

Users' Perceptions of Service Quality in Murtala Muhammed International Airport (Mmia), Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

MMIA enjoys the position of aviation hub in Nigeria, in terms of passengers' and freights movements. This is because of the available facilities and services. The functionalities of these services and facilities have come under scrutiny of late. This study looks at this from the users' perspective aimed at proffering recommendations for meeting the myriad shortfalls of the Nigeria's pride. This would offer the airport managers, policy makers, aviation experts, researchers, air transport students and the general public a useful guide all streamlined for better service delivery in time, efficiency, comfort, cost and functionality. Furthermore, the troubles in the airline industry can provide important lessons for managers in other industries interested in questions of customer service.

Keywords: airport, users' perceptions, service quality

Introduction

The Aviation industry is still budding in developing countries like Nigeria with minimal passenger and freight patronages. Without suitable measures put in place to address this, much will be lost in both revenue on the part of the government and in cash and time on those patronizing the aviation industry.

Three basic facilities are needed for air transportation and they are: the network, terminal facilities and the carrier. Airports are more than places where trips for air passengers and goods start or stop. They also provide a location for the concentration, the dispersion, the shipment and vehicular services. Airports also act as the interchange or interface between road and transport modes.

Passengers leaving on a trip normally want to spend as little time as possible in the terminal. They want to have baggage carts readily available, a fast check-in, and little time waiting before and quick boarding prior to a timely departure. Passengers do not appreciate long line-ups, repetitive security checks, crowded departure areas, line-ups for boarding and a delayed departure. The rise in terrorist activity requires more stringent security measure. Passengers' identity must be verified, luggage must be x-rayed, metal detectors and other security techniques must be used. As a result, passengers must arrive early at the terminal hours before departure, line up at the security checkpoint, and show their boarding passes and passport numerous times and wait while luggage is matched with boarded passengers.

The Murtala Mohammed International Airport occupies a noticeable position in the Nigeria's aviation industry by accommodating the highest patronage and service delivery. Though Nigeria has four international airports run by Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria spread across the federation (Murtala Muhammed Airport, Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport, Aminu Kano Airport and Usman Dan Fodio Airport), MMIA still attracts huge investments from both the federal government and the private sector ((www.faan.org.ng, accessed on 20th May, 2010)

The airport as the mover and shaker of the aviation industry in Nigeria has attracted a couple of researches all aimed at making it to achieve its prime position in terms of passengers movement, aircraft movements, good service delivery and functional facilities.

This study is nonetheless different from earlier researchers but seeks at striving to assess user's perceptions of facilities and services at MMIA. In addition, look into users' movement in 2009. Also, it will ascertain the challenges bedeviling the airport and proffer solutions and recommendations for the observed challenges.

Literature review

Air transport is however relatively expensive but the most reliable, efficient, safe and dynamic mode of transportation. This mode of transport is concomitant to the development of any economy, as reaction efforts towards ensuring a sustainable air transport system is of major concern to the operators. Hence the need for effective management of airspace systems and airport infrastructure for safe and reliable aircraft operations, of utmost necessity (Orimoloye, 1996).

Incheon International Airport (Seoul, South Korea) was named World's Best Airport for 2009, in the World Airport Survey results published by Skytrax. The most prolific World's Best Airport winner in recent years, Hong Kong International Airport, was pipped into 2nd, with Singapore Changi Airport ranking 3rd best in the world, according to the latest passenger satisfaction rankings. Cape Town International Airport was named as

the winner of the Best Airport in Africa award. Customers of Cape Town International Airport specifically highlighted it as being a friendly airport. That in itself is not an easy task for any airport to achieve and enviable.

These World Airport Awards are based on the results from 9.8 million questionnaires completed by 100 different nationalities of airline passengers in 2009/2010, covering more than 210 airports worldwide. The survey evaluates traveler experiences across 39 different airport service and product factors - from check-in, arrivals, and transfer through to departure at the gate. Operating since 1999, the survey is held in highest esteem for its clarity of process and rigorously applied rules of complete independence (Skytrax, 2010). The indicators used invariably affect service quality.

This Service quality as an old concept is pronounced in marketing literature and has been applied by lot of researchers in different academic fields and organizations. Furthermore it has been identified as one of the three main obstacles both in the transport literature and governmental publications. Bhat et. al, (2006) and Isaac, (1993) say the ability to improve public transport performance is closely tied on the ability to measure it. These measures and dimensions reflect multiple perspectives such as passengers, the service providers (i.e operators), the community (Taylor, et.al. 2009) and other relevant stakeholders. Blending these perspectives can pose a daunting challenge. This is because each of them has a way of evaluating service quality. The fact that the underlying goal and objective of measurement differ and at some point in time in contrasting manner, trade-offs among these considerations need to be made (Bhat, Guo, Sen, & Weston, 2005; Shet, et. al., 2007; Guihaire & Hao, 2008).

As an example, while passengers insist on high level of transportation services, operators are focused on cost-effective operations of the transit system, as well as the authorities play a double role of a stakeholder and decision maker at the same time.

Service quality measurement based on customer opinions allows the perceived performances of a given transit service to be analyzed. The main disadvantages of this type of measure are the strong subjectivity of transit users' judgments and the failure to take non-users' (potential users') perceptions into account. Many researchers consider the customer's (travelers' or user's) point of view the most relevant for evaluating transit performance (Eboli and Mazzulla, 2010; European Commission, 2011; Ali, 2010, Kho et al., 2005; Felleson and Friman, 2008). For instance Berry et al. (1990) points out that "customers are the sole judge of service quality. Passengers evaluate services in many ways that may not be systematically associated with the amount of use of the service, because the measures of efficiency and effectiveness, as aggregate indicators of total output, implicitly assume homogeneity of service quality (Hensher, 2007). However, the level of service should be mainly based on passengers perceptions because their point of view is very relevant for evaluating the performance of a transport service (Eboli & Mazzulla, 2011; Ndoh & Ashford, 1994).

Glab, (1998) in Rhoades & Waguespack (2008) indicate that airline service quality is driven by ten key factors: on-time performance, airport check-in, schedule/flight accommodations, seating comfort, gate location, aircraft interior, flight attendants, post-flight service, food service, and frequent flyer programs .

Study area and Methods

Nigeria is a republic in western Africa, with a coast along the Atlantic Ocean on the Gulf of Guinea. In 2008 Nigeria's estimated population was 138,283,240, yielding an average density of 152 persons per sq km (393 per sq mi), with a birth rate of 40 per 1,000 and a death rate of 16.4 per 1,000. Nigeria's population is growing at an average of 2 percent annually—a rapid pace, and little changed from the 1970s. It is by far the most populated of Africa's countries, with more than one-seventh of the continent's people. The people belong to many different ethnic groups

Its urban population distribution is 48 percent and rural population of 52percent (2008 estimate). Some of the largest cities in Nigeria are Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan and Ogbomoso. There are three major languages in Nigeria, Yoruba (spoken in south-west), Igbo (spoken in south east) and Hausa (spoken in the north). 50 percent of Nigerians are Muslims, 40 percent are Christians and 10 percent have indigenous beliefs. The life expectancy rate, infant mortality rate and the literacy rate are 47.8 percent, 94 deaths per 1000 births and 70.7 percent respectively.

In 2006 Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) was \$115 billion. The GDP has varied widely, depending on the oil market: \$81 billion in 1985, \$33.2 billion in 1994, \$40.5 billion in 1995. In 2006 Nigeria's GDP per capita was only \$797, among the lowest in the world and well below the average for sub-Saharan Africa. The poor have been especially hard hit by Nigeria's economic problems, notably by devaluations of the currency, which make basic imported goods, such as food, more expensive; cutbacks in services and increases in fees for services; and a 8 percent average annual rate of inflation from 2006 to 2008.

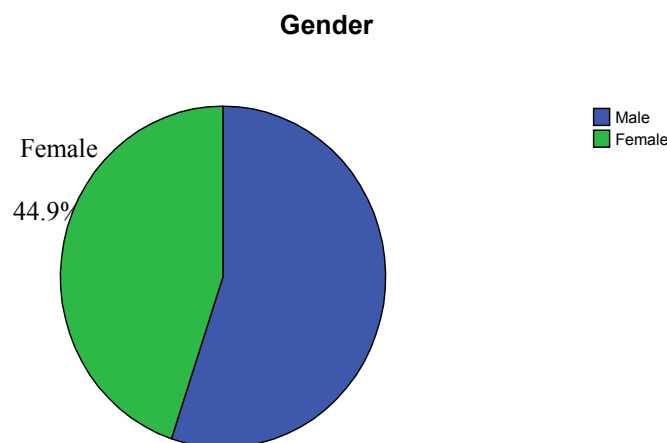
Lagos city is in southwestern Nigeria, in Lagos State, located on the Bight of Benin (an arm of the Atlantic Ocean), the largest city, chief port, and principal economic and cultural center. It served as Nigeria's capital until 1991, when the seat of federal government was moved to Abuja, in central Nigeria. The population of its metropolitan area was about 10.1 million in 2003. The United Nations predicts that the city's metropolitan area, which had only about 290,000 inhabitants in 1950, will exceed 20 million by 2010, making Lagos one of the world's five largest cities (UN Habitat, 2008)

The purpose of the research design is descriptive and for the time dimension cross-sectional. The sample frame for the study comprises the total number of passengers that used MMIA in 2009. Available data from the statistics units of the airports reveals that 2,333,309 passengers used the MMIA in 2009. The researcher therefore used .01 percent of the sample frame to arrive at 234. Accidental random sampling makes it possible to elicit data from available passengers during the data collection period in October, 2010. A well designed questionnaire was used to collect data on the socio-economic characteristics of the users, purpose of travelling, user perception of facilities and services were served at both the departure and arrival lounges of MMIA. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis such as frequencies, tables and percentages by using Statistical package for Service Solutions 16.

Analysis of findings

Figure 1 shows that more male traveled than the female, with the male garnering 55.1 percent against the female’s 44.9 percent.

Figure 1: Gender of Respondents



Source: Author’s Field survey, 2010.

Table 1 indicates the purpose of travel as was ascertained by the 234 respondents. 48(20.5%) respondents’ purpose of travel was for Business, 43(18.4%) respondents traveled for leisure, 80 (34.4%) respondents’ for educational purpose, 38 (18.2%) respondents’ purpose was official 12(5.1%) respondents’ purpose was religious and the rest traveled for medical reasons.

Table 1: Purpose of travel

Purpose of travel	Frequency	Percent
Business	48	20.5
Liesure	43	18.4
Educational	80	34.2
Official	38	16.2
Religious	12	5.1
Medical	13	5.6
Total	234	100.0

Source; Author’s Field Survey,2010

Facilities and services used in assessing user perception of service quality are: the twin airport lounge, ticketing process, corporate etiquettes, places of convenience, protocols, power supply, and assistance offered for the disable and security of lives and property accessing.

- 25(10.7%) respondents were satisfied by the twin-airport departure and arrival lounges 171(73.1%) answered fair, 36 (15.4%) were not satisfied with the airport lounge, and 2(0.9%) were non-committal on their responses.
- 7 (3%) respondents said the process of ticketing is very well. 149(63.7%) said it was well, 72(30.8%) said the ticketing procedure was fair, 5(2.1%) felt bad about ticketing and only 1(.4%) respondent ranked it bad.
- 137(58.5%) thought the corporate etiquettes of the employees of the airport desirable, 21(9.0%) said it was fair, .67(28.6%) said the corporate etiquettes were not desirable and 9(3.8%) respondents reiterated that the corporate etiquettes were not desirable at all.
- 7(3.0%) respondents said the places of convenience were very hygienic, 114(48.7%) ranked as hygienic, 49(20.9%) ranked it fair, 53 (22.6%) r said the places of convenience were not hygienic and 11(4.7%) affirmed that the places of convenience were not hygienic at all.

- 17(7.3%) respondents said protocols were beneficial, 154(65.8%) affirmed that protocols were cumbersome. 43(18.4%) affirmed that protocols were fair, 17(7.3%) respondents said protocols were bad and 3 respondents confirmed that protocols were very bad.
- The largest portion of respondents 185(79.1%) affirmed that power supply was good. This was followed by 23(9.8%) respondents, who said power supply was very fair. 18(7.7%) respondents said power supply was bad. 6(2.6%) respondents said power was excellent. The remaining 2 (.9%) respondents reiterated that power supply was very bad.
- Assistance for the disabled was said to be very good by 192(82.%) respondents. 21(9.0%) respondents said assistance for the disabled was fair. 114(3.7%) affirmed that assistance for the disabled was bad. 7 (3.0%) said it was excellent. The remaining 3(1.3%) said assistance for the disabled was very bad.
- A whopping 202(86.3%) respondents affirmed that security of luggage at the airport was satisfiable. 20 (8.5%) said security of luggage at the airport was fair. 7 (3.0%) respondents said security of luggage was bad. 3 (1.3%) respondents were very satisfied with the security of luggage at the airport. The remaining 2 (.9%) respondents felt very bad about the security of luggage.
- 166(70.9%) respondents said there was adequate security at the airport. The remaining 74 respondents said there was very adequate and inadequacy of security at the airport.

There are quite a number of problems encountered in the international wing of Murtala Muhammed Airport. These problems were collapsed into Seven (6) categorical eminent problems in the international wing of the airport are: Inadequacy of access from origin to airport, Delay /long queue for ticket purchasing, High cost access to airport, Inadequate airport facilities / services (specify), Irregular flight schedule, Cancellation of flight.

Table 4.3: Passengers' movements in 2009

There are three forms of passengers to the international market- incoming, outgoing and transit passengers. Table 2 therefore indicates these passengers movement in 2009. In the table, 84835 passengers came into the country through MMIA and 95,367 left the country giving a total number of 1,802,002 passengers used the airport. In February, 65,743 passengers arrived at the airport, 71,629 departed with 4588 passengers on transit. In April, 94,629 passengers arrived at the airport, 96601 passengers departed and 2,178 passengers were on transit. In May, 86,221 passengers arrived at the airport, 90,554 departed and 2,132 were on transit. In June, 86,472 passengers arrived, 88965 departed from the airport and 4,517 passengers were on transit.

The latter 6- month witnessed an astronomical increment in patronage. One of the reasons adduced to this was the salubrious season in operation for oversea travelers. Being the transition from Autumn to summer, starting from July – October. Hence the increment from 20, 1597

Passengers in July and 20,6881 passengers in October. August and September are the favoured month for overseas travelers for educational and fun-seeking reasons. The same thing applies to those on transit. December (225352 passengers) happens to gather enormous passenger flow. Only August places second to it in terms of passenger movement.

A total of 2,333,309 passengers used the International Wing of Murtala Muhammed Airport in 2009, 64,972 passengers less than 2008, where 2,398,281 passengers used the same airport. The palpable reason given for the drop in passenger movement was as a result of stringent measures prospective Nigerian passengers would go through within and outside Nigeria.

Murtala Muhammed International Airport prides itself by the sophisticated facilities and amenities and services provided at the airport. The facilities, amenities and services provided at the airport are banking hall, places of convenience, bureau de change, car rental, post office, restaurants and bars are located throughout the airport, duty free shopping malls, medical facilities, car parking lot for 750 cars/vehicles, telecommunication stand (MTN, Eltisalat, Glo and Zain), seat out, lounges (arrival and departure), elevator, disabled assistance service, cart, body scanner and metal detector.

The availability of the above mentioned facilities, amenities and services have in one way or the other led to the present surge in passengers' movement. Its provision geared at functionality and comfort ability is yielding positive results. But there are still more to be done. The elevator was not functional at the time this project was conducted. There was overcrowding at the departure lounge. Although the seats should be enough for the passengers if not for the greeters and meters all packed in the departure lounge. Taxis are the easiest and safest way to and from travel from the airport to the city.

Conclusion and recommendations

Murtala Muhammed International Airport have continued to experience innumerable challenges, such as high operational cost, increase in passengers movement, huge foreign exchange component to acquire equipment, absence of maintenance facilities for mandatory checks in the country and the shortage of core aviation professionals. Malfunctioning elevator, inadequate seats in the departure lounge.

Others are ageing workforce, unfavourable competitive environment and inaccessibility to funding to jump start their operations. This situation, no doubt, impacts negatively on the airport service delivery and growth.

Federal Government and aviation actors are aware of the many challenges militating against the operations of the airlines, their survival and their critical importance to the survival of the aviation industry in the country and the planned attainment of the government's vision 20:2020, particularly in the provision of qualitative services to the travelling public and our collective responsibility of ensuring safety and security in the aviation sector.

The study has in general terms shown that the International Wing of Murtala Muhammed Airport is yet to offer its full potential despite being dubbed as the hub of aviation industry in Nigeria and West Africa. Though huge federal allocation is pumped into the airport, it is still performing below expectation. It is not surprising that it was listed as one of the best Airport in any category in Africa, despite being the giant of Africa. This is because of the various constraints earlier highlighted. These recommendations are in consonance in achieving the Federal Government planned attainment of Vision 20:2020 particularly in the provision of qualitative services to the traveling public and responsibility of ensuring safety and security in the aviation sector. In this wise, position the Airport as one of the best in Africa and in the world, the following suggestions were made to achieve the set target:

Physically, the airport cannot be relocated or abandoned. But, since there is still ample land, there is room for a new terminal that will succor the traffic and efficiently cater for the shortfall of the present terminal. An example of this is what obtains in the domestic wing of the airport. There is now a functional and magnificent MMA2 of enviable standard in the sub-region.

Ground access to the airport is rather costly, because taxi operators at the airport realized that they own the franchise to ply the route, and passengers with heavy luggage can not easily carry their luggage into the airport. Also the parking concession fees paid is quite higher when compared with the volume of passengers available. There IS perennial traffic jam from 7:30-10am every day en route the airport and from 3:00pm beyond from the airport every day. Prospective passengers are always advised to leave home say 2-3 hours ahead of their departure to forestall missing of flight. The traffic jam causes man-hour loss and money loss to airport users. The airport management has to make the airport route more attractive to them by reducing parking concession fees paid by the taxi operators, car hire operators and proffer a strategic solution to the persistent hold up.

The quality of air services operated is far from being adequate. Hence there is the need to adopt a strategy to achieve the designed objective of economic operation. For this reason, a reshuffling of flight schedules to increase the number of daily flights operated is necessary. The issue of cancellation of flight and unscheduled flight should be looked into.

Improving the airport facilities should be in the form of upgrading some existing facilities and where possible new ones should be constructed where provision has been made for it in the Airport Master plan.

Some of the facilities needing improvement needing improvements are the air conditions, lighting and Navigational facilities, and power station

Fire and rescue services need more attention. A new and modern building should be erected for fire services to house and keep their equipments.

Airport security should be tightened by providing security with equipments that will help in detecting dangerous weapons carried by hijackers and armed robbers. The security of the airport is very vital not only to the users but the nation as a whole. Hence to protect the nation from terrorists and assure users of their safety, the airport terminal building and apron should be provided with close circuit television for screening and monitoring the activities of suspects
Personnel is an invaluable asset, it is therefore important that the development of staff is given due attention

Senior staff should be encouraged to go for specialized courses and workshops. This could be achieved by granting study leave with pay and organizing seminars and workshops. Junior staff training should equally be encouraged just as the senior staff. Specifically the Fire and Rescue Department and the security section needs proper and specialized training in their respective areas as they perform rather sophisticated and invaluable function at the airport. Engineering, commercial, public relation and accounts and other specialized personnel all needed to be trained frequently on techniques in handling airport finance and administration. Career ladder should be worked out and should help with the planning of educational programmes for the various caliber of staff. This will encourage them, especially the junior and they will feel they have a future with the management. Other incentives could de introduced as at when due.

The commercial department should initiate various activities that will yield more revenue for the management, consequently the head of departments and members of staff in his unit should continually undertake articulated courses on how to improve airport revenue generation. So also is the account officers who are to be trained to be prudent in financial management.

The public affairs unit should also be given continuous training training on various ways of selling their products and airport planning officers that will qualify the potential demand of the airport and also assist in physical development should have continous training on various techniques of airport planning.

There is need to improve the landscape of the airport. Noise abatement instrument like high buttressed noise barriers are necessary along the boundary, however the airport landscape should be improved to

serve as visual screen and noise barrier. In advanced countries, where safety and zoning controls have been established, no building within a certain distance of high annoyance areas is allowed in order to protect areas under flight zones. This should be improved upon at the airport.

Many of the recommendation made here requires a reasonable financial involvement. However with the present revenue generation level of the airport it is apparent that the airport management can implement such without or with subsidy.

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