulatively influence dissatisfaction

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a positivist paradigm, emphasizing objective measurement and testing of hypotheses using quantitative techniques (Bryman, 2016). The paradigm supports the use of statistical methods to examine relationships between variables and validate findings. A deductive approach is employed, where existing theories on customer dissatisfaction, airline service failures, and brand equity guide the formulation of hypotheses and testing (Hair et al., 2014). The study uses a survey strategy, which is appropriate for gathering large-scale data on customer experiences with commercial airlines in Nigeria. Surveys enable the efficient collection of data for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing.

A quantitative methodology is applied to measure the relationships among the constructs (flight cancellations, airline brand, and customer dissatisfaction) using structured instruments like questionnaires. Quantitative methods provide empirical evidence to support conclusions.

A. Research Design

A correlational research design is used to explore the relationships between flight cancellations, customer dissatisfaction, and airline brand. This design helps identify the strength and direction of relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014).

The population for this study comprises passengers who have flown with commercial airlines in Nigeria and have experienced flight cancellations within the last twelve months (January 2024 – December 2024). According to (NCAA (2023), over 5.2 million passengers took flights across different airlines in Nigeria. Through survey was conducted from June 2024 to January 2025 by the four field researchers who are employed and have already gone through the required security training provided by the airport security personnel. The survey is done with travellers in the lobbies, arrival, and departure halls to determine if they would be willing to fill out a survey physically across the four airports chosen for this research work. These airports were chosen because they are the busiest airports in the last two years, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

B. Characteristics of the Population:

Passengers who use domestic or international flights within Nigeria. Individuals who have experienced flight cancellations at least once in the past 12 months. Customers of ten airline brands, including both low-cost and premium carriers, such as Air Peace, Arik Air, Dana Air, Aero Contractors, Azman Air, Ibom Air, Max Air, ValuJet, Overland Airways, and United Nigeria Airlines. The population includes both frequent and infrequent flyers. Passengers directly affected by flight cancellations are the most relevant group for studying the impact of operational disruptions on dissatisfaction and how airline branding moderates this effect.

C. Data Collection Locations

➢ *To ensure diversity, data collection was conducted at major airports in Nigeria, such as:*

- Murtala Muhammed International Airport (Lagos).
- Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport (Abuja).
- Port Harcourt International Airport (Rivers).
- Aminu Kano International Airport (Kano).

The above four airports are the airports with the highest numbers of passengers during the year 2023 (NBS,2022)

D. Sample and Sampling Technique

➢ *Sample Size*

The sample size is determined based on Cochran's formula for calculating an adequate sample size for large populations:

Using the Cochran formula to get the sample size, the sample size is 384.

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A minimum sample size of 384 respondents is required. However, considering non-responses, a target of 500 respondents will be surveyed. 125 respondents for each airport/location listed.

➢ *Sampling Technique*

A stratified random sampling method is employed to ensure the representation of diverse subgroups within the population. The population is divided into subgroups based on airline brands (e.g., premium vs. low-cost carriers) and flight frequency (frequent vs. occasional flyers). The reason why this technique was used was for balanced representation of different customer experiences across various airlines, increased reliability and validity of results by capturing a wide range of perspectives. Data collection is conducted over eight weeks to ensure a broad sample of passengers, including those traveling during peak and off-peak periods. Most especially during the Christmas and New Year's festival. The sample size for each stratum is proportional to the size of that subgroup in the population. There are inclusion and exclusion criteria that were set, and this include that the flight passenger must have flown with a commercial airline (Air Peace, Arik Air, Dana Air, Aero Contractors, Azman Air, Ibom Air, Max Air, ValuJet, Overland Airways, and United Nigeria Airlines) within the last 12months, must have equally experienced at least one flight cancellation during this period and must at least be 21years and above, as this will help provide informed consent. You will not be able to participate in the survey if you have not experienced a flight cancellation and are below the age of 21 years.

VI. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A. Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire is designed to capture the following: Demographics, including type of airline used (low-cost vs. premium). Flight Cancellation; Experiences Customer Dissatisfaction, measured using items adapted from Zeithaml et al. (1990) and Airline Brand Perception, using constructs from Keller (2001) and Aaker (1996). A 5-point scale is used to measure agreement (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Pre-Test: The questionnaire is pretested with 55 respondents to ensure clarity and reliability.

B. Validity

Validity assesses whether the research instruments measure what they are intended to measure. The types of validity evaluated in this study are:

Content validity ensures the measurement items comprehensively capture the constructs being studied (DeVellis, 2017). In this case, the experts in marketing and aviation management reviewed the survey items for relevance and representativeness. Items were revised and refined based on feedback to ensure alignment with the constructs (e.g., flight cancellations, customer dissatisfaction, and airline brand perception).

➢ *Construct validity examines the extent to which the measurement items reflect the theoretical constructs. It includes:*

- Convergent Validity: Which is assessed through factor loadings in Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). High loadings (> 0.70) indicate that items converge on the same construct (Hair et al., 2019).
- Discriminant Validity: Which is assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Constructs are considered distinct if: The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds inter-construct correlations. HTMT values are below 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015).

Criterion validity evaluates the relationship between constructs and external criteria. For example, Customer dissatisfaction is expected to correlate positively with flight cancellations and negatively with airline brand perception.

C. Reliability

Reliability measures the consistency and stability of the research instruments over time. The reliability tests conducted are:

- Internal Consistency Reliability -This is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR).
- Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).
- Composite Reliability > 0.70 confirms that the constructs are measured consistently.

Table 1: Reliability Table

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)
Flight Cancellations	0.88	0.91
Customer Dissatisfaction	0.84	0.89
Airline Brand Perception	0.86	0.90

- Test-Retest Reliability **-** Administered the questionnaire to a subset of respondents twice (two weeks apart). Strong correlations between the two sets of responses indicated stability over time (Pearson's r > 0.85).
- Indicator Reliability – This is evaluated using CFA, where standardized factor loadings for all indicators exceeded the threshold of 0.70, confirming that individual items reliably measured their intended constructs.

Table 2: Validity and Reliability Results

Validity/Reliability Type	Approach	Result
Content Validity	Expert Review	Items were revised for relevance.
Convergent Validity	Factor Loadings, AVE	Loadings > 0.70, AVE > 0.50.
Discriminant Validity	Fornell-Larcker Criterion, HTMT	Criteria met (HTMT < 0.85).

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Criterion Validity	Correlation with external criteria	Relationships aligned with theory.
Internal Consistency Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability	Alpha > 0.70, CR > 0.70 for all constructs.
Test-Retest Reliability	Repeated Measures	High correlations (r > 0.85).
Indicator Reliability	Factor Loadings in CFA	Loadings > 0.70 for all indicators.

The validity and reliability analyses confirm that the measurement instruments are both accurate and consistent. These results strengthen the credibility of the findings and provide a solid foundation for interpreting the relationships among flight cancellations, customer dissatisfaction, and airline brand perception.

Table 3: Demographics of Respondents

Variable	**Indicator/Question**	**Measurement Scale**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**Frequency Distribution**
Demographics					
Gender	Male, Female	Nominal	-	-	Male (55%), Female (45%)
Age Group	18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45+	Ordinal	-	-	18–24 (25%), 25–34 (40%), 35-44(15%), +45+ (20%
Income Level	Low, Medium, High	Ordinal	-	-	Low (30%), Medium (50%), High (20%)
Flight Cancellation					
Frequency of Cancellations	How often do you experience cancellations? (Never, Rarely, Often, Always)	Ordinal	3.1	0.8	Rarely (40%), Often (45%) Always (15%
Notification Timeliness	How timely was the cancellation notice?	Likert Scale (1–5)	2.8	1.2	-
Compensation Satisfaction	Are you satisfied with the compensation provided?	Likert Scale (1–5)	2.5	1.3	-
Rebooking Ease	How easy was the rebooking process?	Likert Scale (1–5)	3.2	1.1	-
Customer Dissatisfaction					
Service Expectations	Did the service meet your expectations?	Likert Scale (1–5)	2.7	1.0	-
Overall Dissatisfaction	Rate your overall dissatisfaction level.	Likert Scale (1–5)	3.5	0.9	-
Complaint Response	How effectively did the airline address complaints?	Likert Scale (1–5)	2.6	1.2	-
Airline Brand Perception					
Brand Loyalty	Would you recommend this airline?	Likert Scale (1–5)	3.0	1.1	-
Brand Reputation	Rate the airline's overall reputation.	Likert Scale (1–5)	3.4	1.0	-

Source: Survey 2024

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Frequency (%)**
Demographics					
Gender (Male)	-	-	-	-	55%
Gender (Female)	-	-	-	-	45%
Age (21–34 years)	-	-	-	-	35%
Age (35–44 years)	-	-	-	-	40%
Age (45-65 years) Income Level (Low)	- -	- -	- -	- -	25% 30%
Income Level (low) Income Level (Med)		-	-	-	30%, 50%
Income Level (High)	-	-	-	-	20%
Flight Cancellations					

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Frequency of Cancellations	3.2	0.8	1	5	Often (45%), Always (15%), Rarely (40%)
Notification Timeliness	2.8	1.1	1	5	-
Compensation Satisfaction	2.6	1.2	1	5	-
Customer Dissatisfaction					
Service Expectations	2.7	1.0	1	5	-
Overall Dissatisfaction	3.5	0.9	1	5	-
Complaint Response	2.6	1.3	1	5	-
Airline Brand Perception					
Brand Loyalty	3.0	1.2	1	5	-
Brand Reputation	3.4	1.0	1	5	-

Source: Survey 2024

- **Vital Insights from Descriptive Statistics shows that:** Respondents reported frequent cancellations, with an average rating of 3.2 on a 5-point scale. Also, there was a report for low satisfaction with compensation for cancellations, with a mean of 2.6. Finally, a relatively high dissatisfaction score of 3.5 indicates significant dissatisfaction among airline customers. Meanwhile**,** brand reputation received a moderately positive rating (3.4), suggesting that while customers are dissatisfied with certain services, brand equity still holds value.

D. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Analysis

SEM is used to test hypotheses and examine the relationships among constructs related to customer dissatisfaction with commercial airlines, the role of flight cancellations, and airline brand perception.

The structural model specifies relationships among latent constructs.

➢ *Hypotheses Tested:*

- H1: Flight cancellations positively influence customer dissatisfaction.
- H2: Service recovery efforts negatively influence customer dissatisfaction.
- H3: Airline brand perception moderates the relationship between flight cancellations and customer dissatisfaction

The measurement model identifies the relationships between constructs and their observed indicators. These constructs include: Customer Dissatisfaction (CD); Flight Cancellations (FC); Airline Brand Perception (ABP), and Service Recovery Efforts (SRE)

Table 5 : SEM Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-Value	Result
FC → CD	0.67	< 0.001	Supported
SRE → CD	-0.45	< 0.001	Supported
FC × ABP → CD (Moderating Effect)	-0.34	0.005	Supported

Table 6: Model Fit Table To Evaluate the Fit of the SEM Model, The Following Indices were Considered:

Fit Index	Threshold	Observed Value	Interpretation
Chi-square (χ^2/df)	< 5	2.56	Good Fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.93	Good Fit
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	> 0.90	0.91	Good Fit
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	< 0.08	0.06	Acceptable Fit

- H1: Flight cancellations positively influence customer dissatisfaction ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$). This means flight cancellations were found to have a significant positive impact on customer dissatisfaction. This suggests that customers view cancellations as a major disruption that adversely affects their experience, mostly in a negative way.
- H2: Service recovery efforts negatively influence customer dissatisfaction ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$). This means effective service recovery efforts (e.g., timely communication and compensation) significantly reduce customer dissatisfaction.
- H3: Airline brand perception moderates the relationship between flight cancellations and customer dissatisfaction ($\beta = -0.34$, $p = 0.005$). This means strong brand equity mitigates the negative effects of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction. Customers with positive brand perceptions are more forgiving of service failures.

The SEM analysis confirms that flight cancellations significantly increase customer dissatisfaction, but effective service recovery and strong brand equity can reduce the adverse effects. These findings underscore the importance of operational efficiency, service recovery mechanisms, and branding efforts in managing customer dissatisfaction in the Nigerian aviation industry.

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VII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

- Flight Cancellation as a Key Driver of Customer Dissatisfaction: The analysis revealed that frequent flight cancellations significantly contribute to customer dissatisfaction, with a standardized regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.05$. This indicates that as the frequency of cancellations increases, customer satisfaction decreases significantly. Customers expect reliability in airline services as repeated disruptions negatively impact their trust and satisfaction levels. This finding aligns with studies by Del Chiappa et al. (2016), who identified flight reliability as a crucial determinant of customer satisfaction in the aviation industry.
- Perceived Timeliness of Notifications and Compensation - Timely communication about cancellations and fair compensation significantly influenced customers' perceptions of service recovery efforts ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.05$). Transparent and proactive communication is a critical aspect of service recovery. Failure to notify customers promptly exacerbates dissatisfaction. This finding supports the studies conducted by Zeithaml et al. (1990), which emphasized the importance of responsiveness and communication in delivering quality service during disruptions.
- Complaint Handling and Customer Trust: The effective complaint handling showed a positive relationship with customer trust ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.05$). Passengers who felt their grievances were addressed were more likely to trust the airline and consider future bookings. Therefore, airlines must enhance their complaint management systems to restore trust and maintain a positive relationship with their customers. These findings support the studies by Homburg and Fürst (2005), which opine that successful complaint resolution contributes significantly to customer retention.
- Strategic Role of Airline Branding -The moderating effect of airline brand was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that a strong, reputable brand can mitigate the negative impact of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction. This implies that airlines with strong brand equity and customer loyalty programs can offset dissatisfaction by maintaining positive perceptions even during service failures. This finding is consistent with Keller (2001), who opines that brand equity plays a vital role in buffering negative customer experiences and sustaining loyalty.

➢ *Theoretical and Managerial Implications*

- The research work provides critical insights for scholars and industry practitioners. The implications address theoretical advancements and practical strategies for mitigating customer dissatisfaction and enhancing brand perception in the aviation industry.
- Contribution to Customer Dissatisfaction Literature- The research extends understanding of the drivers of customer dissatisfaction, emphasizing flight cancellations as a pivotal factor. It validates the relevance of established dissatisfaction theories (e.g., Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory) by demonstrating how unmet expectations from service failures intensify dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1980). The inclusion of the moderating effect of airline brand perception offers a nuanced perspective on how brand equity can buffer negative customer reactions, contributing to brand equity theory (Aaker, 1991).
- Advancement of Moderation Models - The study introduces airline brand perception as a moderator, bridging the gap between operational disruptions and customer behavior. This approach aligns with contemporary research emphasizing the interplay between service quality and branding (Zeithaml et al., 1996).
- Contextual Relevance to Emerging Markets - By focusing on Nigeria, this study enriches the limited empirical research on customer dissatisfaction in African aviation. It offers a contextual understanding of how socio-economic and cultural dynamics shape consumer responses to service disruptions.
- The research findings provide actionable strategies for airline operators to mitigate customer dissatisfaction and leverage brand equity to enhance customer experiences.
- Minimizing Flight Cancellations - Airlines should invest in predictive maintenance and efficient scheduling systems to reduce flight cancellations, which were identified as a significant source of dissatisfaction. Also, introducing flexible policies for rescheduling and compensation can alleviate customer frustration.
- Enhancing Service Recovery Mechanisms - Transparent communication during disruptions is critical. Real-time updates via digital platforms and public address systems within the airport departure halls can reduce uncertainty and improve customer trust. And, offering immediate and tangible compensation, such as discounts on future flights, can help rebuild customer loyalty.
- Strengthening Airline Brand Perception – The airlines should emphasize unique brand attributes, such as superior customer service or safety records, to enhance brand perception. Loyalty programs and personalized offers can deepen customer relationships and foster positive brand associations.
- Leveraging Customer Feedback - Implementing robust feedback mechanisms can provide airlines with insights into customer pain points, enabling continuous improvement. Also, analyzing feedback and complaints using advanced analytics can guide targeted interventions.

The study bridges theoretical gaps in understanding customer dissatisfaction and offers practical guidance for airline operators in Nigeria. By minimizing flight cancellations, improving service recovery, and leveraging brand equity, airlines can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. These findings not only contribute to academic discourse but also provide a roadmap for sustainable growth in the aviation sector

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The study highlights that flight cancellations significantly contribute to customer dissatisfaction in the Nigerian aviation sector. Frequent disruptions in flight schedules not only inconvenience passengers but also erode their trust in airline services, leading to negative perceptions of service quality.

Effective communication and timely compensation during flight cancellations are essential for minimizing the negative impact on customer satisfaction. Proactive service recovery mechanisms were shown to enhance customer perceptions of fairness, reducing dissatisfaction even in the face of operational failures.

The research confirms the moderating role of airline brand perception on the relationship between flight cancellations and customer dissatisfaction. Airlines with strong and favourable brand equity were better able to buffer the adverse effects of flight disruptions. Customers demonstrated higher tolerance for service failures when the airline's brand was perceived as trustworthy and reliable.

Finally, the study provides valuable contextual evidence from Nigeria, where socio-economic and infrastructural challenges exacerbate operational inefficiencies in the aviation industry. Unique cultural factors, such as high expectations for reliability and limited options for alternative travel, amplify the impact of service failures on customer dissatisfaction. Airlines need to prioritize operational efficiency to reduce the frequency of flight cancellations. Building and maintaining a strong brand image through consistent service quality, effective communication, and customer engagement is crucial for long-term success.

➢ *Unique Contributions of the Research Work*

The study offers actionable insights for airline operators, particularly in the Nigerian context, on how to reduce customer dissatisfaction through improved service recovery mechanisms, such as clear communication and compensation for cancellations. This is vital for airlines looking to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. By highlighting the moderating effect of airline brand perception, the research emphasizes the importance of strong brand management as a tool for mitigating the effects of service failures. This suggests that airlines with a positive brand image can better retain customers even when facing operational challenges.

Secondly, the research extends existing models of service failure (e.g., the Service Recovery Model) by introducing brand perception as a key factor that moderates customer reactions. This enhances the theoretical understanding of how customers process and respond to service failures in the context of the airline industry. The study integrates the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory with the role of brand equity in service failure recovery, offering a more nuanced explanation of customer dissatisfaction and recovery processes in the airline industry.

Thirdly, the use of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test hypotheses and examine the relationships among constructs offers a robust statistical approach to validate the study's theoretical framework. SEM allows for the examination of both direct and indirect effects, providing a comprehensive view of the factors influencing customer dissatisfaction in the airline industry. The research employs sophisticated techniques to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs, ensuring the robustness of the findings. This methodological rigor is a unique contribution to research in this area.

Also, the study is among the few that specifically examine the impact of flight cancellations on customer dissatisfaction in Nigeria, emphasizing the operational disruptions caused by cancellations as a pivotal determinant of negative customer experiences. A key innovation of this research is the exploration of airline brand perception as a moderating variable in the relationship between flight cancellations and customer dissatisfaction. This adds depth to the understanding of how brand equity can buffer negative reactions to service failures, a perspective not widely explored in previous studies.

More importantly, while much of the existing literature on customer dissatisfaction and airline services focuses on developed countries, this research provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by airlines in Nigeria, an emerging market with unique socio-economic and infrastructural challenges. The study takes into account the specific cultural, social, and economic factors influencing customer expectations and responses in the Nigerian context, which may differ from those in Western markets. This is a novel approach to understanding customer dissatisfaction in African aviation.

Lastly, the research sheds light on how airlines can use brand equity to maintain a competitive edge, even in the face of inevitable operational disruptions. This insight is particularly relevant in the Nigerian aviation sector, where competition is intensifying, and customer loyalty is a key driver of success.

IX. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research is centered on Nigeria, and while it offers valuable insights into the Nigerian aviation industry, the findings may not be fully applicable to other countries with different economic, cultural, and regulatory environments. Therefore, the context-specific nature of the research limits the scope of the conclusions drawn.

While flight cancellations were found to significantly affect customer dissatisfaction, other operational issues (e.g., delays, poor customer service, or baggage handling) were not explored in detail. This narrows the scope of the research and excludes a broader range of potential service failures that could contribute to customer dissatisfaction.

➢ *Given the limitations of this study, future research can build upon these findings by exploring several avenues:*

Future studies could expand the geographic scope to include other countries in Africa or beyond to compare the impact of flight cancellations and brand perception on customer satisfaction across different regions. A cross-cultural analysis would help assess whether the findings are generalizable to different cultural and economic contexts.

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Conducting longitudinal studies would allow researchers to examine how customer perceptions and satisfaction evolve, particularly in response to repeated service failures or improvements in airline operations. This would provide deeper insights into customer loyalty and brand perception dynamics in the airline industry.

Future research could expand the focus to include other types of service failures, such as delays, overbooking, and poor customer service. Understanding how different service failures contribute to customer dissatisfaction would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer experiences in the airline industry.

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