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IMPACT OF CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCE IN TRAVEL AGENCY AND TOURISM BUSINESS

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of customer service experiences in the travel agency and tourism industry, with a focus on Sango-Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria. Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, while secondary data comprised quantitative information obtained from various sources, including textbooks, journals, and online articles reviewed in the literature section. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 100 were successfully retrieved and analyzed. The income distribution of respondents indicated that 17.8% earned below ₦51,000, 71.1% earned between ₦100,000 and ₦200,000, while 11.1% had an income above ₦201,000. Regarding travel frequency, 55.6% of respondents traveled once a year, 24.4% traveled two to three times per year, and 20.0% traveled more than three times annually. The purpose of travel varied among respondents, with 26.7% traveling for leisure, 48.9% for business, 11.1% for adventure, 8.9% for cultural or historical purposes, and 4.4% for other reasons. In terms of service satisfaction with travel agencies, 47% of respondents reported being satisfied, 35% were very satisfied, while 18% remained neutral. When asked about the most critical factors influencing their customer experience, 32% identified responsiveness and availability as the most important, 31% emphasized staff knowledge and experience, 21% highlighted friendliness and professionalism of staff, and 16% prioritized clarity and accuracy of information provided.

Keywords: Customer experience, Travel agency, sustainable, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Customer service experience refers to the perception that customers develop regarding a company based on the quality of support they receive throughout the entire purchasing journey (Verhoef et al., 2019). It encompasses all interactions between the customer and the company, including the online checkout process, ease of ordering, delivery efficiency, and the professionalism and friendliness of customer service representatives (Gilmore & Pine, 2018). Additionally, customers may engage with a company's sales, service, or support teams at various stages during and after their purchase. Consistently positive customer service experiences are critical for fostering customer satisfaction, strengthening brand loyalty, and enhancing word-of-mouth recommendations, all of which contribute to a company's long-term financial growth and consumer base expansion (Babin et al., 2015). According to Imran, et al, (2017), customer service experience serves as a key predictor of consumer behavioral

outcomes, including satisfaction, brand advocacy, and loyalty. To improve the assessment of customer service experience, specific measurement strategies have been developed, particularly in the tourism industry, which is highly reliant on experiential services (Imran, et al, 2017). From the initial stage of searching for a product to the point of purchase, customer service encompasses all aspects of assisting customers in selecting the most suitable product, providing usage guidance, and addressing any issues that may arise (Verhoef et al., 2019). Enhancing customer experience should be a strategic priority for businesses, and implementing a help desk system equipped with an efficient ticketing tool can be instrumental in achieving this objective. An online ticketing system, also known as a customer support ticketing tool, has the potential to significantly improve customer satisfaction. The travel agency sector is a fundamental component of the private tourism industry, playing a crucial role in developing and promoting tourism both nationally and at specific destinations. Travel agencies are responsible for packaging and organizing a country's tourism

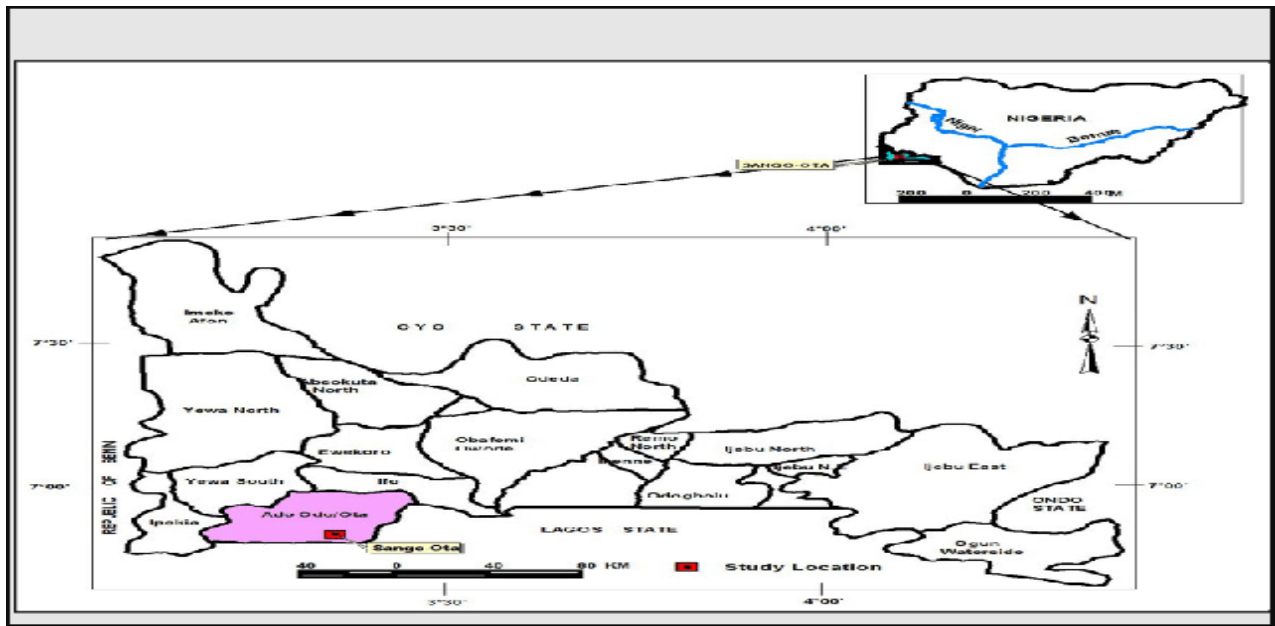


attractions, infrastructure, amenities, and supplementary services and presenting them to potential tourists (Mittal and Kamakura, 2017). Functioning as private retailers or public service providers, travel agencies facilitate travel and tourism-related services by acting as intermediaries between travelers and service providers, offering tailored travel packages for various destinations. Their services may include organizing outdoor recreation, coordinating logistical arrangements such as luggage and medical supply transportation, providing public transportation schedules, car rental services, and currency exchange (Rust & Zahorik, 2018).

STUDY AREA

Sango-Ota, located in the Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria, is situated at approximately 6.7073° N latitude and 3.2428° E longitude. The climate in Sango-Ota is classified as tropical wet and dry (Aw) under the Köppen-Geiger climate classification system. This region experiences a distinct wet season and a dry season. The wet season typically spans from April to October, characterized by overcast skies and significant rainfall, with June averaging about 7.6 inches (193

mm) of precipitation. The dry season occurs from November to March, featuring partly cloudy skies and reduced rainfall, with January averaging approximately 0.3 inches (7.6 mm) of precipitation. Temperature-wise, Sango-Ota maintains warm conditions throughout the year. The hot season lasts from mid-December to late April, with average daily high temperatures exceeding 90°F (32°C). March is typically the hottest month, with average highs around 91°F (33°C) and lows near 77°F (25°C). The cooler season extends from late June to late September, with average daily high temperatures below 84°F (29°C). August is usually the coolest month, with average highs of 82°F (28°C) and lows of 74°F (23°C). Humidity in Sango-Ota is generally high due to its tropical climate, contributing to a moist atmosphere, especially during the wet season. The region's proximity to the equator results in relatively consistent daylight hours and minimal variation in day length throughout the year. Generally Sango-Ota's climate is characterized by a hot and humid environment with a pronounced wet season, aligning with typical tropical savanna climate patterns.



Map of Sango Ota, Ogun State.

Research Design



This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of customer service experience in travel agency and tourism business. This design allows for a detailed assessment of customer service impact on travel agency, covering both measurable outcomes and nuanced perceptions.

Subject

The subject of the research work was made up of staff and tourists of staff and tourist of the travel agencies and other visitors who visited these agencies during the period of collecting Data.

Method of Data Collections

This research was dependent on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Secondary sources such as: Textbooks, Journals and the Internet were consulted to formulate a body of the research after which primary method which include well-structured questionnaire was employed in collecting first hand information for the respondents concerning the research topic.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The sampling techniques that the researcher uses are randomization technique so as to avoid any element of bias in the subject to be included for the study. Due to large size of the target population, the researcher used the Taro Yamani formula to arrive at the sample population of the study.

Research Procedures:

The body of the research, the researcher went to the study area to distribute sixty 103 copies of well structured questionnaire to the respondents based on the research topic. Instructions on how to fill the questionnaire were given after which the researchers waited to collect the questionnaire back. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, Section A was about Demographic Information of the respondents and Section B consisted of questions related to the research questions.


3.7 Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis data analysis involves using descriptive and inferential statistics to summarize and test relationships between variables, why Qualitative data analysis employees thematic coding and interpretation to explore patterns and theme in interview responses, with both methods integrated to provide comprehensive insight into the impact of technology on the tourist satisfaction at travel agency.

Results

Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

Table 1 below shows that the demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that their ages are distributed as follows: 40% fall within the 18–25 age range, 44.4% are between 26 and 35 years old, while 15.6% are aged 46 years and above. The gender distribution reveals that 75.6% of the respondents are male, whereas 24.4% are female. Regarding educational qualifications, 8.9% of respondents hold a Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE), 26% possess a National Diploma (ND) or Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), 57.7% have a Bachelor's degree or Higher National Diploma (BSc/HND), and 6.7% hold a Master's degree. The employment status of

VARIABLES	STATUS	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
AGE 	18-25	18	40
	26-35	20	44.4
	46 and above	7	15.6
	Total	45	100%
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SEX	Male	34	75.6
	Female	11	24.4
	Total	45	100%
EDUCATION QUALIFICATION	SSCE	4	8.9
	ND/NCE	12	26.7
	BSC/HND	26	57.7
	MASTERS DEGREE	3	6.7
	Total	45	100%
Occupation	Employed (Full time)	11	24.5
	Employed (Part time)	10	22.2
	Self Employed	24	53.3
	Total	45	100%
Income Monthly Level	Below 51,000	8	17.8
	100,000 to 200,000	32	71.1
	201,000 and above	5	11.1
	Total	45	100%
Frequency of travel	Once a year	25	55.6
	2-3 times a year	11	24.4
	More than three times a year	9	20.0
	Total	45	100%
Type of travel Preferred	Leisure	12	26.7
	Business	22	48.9
	Adventure	5	11.1
	Cultural/ Historical	4	8.9
	Others	2	4.4
	Total	45	100%



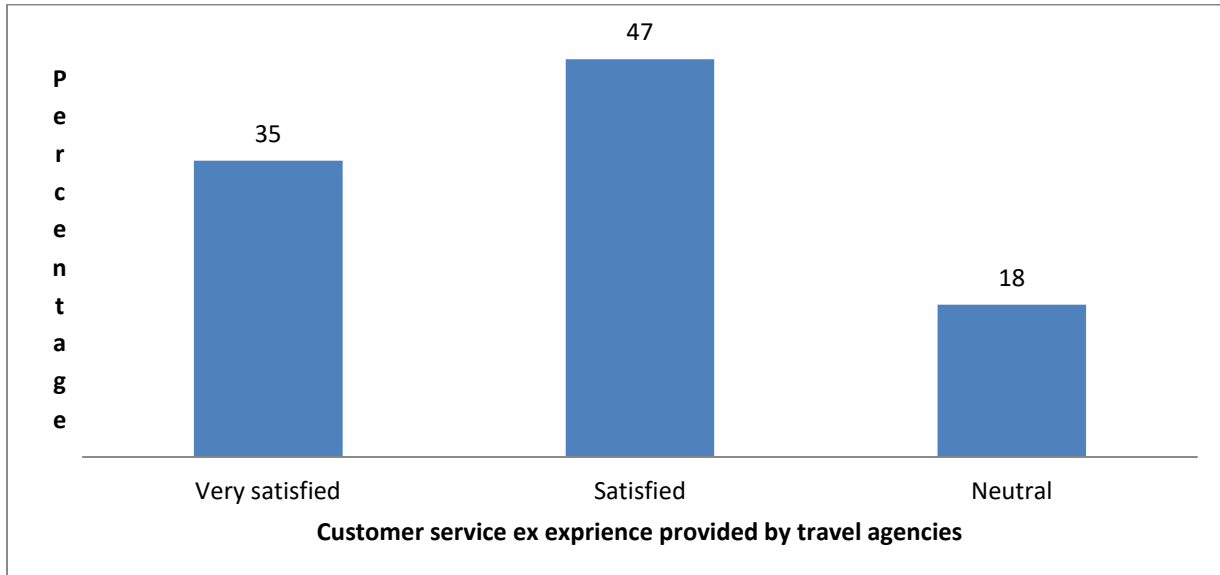
respondents shows that 24.5% are in full-time employment, 22.2% are employed part-time, and 53.3% are self-employed. In terms of monthly income levels, 17.8% earn below ₦51,000, 71.1% fall within the ₦100,000–₦200,000 range, while 11.1% earn ₦201,000 and above. The frequency of

travel among respondents indicates that 55.6% travel once a year, 24.4% travel two to three times annually, and 20.0% travel more than three times a year. The purpose of travel is categorized as follows: 26.7% for leisure, 48.9% for business, 11.1% for adventure, 8.9% for cultural or historical purposes, and 4.4% for other reasons.

Customer Service Provided By Travel Agency

Figure 2, shows that the services offered by travel agencies received varying levels of satisfaction

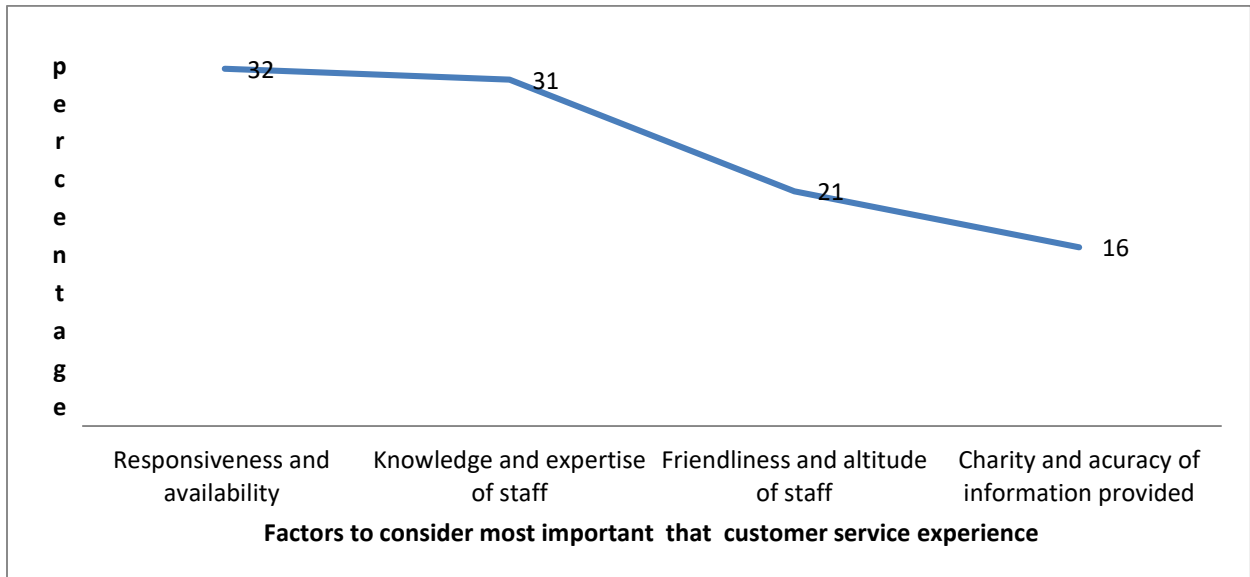
among respondents. A total of 47% expressed satisfaction, while 35% reported being very satisfied. Meanwhile, 18% of respondents remained neutral regarding their experience.



Factors That Significantly Influence Customer Experience in a Travel Agency

Figure 3, shows that the factors influencing customers' experiences with travel agencies received varying levels of agreement among respondents. A total of 32% strongly agreed

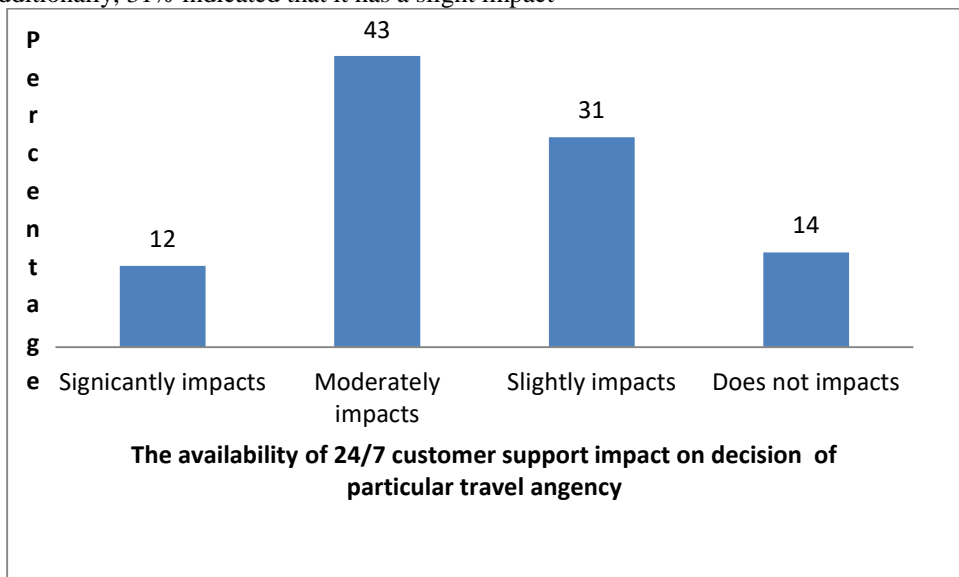
that responsiveness and availability were the primary factors, while 31% believed that knowledge and expertise played a significant role. The least influential factor was clarity and accuracy of information, with only 16% of respondents identifying it as a key determinant of their experience.



To What Extent Does Round-the-Clock Customer Support Affect Your Choice of Travel Agency?

Figure 4, shows that among the respondents, 43% agreed that a 24/7 support unit has a moderate influence on their choice of a travel agency. Additionally, 31% indicated that it has a slight impact

on their decision, while 12% stated that it significantly affects their choice. Meanwhile, 14% reported that the presence of a 24/7 support unit does not influence their decision. This is similar to McDougall and Levesque, (20115) who reported that 24/7 enhances customer service

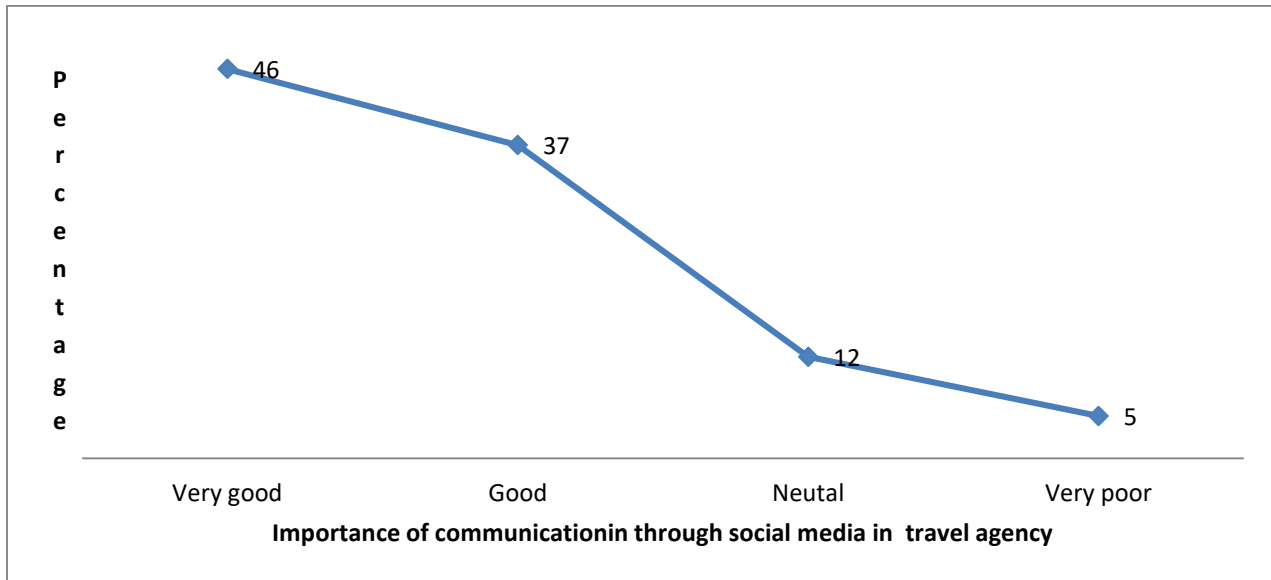




How Important Are Communication Channels (Such as Phone and Email) in Your Experience with a Travel Agency?

Figure 5, shows that among the respondents, 46% rated communication as very good, while 37% considered it good. Additionally, 12% remained

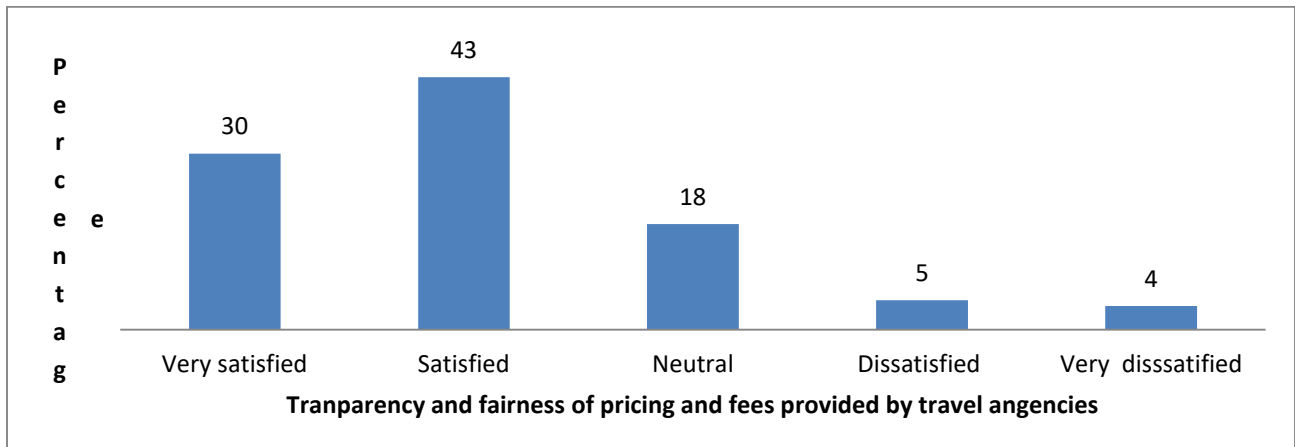
neutral, and 5% rated the communication as very poor. This is consistent with Puccinelli, et al. (2018) Who reported that many values that make experience to be successful and that communication was very important value



Transparency and Fairness of Pricing Satisfaction

Figure 6, 43% of the respondents were satisfied with transparency and fairness of the fees travel agency offered to them, 30% of the respondents were very satisfied, 18% of the respondents were neutral 5% of

the respondents were dissatisfied and 4% were very dissatisfied. This is in agreement with Topalović, and Marinković, (2020) who reported that transparency and fairness promote customer satisfaction

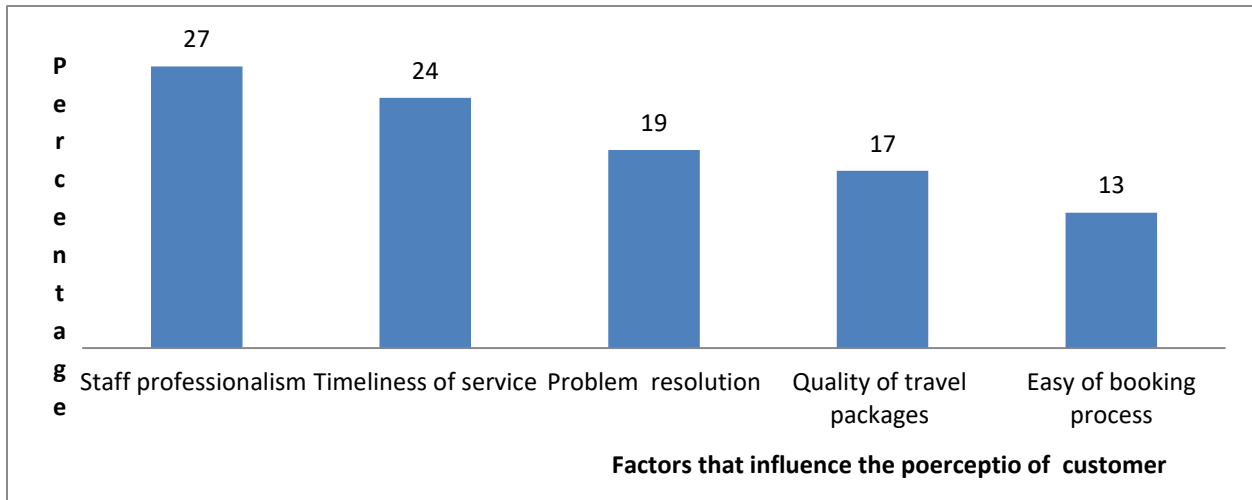




Key Elements That Shape Your View of the Customer Service Experience

Figure 7, shows that among the respondents, 27% indicated that staff professionalism influenced their perception of customer service, while 24% attributed their perception to the timeliness of service.

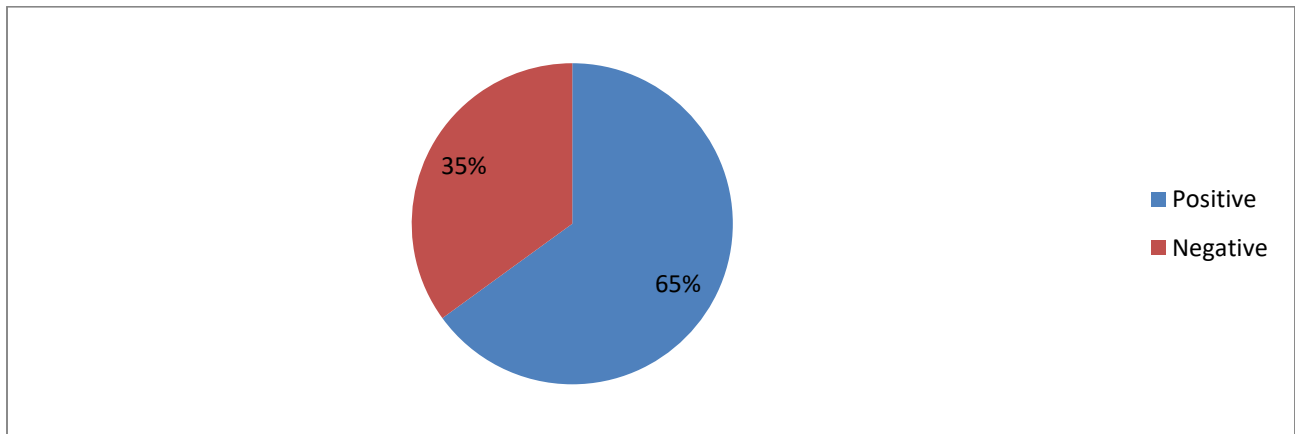
Additionally, 19% stated that problem resolution played a role in shaping their views, 17% emphasized the quality of travel packages, and 13% considered the ease of the booking process as a key factor in their perception. This is similar to Zeithaml, and Bitner, (2018) who reported that staff quality enhances customer satisfaction



Positive And Negative Customer Experience

Figure 8, shows that among the respondents, 65% reported having a positive past experience with a

travel agency, while 35% indicated that their experience was negative. (Zeithaml, et al, 2018).





CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regularly train staff on customer service best practices, focusing on effective communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. This ensures that employees are well-equipped to handle a variety of customer needs and complaints.

Given the diversity in Nigeria and the wide range of tourists, training on cultural sensitivity is essential. This will enhance the ability of the staff to serve clients from different cultural backgrounds, improving overall satisfaction.

Online chat support, AI-driven chatbots, and social media support to respond quickly to inquiries. Tourists prefer immediate responses, and an online presence helps manage customer concerns efficiently. Use customer feedback tools like surveys and ratings to gather information on customer experiences. This data can help agencies adjust their service delivery to better meet customer expectations.

Create mobile-friendly websites and apps that allow customers to book tours, make payments, and seek

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assistance on the go. With the rise of mobile technology in Nigeria, this is essential for convenience and accessibility.

Offer personalized travel packages based on customer preferences. By understanding their individual needs, whether it's adventure tourism, cultural experiences, or luxury travel, travel agencies can create more satisfying experiences. Loyalty Programs: Develop loyalty and reward programs to retain customers. Offering discounts, upgrades, or exclusive deals for repeat customers can help build strong client relationships.

Implement CRM systems to track customer interactions, preferences, and history. By having a detailed understanding of past interactions, travel agencies can better anticipate customer needs and improve satisfaction.

After a service is rendered, agencies should follow up with customers to check on their satisfaction levels and address any concerns. This not only improves the relationship but can also lead to positive word-of-mouth referrals.

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