



VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Faith Ezerie

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE IN
CUSTOMER SERVICE OF
PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA
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Tekijä	Faith Ezerie
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Tämä tutkimus käsittelee sitä, miten kulttuuri vaikuttaa ihmisten näkemykseen asiakaspalvelusta. Se arvioi Nigerian ja Suomen julkisen sektorin asiakaspalveluja. Vastaavasti se myös pohtii, vaikuttaako kunkin kyseisen maan kulttuuri ihmisten näkemykseen asiakaspalvelusta.

Eri teorioita ja kulttuurikäsitteiden ulottuvuuksia analysoitiin, jotta saatiin selville, mitkä mekanismit vaikuttavat kulttuurien ja asiakaspalvelunäkemyksen väliseen suhteeseen. Näiden suhde osoittautui pääsääntöisesti nivoutuvan yhteen. Laadullisia menetelmiä kyselytutkimuksen ja haastattelujen muodossa käytettiin, ja osallistujat koostuvat viiden nigerialaisen ja viiden suomalaisen julkisen sektorin työyhteisön työntekijöistä ja johtotehtävissä työskentelevistä henkilöistä. Nigerialaisten osallistujien määrä on 62 ja lisäksi 10 suomalaista vastasi haastatteluun. Tiedot kerättiin ja tulokset havainnollistettiin laatimalla taulukoita ja jakaumakaavioita SPSS-ohjelman avulla.

Tutkimus paljasti, että kummallakin siinä käsitellyllä kulttuurilla on huomattava vaikutus näkemykseen asiakaspalvelusta. Rajoituksena on se, että tutkimuksessa on käytetty näytteinä vain muutamaa julkisen alan työyhteisöä Nigeriasta ja Suomesta. Lisäksi Suomen osalta käytettiin mukavuusotosta. Joka tapauksessa, käytetyt tutkimusmenetelmät ja niiden sovellukset muodostavat perustan myös tulevalle tutkimukselle. Suosituksena on, että julkisen sektorin yksiköt Nigeriassa sitoutuisivat enemmän ja ennakoivammin asiakaspalveluun, ja että Suomessa omaksuttaisiin julkisten järjestelmien välistä kilpailua.

ABSTRACT

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This research examined the effect culture has on perception of customer service. It evaluated the customer services in government organizations between Nigeria and Finland. Comparably, it determined whether both cultures influence how customer service is perceived.

Different theories and dimensions of culture concepts were analyzed to reveal the dynamics influencing the relationship between cultures and customer service perception. The indication is that the relationship is directionally interconnected. The quantitative method in form of a survey design and the qualitative method in form of interviews were used and the population comprised of staff and management of five public organizations in Nigeria and five in Finland. The sampled size in Nigeria was sixty-two and ten interviewees in Finland. Data was collected and results were presented descriptively using charts and percentages and utilizing the SPSS software.

The study revealed that both cultures have considerable influence on service perceptions. The limitation is that few organizations in Nigeria and Finland were the basis for the study, thus a small sample size. Furthermore, convenience sampling was used in Finland. Nevertheless, the methodology and its interpretations lay a basis for future research. Recommendation is that public organizations in Nigeria be more committed to serving customers, be proactive and Finland absorb the spirit of competition amongst organizations.

Keywords	Customer Service, Culture, Customer Service Perception, Public Organizations, Nigeria, Finland
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1 INTRODUCTION

Customer service is a major focus for companies and organizations today because they strive and are successful when the customer service is efficient. It presents an avenue for the customer to have contact with the company or organization whether on a cordial or complaint basis and if the service is good, it creates a difference between a company and its competitors (Stevens, 2011). Hence, the importance of customer service to a company or organization cannot be overemphasized. Dedicated customers who have devoted a reasonable amount of their time and resources with a company would expect good service at all times from the customer service department. However, one of the underlying factors that affect good customer service is culture. We tend to be culturally groomed and programmed, perhaps exhibiting attitudes, behaviors, reactions and sometimes responding in manners that reflect our cultures. Furthermore, the perception of good customer service is different in different cultures (G, Hofstede; G.J, Hofstede, 2005).

This paper will emphasize on how these have an impact in customer service perception in both the Nigerian and Finnish cultures, having as a background the basic cultural particulars of each country. There are various cultures in the world but this thesis will focus on customer service perception in the public organizations. Nigeria and Finland will be analyzed through the theories and dimensions which measure cultural differences.

1.1 Background of Study

The global competitive and economic situation today has demanded for optimum quality in business activities. In the recent past companies have increasingly cultivated the idea of delivering more than the goods by investing more on the quality of their customer service. Globally, in 2013, 66% of consumers switched brands or businesses as a result of poor customer service (Trendwatching, 2014). Invariably customer service has to suit and fit the needs and cultures of the consumers. Human needs differ as well as the cultural orientation of individuals. Abraham

Maslow's hierarchy of needs as well as Geert Hofstede's 6- Dimensional Model of cultural differences will help to analyze how customer service is boosted by satisfying customer needs and how customer service is influenced by culture in the two countries studied.

1.2 Research Problem and Objectives

The objective of this study is to show how culture affects customer service of authorities and its possible outcome. Studies have shown that the issue of customer service is not just a problem for customers, those in higher positions of authority, such as CEOs and MDs as well as shareholders, need to be paid rapt attention too. Additionally, Nigeria and Finland have different cultures which this research will analyze and examine whether the underlying cultures of the two countries perhaps do influence or do not have any impact on their customer service methods and behaviors.

The objective of this research is to outline aspects of both cultures which play pertinent roles in customer service and which perhaps constitute to one of the factors or reasons for failure. Hence, the thesis will search for culture-based customer service that can perhaps be recommended or suggested for both countries to overcome barriers of good customer service.

This research aims to find answers to these questions:

- Does culture have any impact on customer service and how do cultural backgrounds affect how we perceive and render customer service?
- Should the management, such as the CEOs and MDs be interested in and handle customer service related issues?
- How does culture influence customer service of those in public organizations in Nigeria and Finland?
- What can both countries improve or do differently or learn from each other in order to be excellent from the customer's point of view?

1.3 Outline of Thesis

The thesis is divided into two sections, the theoretical and the empirical frameworks. The theoretical section starts with the introduction of the topic and it highlights the research problem and the objectives of the study as well as the research limitations. It also outlines the questions to be answered at the end of the research. It also introduces the various concepts and theories of needs and cultural dimensions that are relevant to the research as it relates to customer service. The procedures and measures used to obtain the results and solve the research questions which include the research methods, the reason for the choice of research methods and the result of the study is analyzed in the empirical section where the sources of data, the used data collection method and analysis are explained. The thesis concludes with a summary of the results, the reliability and validity of the results, the answers to the research questions with highlights of possible suggestions that can be adopted or implemented with regards to customer service.

1.4 Restrictions

Out of the six (6) geopolitical zones in Nigeria, the North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South and South West, the questionnaires will be distributed to three (3) of the zones due to lack of contact personnel in the other three (3) zones. Convenient sampling will be used in Finland. Time constraint is another factor because the data collection time is for two weeks.

2 THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURE

In this chapter the term culture will be defined as it gives insight into the understanding of the theoretical framework. Relevant concepts and theories will also be introduced with a focus on Hofstede's, Maslow's theories as well as a few other theories and approaches.

2.1 The definition of Culture

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines culture in various ways. Culture is the beliefs and customs of a particular society, group, place, or time; Culture is a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life or art; Culture is a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business) (Merriam-Webster, 2016.). For the purpose of this research, culture is understood as something common among some group of people that is human made.

Therefore, culture is the norms, values, traditions, rules and learnt beliefs of a certain group of people and because they have these common qualities evident in their society, they are said to be unique in their own way (Northouse, 2007). However, there are different levels of culture: individual, organizational and national levels.

The individual level of culture is created over time via self-knowledge and the various interpersonal relationships that the individual has had as time passes by. In order to understand the other levels of culture, the individual level has to be well understood because it is the basis for an individual's effectiveness (TMC, 2010). The organizational levels are created via personal feelings, values and experiences as well as expectations of those within the environment of the organizations while the national level is created based on values, norms, behaviors and customs within the population of a sovereign nation which gives them a national identity (Businessdictionary, 2016).

In this report, the focus will be on the influence of national culture on customer service in the Nigerian and the Finnish behaviors.

2.2 The Theories and Dynamics of Culture

There have been various well- established theories of culture which have given a description of the pattern, diversity and the content of different cultures. Today cultural studies are interested in the dynamism of culture throughout the world. There are well-known cultural models that have used various cultural variables in explaining their theories; they include those of Edward T. Hall (1989), Geert Hofstede (1991), Richard R. Gestelands (1999) and GLOBE (2004). This thesis will examine a few of the theories.

2.2.1 Hofstede Cultural Dimension Theory

For the purpose of analyzing how customer service is influenced by culture, Geert Hofstede's Dimensional Model for cultural differences provides a helpful guideline. Other research and studies have also presented cultural dimensions as having impact on customer service. These six dimensional models include power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation and indulgence as shown in Figure 1. Many cultural systems in most countries, in variety of ways, experience and exhibit their behaviors in these common dimensions.

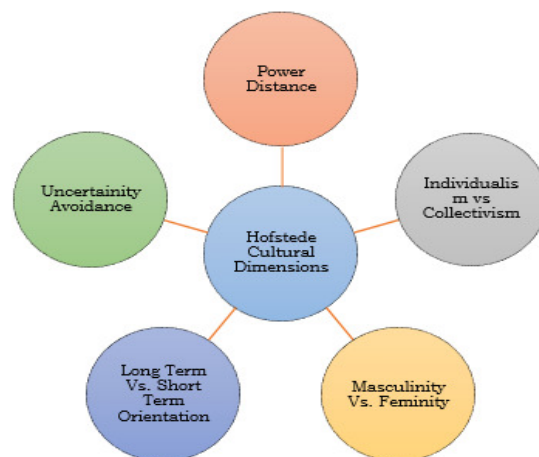


Figure 1. Hofstede Cultural Dimension Theory

a) Power Distance

Power distance refers to the extent or degree of inequality which exists within the population of a country and it is considered normal and generally accepted. In a high power distance country, people understand and accept their place in the hierarchy and such a society has grown with that unequal perception of power distribution. However, a society with low power distance, power is equally shared and well dispersed.

In issues related to customer service relationships, power distance is an important factor. This factor can be evident in cultures which are characterized by high power distance because in these countries, the perception of class and position is a very sensitive matter. While some individuals are uncomfortable with anything hierarchical, others accept and follow the hierarchy or power without difficulty.

b) Individualism/ collectivism

This refers to the strength of the bond that exists within individuals in a community. If the bond is strong, then the community exists as a collective and strong unit but if the bond is loose or weak, the community exists based on individual's self-image.

c) Masculinity / Femininity

This explains the degree to which a culture is driven by competition or cooperation based on gender. Countries, where men are expected to handle tough and highly demanding roles, have high masculinity. However, in low masculinity countries, roles are equally handled by both genders.

d) Uncertainty Avoidance

The degree of preference for an uncertain or unstructured situation over a structured or certain situation explains this dimension. Societies where people are willing to take unfamiliar risks have low uncertainty avoidance index and it is high where the people avoid unclear and uncertain situations making them predictable.

e) Long Term Orientation

Long term orientation refers to the degree to which a country is emotionally involved to the past in contrast with the future. A high score indicates that the people in the country are willing to make adjustments when necessary and believes that problem-solving is a necessity while a low index indicates that a high value is placed on tradition and are therefore honored and kept.

f) Indulgence / Restraint

The degree to which inhabitants endeavor to control their desires and impulses, based on their upbringing. A culture with a relatively weak control is indulgent and a culture with a relatively strong control is restrained. Indulgence depicts a society that permits relatively free satisfaction of basic and natural human urge or impulses related to enjoying life and having pleasurable times. Restraint depicts a society that restrains gratification of human pleasures and controls it by means of firm societal norms.

2.2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs gives a useful analytical structure of culture which suggested that people's desires can be satisfied as long as they are arranged in a hierarchy of needs of relative importance. As soon as the basic or lower level needs are filled, other higher needs emerge immediately to dominate the individual. When these higher needs are fulfilled, other new and still higher needs surface as depicted in Figure 2.

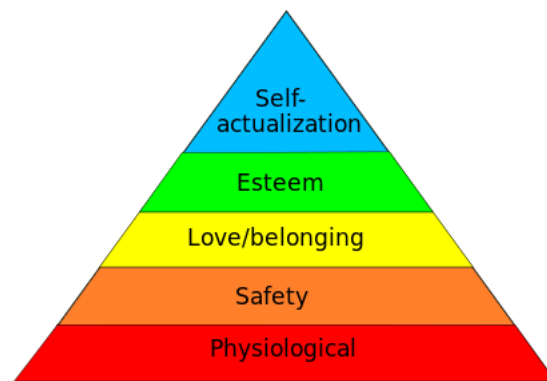


Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

a) Physiological needs

These are the most important needs for life and it is vital that they are met first among every other thing. They refer to the basic necessities of life which are necessary for human survival. Without it, the body cannot function adequately. They include food, water and air. Thereafter, clothing, shelter and sexual satisfaction are met.

b) Safety needs

After the basic needs have been relatively satisfied, safety needs arise. Safety is as well important; Physical security, financial safety, security for health and well-being and security from adverse emergencies. Humans desire physical safety from violence, war, abuse, natural disaster, stress and trauma. This safety needs become evident when there is lack of economic safety in a country. Individuals would quest for job security, insurance policies, savings accounts and preference for accommodation at certain residential locations.

c) Love and Belonging

After the physiological and safety needs are satisfied, the next level of human needs is interpersonal and involves the desire to love, feel belonged and be loved as well. When this need is lacking, human beings tend to feel worthless and depressed. It starts at childhood and over time, the individual's ability to strike a

balance with emotional relationships such a friendship, intimacy and family interactions is developed.

According to this theory, humans naturally want to satisfy their need to feel a sense of belonging and accepted among their social groups. In order to fill this vacuum, they form social connections even within the family and colleagues. Also, they establish social groups such as sport teams, gangs, clubs and professional organizations.

d) Esteem

The desire to be valued is a general characteristic of people. Human beings occasionally at least do have the need to feel respected and highly esteemed by others. This explains why some individuals choose and keep certain professions that would offer them the self-confidence, self-value and grow the respect and recognition they desire. Low self-esteem individuals feel inferior and may have the desire to grow their self esteem but if they are not able to achieve it, they end up being depressed.

e) Self-actualization

Humans have the strong desire to realize their goals and potentials. Therefore, they are determined to identify their full potentials and map out the various strategies, to any degree, to which they realize those potentials. Some have the potential to be great athletes, scientists or artists depending on choice. Maslow later added the self-transcendence level after this stage because humans tend to progress from achieving their human potentials to seeking for spiritual allegiance and acceptance.

2.2.3 The Self- Reference Criterion

The Self-Reference Criterion is an unconscious reference to one's own cultural values, personal understanding or experiences, and accrued knowledge as a basis for decisions. A person who makes conclusions based on this premise is said to be

using the self-reference criterion. This is similar and connected to ethnocentrism and subjectivism. This is the belief that people in one's own company, culture, or country know best how to do things compared to people from other contrasting places.

2.2.4 Diffusion Theory

The basic concept of the diffusion theory focuses on process and stages. Diffusion refers to the spreading of any physical idea, value, social practice, or attitude through and between populations. There are three major traditions or theories in the study of diffusion (Encyclopedia, 2001).

The three theory families are cultural diffusion, diffusion of innovations and collective behavior. This work focuses on the cultural diffusion.

“Cultural diffuse on is the spread of cultural beliefs and social activities from one group to another. The mixing of world cultures through different ethnicities, religions and nationalities has increased with advanced communication, transportation and technology” (YourDictionary, 2016). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, this theory substituted the evolution theory as a basis for understanding and perceiving the reasons for cultural differences and change.

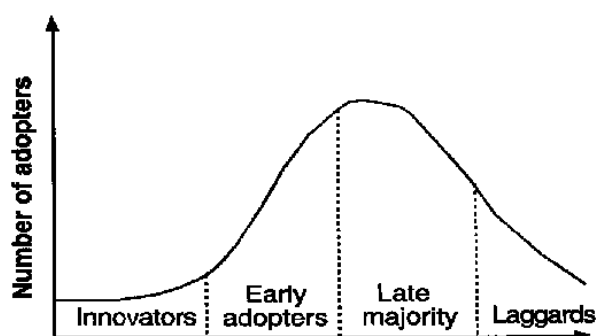


Figure 3. The Cultural Diffusion

2.2.5 High and Low Context Cultures and Perception

This concept presents a logical way of understanding different cultural orientations. In low context cultures or countries, messages or information have to be very clear, precise and explicit. For example, oral agreements and simple word of mouth is not relied on, everything must be written and well documented. However, in high context countries and cultures, less information is required when communicating a verbal message and oral agreements are well respected, trusted and taken with seriousness.

3 THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service is fundamental to every flourishing organisation. Customers are the compelling reasons why organizations are striving for success; hence, continued existence of these organizations clearly depends on their customers (Lewis, 2000; Kotler, 2000). High quality customer service is a major contributing factor that creates customer loyalty. Customers receive ever more sophisticated patterns of customer service from various companies as companies endeavour to differentiate themselves. The importance of Customer Service Management has become highly significant. Customer Service Management (CSM) refers to how adequately an organization manages its customer service in terms of effectiveness, productivity and quality (Khong and Mahendiran, 2006). CSM is demonstrated by the way organisations manage their customer services to create value and satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2001; Gabbott, 2004). It is regarded as an approach to delivering customer satisfaction through the fulfilment of customers' needs and wants. Thus innovative systems of splitting organizations into sub-units and dividing labour within are planned. Such are designed in order to satisfy the basic need for organizations that aspire to place customers as the focus of their organizational activities.

Consequently, creating and maintaining a strong reputation has become ever more demanding (Khong, 2005). Today customers are not only fascinated by the product or service they are being offered or that they pay for. They desire to have other additional elements of service that they can possibly receive. This ranges from the welcome and greetings they receive as they enter into a company, to the refund they get after they must have paid and when they have a complaint or even the assistance and help that they receive whenever there is a faulty issue that arises.

This chapter will emphasize on the different approaches such as the Customer Service Management and Customer Relationship Marketing Approaches, The Steve Jobs Theory of Customer Relations, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory as well as principles that are practical in providing and managing good customer service and relationship.

3.1 The Importance of Customer Service and Relationship

Nichols (2000) defines services as intangible products that are performed rather than produced. Since performance is at the core nowadays, companies strive to differentiate themselves by competing on customer service due to globalization and competition. The intensifying forces of competition are on the rise and customers find themselves savouring the choices presented to them by various companies and organizations. Therefore, the need for good CSM is imperative.

According to Kotler (2000, p. 45) customer service is “all the activities involved in making it easy for customers to reach the right parties within the company and receive quick and satisfactory service, answers and resolutions of problems”. They endeavour to create and build relationships with their customers so that they can acquire the loyalty, mind and heart of their customers. Also, they desire to understand the value and necessity of happy customers. An enhanced CSM can accelerate and increase customer patronage, hence leading to improved customer satisfaction, customer retention and relationship management (Khong, 2005; Khong and Mahendiran, 2006). In order to retain customers good customer service must be offered and present, so an effective CSM is necessary (Khong and Richardson, 2003).

Customer service is the overall activity of identifying and satisfying already established customer needs. Excellent customer service is a necessity for success for organizations; therefore, it should be paramount in their mind and hearts. "Customer service excellence is how well an organization is able to constantly and consistently exceed the needs of the customer" (Danbatta, 2017). The provision of good customer service cannot be overemphasized. Irrespective of whom the customer is, whether potential, new or existing ones should be given the best service possible. Pasi-Heikki Rannisto, a researcher of service culture from the University of Tampere reiterated that despite the notion that components to enhancing good service are costly; it is actually bad service that oftentimes carries the bigger price tag. “If customers don’t get the service value they deserve, the work invested in their assistance is wasted. Poor service generates a pure loss. If someone is given

good service that understands the customer need, in the big picture it actually proves more economical.” (Yle, 2015).

The service will be rated excellent, if perceptions exceed expectations; it will be considered as good or adequate, if perceptions or experience equals the expectations; the service will be regarded as bad, poor or deficient, if it does not meet both perception and expectation (Naik et al, 2010). Kotler (2000, p.36) defined Customer satisfaction as an individual's feelings of contentment or displeasure resulting from comparing a product or service perceived performance (or conclusion) in relation to the prior expectations. The emphasis on effective CSM is because it has a tangible correlation with customer retention and consequently, customer satisfaction. High customer retention rate strongly suggests that these retained customers are satisfied with the services offered by the organization. Therefore customer retention can indicate customer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2001, pp. 665-673;Kotler,2000, pp. 44-49).

People at all times remember the customer service they received, whether it was truly great or actually horrible. This is because that is one channel for them to actively interact with the organization. Hence, a good service is a positive reflection of what the organization stands for and an indication that they care for the customers or citizens at large.(Naylor,2014). Hence, Danbatta (2017) explains that "excellent customer service is revealed when an organization is honest, gives value for money, has a high reputation, meets deadlines, has quality products and services, has user-friendly processes, responds to criticism, encourages complaints and handles them properly as well as demonstrates that it is passionate about the customer".

3.1.1 Customer Relationship Marketing Approach

This approach presents a situation whereby the needs of organizational current and potential customers are implicitly understood and managed. Superior customer service which will certainly lead to a customer relationship, if well managed, really is not all complicated or expensive.

The principles of CRM include:

- 1) Organizations must be customer focused with good customer service.
- 2) Organizations must be prepared to adapt so that customer needs are taken into account and systematically delivered to their satisfaction.
- 3) Customers needs and satisfaction must be assessed by market research.

3.1.2 The Steve Jobs Theory of Customer Relations

This theory explains why top authorities like the CEO or public managers of corporations decide to deal directly with customers, for example, by responding to the complaint of a customer instead of leaving the task only to the customer service representatives. Thus, a human response at the entire levels of the organization can shape the customer's experience, yet one unhappy customer can send lots of negative messages about an organization (Pennington, 2007).

3.1.3 Herzberg's Two Factor Theory

This theory introduces two separate scales used to measure employee satisfaction. One scale measures satisfaction and the other scale measures dissatisfaction. The two factors that comprise the theory are motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators such as autonomy, recognition, and skill development work to improve employee satisfaction while the hygiene factors such as salary, job security, and work conditions work to reduce employee dissatisfaction.

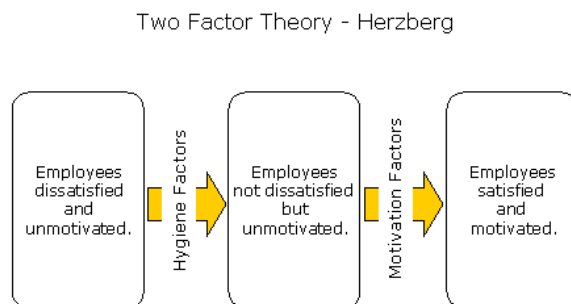


Figure 4. *The Two Factor Theory*

3.1.4 The Five Dimensions of Service Quality

Delivering quality service is a major concern for service providers because they want to know what customers actually want. Hence, these five dimensions are used to assess the service quality in organizations.

The 5 Dimensions (Furrer;B;& Sudharshan, 2000) are:

- Reliability – the ability to perform the promised service dependably and reliably
- Responsiveness– the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
- Assurance – the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence
- Empathy – the caring, individualized attention provided to the customer
- Tangibles – the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, and communication materials

4 CONNECTION BETWEEN CULTURE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

4.1 Culture Differences and Motivation

Erin Meyer (2014) established that cultural differences exist around the world and they have immense impact on how people run their day to day activities, international business and customer service. What lies beneath success is the efficient evaluation of cultural differences and how to strategically use these differences to advance, develop and make progress in the various relationships that humans cultivate. Therefore, the one-size-fit-all approach to customer service that brushes aside local or cultural diversity would likely not focus on the desired need of the customer during customer service.

The perception that culture shapes individuals who directly or indirectly form the pattern of customer service is quite significant in when considering national differences and human interactions.

4.2 Trompenaars' Model of National Culture Differences

This model was developed by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner and it is often applied to management and general business especially for cross-cultural communication. The survey was extensively carried out in 43 countries and correspondents numbered 8,841 managers and organization employees.

There are seven dimensions in this model of national cultural differences. Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (1997) listed five approaches which cover the behavioural pattern in which humans generally deal with one another, in relation to time and the environment.

4.2.1 Universalism vs. Particularism

Both behavioural pattern involves belief. That ideas and practices can be functional and practiced everywhere without modification is universalism, the rules and codes apply equally to everyone regardless of relationships whereas particu-

larism is the belief that situations and unique circumstances determine how ideas and practices should be applied. It brings to fore what really is the priority in this subject matter, values, rules, obligations or relationships.

Cultures which have high universalism will only notice one certainty or reality and therefore will focus on formal laws and rules. Customer service behaviours are characterized by realistic, proficient attitudes with a "get down to business" approach and standards. Trompenaars study established that there was high universalism in countries like the United States, Canada, UK and Scandinavian countries.

Cultures which have high particularism perceive that certainty or reality are considerably subjective and therefore place a greater emphasis on relationships. For example, during business meetings in a particularistic environment, it is essential to get acquainted and friendly to the people one is doing business with. A person from a universalist culture who finds himself in this kind of environment would be shrewd, never to dismiss certain things which he might consider to be irrelevancies such as simple small talks. Countries that have high particularism include Venezuela, Indonesia, China, South Korea, and some African countries.

4.2.2 Individualism vs. Communitarianism

Individualism refers to people considering themselves as individuals with the interest on personal growth and achievements, while communitarianism refers to people regarding themselves as a community or part of a group with the reliance on group goals and fulfilments. Trompenaars examination resulted in some interesting conclusions and suggested that the rate at which cultures may change is more frequent than people may realize. For instance, in Trompenaars research, a country like the United States with high individualism as well as Mexico are found to be individualistic. This is because in Mexico, the shift from a formerly communitarian culture may possibly be explained with its membership in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and involvement in the global economy.

This result contrasts with Hofstede's earlier study, which found some of these

countries to be collectivist and practice communitarianism. This indicates the dynamism and complexity of culture.

4.2.3 Neutral vs. Emotional

A neutral culture is a culture which endorses the control of emotions and that it is incorrect to express one's feelings openly whereas an emotional culture is a culture in which emotions are displayed openly, reactions are usually expressed almost immediately and naturally. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) listed the Japanese and British cultures as such. In emotional cultures, people habitually smile, chat loudly when excited, and greet one another enthusiastically. Imperatively, customer service pattern in this culture should be ready for potentially vibrant, warm and energetic greetings as observed in countries such as Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Mexico. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012).

4.2.4 Specific vs. Diffuse

A specific culture is one in which people have a large public space which they openly and readily share with others and a small private space which they safeguard closely and share basically with close friends and associates. In a diffuse culture, the public space and private space are similar in size, hence individuals guard their public space cautiously for the reason that entry into public space allows access into private space simultaneously. To a considerable extent therefore, culture has its way of keeping their personal and public lives in their separate perspective.

Luthans, F., & Hodgetts, R.M. (1991) used the specific and diffuse cultural dimensions that exist in the United States and Germany to explain that a U.S. professor, such as Robert Smith, PhD, would be called 'Doctor Smith' within the university environment. However, in another different setting such as in a grocery store or golfing venue, he could simply be called Bob indicating a strong separation between work and private life. On the other hand, in Germany, a high diffuse country where a great deal of formality is required, a person's public life and pri-

vate life are closely linked and similar, though intensely protected. In this sense, Doktor Schmidt would be referred to as Doktor Schmidt everywhere.

4.2.5 Achievement vs. Ascription

Depending on how well individuals carry out their functions, they are correspondingly placed on a status in an achievement culture. Invariably, a person has to demonstrate in all certainty that he is worthy to receive that status. However, in an ascription culture, prominence is based on who or what a person is. Prominence can be linked to gender, age, wealth, connections or even family name. When rendering customer service in an ascription culture it is vital to accord respect to older people and also refer to them by their formal titles.

4.2.5 Sequential vs. Synchronic

In a sequential setting, only one thing is done at a time, in other words, finish one task before another one is started. Emphasis is placed on certain orderliness and punctuality. Time is regarded mostly as a rigid guideline and activities are tailored and placed along that line in sequential orderliness, hence, time requires to be efficiently utilised. Also, the culture does not value unnecessary interruptions. Synchronic cultures, however, prefer to do several things at once and contrary to the former, time is flexible and a variety of activities can take place at the same point in time. Individuals from synchronic cultures always have objectives and their targets in mind but there is no fastidious or critical path to attain the goals. As far as the culture allows and accepts the numerous ways to achieve the goals, an individual can switch between activities as deemed necessary. By all means, the perception of time is heavily influenced by culture since time is an idea, not an object, and therefore subjective and open to interpretation (Dingemans A. 2011).

4.2.6 Internal vs. External control

This explains how people relate to their environment. In other words, do they control their environment or are they controlled by it? People with the internal culture have the opinion that they can control nature or their environment in order to achieve their set goals. Whereas, people of the external culture believe that nature,

or their environment, controls them. It is important that they must work with their environment to realize their goals. In every ramification, they pay attention to their actions on others, and as much as possible avoid conflict with others.

5 RELEVANCE OF CULTURE TO PUBLIC SERVICE

5.1 The Public Organization

Okpata (2004:67) explained that the word organization conveyed three concepts: an entity, a group or a process. Organization as an entity comprise of government ministries, churches, schools and civil service organizations. The people have specific aims and objectives to achieve and they all have some type of structures that set the limits of and define the performance of the people. This is comparable to the voluntary sector, in the sense that organizations in the public sector do not seek to generate a profit. Funding for public services are generally raised via various means such as taxes, fees, and through financial transfers from other levels of government and they are chosen by the government.

For the purpose of this thesis, focus is on the people in government organizations or institutions who have the responsibility of rendering customer service to clients. They include the employees, trainees or the management of the organization. Government-owned organizations are also referred to as the public sectors have employees who work for them. These people in the public sector ensure that the government-provided services offered are duly rendered. The beneficiary of the services is the general public. Also, the existence of this sector depends on these customers (Kotler et al. 2001), the general public.

These include various governmental services apart from the simple utilities which are obligatory such as the military, public education, police, infrastructure, electricity, emergency services, postal services, health care and public transportation. Clients growing expectation of better standard of customer service in this sector has necessitated the need to progressively improve the approach used in the delivery of service. The public sector is one the lowest performing sectors with listening to customer insights being identified as a key area to focus on for improvement. This is especially important when you consider that 28% of customers who experience a problem when dealing with a public sector organisation, do not report it as a complaint, primarily due to feeling that it would not make any difference (Rautenbach, 2014).

5.2 Impact of Culture on Public Organizations Service

Cultural diversity is a daily realism for the current customer service representatives. A best-intentioned employee can possibly create a poor impression with clients or customers from a different part of the world due to cultural differences which are unconsciously not known to the employee. On that basis, behaviours can be interpreted based on tradition, values and assumptions.

As pinpointed above, since the function of the public service is to maximize the welfare of the general public as a collective group by its regulations, extensive policies and procedures that are in set to guarantee that people are treated equally and beneficially under the law. In other words, the authorities endeavour to shift its goals to modifying and looking at all customers in order to serve them well. It is really possible that the level of customer service can degrade progressively without been noticed (Khong and Mahendiran, 2006). In such situations, customer perceptions are often necessary and perhaps surveyed. For the reason that the government safeguards the interests of everyone, to a certain extent, the interactions between government and customers reasonably differ. Rautenbach (2014) highlighted that leaders in the public sector are of the opinion that improved customer service is a central strategic objective which in turn should yield an increasing outcome in customer satisfaction. Good customer service is as well important in public organizations because customers or clients could come in from anywhere in the world bringing along their local cultures with them. Thus, helping service reps to understand customers from around the world is a target in these organizations.

6 COMPARING THE NIGERIAN AND FINNISH CULTURE

6.1 An Overview of the Nigerian Culture in relation to Customer Service

Nigeria is often referred to as "the Land of Many People" with a population of 186 million (World Bank, 2016) and culture with over 500 different ethnic groups who in turn have their own languages and heritage. This makes Nigeria a country of rich ethnic diversity. The country comprises 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory with Abuja as the capital. The major groups include the Hausa in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest and the Igbo (or Ibo) in the southeast. The languages of these three groups can therefore be used in government organizations alongside the official language, English.

Public organizations comprise of institutions aimed at making and implementing decisions with regards to interests of various kinds including the provision of goods and services to citizens based on 'realization and representation of public interests and its possession of unique public qualities compared to business management' (Hague,2001). In the provision of goods and services to citizens and pursuit of public interest, making of decisions and its implementation is vital. Nigeria is an established hierarchical cultural society. Age, class and position earn and often times demand for esteem and respect. Age is supposedly presumed to indicate wisdom, thus older persons are accorded respect. The oldest individual in a crowd is undoubtedly honoured and highly regarded. They are greeted and served first especially when there is a social gathering. In turn the oldest individual or individuals are liable and accountable to what happens in the assembly, consequently taking it up as a duty to make the right decisions that would benefit the group wholly.

However, customer service, according to Ekeke (2009:104) is a total package *involving all functional units* in an organization in the quest to ensure that *efficiency* is achieved in creating time and place utility. In the public sector especially, Danbatta (2017) highlighted that the public sector organizations have been experiencing increasing pressure in the last few decades to deliver quality services and im-

prove efficiencies. Transforming the public service to meet the expectations of the citizens and customers, improvement and responsiveness in service delivery are very important. Actually, service quality practices in many public sector organizations are slow and additionally aggravated by difficulties in measuring outcomes, increased critical observation from the public and media, a lack of empowerment and a requirement for decisions to be based on existing law. Little wonder why the public sector have repeatedly been perceived to slight delays in service delivery.

Danbatta (2017) highlighted the following four major problems negating the quality of service delivery in the Public Sector:

- i. Lack of monitoring of outcomes and failure to hold anyone to account for specific service delivery.
- ii. Shortages of service capacity and inaccessibility for most citizens and customers.
- iii. Poor service quality and customer care.
- iv. Lack of support services such as finance, technology, procurement and personnel that are required for quality service delivery.

Nnamchi (2012) identified two problems in the quality of service delivery:

Attitude: Employees in the customer service section habitually exhibit indifferent attitude to customers' complaints. They do so with the perception that the work belongs to the government and therefore, it belongs to nobody in particular.

Image protection: In rendering customer services, employees feel they have an obligation to be loyal and devoted; as such they always try to obscure or protect the image of the public organization.

6.2 The Overview of the Finnish Culture in relation to Customer Service

Finland is one of the largest countries in Europe. According to Statistics Finland (2017), Finland has a population of over 5.5 million inhabitants and the capital is

Helsinki. Finland is a Nordic country, located in northern Europe with Sweden, Russia and Norway as its neighboring countries.

Finland is a country where substantial credence is attached to the spoken word; it is reasonable to say that Finns have a unique disposition to words and speech. For this reason, words are chosen cautiously and with much value which is reflected in the tendency to say little and avoid 'unnecessary' small talk. Finns consider verbal agreements and promises binding. According to Professor Olli Alho (2010), Finns are supposedly better at listening than at talking, and it is considered impolite to intermittently interrupt another speaker. When there are breaks or silence in the conversation, the silence is regarded as part of the conversation and message.

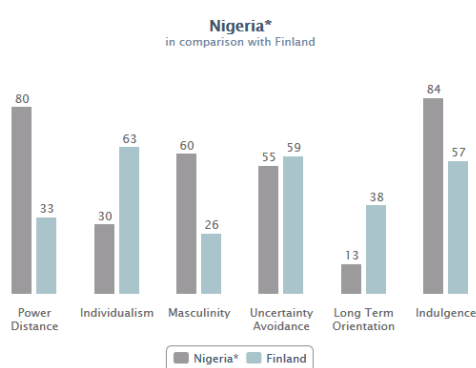
Equality between the sexes is profound and it is evident with the presence of women in different fields in society. Finns are cognizant and proud of any official titles they may have although it is uncommon to hear them use titles when introducing themselves. Nevertheless, Finns would prefer to be addressed by their title in professional and official settings, especially if the titles are known to the speaker. On the other hand, the use of first names is common and it feels appropriate to Finns. They are known to take pride in their history and culture, including technological and athletic achievements. They value trust and honesty. In fact, punctuality is related to trust and reliability.

Also, Yle (2015) reported that customer service is unusually thought of as one of Finland's leading merits, but increasing anxiety to gain marketplace share has led to implementing a progressively more customer-oriented approach in transacting business. Rannisto from the University of Tampere highlighted that the current service culture has traditionally focused on expertise and production and that both the public and private sector have developed specific service behavior, complete with authoritative habits that are hard to shed. Attitudes such as tossing away certain details from the customer while remaining deaf to the needs of the customer, even refusing to consider the client's views on the subject were to be avoided. Customer service based on knowledge of the customer service agent can miss the mark when it enforces an undesired need on the customer rather than when the

services provided serve an ever-increasing audience with more individual needs on the priority. According to Rannisto, in most cases, customer service is better in the private sector basically because these companies seek more profit and as such, they serve the customers better to ensure repeat business. However, changes are becoming apparent in Finland's public sector as well. Efforts are geared towards ensuring more training in personal interaction. Additionally, service experts have pinpointed that communication skills is one of the most essential tools that are basically required for as well as the foundation of good customer service. Being friendly, polite and showing a real interest in the clients matters a lot even when the time is limited. Remaining calm and creating an unhurried atmosphere leaves a positive impression in the minds of clients.

6.3 Comparing both cultures

Delivering quality service in all sectors is counted as a fundamental strategy. Evidence shows strong links between service, trust and confidence that customers have in these public organizations in most countries. (Danbatta, 2017). Therefore, the cultural attitude of a society can have an impact on quality service delivery. Figure 5 below compares both countries under the lens of Hofstede cultural dimensions.



(Source <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/finland/>)

Figure 5. Nigeria in comparison with Finland

According to Figure 5, Nigeria is a high power distance country (80) where people understand and accept their place in the hierarchy and the culture has grown with that uneven perception of power distribution. Finland has a lower score (33) indicating the Finnish style of independence and power decentralization. Individualism exists more in Finland (63) where the bond that exists among individuals in a community is loose and, thus the community exists based on individual's self-image unlike in Nigeria (30) where individuals bond strongly in a community thereby living as a collective unit. Masculinity in Nigeria (60) is evident as roles are determined either by competition or based on gender, Finland (26) is a low masculinity country where roles are equally or cooperatively handled by both genders. Nigeria has an uncertainty avoidance level of 55 while Finland is 59. Both countries degree of preference for an uncertain situation over a structured situation is close. However, Finland shows a higher index where the people avoid unclear situations that would make them predictable. In addition, time is money, accuracy and punctuality are favored. Both countries have a relatively low score in uncertainty avoidance. However, Finland's long term orientation index (38) classifies the Finnish culture as normative. Inhabitants in such societies have a profound responsibility of establishing the absolute truth. People in Finland exhibit a relative inclination to save for the future and are therefore, willing to make adjustments whenever necessary while Nigeria long term orientation index (13) denotes its emotional involvement to the past and value on tradition, norms and maintaining them. With a high mark of 84, the culture of Nigeria is that of indulgence. Based on the way they were raised, people display willingness to recognize their desires with a view of enjoying life and having fun. They hold a positive attitude and they place a higher degree of importance on leisure time. Finland, on the other hand, has a relatively high score of 57, an intermediate score which does not show a clear preference for indulgence or restraint when compared to Nigeria.

7 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

7.1 Research Method

This research is directed at studying how the Nigerian culture and the Finnish culture influence the way customer service is perceived by comparing the two of them. This is done with a view to highlighting the positive attitudes or acts that can be borrowed from each country and simultaneously whisking out the negative ones. This chapter explains the various steps carried out in conducting the study as well as describing the research methods used.

Onodugo et al (2010) explain that the coverage of a geographical region during a research work should be the central focus in a researcher's area of study. Therefore, this study covers five public organizations with the focus on organizations in three geo-political zones in Nigeria: the North Central, North West and the South West and a few organizations in Finland. The project will be achieved with the use of various concepts such as theories, sample size and techniques, sources of data, instruments of data collection for precision and reliable conclusion, data presentation and the adequate analysis of the techniques used.

The data for this study will be collected using both the quantitative and the qualitative research methods which include the use of a questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaire is designed in such a way that it will yield efficient results and it is assessed to be suitable for the research by the thesis supervisor before its distribution. The questions are clear, yet detailed, incorporating most of the theories. It includes multiple choice answers from which the respondents can choose from. Nonetheless, it incorporates relevant materials that will provide answers to the research questions. Administering the questionnaire will be via email for correspondents in Nigeria while the interviews will be by direct contact with the interviewees. Five contact persons in the various five organizations will be representing the researcher and the correspondents in Nigeria, thereby providing the link to the questionnaire distribution, concrete information and data collection. Each of the five correspondents in Nigeria will be encouraged to share the ques-

tionnaire to twenty colleagues or staff in the public sector making it a total of one hundred questionnaires administered.

The population or respondents of this research is made up of the staff and management of five public organizations in Nigeria and a few of the staff and management of three public organizations in Finland. A total of sixty-two respondents in Nigeria and ten interviewees in Finland were collected.

Interviews are conducted with the main objectives in mind as the questionnaire. The theories and dimensions serve as guides to conduct and transcribe the interviews. Ten questions that are relevant to the survey will be used centering on understanding the perception of the respondents' vis-à-vis the quantitative survey. The respondents are encouraged to express their thoughts freely as the answers are anonymous. Allowing for flexibility makes the communication and atmosphere between the interviewer and the interviewee relaxed (Mark et al, 2009). To make the analysis easier, the interviews will be recorded but with the permission from the respondent.

7.2 Analysis and Discussion of Results

The data collected from the respondents who answered the questionnaire will be presented in form of tables and charts with percentages. 100 copies of questionnaire were distributed to management, staff and customer service personnel in five government establishments. A total of 62 out of the 100 questionnaires distributed were answered and this represents a good response rate. In analyzing the data, 38 of the unanswered questionnaires were discarded. Using the SPSS software, the relevant data was presented in charts and in percentages and analyzed in comparison to the research questions and the aim of the work.

7.2.1 Gender of respondents

Gender distribution is presented in Figure 6.

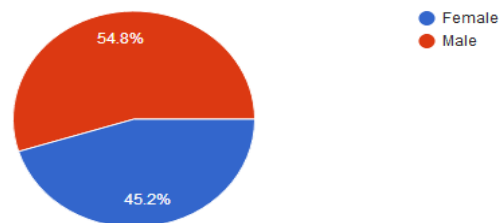


Figure 6. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Figure 6 above reveals that a total of 34 respondents (54.8%) were males while a total of 28 respondents (45.2%) were females. The interviewees were six males (60%) and four females (40%). Therefore, more males participated in the study than females.

7.2.2 Age group

The distribution of the respondents' age groups is presented in Figure 7.

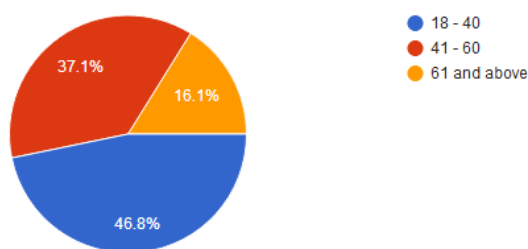


Figure 7. Age Distribution of Respondents

Figure 7 above indicates that more of the respondents who answered the questionnaire were between 18 to 40 years with a total of 29 (46.8%) and all interviewees (100%), next to those between 41 to 60 years who were 23 in number (37.1%) while ten respondents (16.1%) were between 61 years and above.

7.2.3 Perception of how much they care about service received

The respondents' perceptions of how much they care about the service they receive elsewhere is portrayed in Figure 8.

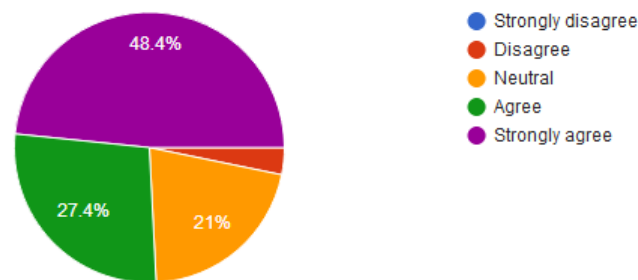


Figure 8. Perceptions about service received

The analysis indicates that 30 respondents (48.4 %) strongly agreed that they care much about the kind of service they receive anywhere they go, 17 respondents (27.4%) agreed, 13 (21%) of the respondents were indifferent about it while two respondents (3.2%) disagreed with no one strongly disagreeing. All the interviewees (100%) strongly agreed too. This signifies how much people care about the kind of service they receive anywhere they go.

7.2.4 Respondents attention level of their actions towards customers

The distribution of respondents' level of attention towards customers and their avoidance of conflicts with them is depicted in Figure 9.

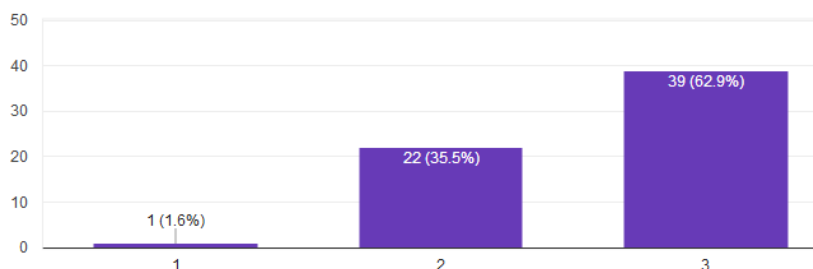


Figure 9. Respondents' attention level of their actions

As presented in Figure 9 above, 39 respondents (62.9%) and eight interviewees (80%) confirmed that their level of attention towards customers and avoidance of conflicts with them is high while 35.5 percent (22 respondents) and two interviewees (20%) are indifferent on the issue and one respondent (1.6%) does not pay attention to this at all. This infers that a high level of attention is paid towards customers as service agents endeavor to avoid conflicts with them.

7.2.5 View of formalities and respect for their public and private lives

The classification of respondents' view of formalities and respect for their public and private lives is shown in Figure 10.

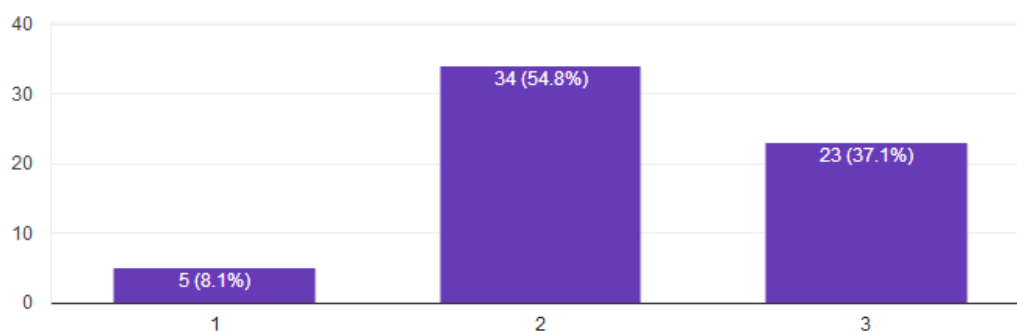


Figure 10. Respondents' view of formalities

As presented above, five respondents (8.1%) and seven interviewees (70%) would prefer not to be referred by their titles or formalities be observed all the time. 34 respondents (54.8%) did not make a decision about it while 23 respondents (37.1%) and three interviewees (30%) preferred that their public and private lives be respected, therefore, they should be called by their titles. This indicates that the majority are indifferent about formalities and their personal titles while the majority of the interviewees would prefer that formalities be seldom observed.

7.2.6 Perception of employee satisfaction in relation to good customer service

The distribution of respondents' perception of the effect of employee satisfaction towards good customer service is shown in Figure 11.

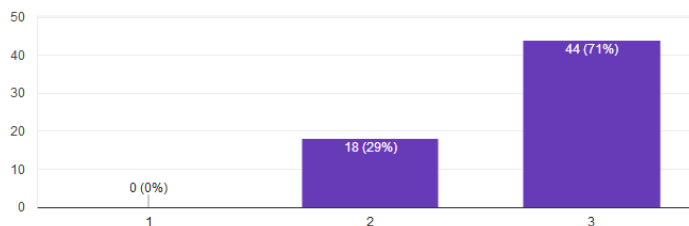


Figure 11. Effect of employee satisfaction on customer service

As illustrated in Figure 11 above, no respondent (0%) is of the opinion that employee satisfaction has no effect on good customer service, however, 18 respondents (29%) did not decide whether it has any effect while 44 (71%) and all interviewees (100%) confirmed the positive relationship between employee satisfaction and good customer service. This infers that employee satisfaction boosts good customer service.

7.2.7 Respondents' view about management dealing directly with customers

The opinions of respondents regarding top management personnels dealing directly with customers is shown in Figure 12.

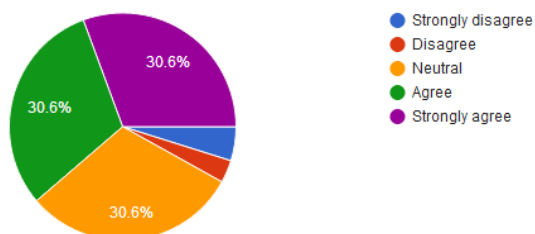


Figure 12. View on management dealing directly with customers

An equal number of respondents, 19 (30.6%) agreed, strongly agreed and were neutral about the question that top personnels in the management can as well deal directly with customers while three persons (4.8%) strongly disagreed and two persons (3.2%) disagreed. Seven interviewees (70%) agreed that members of management can, if only they want to while three (30%) did not decide. The implication is that management personnels can also deal directly with their custom-

ers and customer service issues might not just be left to the front desk service agents.

7.2.8 Perception on the most focused qualities

The distribution of respondents most focused quality in relation to their customers is depicted in Figure 13.

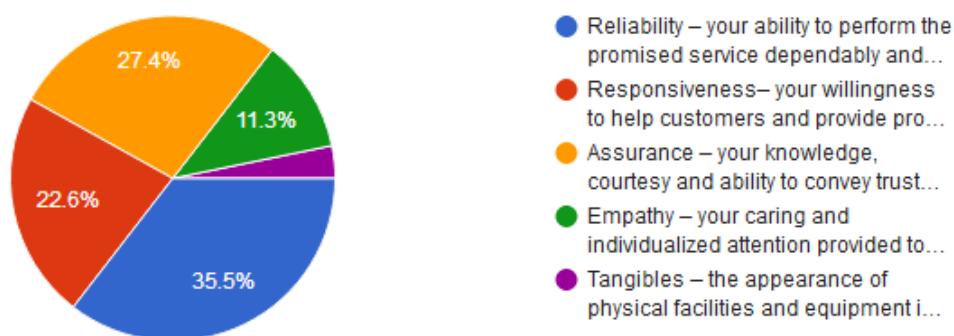


Figure 13 .*Respondents' most focused quality*

The Figure 13 above implies that 22 respondents (35.5%) and six interviewees (60%) focused mostly on reliability which is their ability to perform the promised service dependably and reliably, 17 respondents (27.4%) and one interviewee (10%) paid more attention to their knowledge, courtesy and ability to convey trust and confidence, 14 persons (22.6%) and three respondents (30%) focused on their willingness to help customers and provide prompt service, seven persons (11.3%) focused empathy which is their caring and individualized attention provided to the customer while two respondents (3.2%) concentrated on the organizations tangibles, the appearance of physical facilities and equipment in their offices. The interpretation is that the ability to perform the promised service dependably and reliably is a quality of utmost attentiveness.

7.2.9 Respondents' view of environment and attitude

The opinions of respondents regarding the environments influence on their attitudes is shown in Figure 14 below.

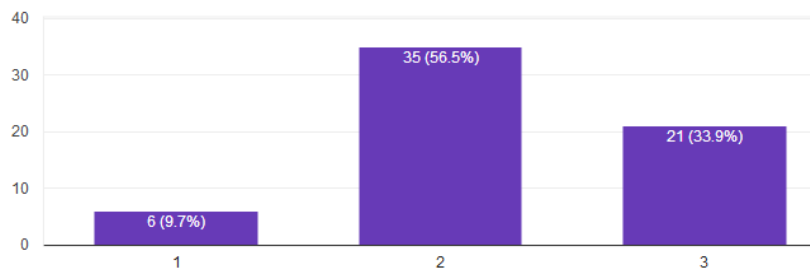


Figure 14. View on the environments control of their attitude

The data in Figure 14 clearly shows that the environment controls the attitude of 21 respondents (33.9%) and four interviewees (40%) while the attitude of six respondents (9.7%) is not controlled by the environment. 35 respondents (56.5%) and six interviewees (60%) were indifferent on the issue. This implies that the control of one's attitude by the external environment is objective.

7.2.10 Respondents' notion on protocols

Those who follow protocols such that customers who arrive first are attended to first, are grouped in Figure 15.

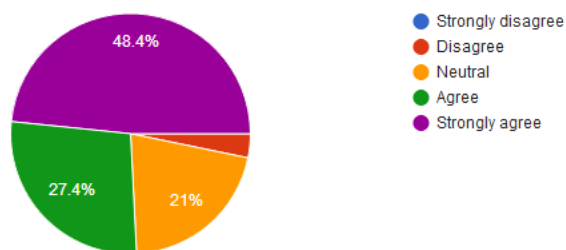


Figure 15. Respondents' notion on protocols

As revealed from Figure 15, 30 respondents (48.4%), 17 respondents (27.4%) and ten interviewees (100%) strongly agreed and agreed respectively that protocols should be followed and those who come first should be served first, 21 percent of the respondents (13) did not decide on the matter while two respondents (3.2%) disagreed totally. This denotes that protocols ought to be followed at any given time irrespective of who is involved.

7.2.11 Respondents' view on universally functional service standards

The perception of respondents on service standards being functional and practiced everywhere without any modification is shown in Figure 16.

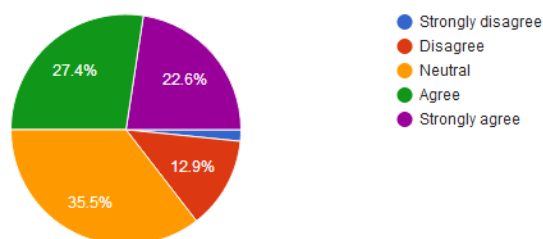


Figure 16. Respondents' view on universal service standards

Analysis of Figure 16 shows that 22 persons (35.5%) did not outrightly decide on the matter, 17 respondents (27.4%) agreed that service should be functional everywhere, 14 respondents (22.6%) strongly agreed to it, eight respondents (12.9%) disagreed while one person (1.6%) strongly disagreed. Thus, the one-size-fit-all approach to service standards is irresolute for the respondents while all interviewees (100%) agreed to the universal functional approach.

7.2.12 Perceptions about partial treatment of customers

The respondents are grouped according to whether they subconsciously treat customers based on their fame and achievements as illustrated in Figure 17.

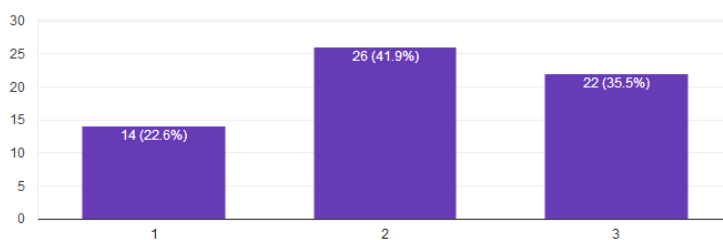


Figure 17. Subconscious treatment of customers according to their achievements

As shown in Figure 17 above, 14 persons (22.6%) and ten interviewees (100%) declined treating customers in proportion to their fame and achievements, 26 respondents (41.9%) were indecisive about it while 22 persons (35.5%) revealed

that they subconsciously consider the fame, personal growth and achievements of their customers during service. This implies that customer treatment in relation to their achievements is an uncertain matter for the respondents while all interviewees absolutely declined.

7.2.13 Perceptions about reporting good or horrible service

The opinions of respondents regarding the report of a good or horrible service is presented in Figure 18.

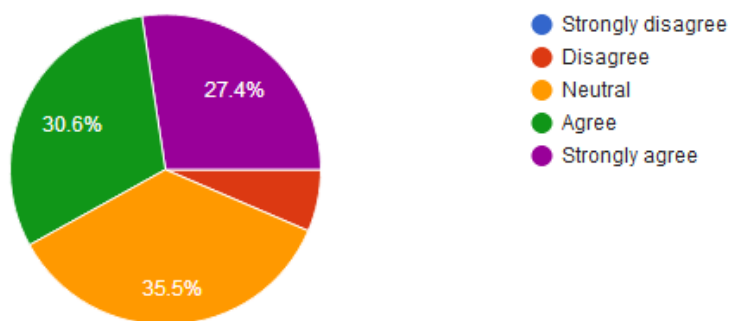


Figure 18. Perceptions about reporting good or horrible service

22 respondents (35.5%) did not decide whether good or horrible services should be reported or published publicly, 19 persons (30.6%) agreed, 17 persons (27.4%) and ten interviewees (100%) strongly agreed while four persons (6.5%) disagreed. The interpretation is that reporting or publicly publishing good or horrible services is debatable for the survey and strongly agreed in the interview.

7.2.14 Attribution of fantastic or terrible service to the organization more than local culture

The distribution of the respondents' perception as to whether a fantastic or horrible service should be attributed to the organizational culture is described in Figure 19.

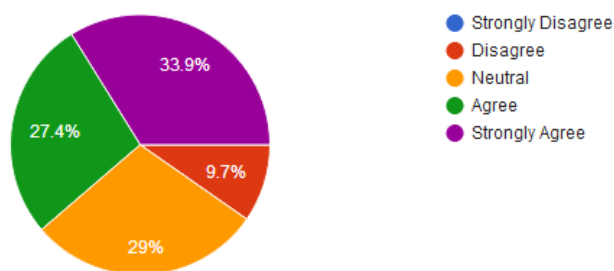


Figure 19. The attribution of good or bad service to organization or local culture

As presented in Figure 19, 21 respondents (33.9%) and ten interviewees (100%) strongly agreed and 17 persons (27.4%) agreed that the type of service rendered to customers should be attributed to the organizational culture more than local culture, 18 respondents (29%) did not make a decision while six persons (9.7%) disagreed with the statement. This means that a good or horrible service is the responsibility of the organizational culture more than the local culture.

7.2.15 Service duties or roles should be based on gender

The views of the respondents on certain service roles being handled based on gender is differentiated in Figure 20.

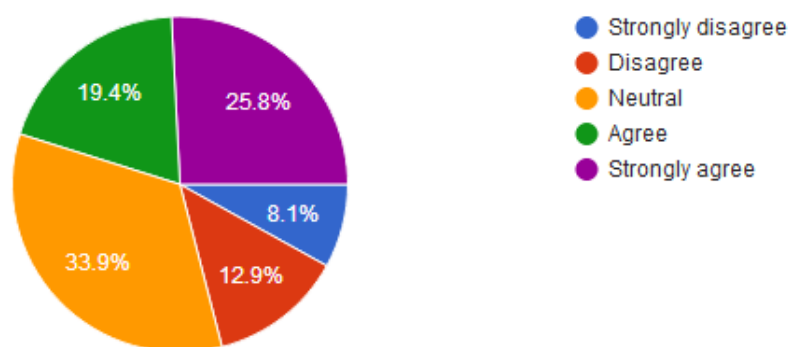


Figure 20. Respondents view on service duties based on gender

The chart showed that 16 respondents (25.8%) and 12 persons (19.4%) strongly agreed and agreed that certain service roles should be distributed based on gender, eight persons (12.9%), five respondents (8.1%) and ten interviewees (100%)

strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. However, 21 respondents (33.9%) were indifferent. Thus, whether service duties should be apportioned based on gender is uncertain in the survey but absolutely certain for the interviewees.

7.2.16 Respondents view of face-to-face interactions to the use of technology

The distribution of the various views on the communication preference is shown in Figure 21 below.

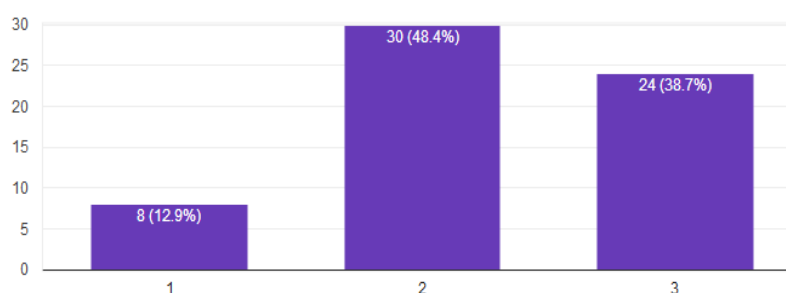


Figure 21. View of face-to-face interactions compared to technology

The analysis discloses that eight respondents (12.8%) and eight interviewees (80%) have a preference for the use of technology, that is, communicating via telephones or emails with their customers, while 30 respondents (48.4%) had a neutral view about their preference and 24 persons (38.7%) and two interviewees (20%) preferred a face-to-face interaction with customers. This means that the preference on the method of communication with customers is negotiable in the survey while use of technology is preferred for the interviewees.

7.2.17 Factors that influence respondents behavior with customers

Respondents are grouped based on the factors that would most likely influence their behavior with customers as seen in the Figure 22.

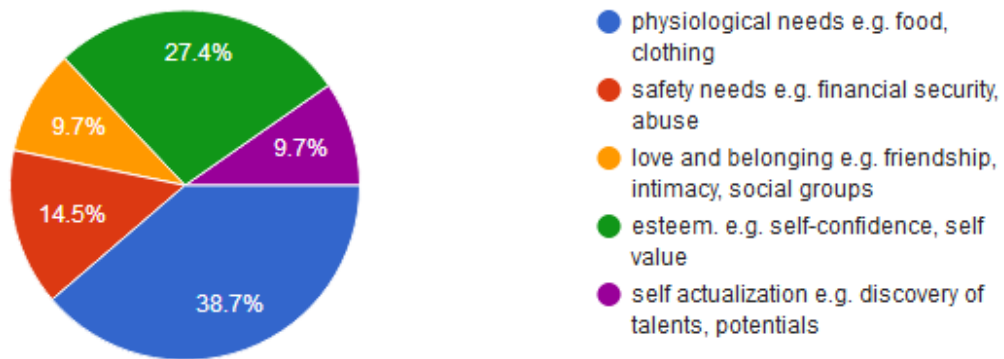


Figure 22. Factors that influence respondents' behavior

The data above shows that physiological needs such as food and clothing influences 24 persons (38.7%) and five interviewees (50%), 17 persons (27.4%) are mostly influence by self esteem and self confidence, nine respondents (14.5%) and two participants (20%) are mostly influenced by safety needs such as financial security and abuse. Love, belonging as well as self actualizations mostly influenced equal number of persons, six (9.7%) and three participants (30%). This means that the physiological needs, when satisfied, most likely influence behaviors.

7.2.18 Respondents' view of handling customer issues

The willingness and swift step taken by respondents regarding the handling of customer issues is shown in Figure 23.

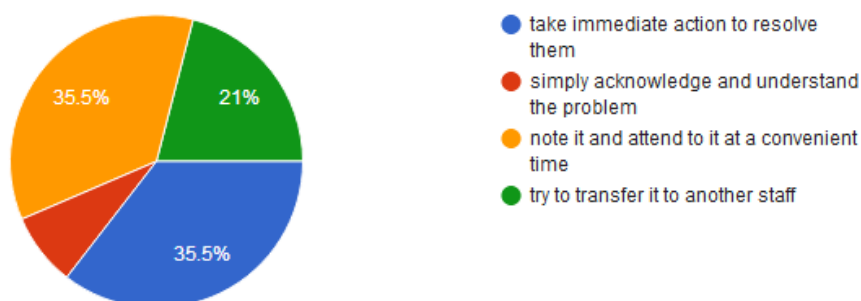


Figure 23. How swift respondents handle customer issues

It was noticed from Figure 23 above that equal number of respondents, 22 (35.5%) and ten interviewees (100%) would take immediate action to resolve customer issues while the other group would note what the customer problems are and attend to them at a convenient time. 13 respondents (21%) would try to transfer it to another staff and five persons (8.1%) would simply acknowledge and understand the problem. This implies that immediate actions are taken to resolve customer issues and at times they are noted and are thereafter attended to at a convenient time in the survey but are immediately taken care of by the interviewees.

7.2.19 Respondents' attitude and use of time

The distribution of the respondents based on the opinions on how time is utilized in relation to their service duties is shown in Figure 24.

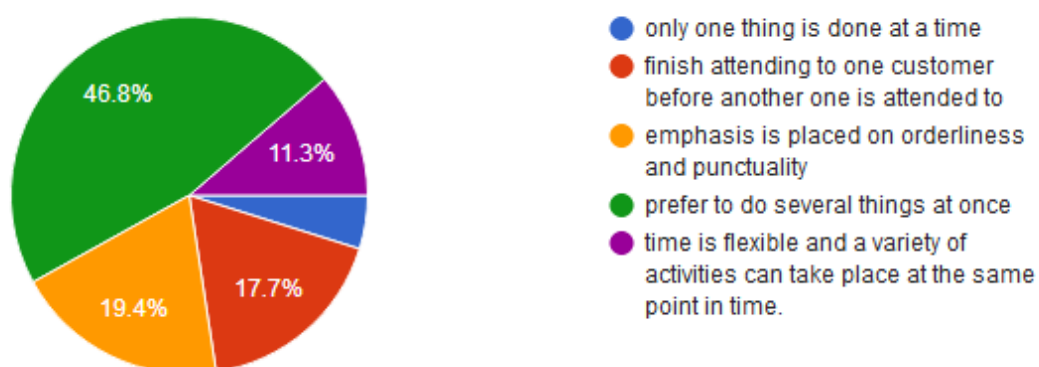


Figure 24. Respondents' concept and use of time

Figure 24 discloses that 29 persons (46.8%) prefer to do several things at once with their time, 12 respondents (19.4%) place emphasis on orderliness and punctuality, 11 persons (17.7%) would finish attending to one customer before another one is attended to, seven persons (11.3%) are of the opinion that time is flexible and a variety of activities can take place at the same time while three persons (4.8%) and ten interviewees (100%) do only one thing at a time. This interprets the concept of time and that several things are preferably done at once as in the survey and only one thing at a time for the interviewees.

7.2.20 Respondents' view on commitment to customer needs

The different opinions of the respondents based on their focus and commitment to the expressed needs of the customer base more than the local culture is seen in Figure 25.

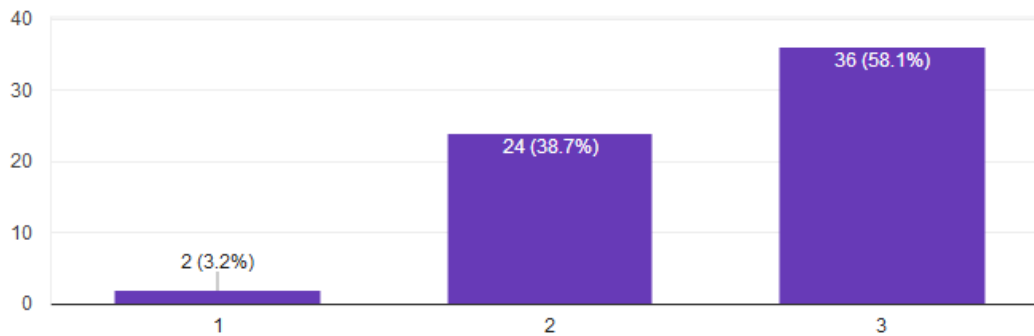


Figure 25. View on commitment to customer needs

According to Figure 25 above, two persons (3.2%) focus more on the local culture than the expressed needs of the customer base, 24 respondents (38.7%) did not decide on which they are more focused on while 36 persons (58.1%) and ten interviewees (100%), to an extent possible, are focused on and more committed to the needs of the customer. This shows that the needs of the customer base are more focused on in the organization.

7.2.21 Respondents' willingness to admit delay or unattainable customer demands

Respondents' opinion on their reluctance to inform clients that their requirements and demands cannot be met is described in Figure 26.

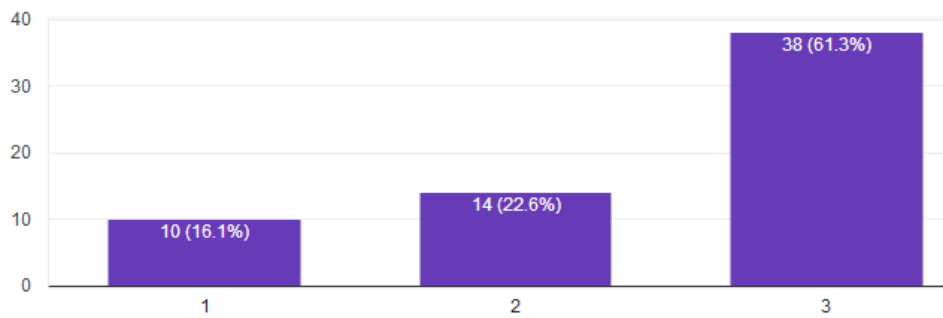


Figure 26. Willingness to admit unattained customer demands

As indicated in Figure 26 above, ten persons (16.1%) and ten interviewees (100%) are not reluctant to admit to their customers that their demands cannot be met, 14 respondents (22.6%) were indifferent as to whether they are willing or reluctant to inform their clients of the unattainable needs while 38 persons (61.3%) agreed that they are reluctant. This indicates the degree of reluctance to which admitting to clients that their requirements cannot be met is in the survey while there is no reluctance as for the interviewees.

7.2.22 Respondents' sensitivity to class and position

The arrangement of respondents according to their sensitivity to class and position is displayed in Figure 27.

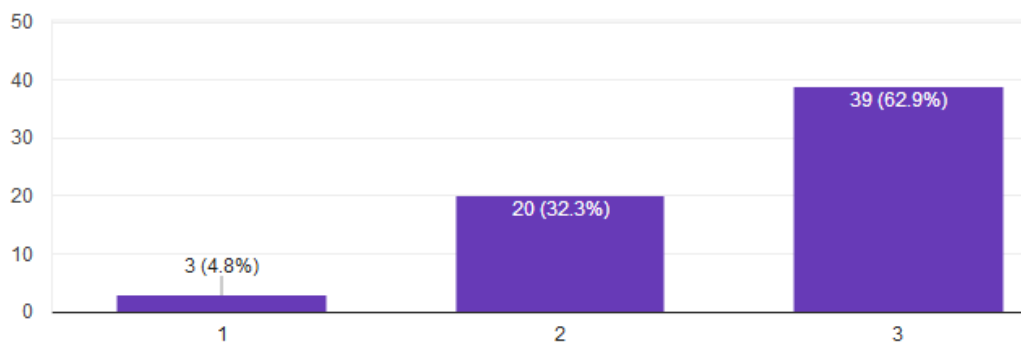


Figure 27. Respondents' sensitivity to class and position

The analysis of the diagram above is that three persons (4.8%) and ten interviewees (100%) do not perceive class and position as being sensitive to them, 20 respondents (32.3%) did not decide if both were sensitive to them and 39 persons

(62.9%) considered class and positive to be sensitive to them. It is deducible that class and positions are sensitive matters in the survey while it is not in the interviews.

7.2.23 Necessity of small talk in customer service when necessary

The grouping of respondents according to their opinions on small talks and pleasantries is presented below in Figure 28.

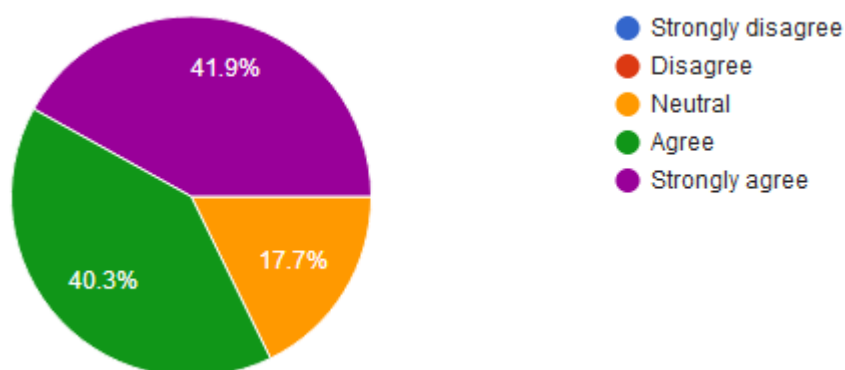


Figure 28. Respondents' view of small talks

As portrayed in Figure 28 above, 26 respondents (41.9%) strongly agreed that small talks and pleasantries are necessary in customer service whenever appropriate, 25 persons (40.3%) and two interviewees (20%) agreed as well while 11 persons (17.7%) were indifferent. Eight interviewees (80%) disagreed. The implication is that small talk is necessary in customer service whenever appropriate as indicated in the survey.

7.2.24 Respondents' view on effect of local culture and behavior

The opinions of respondents as to whether their local culture affects their perception of customer service is shown in Figure 29.

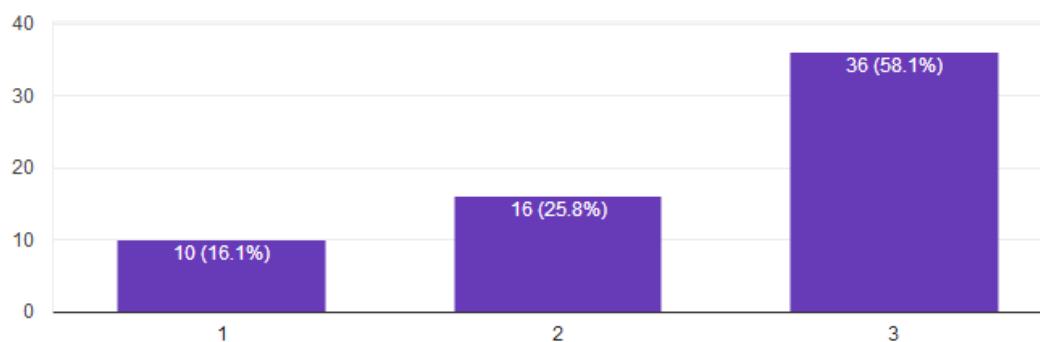


Figure 29. Respondents' view on local culture and perceived customer service

The data above reveals that local culture does not affect the behavior and the way ten persons (16.1%) and four interviewees (40%) perceive customer service, 16 respondents (25.8%) did not take a decision while 36 persons (58.1%) and six interviewees (60%) admitted to the effect of their local culture to their behavior and how they perceive customer service. This shows the effect of local culture on the perception of customer service.

7.3 Summary of Findings

In line with the research questions, every country has its own cultural background, patterns of thinking and standards of acting and these cultural differences influence the way customer service is perceived. The highlight of this paper has been presented by studying some of the cultural similarities and differences between Nigeria and Finland.

That people care about the kind of service they receive is certain. This inferred that a high level of attention is paid towards customer service. However, an indifferent attitude is observed in the Nigerian culture about formalities and personal titles while the Finnish culture preferred that formality is seldom observed and personal titles are not necessary. In both countries the management can handle customer related issues as well was also highlighted.

The one-size-fit-all approach to service standards is irresolute in the Nigerian culture while the Finnish culture agreed to the universal functional approach. Invariably, the perception of customer treatment in relation to their achievements is dif-

ferent in both cultures. Reporting or publicly publishing good or horrible services is indecisive in Nigeria while it is strongly allowed in the Finnish culture. More so, whether service duties should be apportioned based on gender is uncertain in the Nigerian culture but absolutely certain of gender equality in Finland. The concept of time differs in the sense that several things are preferably done at once in the Nigerian culture and only one thing at a time is preferred in Finland. There is a degree of reluctance to admitting to clients that their requirements cannot be met in the Nigerian culture while Finland is noted for its straightforward attitude. It is deducible that class and positions are sensitive matters in the Nigerian culture while they are not in Finland. Small talk is necessary in customer service whenever appropriate in Nigeria while it is not in Finland, although it is not totally disapproved of.

Notably, a seemingly slight change in the opinions of respondents in Nigeria on issues such as titles, apportioning certain duties based on gender and formalities was observed from the statistical data. Perhaps this could be attributed to the age group of the respondents as their perceptions tend to adjust over time.

7.4 Reliability and Validity of the Research

A research is accurate when it is reliable and valid. Thanasegaran (2009) defined reliability as the absence of error in a measurement and the presence of consistency in results. Hence, when an instrument continually produces the same outcome, that is, when respondents give similar answers to questions, then it is reliable. In the same vein, a valid measure fulfils its purpose. A questionnaire should not be unclear so that respondents would give valid responses.

For the purpose of increasing the validity of the questions, both the questionnaire and interview questions were tested on a few respondents to observe if they understood the questions in the same way that the researcher had intended. The test responses proved that the respondents understood the questions in the purposive line of reasoning and thereafter, the questionnaires were distributed and qualitative interviews commenced. Therefore, the study is presumably reliable and valid.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Suggestions for both Countries

This research sought to evaluate the influence of culture on the perception of customer service and it has given a short overview to provide an understanding on how cultural similarities and cultural differences are important factors that influence perception of customer service. Furthermore, it has necessitated the need to evaluate more fully which of the cultural issues have greater impact when it comes to the perception of customer service. Both countries keep improving in their customer service quality. Hence, the suggestion is that public organizations in Nigeria be more committed and loyal to serving customers, be proactive and willingly report poor service to appropriate quarters as Finland absorbs the spirit of competition amongst organizations and increase trainings in personal interaction.

8.2 Suggestions for future studies

Future studies can build on the limitations encountered during the research. The constraint is that few organizations in Nigeria and Finland were the basis for the study, thus accounting for a small sample size. Moreover, convenience sampling was used in Finland. However, the methodology and its interpretations lay a basis for future research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Gender
 - 1 Male
 - 2 Female

2. Age group
 - i 18-40
 - ii 41- 60
 - iii 61 and above

3. Cadre in the organization
 - i trainee
 - ii junior
 - iii senior
 - iv management

4. I care about the kind of service I receive wherever I go
 - 1 Strongly disagree
 - 2 Disagree
 - 3 Neutral
 - 4 Agree
 - 5 Strongly agree

5. I pay attention to my actions towards customers and as much as possible avoid conflict
 - 1No
 - 2Neutral
 - 3 Yes

6. I prefer a great deal of formality from customers with my public and private life being respected. E.g. should be called by my titles always

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

7. Employee satisfaction has a motivating effect on good customer service

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

8. In my opinion, top authorities like the management of corporations can deal directly with customers

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

9. Which do you focus more on?

1 Reliability – your ability to perform the promised service dependably and reliably

2 Responsiveness– your willingness to help customers and provide prompt service

3 Assurance – your knowledge, courtesy and ability to convey trust and confidence

4 Empathy – your caring and individualized attention provided to the customer

5 Tangibles – the appearance of physical facilities and equipment in your office

10. My environment controls my attitude sometimes

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

11. I prefer to follow protocols, where customers who arrive first get attended first, giving no sort of preferential treatment

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Neutral

4 Agree

5 Strongly agree

12. I think customer service standards can be functional and practiced everywhere without modification and the rules apply equally to everyone (one-size-fit-all approach)

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly agree

13. Sometimes, I subconsciously treat customers according to their personal growth, fame and achievements

- 1 No
- 2 Neutral
- 3 Yes

14. I prefer that a good or horrible service of an organization be reported or published publicly

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly agree

15. A fantastic or terrible service can be attributed to the organizational culture or training more than the local culture

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly agree

16. Certain roles or customer care duties should be handled based on gender

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree

5 Strongly agree

17. I prefer to avoid uncertain and unfamiliar situations in customer service

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

18. When communicating with or assisting clients, I prefer face-to-face interactions to the use of technology e.g. telephones, email

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

19. Customer service professionals must be bilingual

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Neutral

4 Agree

5 Strongly agree

20. With customer issues, I prefer to

i) take immediate action to resolve them

ii) simply acknowledge and understand the problem

iii) note it and attend to it at a convenient time

iv) try to transfer it to another staff

21. Trainings for employees and managers to help them be flexible and adaptable to other cultures are important

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

22. Choose which is most applicable to you when attending to customers

i) only one thing is done at a time

ii) finish attending to one customer before another one is attended to

iii) emphasis is placed on orderliness and punctuality

iv) prefer to do several things at once

23. I am focused on and more committed to the expressed needs of the customer base to a certain extent than the local culture.

- 1 No
- 2 Neutral
- 3 Yes

24. I am reluctant to inform clients that their requirements cannot be met.

- 1 No
- 2 Neutral
- 3 Yes

25. I prefer

- i) that messages or information be very clear, precise and explicit
- ii) everything must be written and well documented rather than oral agreements
- iii) oral agreements because they are well respected, trusted and taken with seriousness
- iv) to regularly improve the ways I deliver services

26. The perception of class and position is a very sensitive matter to me.

- 1 No
- 2 Neutral
- 3 Yes

27. Small talks and pleasantries are necessary in customer service whenever appropriate

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly agree

28. I control my emotions and do not express my feelings openly when dealing with customers

- 1 No
- 2 Neutral
- 3 Yes

29. Which need could mostly influence your behavior with customers

i. physiological needs e.g. food, clothing

ii. safety needs e.g. financial security, abuse

iii. love and belonging e.g. friendship, intimacy, social groups

iv. esteem. e.g. self-confidence, self value

v. self actualization e.g. discovery of talents, potentials

30. Overall, my local culture affects my behavior and the way I perceive customer service

1 No

2 Neutral

3 Yes

APPENDIX 2.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Does your local culture influence how you perceive customer service?
How and why?
2. What factors determine your attitude to clients? E.g. food, culture, weather, How and why?
3. Would you engage in 'small talk' and pleasantries when necessary in order to calm a client? Why?
4. Do you think top authorities such as the management of organizations can deal directly with customers? Why?
5. Do you follow protocols? Even when you think someone needs quick attention? When tipped too? Why?
6. Should good or horrible service be reported? To whom and why?
7. Do you attend to clients one at a time or many things simultaneously to save time?
8. Are you reluctant to inform clients that their requirements cannot be met? Even to a famous or influential client? Why?
9. Do you control your emotions and do not express feelings openly when dealing with customers?
10. What is your perception of titles, class and position in relation to customers?
11. Should certain service duties be based on gender? Which?
12. Should service personnels be bilingual? 100% committed to customers?