

## **Social Media Micromarketing and Customers' Satisfaction of Domestic Airlines in Nigeria**

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This study seeks to investigate the effect of social media micromarketing on customers' satisfaction in the domestic airline industry in Nigeria. Specifically, the study measured the effect of social media micromarketing on customers' willingness to recommend service to others (word of mouth communication), customers' loyalty and retention and lastly determined if overall customers' satisfaction differ with the type of social media technology. A stratified sample of 391 travelers drawn from two domestic airlines operating in two states (Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State) in the South- South Geo-graphical Zone of Nigeria were used for the study. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the research and the statistical significance of the variables in the three hypotheses were tested using simple regression analysis and one way analysis of variance. The study revealed significant relationship between social media micromarketing and the customers' satisfaction variables: customers' willingness to recommend service to others, customers' loyalty and retention. It also shows that overall customer's satisfaction differs with the type of social media technology. It was therefore suggested that in order for airlines in Nigeria to benefit maximally from their customer orientation philosophy, their social media platforms should be upgraded to include other technologies that are not currently in operation.

*Key words:* Social media micromarketing, Micromarketing, Social media, Customer loyalty, Customer retention, Customer satisfaction

### **Introduction**

Transportation is one critical sector of national economy; be it in advanced economies or developing economies of the world. Technological innovations and development in the travel and tourism industry has led to rapidity of changes in global tourism transport infrastructure (land, air and sea). This has impacted positively on local, regional and international trade and commerce and economies. Information communication technology (ICT) has greatly revolutionized the way things are done in the air transport sector. The application of technology in service delivery has become a competitive tool for all airlines because of the peculiarities of this mode of transport; speed of mobility, reliability, timeliness, comfort ability, convenience, etc. Apart from these core attributes of air carriers, most airlines are now competing using ICT to offer superior and excellent services delivery to travelers.

Functionally the proliferation of affordable computer and mobile devices capable of transforming and organizing data in a format that could be tracked and altered by a single user has deepened the scope of activities performed by micromarketers. Traditionally micromarketing was understood as the branch of marketing that deals with low level aggregates, low degree of impact on society (Bagozzi, 1972; Hunt, 1976 and Moyer,

1972). Bartels and Jenkins (1977) describe micromarketing as marketing that deals with organizational units such as individuals, households and institutions and the management functions performed by managers. Micromarketing was a term coined in 1988, by Ross Nelson Kay, as a marketing technique used to describe a form of target marketing that was more precise and focused than typical niche marketing technique (Verdino, 2010).

The use of social media driven micromarketing has been celebrated by airlines in some developed economies because of its resultant effect on marketing performance. It is said to be the most effective technique for small business users to sustain, build and grow their own brands (Peterson and Rogers, 2007). Prabu (2012) in his paper titled "Social Media in Airline Industry: How Airlines are Leveraging this Platform with their creativity", made the following exposition on the benefit of social media driven micromarketing:

*"Social media is much more than just establishing mere presence. It is a revenue generating channel for many airlines, a medium that has helped the PR team at airline companies to cut down costs, a medium in which airlines roll-out innovative programs/ campaigns, a medium that airlines use for managing their internal PTOs (JetBlue does it), a medium that's perceived by*

*airline marketing team as THE most successful”* (Prabu, 2012: 1).

The above quote or statement portrays the fact that social media driven micromarketing has substantive impact on marketing performance of airlines in developed economies. However, there has not been much empirical evidence to support this claim among marketing academics and practitioners, even in the developed economies. Most worrisome is the fact that the concept and practice is a new phenomenon in the Nigerian aviation service capes.

Despite the challenges faced by airlines in Nigeria, the liberalization policy of the industry has introduced some element of competition. There are however few domestic lines operating in Nigeria. In the past three decades, the industry has witnessed the use of print and electronic technologies in direct marketing. Direct marketing has come of age as a result of the presence of social media. Subsequent upon this, the integration of social media in directing customer contact information has led to the broadening of what used to be known as micromarketing. Nigeria airlines like their counterparts in developing economics have started adopting the use of social media in enhancing direct marketing. However, little is known as to the extent to which this strategy, “*social media micromarketing*” has been practiced by airlines in Nigeria. As orchestrated by airlines in advanced economies, does the application of social media driven micromarketing by airlines in Nigeria lead to increase marketing performance (especially on customer satisfaction)? This paper therefore seeks to investigate the influence of social media micromarketing on customers’ satisfaction in the airline industry in Nigeria. To guide the direction of this research, the following objectives were formulated:

- (i) To investigate the relationship between social media driven micromarketing and customers’ willingness to recommend services to others (word of mouth communication) in the airline industry in Nigeria
- (ii) To examine the affect of social media micromarketing on customer’s loyalty and retention in the airline industry in Nigeria.
- (iii) To determine whether overall customers’ satisfaction depends on the type of social media micromarketing technologies in the airline industry in Nigeria.

## Literature Review

### *The Nigeria aviation industry*

The Nigeria Airline Industry has a unique historical evolution. The history of aviation in Nigeria dates back to 1925 in Kano when the Royal Air Force (RAF), a British pilot made a breath- taking, but safe

landing on the horse race course in Kano, thus going down in history as the first recorded aviation activity in Nigeria. In the early 1930s, an enterprising pilot also made a flight with a few fare-paying passengers in a seaplane between Lagos and Warri. This became an annual business for a few years thereby creating the need for aerodromes. On hearing this development, a representative of the Air Ministry in London visited Nigeria to inspect what could then be appropriately described as “landing grounds”. This led to the selection of six points in Nigeria for ‘planes landing’ (Maiduguri, Oshogbo, Lagos, Minna, Kano and Kaduna). In August 1958, the Nigerian government in partnership with British Office of Aviation Control (BOAC) and Elder Dempster Lines formed the West African Airways Corporation (Nigeria) Limited which later metamorphosed into today's Nigeria Airways. This single, historic move heralded the genesis of the airline industry in Nigeria (Wikipedia, 2014).

It is the statutory responsibility of the Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) to manage all Commercial Airports in Nigeria and provide service to both passenger and cargo airlines. FAAN has its head office on the grounds of Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Ikeja, Lagos State. Airports in Nigeria are categorized into three; international Airports, Major Domestic and other Domestic. At the moment there are five international Airports in Nigeria: Murtala Muhemmed International Airport (MMA1) Lagos; Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport, Abuja; Port Harcourt International Airport, Port Harcourt; Mallam Aminu Kano International, Kano, Enugu International Airport. There are about 6 Major Domestic Airports: Margaret Ekpo International Airport, Calabar; Yakubu Gowon Airport, Jos; Kaduna Airport, Maiduguri Airport; Yola Airport; Sultan Saadik Abubakar Airport, Sokoto and 12 Other Domestic Airports: Akure Airport, Bauchi Airport, Benin Airport, Makurdi Airport, Ibadan Airport, Illorin Airport, Katsina Airport, Minna Airport, Sam Mbakwe Airport, Owerri Airport, Warri Airport, Zarai Airport, and Akwa Ibom Airport.

There are currently 11 local/domestic airlines in Nigeria: ADC Airlines Plc, Air Nigeria, Arik Air, Bellview Airlines, EAS Airlines, Aero Contractors, Allied Air, Associated Aviation, Capital Airlines, Dornier Aviation Nigeria, Kabo Air and 27 international airlines operating in Nigeria: Arik Air, Air Nigeria, Allied Air, IRS Airlines, Pan African Airlines, Air Afrique, Air France, KLM, Air India, Atlantic Express, Alitalia, British Airways, Bellview Airlines, China Southern, Airlines, Delta Airlines, Emirates, Egypt Air, Ethiopian Airlines, Ghana Airways, Kenya, Airways, Lufthansa German Airlines, Middle East Airlines, Qatar Airways, Saudi Air, South African Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Virgin Atlantic, and Virgin Nigeria.

The Aviation Industry in Nigeria has not been without its share of challenges. Odidi (2013) reports on the low product and service quality of the aviation industry in Nigeria in the past three decades in his paper “Challenges Facing the Airline industry in Nigeria”. According to him, the industry has problems from regulation, support services and to carriage vessel (planes). It is statistically reported that about 2021 people have lost their lives and properties through air mishap from 1969 to 2012 in Nigeria (Odidi, 2013).

### ***Moving from micromarketing to social media driven micromarketing***

Micromarketing was traditionally understood as a marketing technique used by small business users to sustain, build and grow their own brands. Micromarketing was also characterised by the practice of tailoring products/services and marketing programmes to the needs and wants of specific individuals and local customer groups—including local marketing and individual marketing (Kotler and Armstrong 2010). Micromarketing was first referred to in United Kingdom Marketing Press in November 1988 in respect of the application of geo-demographics to customer marketing (Whitehead, 1988). According to Whitehead (1990), micromarketing concept has gradually taken a new dimension over the years especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This was affirmed by Verdino (2010) who asserts that micromarketing is a back-to-basic approach to engaging people and sharing stories more effectively in a world that is decidedly different than it was 50 years ago. He further said that micromarketing for the new age (21<sup>st</sup> century), is a series of approaches infused to their core with a social media sensibility, powered by social computing technologies, and optimized to allow business of all sizes and types to satisfy individual customers. For Verdino (2010) micromarketing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century implies the use of social media technologies in enhancing marketing communication and customer contacts.

The evolution in the marketing opportunities offered by the proliferation of information, communication and technology development and application of micromarketing has led to its being christened ‘*social media micromarketing*’. Through social media micromarketing businesses are now entering the mass customized world and marketers are rushing out to develop or enhance databases to make one-to-one marketing a reality (Rogers and Peppers, 2000).

### ***Social media technologies***

Historically, social media has played a vital role in transforming business and communication. Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson &

Seymour (2011) define social media as “a form of electronic communication (as web sites for social networking and blogging) through which users create online communication to share information, and content (as videos).” The University of Kentucky (2011) defines social media as “media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques online. Examples of social media technologies include but not limited to: LinkedIn, Face book, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Itune u, Second Life and Myspace”. Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary (2011) defines social media as “the use of dedicated websites and applications to communicate with other users.” Dovetailing from the above three definitions, social media can be described as a set of communication channels and tools which are web based, operated online, designed for the purpose of information sharing in an interactive manner between users.

Social media is not a recent media. According to Carton (2009), throughout human history, there have been technologies that made it easier for people to communicate with each other. The earliest known technology was the telegraph which was used to transmit and receive messages over long distances (Ritholz, 2011). Edosomwan et al (2011) observed that social media has grown steadily over the years to the modern-day variety which uses digital media. Junco, Heibertgert & Loken (2011) gave a historical narration of the emergence of various types of social media. In 2000 social media witnessed the birth of many social networking sites among which were: Lunarstorm, Six degrees, Cryworld, ryze, Wikipedia. In 2001, the following sites emerged: fotolog, skyblog and friendster. In 2003 sites like Myspace, LinkedIn, LastFM, tribe.net, Hi5 emerged. In 2004, popular sites like Facebook, Dogster and Mixi emerged. In 2005, the following sites emerged: Yahoo! 360, YouTube, Cryword and black planet. A few of the social media technologies commonly used by organizations are discussed here. *Facebook*: The Facebook was launched in 2004. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg and friends in Harvard. The site is privately operated by Facebook Inc. (Facebook 2004). The site was ranked by Google as the most used social network worldwide. Functionally, Facebook is used to create a personal profile, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notification, photos and comments when a user updates his/her profile. It is reported that Facebook has over 1 million new users very week (Edosomwan et al, 2011).

*YouTube*: YouTube was founded in 2005. It is regarded as the world’s most popular online video community where millions of people can discover, watched and share originally created videos. It creates a platform for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe. It also serves as a

major distribution channel for original content creators and advertisers.

*Twitter and microblog:* Twitter emerged in 2006. It offers more different options such as micro-blogging and been used by some celebrities (Jasra, 2010). Micro-blogging is a new way of communication in which users can describe their current status on short posts distributed by instant messages (MSN, G-talk and yahoo), mobile phones (SMS), RSS, email or the website (Hsu, Liu & Lee 2010). Micro-blogging is characterized by thought sharing and opinions, inviting discussion and talking to people about your life. Unlike the conventional blog, micro blogs have limited entry length which can be posted by mobile phones text messages and a maximum of 140 characters per message and a concept of fans and friends (Beaumont, 2008).

Edosomwan et al (2011) suggest that social media technologies could be used to achieve the following purposes.

- To promoting open communication between employees and management.
- To ensure effective participation of employees in decision making through sharing project ideas and team spirit
- To build an organizational culture that will support group cohesiveness among employees
- To enhances communication between current and potential customers, in receiving feedback, product concept and formulation and ancillary services necessary to push the product or service.
- To provides a good platform for discussion and for carrying out marketing communication.

Rains (2012) in measuring customer satisfaction with support services found that 23% of organizations use company's websites (www) to get feedback from customers, 11% of organizations use social media monitoring (a valuable way to spot red flags for gauging customer satisfaction levels), 46% of organizations use informal feedbacks from customer, 7% of organizations used other methods. Breed (2011) asserts that social media has changed the way and frequency customers want to be communicated to by service providers. She found that customers had different distribution and preference to different social media tools: over 100 million people were engaged in blogging with service providers, 175 million customers were registered twitters, over 600 million customers visited facebook each month.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction is the collective outcome of customer's perception, evaluation and psychological reaction to the consumption experience with a product or service (Khalifa & Liu, 2003). Consumer's satisfaction is a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet

or surpass customer's expectation. It is the number of customers or percentage of total customers who reported that their experience with a firm, its products, or services (ratings) exceeds specified satisfaction goals (Farris, Bendle, Pfeiffer & Reibstein, 2010). Customers' satisfaction is associated with the following outcomes: customers' patronage, customers' loyalty and retention, improve firm's image, positive word of mouth and increase profitability for the organization (Gummenson, 1999 & Wirtz, 2003). Zeithaml & Bitner (2000: 467) assert that "customers are loyal as long as they continue to use a good or service". Zeithaml & Bitner (2000: 467) also describe loyalty to a restaurant as "always eat there; eat there more times than at other restaurants". Word-of-mouth communication is a situation where people tell each other information about a product, service, place or event and not because they read about it. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) describe customer retention as "keeping the customers a firm already has".

The concept of customer's satisfaction is supported by a number of theories. These include: the assimilation-contrast theory, the contrast theory, the equity theory, attribution theory, value-percept theory, discrepancy theory and expectation disconfirmation theory. The Assimilation-contrast theory was developed by Anderson (1973). It suggests that performance is within a customer's latitude (range) of acceptance, even though it may fall short of expectation, the discrepancy will be disregarded, assimilation will be operated and the performance will be deemed as acceptable. If performance falls within the latitude of rejection (no matter how close to expectation), contrast will prevail and the difference will be exaggerated, and the product/service deemed unacceptable.

The contrast theory was developed by Cardozo (1965). It asserts that, any discrepancy of experience from expectation will be exaggerated in the direction of the discrepancy. If a firm raises expectation in its advertising for a product/service and then a customer's experience is only slightly less than promised the product/service will be rejected as totally unsatisfactory. Conversely, under promising in advertising and over delivery will cause the positive disconfirmation also to be exaggerated.

Equity theory was credited to Fisk and Yong (1985) & Swan and Oliver (1995). The theory advocates a balance between inputs made by consumers and outputs derived from providers of goods/services in exchange. It advocates fairness in an exchange transaction. It assumes that consumers form perceptions of their inputs and outputs different from those of the salesperson, dealer or company. Consumers' inputs could be in the form of quality, price, time, etc. while sellers' inputs include quality manufacturing, selling effort and a financial plan. However, seller output could be a fair profit. For equity to take place, the consumer must perceive

a fair dealing in his exchange transactions with the firm (seller).

The attribution theory was propounded by Weiner (1980 and 1985) and Folkes (1984). The theory explains how individuals find explanation or causes for certain behaviours. A consumer who made use of a service and suddenly discovered that it failed to fulfill this needs is likely to be dissatisfied. Attribution theory comes into play when consumer tries to find explanation to the cause of his dissatisfaction. Three (3) key factors that influence the nature of this explanation are: stability, focus, and controllability. Dissatisfaction is likely to occur if the cause is perceived to be permanent, marketer-oriented, and under volition (Hoyer & Macnnis, 1997).

The value-percept theory was developed by Westbrook and Reilly (1983). The value-percept theory defines satisfaction as an emotional response caused by a cognitive evaluative process, which is the comparison of the product or service to one's value rather than an expectation. This simply means that satisfaction is a discrepancy between the observed and the desired.

The Discrepancy theory was associated with the works of Porter (1961). He argues that satisfaction is determined by the perception of difference between some standard and actual performance.

Expectation disconfirmation theory was developed by Oliver (1977 and 1980). Expectations disconfirmation theory posits that expectations, coupled with perceived performance, lead to post-purchase satisfaction. This effect is mediated through positive or negative disconfirmation

between expectations and performance. If a product/service outperforms expectation post-purchase satisfaction will result (positive disconfirmation). If a product/service falls short of expectations the consumer is likely to be dissatisfied (negative disconfirmation).

Customer satisfaction measurement has become a strategic management tool in most organizations. Naumann (1995) asserts that the reasons for measuring customer satisfaction may vary among firms, and the success of the measurement depends on if the measurement is incorporated into the firm's corporate culture or not. He suggested five (5) reasons for measuring customers' satisfaction: (1) to get close to the customers, (2) measure continuous improvement in the performance indicators of the organization, (3) to achieve customer-driven improvement through the used customer database, (4) to measure competitive strengths and weakness – determine customer perceptions of competitive choices and firms, and (5) to link customers' satisfaction measurement data to internal system.

## Research Methodology

### Research model and hypotheses

The study seeks to investigate the effect of social media micromarketing on customers' satisfaction. Here we present guided hypotheses and a conceptual framework for the study as shown in figure1.

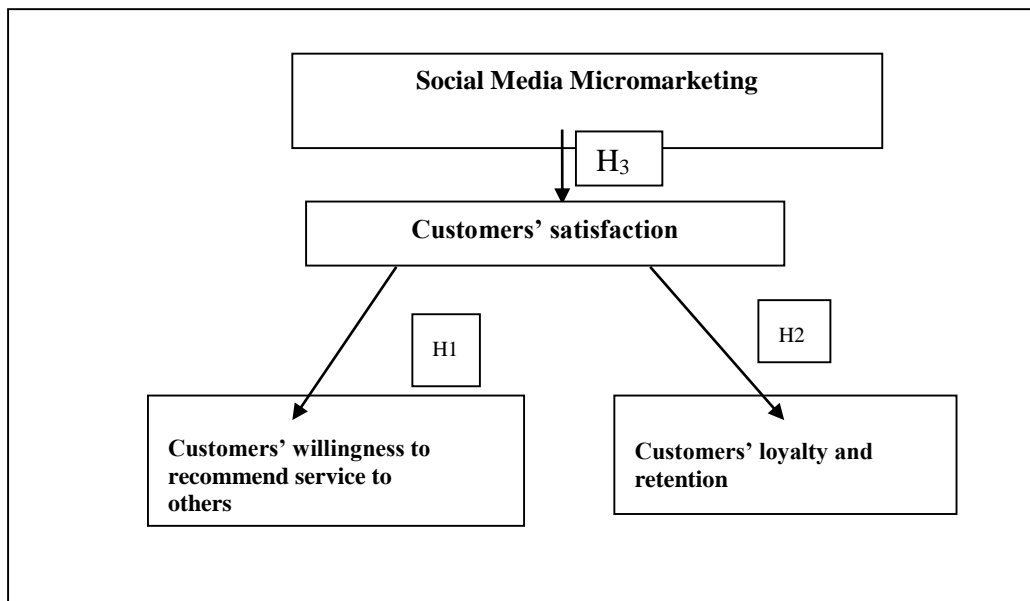


Figure 1: Social media driven micro marketing and customer satisfaction model.

The first hypothesis to be tested is the influence of social media micromarketing on customers' willingness to recommend services to others. We can draw insight from the experience of Ford Motors. Ford Motors introduced a new model of car in 2009 called Ford Fiesta, instead of using their normal traditional media-advertising to create awareness; the company rather adopted the social media to create attention of their offering (Lim and Bednall, 2010). Ford loaned European – Spec Fiestas to 100 young users connected by social media for six full months as a means of earning attention, build evangelism, generating buzz, and sparking a movement. Wells Fargo and company, a financial services company based in San Francisco also used social media to increase positive mentions and sentiments about its brand. It turns out to be the most effective customer service tool that increased brand mentions and sentiment by 38%. Thus in this study we hypothesized that:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *There is no significant relationship between social media micromarketing and customers' willingness to recommend service to others.*

The second hypothesis to be tested is the influence of social media micro marketing on customers' loyalty and customers' retention. Hsu et al (2010) in their research, found that the influence of micro-blog of enterprise on customers' commitment, trust, sense of community and consumer behavioural intention are significant and recommended that enterprises should spend more effort improving consumer satisfaction with their micro-blogs. The research work conducted by Lim and Bednall (2010) with Ford motors and Coca-cola company revealed that micromarketing assisted firms in achieving customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty. Thus in this study, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** *Social media micromarketing does not significantly affect customers' loyalty and retention in the Airline industry in Nigeria.*

Hypothesis three tested the influence of the different types of social media marketing technologies on overall customer satisfaction. A research work conducted by Lim and Bendall (2010) to measure the effect of different types of direct mails on customers' satisfaction of women purchasing cosmetics product using exploratory research approach gave us some insight. There were four different types of letters designed differently with the same information on the customer card. The study revealed that the women had different perceptions of the content of the letters. Thus in this study, we propose that:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Overall customers' satisfaction does not depend on the type of social media micromarketing technologies used in the airline industry in Nigeria.*

### The Study Area

They study took place in two States in Nigeria; Cross River State (Paradise City) and Akwa Ibom State (Land of Promise). Akwa Ibom State is named after Qua Iboe River. The two States are in what is known as South- South Geo-political Zone of Nigeria. Other states in the zone are: Edo, Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta.

Akwa Ibom States is located in the coastal South-South of Nigeria, lying between Latitudes 4°32'N and 5°33'N North, and Longitudes 7°25'W and 8°25'W East. The State is bordered on the East by Cross River State, on the West by Rivers State and Abia State, and on the South by the Atlantic Ocean. According to Wikipedia article (2011a) Akwa Ibom State is populated with over 5 million people and more than 10 million people in Diaspora. It was created in 1987 from the former Cross River State and is currently the highest oil and gas producing state in Nigeria. The administrative headquarter of the State is Uyo with over 500,000 inhabitants. Akwa Ibom State has an airport (Akwa Ibom Airport). The main spoken languages are Ibibio, Annang, Eket, and Oron. The State is made up of 31 Local Government Areas. The major occupational activities in the state include – agriculture, fishing and trading.

Cross River State was created on May 27, 1967 from the former Eastern Region. Cross River State is a coastal State in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Calabar is administrative headquarters of the State. According to Wikipedia Article (2011b), Cross River State occupies a landmass of 20,156 square kilometer. It shares boundaries with Benue State to the North; Ebonyi, Abia and Akwa Ibom States to the West; and to the East by Cameroon Republic and to the South by Akwa Ibom State and the Atlantic Ocean. The State is divided into 18 local government areas. It is composed of three major ethnic groups: Efik, Ejagham and Bekwarra. Cross River State has an International Airport in Calabar (Margaret Ekpo International Airport). The major occupational activities in the State include – agriculture, tourism, and trading.

### Research design

Research design refers to the conceptual framework for controlling the collection, measurement and analysis of data. It serves as guide for the collection

of relevant data to enable the researcher provide answers for research questions and test research hypotheses.

It also provides an opportunity for the comparisons required by the hypotheses of the research (Asika, 1991; Ndiyo, 2005 & Etuk, 2010). The cross-sectional research design and in-depth interviews were used for the study. A cross-sectional study usually consists of gathering data from a sample of elements from the population of interests; these elements in the sample are measured once on a number of characteristics, which are thought to be relevant to the area of research interest (Ezejelue, Ogwo & Nkamnebe, 2009). These designs were used because they sought to unravel and describe the element of social media micromarketing and how it affects customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Nigeria.

The in-depth interview was useful in gaining insight into managerial operations of the airlines that relate to the use of social media micromarketing and technologies.

### ***Sampling design and size***

The choice of Margaret Ekpo Airport and Akwa Ibom Airport was because of the convenience it offers since the researchers reside in the two contiguous States. The two airlines (Arik Air and Aero Contractors) were the only ones that operated commercial flights in the two airports as the time of this study. The population of this study therefore consists of all passengers that travel with Arik Air and Aero Contractors in and out of Margaret Ekpo Airport Calabar and Akwa Ibom Airport during the specified period.

The stratified sampling design was used in selecting respondents from travelers using the two airlines. Yaro Yamani formula was used in determining the sample size since the population of travelers using the two airports and airlines was known. The population was derived by collating the total passengers from the two airports for the two airlines in 2011. The population was estimated at 153,600 travelers. Out of this number, 95,920 travelers used the Margaret Ekpo Airport, Calabar and 57,780 travelers used the Akwa Ibom Airport. Similarly, out of a total of 153,600 passengers, 98,880 passengers used Arik Air and 54,720 passengers used Aero Contractors. Using the Yaro Yamani formular, the estimated sample size was 399 travelers. Out of the 399 travelers, 247 were drawn from travelers passing through the Magaret Ekpo Airport and 152 travelers were drawn from the Akwa Ibom Airport. Similarly, 255 of the sample were drawn from Arik Air passengers and 144 of the sample were drawn from Aero Contractors passengers. A total of 391 travelers constituted the sample size used for analysis - Arik Air (197=50%) and Aero Contractor (194= 50%). The response rate

of questionnaires used for the study was 97% which is considered representative of the population of travelers in the study area.

### ***Sources of data and data collection method***

Data were collected both from secondary and primary sources. The secondary sources included data from textbooks, articles, journals, etc. The primary data were sourced from questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaires were self administered and divided into two sections. Section A contains bio data of respondents (passengers) and Section B was made up of items that elicit information on the likely effect of social media micromarketing in achieving customer satisfaction.

The instrument that was adopted for data collection is a researcher-developed questionnaire. Customer satisfaction was measured in two domains: customers' willingness to recommend services to others (word of mouth communication) and customers' loyalty and retention using interval scale. Items in the two domains were measured on a five point Likert scale- Strongly Agree (SA) -5 points; Agree (A) - 4 points; Undecided (U) -3 points; Disagree (D) -2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) -1 point). Social media micro marketing technologies were measured by a nominal scale categorizing social media technology into five types: Facebook, Twitter, Email, Mobile phone and Website.

Validity test was carried out to ascertain content validity. Validity is the degree to which a measuring instrument measures what it is designed to measure (Ndiyo, 2005). The validity of the instrument was ascertained by giving the questionnaire to two (2) experts; one in test and measurement unit of the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar and the second expert was a research lecturer in the Department of Marketing, University of Calabar. After further modification and improvement by the two (2) experts, the questionnaire was finally accepted as relevant.

Reliability test was also carried out. Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which an instrument measures repeatedly whatever it is supposed to be measuring. According to Ndiyo (2005) reliability of a measuring instrument is the degree of consistency with which it measures whatever it is measuring. To establish the reliability of the constructs relevant in this study in the questionnaire, Cronbach's coefficient alpha method was deployed: reliability of items pertaining to the two domains of customers' satisfaction and social media micromarketing technologies. Nunnally (1978) suggested that the lowest acceptable value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.5 and it would be better with higher values.

The reliability values for all the constructs were far above 0.5 (it ranged from 0 .88 to 0 .95). The

value of reliability generated by the test support the internal consistency of the measure of the constructs.

### **Data analysis**

The SPSS was used in capturing the data. Three statistical tools were used in analyzing and verifying the data: descriptive statistics, simple least square regression analysis, and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

### **Research Result**

#### *Descriptive statistics of respondents*

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and provide information on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and respondents' perception of airline service delivery. The socio-demographic characteristics include variables such as respondents' gender, marital status and class of traveler, passenger flight used and types of social media technologies engaged with service provider. The result is shown in table 1.

The study shows that half of the sample was Arik Air passengers and half were Aero contractors. 68% were males and 32 were females. About 55% of respondents were single and 40% were married. Most of the respondents (64%) were economy class travelers and 36% were business class travelers. 47% of respondents said the airline(s) had communicated or engaged them with one of the social media technologies, while 53% said they have not been engaged with the two airlines through social media technologies. Out of this number (recipients), 72% of the respondents said the airlines communicated with them via mobile phones, 18% said they interact with the airline via the company's web site, 11% had information about airline services through emails. Twitter and Face book were not used at all by the airlines. On respondents' perception of service delivery, majority of the respondents (95%) agreed that the use of social media in service delivery by airlines will enhance their satisfaction. See table 1 for specifics.

#### *Social media micromarketing and customers' willingness to recommend services to others (word of mouth communication)*

The simple least square regression analysis was used to establish the relationship between social media micro marketing and the customers' willingness to recommend the airline services to other prospective customers. This is shown in table 2. The coefficient of determination R-square (0.854) implied that 85.4% of the sample variation in the dependent variable (customers' willingness to recommend services to others) is explained or caused by the firm's utilization of social media micromarketing technologies. The high value of R-square is an indication of a good relationship between the dependent variable (customer's willingness to recommend services to others) and independent variable (social media micromarketing).

The F-statistic shows that there is a significant relationship between social media micromarketing and customer's willingness to recommend services to others ( $F= 20.048$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The regression coefficient is positive and significant ( $t=8.478$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). This indicates that 1 unit increase in the use of social media driven micromarketing strategy will likely increase customers' willingness to recommend services to others prospective customers by 8 times. The test of autocorrelation using Durbin Watson (D/W) test shows that the D/W value of 2.879 falls within the inconclusive region of D/W partition curve. This means that there exists no degree of autocorrelation.

#### *Social media micromarketing and customer s' loyalty and retention*

The study investigated the effect of social media marketing on customers' loyalty and retention. The least square regression model was used to establish if there was a relationship between the two variables. The result shows that the coefficient of determination (0.901) reveals that 90% of the variation in the customers' loyalty and retention is accounted for by the use of social media in the service delivery by the airlines. The result is shown in table table 3. The high value of R-Square is an indication of a good substantive relationship between the dependent variable (customers' loyalty and retention) and independent variable (social media micromarketing). The result of the analysis also shows that there is a significant relationship between social media micromarketing and customers' loyalty and retention ( $F=10.475$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).



Table 1: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and perception of service delivery

Variable	No of respondents	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	264	68
Female	107	32
Marital status		
Married	152	39
Single	216	55
Widowed	7	2
Divorced	16	4
Class of flight		
Business class	140	36
Economy class	251	64
Respondent's flight		
Arik	197	50.4
Aero	194	49.6
Engaged with social media by service provider		
Yes	183	47
No	208	53
Respondents' perception of social media tool		
Email	41	11(3.5)
Facebook	0	0(0)
Mobile phone	280	72(1.13)
Twitter	0	0(0)
Website	70	17(1.43)
Respondents' overall satisfaction with airline service delivery		
Strongly agreed	226	58
Agreed	145	37
Undecided	6	2
Disagreed	14	3
Strongly disagreed	0	0

The regression coefficient is positive and significant ( $t=18.415$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). This indicates that 1 unit increase in the use of social media driven micromarketing will likely increase customers' loyalty and retention by 18 times. The test of autocorrelation using D/W test shows that the D/W value of 2.079 falls within the inconclusive region of D/W partition curve. Hence, we can clearly say that there exists no degree of autocorrelation.

#### Effect of types of social media micromarketing technologies on overall customers' satisfaction

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effect of different types of social media micromarketing technologies on overall customer satisfaction. The dependent variable (overall customers' satisfaction) was measured on a five 5 point Likert scale with 5= Strongly agree and 1= Strongly disagree, while the independent variable social media micromarketing technologies were categorized into five types (See table 1).

Table 2: Regression result on social media micromarketing and customers' willingness to recommend service to others

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	37.794	4.458		8.478	.000
	MIC. MKT	.035	.158	.011	5.219	.000

Dependent Variable: CUS.WD MOUTH  
R = .933; R-square = .854; Adjusted R-square = .763;  
F\* - ratio = 20.048; Durbin Watson = 2.879.

\*Significant,  $P < 0.05$ ,  $df_1 = 1$  and  $df_2 = 389$ , crit. F = 3.84

Table 3: Regression result on the relationship between micromarketing and customers' loyalty and retention.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	
1 (Constant)	40.105	2.178		18.415	.000
MIC. MKT	.035	.051	.035	20.689	.000

a. Dependent variable: CUS RET

R = .981; R-square = .901; Adjusted R-square = .894;

F\*-ratio = 10.475; Durbin Watson = 2.883

\* Significant,  $P < 0.05$ ,  $df_1 = 1$  and  $df_2 = 389$ , crit.  $F = 3.84$

The result of the ANOVA shows that there is significant difference in the level of customers' satisfaction resulting from the use of different social media type ( $F=10,334$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The mean comparison shows that email had a customer

satisfaction rating above average (3.5), mobile phone and company website had customer rating below average (mobile phone = 1.13, website = 1.43) respectively.

Table 4: ANOVA on the influence of type of social media technologies on overall customers' satisfaction

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F-ratio
Between groups	40.51	4	10.13	10.334*
Within groups	11711.68	386	30.34	
Total	11752.19	390		

## Discussion

This study is focused on investigating the effect of social media micromarketing on customers' satisfaction of domestic airlines in Nigeria. The study showed that the two airlines in Nigeria are engaged in the use of social media micromarketing by 47%. Through an indepth interview with station managers of the airlines: Arik Airline – Mrs. Grace Anietie (Calabar Airport) and Mr. Emmanuel Okon (Akwa Ibom Airport) and Aero Contractors Ariline – Mr. Bello Osagie Taju (Calabar Airport) and Mr. Ben Emmanuel (Akwa Ibom Airport), the researchers found that, the airlines adopted social media micromarketing concept to a large extent in their operations. They assert that the strategy assisted the Airlines to appeal to specific customers (passengers) segments and foster good firm-customer relationship, the firms have database of customers that patronize their services and that the firm used mostly mobile phone and website to inform passengers (customers) of any development. This qualitative data supports the result of the quantitative survey. They also affirmed that the strategy assisted them in informing passenger of any

development in their service plan, thereby enhancing customers' satisfaction.

The effect of social media micromarketing strategy was measured on two customers' satisfaction variables; customers' willingness to recommend service to others and customers' loyalty and retention. The result of the first test of hypothesis shows that there is a significantly relationship between the utilization of social media micromarketing and customers' willingness to recommend services to other prospective customers. Hsu et al (2010) analysis on the effect of micro blogging on customers' satisfaction found a significant relationship between customers' sense of community and the use of social media technology (micro-blogs). Through social media micromarketing, an organization is able to create a platform that will cause happy and delighted customers to become advocates or evangelist of the brand. Because of the constant interaction between the company and customers and the attendant attention that it generates, the company is able to identify and also able to meet the customer's needs and wants. This is further supported by Lim and Bednall (2010) who identified social media

micromarketing as the latest marketing strategy to achieve customers' satisfaction.

The second hypothesis investigated the relationship between social media micromarketing and customers' loyalty and retention. The analysis shows that, there is a significant relationship between the utilization of social media technologies by airlines in Nigeria and customers' loyalty and retention. Hsu et al (2010) in their research, demonstrated that, the use of micro blog by enterprise positively influence customers' commitment and trust. Commitment and trust are the precursor of customers' loyalty and retention. Greg Verdino was pleased to board JetBlue Airline on his next journey to Las Vegas, Nevada, because he was re-informed by Morgan Johnston, a corporate communication manager for JetBlue Airline, the man behind JetBlue Twitter who directly apologized and confirmed his flight schedule not been changed (Verdino, 2010). This result is corroborated by Lim and Bednall (2010) whose study on the effectiveness of social media on customers' satisfaction revealed an increase in customers' loyalty and retention. According to Lim and Bednall (2010) micromarketing strategy calls for getting to know the customer's needs, likes and dislikes very well. This makes it easier to match the consumers with the goods and services that are being offered. It is often successful because the customer receives a sense of being important to the firm and sees the efforts to connect as being on a more personal level rather than a general one. Verdino (2010) further asserts that social media micromarketing strategy demands that businesses operate with a new level of authenticity. It also allows them to resonate with an unprecedented degree of humanity. This in turn, enhances customer retention. JetBlue Airline were able to retain Greg Verdino on his next trip to Las Vegas, Nevada, because the Airline directly re-informed, apologized and confirmed that his flight schedule was not changed as was earlier informed. Social media micromarketing has been seen as the latest marketing strategies to achieve customer retention, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction in an effort to seek higher levels of repeat purchase (Lim and Bednall, 2010).

Hypothesis three investigated the influence of type of social media technologies on overall customers' satisfaction. Analysis using ANOVA showed that the type of social media technology causes a significant difference in the overall satisfaction of customers with the services delivery of the airlines. This can be seen from the fact that the mean comparison of customer satisfaction rating was higher for email than mobile phone and company website.

## **Conclusion and Managerial Implication**

The study investigated the influence of social media micromarketing of domestic airlines in Nigeria. Findings from the research show that social media micromarketing strategy has significant influences on customers' willingness to recommend service to prospective customers, customers' loyalty and retention. Word of mouth communication is a 'below line advertising' and cost the firm much lower than 'above line advertising'. Loyalty customers are customers who do not easily switch to others brand and because of the relationship that exists between the airlines and customers, they are not prone to switching. Small Business Advisor (2010) reports that, it cost a company \$234 every time it loses a customer and because of this attendant lose; managers are required to use marketing strategies that will produce customer loyalty and retention. To operate above board or to offer superior customer service in the airline industry, the firms must be able to deliver superior service through a medium that the customer actually wants to use. This is because the customers move to other forms of media. It is the manager's job to stay ahead of the curve and be where the customers are. The use of social media technologies impact on the firm's return on investment (ROI) and if used with the traditional promotional tools will synergize the firm's sales levels and profitability much more. It is in view of these that Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) assert that getting new customers is expensive. New customers are often unprofitable for a period of time after acquisition. The longer a customer remains with a company the more profitable the relationship the company enjoys. The airlines should therefore improve and strengthen the use of social media micromarketing to ensure that it enjoys the benefits that word of mouth communication, customers' loyalty and retention brings.

The study indicates that customers' perceptions of social media usage differ with the different types of social media technology. The mobile phones and firm's websites were the most adopted social media technologies by the two airlines in Nigeria. The engagement of more people by mobile phones may be attributed to the fact that mobile phones are more user- friendly than the other tools and owned by almost all the customers. The low usage satisfaction rating may be attributed to fact that it has limited space for information. The emails which today are incorporated in most hand devices are accessible and used by fewer people, but were perceived higher than other tools. Email as a social media technology may be preferred by most service providers in Nigeria because of the fact that it can carry more information than mobile phones. Facebook and twitter had zero mean rating on customer satisfaction because the two tools were never used

by the two airlines. The reason for non usage of face book and twitter is not understood. It could be that the serves providers do not have the technology to create such customer support system.

In today's knowledge based economy, social media micromarketing is a catalyst for the development of customer service orientation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through social media micromarketing customers' interaction (feedback), attention, loyalty, retention and customer relationship are made possible.

The high level of customers' satisfaction expressed by respondents following the use of social media micromarketing and the attendant statistical relationship between social media micromarketing and customers' satisfaction has managerial implication. First, it points to the fact that the airline's management can increase customer satisfaction of travelers or customers by creating smarter and customer friendly social media technologies, especially the by increasing the tempo of usage of interactive media such as email, mobile phones and company websites that are specially designed and targeted at more individuals and organizations in the airline's customer base. Secondly, since at the moment it was found that Twitters and YouTube were not used, the airlines should provide platforms for their use as it may likely sustain the current level of customers' satisfaction or even maximize it. It is inferred that, if more smart technologies are not integrated in the airline's micromarketing strategy, it may have a negative effect on customers' satisfaction in the long-run. This is necessary in view of the fact that majority of the respondents are unmarried, which presupposes that they are fun seeking youths who are already engaged with some service providers on variety of social media technologies.

This research was characterized by some limitations. A non- representative sample was used for the investigation. Whereas there are seven domestic airports and eleven local and domestic airlines only two domestic airports in the South-South Geopolitical Zones of the country and only two local and domestic airlines were used for the study. There is therefore a strong need for the expansion of the sample to cover all the Geopolitical Zones of Nigeria and to use a sample of domestic airlines that will be representative of the population for the purpose of generalization of the result of the study. It may be necessary for a study to be conducted on the reasons for the non usage of some of the popular social media technologies by the airlines that are micromarketing in Nigeria.

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