



ISSN Online 2617-359X



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**ISSN NO: 2617-359X**

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*How to cite this article:* Njeru L, M. (2019), Effect of Service Quality on Customer Loyalty. Does Cultural Orientation Matter? Evidence from African Airlines. *Journal of Marketing, Vol 2(2)* pp. 19-31.

## Abstract

The general objective of the study was to determine moderation effects of cultural orientation and customer satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty among selected African airlines. This study was mainly informed by Expectation Disconfirmation and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theories. Explanatory survey research design was employed in the study. The study targeted 256,254 customers drawn from 9 Airlines in Africa which included Kenya Airways, Ethiopia Airlines, Egypt Air, Rwand Air, South African Airways, Mozambique Airlines, Air Zimbabwe, Air Tanzania and Air Namibia. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 750 customers. This study used questionnaires to collect data relevant to the study. Reliability of the research instruments were computed using Cronbach alpha statistical tests. The study tested three hypotheses for direct, moderation and mediation effects; the first hypothesis was tested by Multiple Regression Analysis Model; the second by Hierarchical Linear Modelling (HLM), while the third was tested by Sobel test using the four steps mediating models. The study concurred with the previous studies that all the five service quality dimensions had a direct and significant effect on customer loyalty. The study findings showed that cultural orientation significantly moderated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty ( $\beta=0.44$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The study therefore concluded that high cultural orientation strengthened the relationship between service quality. The study recommends that African airlines must invest heavily in cultural orientation to foster identity, commitment, attitudinal, behavioral loyalty and the future ability to regulate consumers' behavior. The passengers should therefore be at the center stage of the airlines' operational strategies.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Orientation, Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality, Customer Loyalty*

## 1.0 Introduction

In the current competitive and highly volatile business environment, the loyalty of customers precedes the success and provides an avenue for continuity of the companies or organizations.

Given the obvious importance of the customer to the survival of the company or organization, Sahin *et al.*, (2011) notes that creating an environment in which customer satisfaction thrives is seen as a pre-requisite condition that ensures customer loyalty. There are a number of benefits that accrue from having loyal customers; customer loyalty creates many paybacks for firms and organizations such as reduced price elasticity, lower and reducing relationship costs, the likelihood of increasing the income of the organization or company over time, the acquiring new customers through a snowball effect by way of existing loyal consumers' s word of mouth referrals, promoting the overall improvement of the company or organizational image to other customers, lower sales and promotion efforts (Ergin, 2005). Not only firms and organizations, but also consumers tend to benefit from the loyalty due to the fact that consumer loyalty reduces the cost of carrying out searches and evaluation of purchases in terms of selling promotion, eligibility and financial conditions.

In the current business environment, almost all companies competing in the service industry offer similar products, therefore, the best way to convince potential and retain existing customers is to offer them the best quality services. In addition, in today's competitive world, companies and organizations tend to place the customers at the centre of their attention, and have identified that their loyalty is critical to earning a competitive advantage and edge (Molaei, 2013) over other organizations. To this end, consumer loyalty is correlated with service quality (Topçu & Uzundumlu, 2010). This clearly highlights the important fact that while the goal is having an enhanced competitive edge for the company, customer loyalty becomes a primary focus for the company which can only be driven through the company's focus on the quality of the services offered to the customer. On the other hand, this means that customers may prefer firms which ensure similar satisfaction levels through provision of good service quality. Consequently, determination of the factors that influence the relationships between the firm and consumer is necessary in providing a means of gaining a clear understanding of improving customer loyalty.

Culture has become a trendy facet that prevails in controlling human conduct. According to Arnolds & Thompson (2015), it entails a unified code of conduct that are passed on among community members through different ways. A good example as per Lee (2000) a shared language by people within a certain group, code of conduct and simulation (Kelley & Wendt, 2002) as well as having a shared value system as deduced by Hofstede (2001). Sing and Koshy (2012) argue that such principles bear the likelihood of influencing consumer trends and set the bar when it comes to individual customers. Indeed it is primal to sieve out the moderating influence that culture has on the linkage between customer loyalty and service quality. Cultural value disparities among customers may stir issues for scholars trying to grasp customer tendencies in an environment that is infused with several cultures. Nonetheless, de Mooij (2010) believes culture to be one of the most crucial dimensions of consumer attitudes. Marketing analysts have in the past employed cultural aspects for instance; individual-collectivism to estimate the influence cultural values bears on consumer tendencies enquiry (check Luna & Gupta, 2001). Based on Liu & McClure (2001) Earlier probes include disparities in culuture as part of consumer complaint behaviour, customer retailing (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2002), consumer creativity (Steenkamp, 2001) and impulse purchasing (Kacen & Lee, 2002). Bond *et al.* (2004) claims that taking up of individualism-collectivism as a tool for estimating cultural value is indeed a crucial factor that has been used successfully in conducting marketing research across different cultures.

In addition, in order to satisfy the customers and maintain their loyalty, the airline industry in Africa must focus and invest on key resources such as building cultural orientation skills so as to build strong relationships with customers. However, based on the above reviewed studies, this current study did not come across any study that tested key service quality dimensions directly to see if they have a significant influence on customer loyalty in the airline industry in Africa. Nevertheless, the presence of divergent cultural orientation is a necessary evil in customer satisfaction for adapting tailor-made strategies. A number of studies posit a favourable and significant impact of cultural disposition on customer satisfaction (Homburg, *et al.*, 2011; Ooi, *et al.*, 2011). Although scholars have recognized the importance of cultural orientation and how it carries a major influence on the eventual level of customer loyalty, prior research and studies have been found to be insufficient in several key aspects. Thus, this study focused on contributing to reduce the dearth of knowledge by finding the interaction role of cultural orientation on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty to the African airlines. This has provided a critical means of understanding various aspects that either explicitly or implicitly affect customer loyalty.

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory describes the six entirely different dimensions found in the Hofstede *et al.* (2010) research into organizational cultures. Most scholars encapsulate culture as a behavioural manifestation emanating from shared norms, beliefs, norms, and beliefs among the population of interest (Clark 1990; Hofstede, 1980; Steenkamp, 2001): Reference to Hofstede, (1980), the most cited clause is, "Culture is the collective programming of the mind." Most commonly, the term culture has a bearing on ethnicity or tribal affiliation (in anthropology), nationality (in global politics), and organizational (in management). The level of summation, in this research changes the nature of the concept of 'culture' to imply larger domains of societal, national and international discourse.

Hofstede's is the most widely applied theory due to its pragmatic nature and the concrete cross-cultural empirical evidence, which apparently lacks in majority of the other cultural theories. Criticism exists pointing at Hofstede's theory in regard to the old data that is three decades old, sampling bias owing to his IBM employees sample, and his assumption of culture being a national mean value; all these constitute some valid face value, but no supporting empirical evidence exists to date (Craig & Douglas, 2006). Hofstede's continues to be one of the most cited and applied theory. The Hofstedes' dimensions are: Power distance Index, Uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and finally long-term versus short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001). The theory is relevant to the study due the collectivism biases of African culture which promote high integration and low individualism. This is important in promoting shared values and identity which might have an impact on service quality and loyalty. In addition, African culture manifest high power distance index which may moderate how service quality impacts on customer loyalty.

### **2.0 Literature Review (Hypothesis Development)**

According to Naik, Gantasala, and Prabhakar, (2010); Olorunniwo, Hsu, and Udo, 2006). it acts as a control mechanism for correcting behaviour, it offers the members an chance to identify as a

team, it enhances commitment as well as reinstates company policies. Indeed a unanimous virtue. As affirmed by Steward (2010) that a company's ethics and policies have a huge impact on all affiliated to the company. From a client's point of view, cultural disparities may lead to affiliations or variations in customer feedback and they are seen in terms of income levels, gender, demography and nationality. (Herrmann & Heitmann, 2006) Other research have weighed the cultural diversity against the impacts on the preferences, demand, values and purchasing patterns of customers. Kim, Forsythe and Gu (2002) affirmed that the cultural norms, buying behaviour and needs of customers in different areas are likely to vary, impact and establish where the loyalty lies.

Such reasoning could open up a better comprehension of present models for loyalty. Haryanto et al., (2016; Kassim and Abdullah, (2010); Kasuma *et al.*, (2016) suggest that analysts should as well investigate how culture affect the loyalty of customers. In the opinion of Agag and El-Masry (2016), it would be an interesting venture to investigate the impacts of cultural affiliation on customers loyalty models, an example of social demonstration and risk aversion had a huge fluctuation among customers of mixed demographic and gender in various cultural affiliations in Europe, Africa including Asia (Asamoah *et al.*, 2011).

In concert with Doole and Lowe (2008), the principles imparted through play an active part in instilling societal order, guidance and direction. Culture avails a general stage that is owned harmoniously by the affiliates. Doole and Lowe (2008) attest to the fact that culture is not imparted at conception, but rather, an individual is socialised by the surrounding gradually. Culture is indeed contagious. Cui & Ting, (2009) believe various areas hold a variety of possibilities and occurrences which in the end mould and stir different behaviours. The consumer attitudes are weaved within cultural aspects so much so that the choice to procure a commodity is guided by several element of culture Hofstede, (1984). De Mooij (2004) outlines three cultural dimension, they include, language, consumer behaviours and values. The intrinsic disparities that lie among these three fundamentals bring about the cultural diversity.

Schwartz (2006) is of the opinion that cultural orientations such as mastery, embeddedness, affective and intellectual autonomy, hierarchy, egalitarianism and harmony mould and vindicate personal and group beliefs, practices and objectives. A culture may influence and enhance, highly combative economic frameworks. Siegel, Licht, & Schwartz, (2007) believe that it is indeed a concurrent intermediary of the linkages between other variables

Within Africa, the cultural groups generate affiliates that are low in intellectual and effective economy but high in embeddedness. Their focus is capitalising on robust social association and guarding the general accord of a society and conventions instead of creativity. This concept corresponds with research done in the Middle East (Lewis, 2003) and sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Gyekye, 1997). There exist considerable levels of cultural peculiarities within the African set up than on egalitarianism, embeddedness and intellectual autonomy.

Denison and Mishra, (1995) attest to the fact that concentrating on an institution base on the institutional way of life, is a considerably modern approach in line with organisational and management studies. Nonetheless, institutional development as ana organised process is akin to shifts in organisational culture. Furthermore, (Denison, 2000) believes that it is impossible to implement changes in the company while ignoring the institutional practise

Gillespie *et al.*, (2008) have looked into the linkage between consumer satiety and institutional culture in the field of service provision. They took up Dennison's framework to assess

institutional culture. The findings obtained pointed out that the biggest success in the field of construction was associated with institutional mission and work involvement whereas the lowest success was related to flexibility and affinity within the institution. Gillespie *et al.*, (2008). Claims that aside the biggest success in the vehicle sale field was attributed to the flexibility element and the lowest success was attributed to the institution's stagnation.

Schneider and Bowen (1993) suggest that a cultural orientation is nurtured through regular and periodic supply of customer information about their needs so as to design and deliver good products. It is a concept that has its fundamentals in pursuit of putting customers at the centre of the strategic focus. A customer-oriented culture involves excellence in terms of consumer interactions, market and business environment and customer familiarity and an emphasis on healthy cooperation (Deshpande, Farley and Webster, 1993) between the consumer and the company. On the other hand, Ang and Buttle (2006) put forward a framework for examining a consumer orientation profile. This means having the appropriate vision of consumers and their expectations and this is a phenomenon that makes the organization see itself through the eyes of the consumer (Asikhia, 2010), by utilising the views of the consumers as a roadmap towards charting forward better strategies.

Examples of positive effects of organizational culture are customer satisfaction and superior strategies (Tse & Sin, 2000). These positive effects could be observed in organizations that manage their organizational culture through effecting changes when necessary. Therefore, based on this perspective, organizations, whose culture is static and not customer-focused, would soon or later be condemned to oblivion. Firms or organizations showing identifiable cultural values are likely to demonstrate superior strategic effectiveness (Sin & Tse, 2000) that includes perceived customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction.

Attesting to Bellou (2007) the decision on which firms survive and those that don't, is solely placed upon the current clientele. Such a combative background motivates service firms to come up with fresh and creative ideas of meeting the clients requirements and enhance company performance. It is indeed critical for an firm to establish its upper hand as well as its ranking in the market to serve as clarity in direction. It is not sufficient to merely deliver service .the service industry emphasize on timely deliverance alongside feelings of fulfilment and content and the probable incorporation of the client in the service that they wish to purchase. These new requirements can be achieved when an institution adopts a client oriented organisational culture, which is in a constant flux of innovation.

Pandey *et al.*, (2015), Jamal and Sharifuddin, (2015), Haryanto *et al.*, (2016), Kassim and Abdullah, (2010), Kasuma *et al.*, (2016), Lee and Wong (2016) concur that there is little corroboration on the effect of culture on customer loyalty. It is therefore imperative for researchers to investigate the contribution of culture on customer - loyalty framework. Thus, the study hypothesized that;

*H<sub>1</sub>: under high culture orientation, service quality enhances customer loyalty.*

### **3.0 Methodology**

The research design for this study was an explanatory survey research design; therefore, positivist researchers clearly understand the subject matter through empirical tests and

application of methods such as sampling, measurement, questionnaire and direct observation. Explanatory research design was used in this study to establish the cause-effect association between the independent factors and the dependent factors. From the target population of 256,254 customers from the nine (9) airlines, a random sample of 750+ 5% (non-respondent error) = 788 customers were selected. In order to obtain primary data, questionnaires were used to collect data. Questionnaires were administered to the customers in the airlines.

### 3.1 Measurement of Variables

The study adopted ten items from Cronin *et al.* (2000) to measure the customer loyalty which include telling positive things about airline, recommending family, friends, and relatives, recommending to someone else who seeks airline services, intention to continue using the airline, always coming back for the services of the airline, not hesitating to use the airline services, not switching airlines even when there are cheaper offers, highly rating self as a loyal customer of the airline, willingness to consider the airline as a first choice, and finally commitment to the airline customer loyalty program.

The study of independent variables, the service quality dimensions were based on SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). The indicators used to assess them can be summarised as the five dimensions of service quality namely: Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

For organisation culture adopt a clearly objectivist perspective (Deshpande and Webster, 1989; Camerer and Vepsalainen, 1988; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990) and treat culture orientation as one of the organisational variables. The study used 16 items to measure cultural orientation. This is viewed as "variance" approach as opposed to the typologies that ignore intra-type variability. This was especially important when operationalising culture in Africa. This is because organisational culture may reflect the dominant nationalities of international corporations. In most African countries' "pure" culture types may not be predominant but various shades blend into each other hence our choice of the variance approach

### 3.2 Model specification

The study tested moderation using hierarchical moderated regression as modelled by Barron and Kenny (1986). The first stage was done by regressing the control variables against customer loyalty. Second, service quality dimensions variables regressed against customer loyalty for direct effects. Third, the interaction term was introduced against the dependent variable. Fourth, the interaction term between each independent and moderator variable was calculated by multiplying the two variables yielding a product term that represents the interaction effect which was done at different stage for each individual interaction. Model specification for moderating effect

$$y = \beta_0 + C + \beta_1SQ + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

$$y = \beta_0 + C + \beta_1SQ + \beta_2CO + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

$$y = \beta_0 + C + \beta_1SQ + \beta_2CO + \beta_3CO * SQ + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (3)$$

Y = customer loyalty

- $\alpha$  = Alpha (constant)
- $\beta_0 \dots \beta_5$  = regression Coefficient to be estimated
- C = Control Variables
- SQ = Service Quality
- CO = Cultural orientation
- e = Stochastic Term.

#### 4.0 Findings and Discussion

This section provides a presentation of research findings collected through the methodology discussed. It provides findings on the moderated effect of cultural orientation on relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in selected African airlines. This chapter opens with a section on the demographic description of participants who were involved in data collection. This is followed by reporting of data pertaining to the research objectives posed in this study, correlation and regression analysis. Findings on service quality summed up to a mean of 3.85, standard deviation 0.64. Results on customer loyalty summed up to a mean of 3.9065, standard deviation 0.59503. The results on cultural orientation summed up to a mean of 3.7222, standard deviation 0.55849. Table 1 illustrates Pearson correlation results of the study dependent and independent variables to assess the association of the variables. Findings revealed that service quality was positively and significantly correlated with customer loyalty ( $r = 0.507$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Finally, cultural orientation was positively correlated with customer loyalty ( $r = 0.538$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This implies that service quality and cultural orientation are expected to influence customer loyalty.

**Table 1: Correlation Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	CL	CQ	CO
CL	3.91	0.60	-0.35	-0.63	1		
SQ	3.85	0.64	-0.39	-0.50	.507**	1	
CO	3.72	0.56	0.56	2.53	.538**	.377**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CL = Customer loyalty, CS = Customer satisfaction, CO = Cultural orientation

#### 4.1 Hierarchical Moderating approach

To test the hypothesis that the Customer loyalty was a function of multiple factors, and more specifically whether cultural orientation, moderated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. The findings revealed that in the first model, control variables (respondents age, gender, nationality and years as customer of the airline) were not a better predictor of customer loyalty alone ( $R^2 = 0.054$ ). The

second model depicted that the effect of customer orientation on customer loyalty ( $R^2 = 0.47$ ). The third model showed that after introduction the coefficients of determination on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty increased to 52% from 46% ( $R^2 \Delta = 0.05$ ). Furthermore, The findings also revealed that the interaction regression model (service quality and cultural orientation and customer loyalty) mean sum of squares was greater than that accounted for by the residuals (54.842), F-value = 113.133, p-value = 0.000 which also indicated that the interaction model improved the effect of service quality on customer loyalty. Examination of the model with added interaction showed that the interaction had an enhancing effect since service quality and customer loyalty effect decreased. The findings also revealed that Zscore (SQ) had a positive effect on customer loyalty (Beta = 0.324), p-value = 0.000 while Zscore (CO\_SQ) was shown to have a significant and positive effect on customer loyalty (Beta = 0.437, p-value = 0.000). Thus, the findings accept the hypothesis that under high culture orientation, service quality enhances customer loyalty.

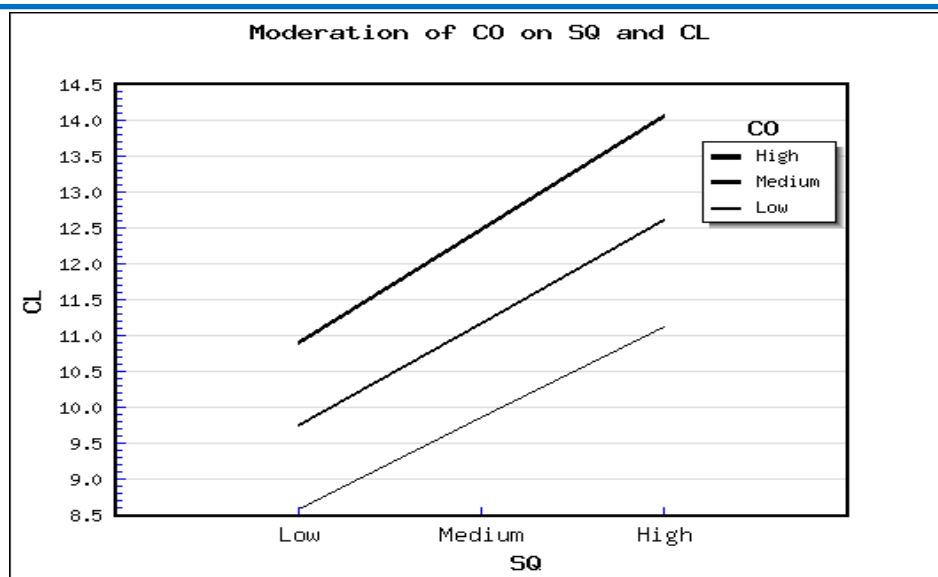
The study revealed that there is a remarkable effect of the cultural orientation as a moderator between service quality and customer loyalty. This means that a strong cohesive culture draws along more customer loyalty as a result of the strongly shared societal behaviours in collectivism dimension. On the contrary, weak cultures that predominantly exhibited high individualism, social welfare was not a concern, as a result, there was minimal customer satisfaction characterised by immense loyalty switching. With introduction of a customer satisfaction as a mediator, the customer loyalty varied significantly. At low customer satisfaction levels, customer loyalty levels were also low for low service quality levels while for high customer satisfaction, customer loyalty levels were high for high service quality levels. These findings concur with Yee, Yeung, and Cheng (2010) study which found that employee loyalty, service quality, and customer satisfaction have a positive influence on customer loyalty in a high-contact service industry.

**Table 2: Hierarchical Regression**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	<b>B(S.E)</b>	<b>B(S.E)</b>	<b>B(S.E)</b>
(Constant)	0.04(.04)	-0.03	0(.03)
Zscore: age	-0.036(.04)	0.05(.03)	0.07(.03)**
Zscore: gender	-0.04(.04)	0.02(.03)	0.04(.03)
Zscore: nationality	0.01(.04)	0.05(.03)	0.05(.03)
Zscore: years as customer of the airline	0(.04)	0.03(.03)	-0.00(.03)
Zscore(SQ)	1.00	0.69(.03)**	0.32(.05)**
Zscore(CO_SQ)	1.00		0.44(.05)**
<b>Model Summary Statistics</b>			
R	0.05	0.68	0.72
R Square	0.00	0.47	0.52
RΔ	0.00	0.47	0.05
Adjusted R Square	0.00	0.46	0.52
Std. Error of the Estimate	1.00	0.73	0.70
<b>Model Fitness Statistics</b>			
F	0.46	110.34	113.13
Sig.	0.77	0.00	0.00
a Dependent Variable: Zscore(CL)			

*Level of significance, \*\*p < .01*

Figure 1 presented the findings regarding the moderation of CO on SQ and CL. Examination of the interaction plot showed an enhancing effect that CO and SQ increased, CL increased. At low cultural orientation and satisfaction, customer loyalty levels were also low for low service quality levels while for high cultural orientation and satisfaction, customer loyalty levels were also high for high service quality levels. This clearly indicated that the moderation of CO on SQ and CL was significant.



**Figure 1: Interaction Plot.**

### 5.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study further affirms the significant contribution of the cultural orientation as a moderating variable, the dimensions of culture should be used as pre-predictors to determine how consumers differ or converge in their behaviour in different countries. This is how culture can serve the purpose of defining consumer behaviour and enable managers develop strategies for specific markets. This research contributes to the viability of current and potential African airlines expansion strategies by analysing the salient aspects of culture relevant to airline passengers handling. Further, the study brings out relevant elements for the development of branding strategies to influence consumer perception and purchasing behaviour. The research provides a practical, proactive, and results oriented analysis, that enable managers to understand the intricacies involved in building strong brands in the airline industry. This will alleviate the “trial and error” entries into unfamiliar markets. Culture is increasingly becoming the focal point for the development of winning customer loyalty global strategies.

This study was conducted to examine the moderated-mediation effect of cultural orientation and satisfaction on relationship between service quality and customer loyalty among African airlines. A replication study in other service industries could generate more insights for example, in the hotel and telecommunication service industries. This research adopted Haiye’s model 5, any of the other 74 models of regression analysis can be employed to evaluate new findings.

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