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Determinants of Customer Satisfaction with Order Fulfilment among Customers of Bespoke Fashion in Nigeria

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Abstract

Due to the changes in customers' preferences, fashion entrepreneurs are finding it difficult to satisfy the needs of the customers with the timing of delivery, the accuracy of the garments made contrary to expectation, the lac. In the fashion design context, customer is likely to be disappointed k of communication thereof and even a reactive effort to provide support for failed services. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine customer satisfaction with the order fulfilment process of female fashion entrepreneurs in Awka metropolis. The specific objectives are as follows to examine the effect of accuracy, timeliness of order fulfilment process, and order fulfilment communication and customer support service influence customer satisfaction with fashion entrepreneurs in Awka. The target population of this study are female consumers' who had custom made garments in the past 12 months in Awka. The sample determined was determined at 126 using Topman formula and the hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis via SPSS. The result showed that order accuracy has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction (β = .74, t = 5.02, p < 0.01); and the timeliness of order fulfilment process on customer satisfaction with fashion entrepreneurs in Awka (β = .45, t =3.76, p < .05). While order fulfilment process communication and customer support service were not significant. Based on the findings, it was recommended that fashion designers should prioritize accuracy in customer orders to ensure customer satisfaction and also estimate how much time it takes to make specific kinds of garments and communicate it as a strategy to win and keep customers.

Introduction

The cultural and creative industries (CCIs), which comprise sectors such as fashion and design, are important levers for sustainable development and essential tools to achieve the aspirations of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. They stimulate economic growth, provide decent employment opportunities, and play a vital role for the well-being of societies and individuals (*The African Fashion Sector*, 2023). Fashion entrepreneurs that specialize in bespoke garments are an essential part of this industry. However, for the fashion entrepreneurs to remain in business and continue to contribute to economic growth and sustainable development

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goals, it is important to ensure customers satisfaction, especially with the order fulfilment process.

Because customer satisfaction is of paramount importance for fashion design entrepreneurs to survive, these entrepreneurs' attempts to identify the variables that affect customer satisfaction and manage these variables to ensure and enhance continual customer loyalty, repurchases, and profitability of the business (Gocek and Beceren, 2012). Order fulfilment overlies the whole customer satisfaction process; it goes from receiving the order to producing the required order, cashing the invoice and after-sales support (Heydari et al., 2020). This involves understanding order timeliness, ensuring accuracy of order, communicating, and building relation with customer and providing support services.

Due to the changes in customers' preferences, fashion entrepreneurs are finding it difficult to satisfy the needs of the customers (Makopo, 2014). In the fashion design context, customer is likely to be disappointed with the timing of delivery, the accuracy of the garments made contrary to expectation, the lack of communication thereof and even a reactive effort to provide support for failed services. Regarding order accuracy, customers face the perennial problem of what was ordered versus what was delivered among fashion entrepreneurs. Oftentimes, when customers' places an order based on some styles, fits, colour, and other descriptions for fashion they expect, what the tailor eventually delivers sometimes falls short of expectation, causing dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction can lead to complaints to businesses, negative word-of-mouth, switching behaviour or even taking no action but remaining angry (Makopo, 2014). Also, and unfortunately too, tailors and fashion designers are notorious for disappointing customers. At times, when customers place order to make garments, it is often in anticipation for an event such as birthday, weddings, funeral, or other ceremonies. They expect to receive their garments days prior to these events; but fashion designers seldom disappoint customers by not meeting up the delivery time. These orders are usually delivered late, mismatching customers' expectations.

Furthermore, anecdotes suggest that there are instances of poor or no communication regarding following up demands. When customers bring their fabrics for some designs, they expect to receive the clothes based on their descriptions with the right fit and style. At least they expect regular update from their fashion designers on the progress and conformity to requirement. If fashion designers did not meet customers' expectation, support services to remedy product failures and defects are often lacking. When fashion made are with some defects or errors, there may be need for the fashion designer to mend the garment, adjust the fit, or some styling. But customers can only derive satisfaction in these instances when there is adequate customer support from the fashion designers. An absence of customer support and other related order fulfilment factors such as order accuracy, order timeliness, and communication will lead customer dissatisfaction. Also, to date, very limited attention has been given to the subject of custom-made apparel. The accuracy of the order, including the correct items, sizes, and colors, is vital to customer satisfaction. Previous studies (e.g., Srinivasan and Ratchford, 1991) have shown that order accuracy significantly affects customer satisfaction and repeat purchase intentions. Also, prompt delivery of orders is a crucial dimension. Customers value timely delivery, and any delays can lead to dissatisfaction. Research by Parasuraman et al. (1988) highlighted the importance of delivery timeliness in determining customer satisfaction. Effective communication throughout the order fulfilment process is essential. Customers expect updates and notifications regarding their orders. Research by Forrester Consulting (2019) stressed

the significance of proactive communication in improving customer satisfaction. Thus, fashion entrepreneurs need an understanding of the order fulfilment process to make the customer stay with them (Davis-Sramek, Stank & Mentzer, 2008; 2010).

Literature Review

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the art of making the customer happy by listening to them and responding to their needs (Zhang et al., 2003). Customer satisfaction involves managing the business with the prime intention of satisfying customer needs rather than the needs of management (Herrmann, Huber and Braunstein, 2000). It is delivering to customers more than they request and consistently exceeding their expectations (Matzler & Hinterhuber, 1998). Customer satisfaction achieves for businesses an increased level of customer loyalty, an increase in cash flow and a decrease in operating costs(Omoruyi & Mafini, 2016). It can define as the result of fulfilment of expectations (Sattari, 2007). While customer satisfaction results from fulfilment of expectations, customer dissatisfaction is the result of negatively unconfirmed expectations (Makopo, 2014). Dissatisfaction occurs when there are unfavourable or unpleasant experiences when using the product or service (Kotler & Armstrong 2016). In customised fashion, customers expect well-fitting, accurate constructed, and timely delivered fashion in which satisfaction would occur if the fashion received surpass or meet expectations, otherwise, customers are dissatisfied. Hence, customer satisfaction has become a unique selling point and a vital factor for a business plan of action in a competitive market attempting to retain customers (Eklof, Podkorytora & Malova 2018). Similarly, as stated by Hameed et al. (2020), customer satisfaction emerges as a critical element in running a successful fashion business.

Order Accuracy is a crucial factor for successful logistics customer service (Wahab et al., 2023). Customers rely on businesses to provide a trustworthy and reliable logistics service during the post-transaction stage (Oláh et al., 2017). This accuracy aspect is akin to reliability, an element in the SERVQUAL model, which refers to the retailer's ability to deliver the promised service in a dependable and precise manner (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Accurate delivery service means that the retailer ships the products based on the specified conditions. Additionally, retailers often ask customers to verify their product order information and shipping details before order confirmation (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020). Delivery accuracy entails delivering the exact product in the right quantity to the correct destination (Mentzer et al., 2001).

H1: order accuracy has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

Timeliness is a key driver of both dissatisfaction and satisfaction (Holloway & Beatty, 2008). Delivery time relates to the time elapsed between placing and receiving an order (Mentzer et al., 2001; Xing et al., 2010). In other words, it is the interval between the moment the order ships to the buyer and the moment when the buyer receives the order (Bezes, 2016). The delivery duration is considered timely when items are delivered within the promised date and time. The parcel's delivery time for a consecutive order not only has to be short, it also has to be consistent with the previous orders. The frequency of delayed order arrivals may increase the dissatisfaction of customers and reduces their confidence towards the retailer and in turn, reduces their repurchase intention (Shin et al., 2017). Thus, in distribution service quality, delivery timeliness is an essential predictor of customers' loyalty (Wu & Chang, 2020).

H2: Timeliness has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

Communication throughout the order fulfillment process is essential. Communication as the ability of a company to frequently disseminate information relating to order tracking, order status, back order status, order confirmation and product shortages among others (Ogunmola & Akeke, 2018). It is about creation of cordial relationship with supply chain partners. Customers expect updates and notifications regarding their orders. Research by Forrester Consulting (2019) stressed the significance of proactive communication in improving customer satisfaction. Communication can mitigate the degree of frustration caused by delayed deliveries (Sivapalan & Jebarajakirthy, 2017). Aspect of communication relates to the rate beneficial and proprietary information is communicated between all stakeholders in the supply chain – in this case, fashion designers and customers. It describes the accuracy, timeliness, adequacy, and credibility of information exchanged (Ogunmola & Akeke, 2018).

H3: communication has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

Customer Support Services is often broadly used to include many service aspects, such as sales clerk service in merchandise selection and support, problem solving, answers to frequently asked questions through e-mails and other channels, distributed desired information, credit and payment transaction completion, and logistic-related activities (such as the handling of returns)" (Cao et al., 2018). According to Holloway and Beatty (2008) customer support service are the helpful, responsive service that responds to customer inquiries and returns/complaints quickly during or after the sale.

H4: customer support services have a positive effect on customer satisfaction

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In fashion context, customers sometimes garments are made with defects or some variations that do not match customers' expectations. This variation can be with respect to size, some features of design, among others. In this situation, customers ask the fashion designer to correct the mistake. Thus, dealing with fashion designers about orders not received as expected (i.e., discrepancy handling, and agility) is still part of order fulfilment process. And when discrepancies need to be addressed timeliness is affected (Zheng et al., 2006)

Reibstein (2002) reported that post-purchase customer support service is one factor that that is a key to customer's satisfaction. More specifically, several activities are found to be crucial to a good e-commerce company and they ensure company's success in an e-business environment business. These activities include promptness in responding to customer's inquires in complaints, access to service, and perception of service quality received (Hsu, 2008; Liu et al., 2008). (Cao et al., 2018). Cao et al. (2018) found that sample in seems to confirm that customer service in online shopping

increases customer satisfaction online shoppers China, and also found that customer service is not associated with customer satisfaction for online shoppers in Taiwan.

Order fulfilment

Order fulfilment has been mostly discussed in the context of online retailing in the literature. In online retailing it involves the order pick, pack and shipping process and consists of availability(Jain et al., 2017). Koufteros et al. (2014) added billing accuracy and described it as an order fulfilment service quality construct. Order fulfilment focuses on delivering customer orders on time and accurately with goal of exceeding customer needs (Laurikainen, 2020). It involves all of the activities from the point of a customer's purchase decision until the product is delivered to the customer and he or she is fully satisfied with its quality and functionality.(Thirumalai & Sinha, 2005). It involves time-consuming and resource-intensive activities and processes for taking orders, packaging products, managing logistics, responding to customer inquiries, and handling after-sales-related issues. Order fulfilment, thus, includes order confirmation, delivery options, clear return policies, logistics services and after-sales service. Order fulfilments experience is a crucial service encounter that can either make or break a customer's future repeat purchases with the retailer (Rao et al., 2011).

Order fulfilment and the delivery of goods to consumers has been characterized as the "most expensive and critical operation for both the online and offline businesses of companies (Whang, 2001, p.54). As such, the need to coordinate the order fulfilment process for the firm which maximizes the level of return and reduces the amount of consumer dissatisfaction "could determine a business success" (Lee and Whang, 2001, p. 54). Davis-Sramek et al., (2010) used the service quality to operationalize order fulfilment quality into functional and technical dimensions. The functional dimension is a subjective assessment of how the service is delivered. It is an evaluation made during the service delivery and focuses on the relationally oriented aspect of the service experience. Therefore, functional OFS quality refers to the perceptions about how the service is delivered through the manufacturer's contact personnel, and of their ability to understand the retailers' needs and expectations. In addition to the functional dimension, service is also evaluated after delivery, reflecting what is received (Grönroos 1984). Referred to as technical OFS quality, it is the operations-oriented dimension reflecting the retailers' perceptions about the manufacturer's ability to deliver products accurately and dependably.

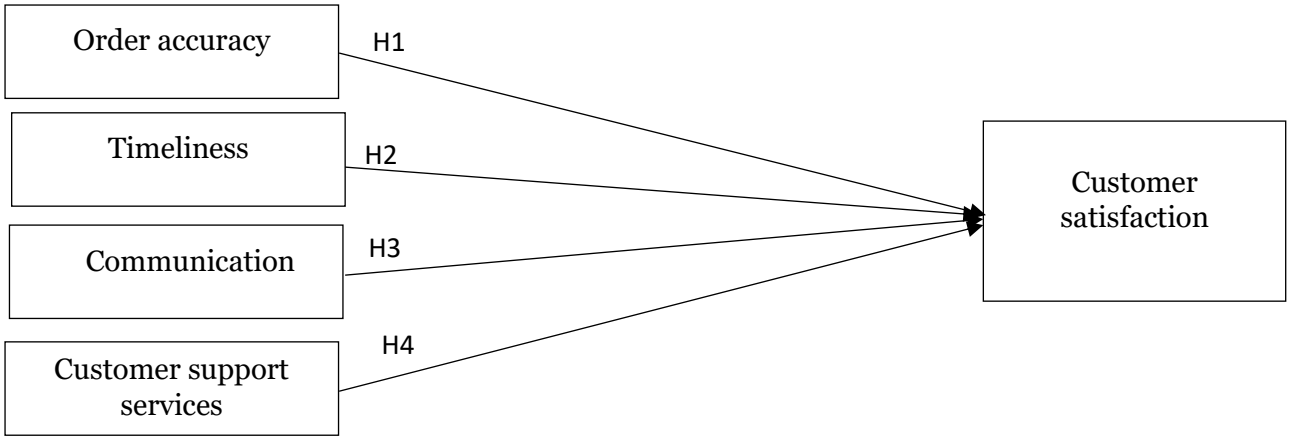

Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

Research Method

Design and sample

In this study, a quantitative approach using the cross-sectional descriptive survey technique was used (Creswell, 2013). The quantitative nature of the study was grounded on the need to quantify the data collected and to generalise the findings (Fouche, 2005). The quantitative approach was selected for the current study because quantitative research enhances the objectivity of the study since it is cheap, flexible, and less time-consuming to conduct. Questionnaire will be used as the instrument for collecting data, as a means of colleting primary data from a selected sample.

Research Instrument

The measures used were from the validated scale in extant studies. The objective of this study made the researcher choose questionnaire as testing instrument. Questionnaire was the main instrument used, the aim of designing the questionnaire was to get a balanced and a comprehensive response from the consumers that have made garments in the last 12 months. To achieve this, the researcher constructed a close ended questionnaire for the respondents. The answers were checked to see what responses were given by customers to the questions asked. It measures order fulfilment using four dimensions namely order accuracy, order timeliness, communication, and customer support service. The 5-point Likert – scale is used for all responses with (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).

Results

Table 1 Demographic profile of Respondents

Variable	Respondent profile	Frequency	%
Age	18-25	60	60
	26-35	20	20
	36-45	14	14
	46 and above	6	6
Marital	Single	63	63
	Married	37	37
level of education	WAEC	23	23
	B.SC	38	38
	NCE/OND and HND	16	16
	Post graduate	13	13
	Professional qualification	10	10
	Total	100	100

Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses formulated were tested using multiple regression analysis and the p-value was set at a 5% level ($p < 0.05$). In other words, we accept the alternate and reject the null when p is less than 0.05 and *vice versa*. Before testing the hypotheses, we tested for model fit and multi-collinearity as a prerequisite for multiple regression analysis. The ANOVA result showed that the overall model is a good fit ($F = 18.3$, $p < 0.001$). The Variance Inflation Factor was all below the threshold of 3. Which suggests

that the data is free from multi-collinearity problems. Also, the model summary result shows that the r-square is 43% and the adjusted r-square is 41%. All the measures have a reliability score above 0.70. All the analysis was performed with the aid of the computer software, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 25.

Table Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-3.472	2.797		-1.241	.218		
	Order Timeliness	.405	.108	.317	3.757	.000	.838	1.193
	Order accuracy	.741	.147	.429	5.028	.000	.820	1.219
	Communication	.011	.057	.015	.194	.847	.956	1.046
	Customer Support	.188	.094	.155	1.997	.049	.987	1.014

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

The research work sought to study customer satisfaction with order fulfilment process of fashion entrepreneurs in Anambra. Based on the findings, the following findings were made. The first hypothesis found that order accuracy has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta = .74$, $t = 5.02$, $p < 0.01$). In line with (Srinivasan and Ratchford, 1991) a study they conducted has shown that order accuracy significantly affects customer satisfaction and repeat purchase intentions. Secondly, it was found also that a positive significant effect of the timeliness of order fulfilment process on customer satisfaction with fashion entrepreneurs **(**$\beta = .45$, $t = 3.76$, $p < .05$). Third, order fulfilment process communication has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction with fashion entrepreneurs **(**$\beta = .01$, $t = .19$, $p = .85$). Finally, there is no positive significant effect of order fulfilment process customer support service on customer satisfaction with fashion entrepreneurs ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2, 00$, $p = .05$).

Discussion and conclusion

With delivery disappoint common among fashion entrepreneurs, this study examined customer satisfaction with the order fulfilment process of fashion entrepreneurs in Anambra metropolis. While fashion design requires a lot of creativity, it is important that fashion entrepreneurs commit to ensuring customer satisfaction with their service. Customer expectations are met when fashion designers to make and deliver garments is short with short lead time and ensure that customers' orders are delivered on time within stipulated period. Importantly, customers also derive satisfaction with fashion designers when they meet customers' orders accurate. In other words, when the design specification does not contain wrong items or designs and without damages. However, less importance is placed on fashion designer's communication effectiveness and customer support service.

Recommendation

Fashion designers should prioritize accuracy in customer orders to ensure customer satisfaction. When customer bring their garments for bespoke, fashion designers should ensure that my fashion specification do not contain wrong items or designs. They should also endeavour to make customers' garments in accordance with the set conditions without damages. Fashion designers should also ensure to deliver customers' orders on time. A strategic choice to acquiring new customers and keeping old ones is to always meet with customers' delivery deadline. It critical for fashion designers to deliver on-time according to agreed deadline. This means they should be careful to promise what they can deliver and not collecting more orders than they can handle. A good strategy would be to estimate how much time it takes to make specific kinds of garments and communicate it as a strategy to win and keep customers. For example, make your *aso-ebi* in 48 hours could be a good tagline.

While customers do not emphasize much importance to communication, providing customers with update information on progress of their garments using social media and short message service could be a good strategy to satisfy and delight customers. This may also involve allowing customers to track the progress of their orders. In addition, if orders delivery may be delayed, fashion designers should not hesitate to communicate such information to customers. Providing support and after-sales services such as garment maintenance will increase customer satisfaction. Even though it is important to get it right the first time, accepting and adjusting garments when there are variations to the order will at least keep customers from venting their dissatisfaction. Fashion designers can also provide recommendations to customers to improve their styles, design and fit. Often, choosing a design to make can be confusing, therefore, designers should emphasize their creativity and communicate same even as they help make it easy for their customers to choose the design to make.

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