

## COMMUNICATION STYLE AND CONSUMER RESPONSES OF INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between communication style and consumer response of international airlines in Nigeria. The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design. The study population was customers of 13 international airlines operating in Nigeria. Relying on Cochran statistical formula, the researcher adopted 385 customers from the 13 international airlines operating in Nigeria as the study sample size. Data were generated from respondents using structured questionnaire. Frequency, mean, standard deviation were used for univariate analyses, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 aided the data analyses. The study found positive and significant relationship between communication style and consumer response in terms of price sensitivity and purchase behaviour. The study concluded that communication style relates to consumer responses of international airline users in Nigeria, and recommends that international airlines in Nigeria should develop and, adapt communication style with high context preferences to elicit consumers' response. Such communication has the capacity to deepen consumer engagement, improve brand perception and confer competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** Consumer response, communication style, purchase behaviour, price sensitivity

### **Introduction**

The liberalization of air transport and globalization of tourism and business have intensified competition among international carriers operating in emerging markets. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest aviation markets, international airlines are central not only to connectivity but also to shaping consumer perceptions of safety, reliability, status and value (Olawale, 2025).

Communication is pivotal because it mediates expectations, signals brand attributes and shape post purchase evaluation. Edim et al. (2023) reveal the real commercial stakes of messaging choices between Nigeria carriers and national aviation environment, noting that service quality, recovery practices and communication are strongly associated with passenger satisfaction and loyalty.

Nevertheless, style of communication, which can be seen in tone, personalization, affective content, transparency and channel selection has received comparatively less attention. International airlines often deploy global communication templates that may not align with local consumer cultural norms, digital preferences or expectations during service disruptions which might weaken trust and amplify complaints (Etuk et al., , 2022; Etuk & Akpan, 2015).

Etuk et al. (2023) confirm ongoing problems with complaint handling and recovery outcomes, suggesting a need to examine communication style as a distinct strategic lever. The ubiquity and immediacy of social media of social media have further transformed how passengers evaluate airline communications. Sharma et al. (2024) explain that airlines' social media responses during crises and complaints substantially influences recovery satisfaction and behavioural intentions which results to shift in both strategies and consumer expectation around responsiveness, empathy and transparency.

Also, evolving regulatory and consumer protection in Nigeria such as the Federal Competition and consumer protection Act and Aviation regulation increase the reputational and legal costs of poor communication and inadequate recovery (Orji-Okafor, 2025). Industry guidance for instance IATA crisis communication and reputation management materials stresses timeliness, clarity and empathy as best practices though how these best practices translate into local communication styles and measurable consumer responses in Nigeria remains under researched.

Although prior studies examine the impact of service quality and recovery on passenger satisfaction and loyalty, there is limited empirical work that isolates communication style as a driver of cognitive, affective and behavioral responses among Nigeria air travelers (Olor, 2023; IATA, 2024; Sharma et. al 2024; James et al., 2023). International best practices exist, but we lack evidence on which communication style that work best in Nigeria's cultural and regulatory environment. Thus, this study examined the relationship between communication styles and consumer responses of international airlines in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical foundation**

This study is underpinned by theory of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980), which explains that cultural values encourage behaviours such as communication style (Almeida & Pereira, 2021). Hofstede (1980) reveal that cultural values are structured around power distance, individualism vs collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance provide insights into consumer responses in different cultural settings.

Power distance reflects the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept unequal power distribution. A relatively high power distance culture implies that consumers might respond better to hierarchical, respectful communication from multinational companies, especially when they engage with local representatives or senior figures (Brown & Johnson, 2023). Individualism vs. collectivism suggests that in collectivist cultures like Nigeria, consumers may favor communication that emphasizes group benefits, family-oriented messages, and social cohesion. Companies using individualized, self-centric messaging may not resonate as strongly with Nigerian consumers.

The implications of this theory to the present study is that Nigerian consumers may respond more favorably to messages that convey trustworthiness and credibility, particularly if they come from recognized authority figures, such as local influencers or company executives. For instance, a Nigerian consumer may find it easier to trust a multinational company that uses a familiar local celebrity or a senior executive from the company to endorse its products or services.

### **Concept of communication style**

Communication is a vital function of every living thing (plants, animals or humans). It serves as the lifeblood of human interaction, as it permeates every facet of our lives-from personal interactions, societal functions to business organization (Stinson & Wang, 2022). In business relationships, communication is not just a tool for exchanging information; it is the key to fostering trust, collaboration and positive consumer behaviour (Yang & Tan, 2021).

Effective communication is essential to the success of multinational companies (MNC) in any market, particularly in regions like Rivers State, where consumer behavior is shaped by a combination of local cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, and global influences (Stinson & Wang, 2022). MNC and indeed, every business organization have their unique communication style. Communication styles is defined as a relatively stable patterns of verbal and nonverbal behaviours that people use to encode, transmit and negotiate meaning in social interactions, which are expressed in trait-like tendencies and situationally adaptive strategies such as habitual

expressiveness, precision, emotionality, how people modulate tone, directness or politeness to fit context (Miller, 2021).

Gudykunst and Kim (2020) define communication style as the consistent and predictable patterns of verbal and non-verbal behaviors used to convey messages and manage relationships in different social and cultural contexts. In the view of Chan et al. (2022), communication style as the habitual and distinctive way individuals use language, gestures, and tone to express their thoughts and emotions in various interpersonal settings.

Smith and Thompson (2019) classified communication styles into three categories: passive, aggressive and assertive. Passive communication is one in which an individual tends to avoid expressing their thoughts, feelings or needs directly (Avery & McDonald, 2021). Passive communicators often prioritize the needs of others over their own and may fail to assert their own opinions, desires, or boundaries (Harrison et al., 2020). They are soft-spoken, unable to articulate their feelings, and rely on others. Passive communication style is typically characterized by a lack of self-confidence, a tendency to avoid conflict, and difficulty in expressing emotions openly.

Aggressive communication refers to a communication approach in which individuals express their thoughts, feelings or needs in a forceful, domineering or hostile manner, often at the expense of others. People with an aggressive communication style tend to disregard the feelings, opinions, or rights of others, focusing solely on their own agenda (Yang & Tan, 2021). This style can manifest through harsh or threatening language, raised voices, body language that invades personal space, or other behaviors that convey dominance and control (Avery & McDonald, 2021). Aggressive communicators criticize others, they are impetuous, and expect things from others.

Assertive communication is a communication approach where individuals express their thoughts, feelings, and needs in an open, honest and respectful manner, while also considering the rights and perspectives of others (Harrison et al., 2020). Assertive communicators are confident in expressing their opinions without being passive or aggressive. They seek to maintain a balance between expressing their own needs and respecting the needs of others, fostering mutual understanding and positive interactions (Avery & McDonald, 2021). They appreciate the need to respect others, and are receptive to recommendations.

### **Consumer Responses**

Consumer response refers to the various ways individuals react to marketing stimuli, including advertisements, pricing, promotion, and product features. It is a critical area of study in consumer behavior research, as it helps businesses understand how customers perceive and interact with their offerings (Blake et al., 2019). Consumer response can be analyzed through three primary dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions. These dimensions determine whether a consumer will develop a positive or negative attitude toward a brand.

Understanding consumer response is essential for marketers because it provides insights into how to tailor marketing strategies to enhance customer satisfaction (Choi & Lee, 2021). Positive consumer response can lead to increased brand loyalty, while negative response may result in product rejection or unfavorable word-of-mouth. Consumer response is influenced by various internal and external factors, including individual preferences, cultural background, social influences and economic conditions. Companies that effectively analyze consumer responses can create more engaging marketing campaigns that align with consumer expectations (Dolan & Goodman, 2021). Furthermore, consumer response plays a crucial role in brand positioning and competitive strategy development. By studying consumer reactions, marketers can make data-driven decisions that improve product offerings and overall business performance.

The cognitive aspect of consumer response pertains to mental processes involved in evaluating marketing stimuli and making purchasing decisions. It encompasses how consumers perceive, interpret, and analyze information about a product or service before forming an opinion (Chevalier, 2020). Cognitive responses are influenced by prior knowledge, personal experiences and the credibility of the source conveying the marketing message.

Affective consumer response relates to the emotional reactions that consumers experience when exposed to marketing stimuli. Emotions play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and influencing purchasing behavior (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2021). Behavioral responses refer to the actions that consumers take following their cognitive and affective evaluations of marketing stimuli, which include purchasing decisions, repeat purchases, word-of-mouth recommendations, online reviews, and social media interactions. A consumer's behavioral response is often the ultimate indicator of the success of a marketing campaign. For example, a well-received advertisement may encourage consumers to visit a store, inquire about a product, or make a purchase (Lee, Lee & Kang, 2022).

The rise of digital marketing has further amplified the importance of analyzing consumer responses in real time to make data-driven decisions. Various theoretical models, psychological factors, and sociocultural influences shape consumer responses, making it essential for marketers to adopt holistic approaches to consumer engagement. As consumer behavior continues to evolve due to technological advancements and cultural shifts, businesses must remain adaptable to meet changing consumer expectations. By leveraging insights into consumer response, brands can improve their competitive positioning and achieve long-term success in the market. Consumer response is a multidimensional concept. In this study, we adopt price sensitivity and purchase behavior to represent it.

### **Price sensitivity**

Price sensitivity refers to the degree to which the quantity demanded of a good or service responds to changes in its price. The concept is fundamental in economics, particularly for understanding consumer behavior, market structure, and pricing strategies. Ailawadi et al. (2021) describe price sensitivity as consumer's responsiveness to price changes. A highly price-sensitive consumer will significantly reduce demand as price increases, while a price insensitive consumer will continue purchasing at higher prices. Chevalier (2020) defines price sensitivity as the degree to which consumers reduce their demand for a product when its price increases, typically observed in markets where substitutes are easily available.

Scholars posit several factors that influences price sensitivity to income level and purchasing power, perceived value and product differentiation, availability of substitutes, brand loyalty, trust, purchase frequency, product type, perceived fairness of price, cultural and psychological factors, situational factors, promotional strategies and discounts (Gupta & Chintagunta, 2020; Lee et al., 2022; Black et al., 2019; Chevalier, 2020). Price sensitivity varies significantly between necessity goods (basic food items, utilities) and luxury goods (high-end electronics, designer clothing). Necessity goods generally exhibit inelastic demand, people continue purchasing them irrespective of price changes. For instance, during economic downturns, consumers may still prioritize healthcare or groceries even if prices increase. Products that are considered necessities (such as food, utilities, or healthcare) tend to exhibit lower price sensitivity.

On the other hand, luxury goods often experience greater price sensitivity, as consumers can delay purchases or seek cheaper alternatives when prices rise (Blake et al., 2019). This heightened price

sensitivity is particularly evident when consumers perceive economic instability or when non-essential spending is curtailed (Gupta & Chintagunta, 2020). Understanding price sensitivity is crucial for businesses when setting pricing strategies. Companies must consider how sensitive their target market is to price changes to maximize revenue without losing customers (Hauser & Wernerfelt, 2021).

### **Purchase behaviour**

Purchase behavior is a critical area of study in marketing and consumer research that involves the decision making process and action that consumers undertake when selecting, buying, using and evaluating products (Morar et al., 2023). Omamuzo and Ngwube (2023) defined purchase behaviour as buying units and exchange processes involved in acquiring, consuming and disposing goods, services, experiences, and ideas. This definition focuses on buying units in an attempt to include not only the individual but also groups that purchase products.

Schiffman and Kanuk (1997) elaborated that purchase behavior entails the study of how individuals make decisions to spend their available resources (time, money, effort) on consumption-related items. It includes the study of what, why, when, where and how often they purchase and how they use the purchased product. Purchase behaviour according to Lakchan *et al.* (2023) has been framed within the context of consumer decision making to five distinctive stages that includes problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, purchasing and post purchase evaluation.

Purchase behavior of consumers is influenced by a number of psychological factors (Ramya & Ali, 2016), including motive. Kotler and Keller (2022) define motive as a need that is sufficiently pressing to drive a person to act. It is the driving force that impels an individual to take action to satisfy his needs. So it becomes one of the internal factors influencing purchase behaviour. A need becomes a motive when it is aroused to a sufficient level of intensity.

### **Communication Style and Consumer Response**

Aziz et al. (2025) examined the effect of teacher communication patterns on students' academic achievement. The result showed a significant impact of teacher communication patterns on student's achievement. This finding affirms that clear, engaging and responsive communication in the classroom substantially enhances students understanding and academic success.

Balakrishnan et al. (2024) explored the complex relationship between leadership styles, work performance and communication styles in different sectors in Malaysian. The findings indicate the need for communication-focused training and engagement programs and the significance of assertive communication styles that improves work performance. The study also suggests that leadership style drives, motivate and efficiently encourages team members. Similarly, Hashim et al. (2023) determined the relationship between a manager's communication style and employees' job satisfaction at Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) Bangi, Selangor. Results showed a significant relationship between a manager's communication style and employee job satisfaction.

Mohammed et al. (2023) examined the relationship between communication style and interpersonal conflict resolution among international students in Malaysian universities. The study found a significant positive relationship between communication styles and interpersonal conflict resolution among international students. Specifically, passive, passive-aggressive, and assertive communication styles have a significant positive relationship with conflict resolution. However, the aggressive communication style exerts an insignificant effect on conflict resolution.

De-la Torre et al. (2021) studied effect of different communication styles on attention performance in primary school children. The study found a statistically significant and

proportional correlation between assertive communication and total number of correct answers of students. It also found positive correlations between the assertive communication style and d2 attention test performance.

Ogunyemi and Olagbaju (2020) investigated the effects of assertive and aggressive communication styles on students' self-esteem and achievement in English language. The results indicated a significant difference in self-esteem scores of students taught by assertive and aggressive teachers in favour of the assertive group, a significant difference in the English language achievement of students taught by assertive and aggressive teachers in favour of the assertive group, and a significant difference in English language achievement of students with high and low self-esteem.

Guo et al. (2015) studied the mediating role of work engagement and job burnout in the relationship of leader's verbal communication style and job satisfaction of MBA students in Dalian university who were employees in various industries. The study also revealed that leader's communication style revealed to have a significant effect on job satisfaction. The study also reveal that autocratic verbal communication has negative relationship with job satisfaction while supportive verbal communication showed positive relationship with job satisfaction.

### Methodology

This study employed cross sectional survey research design. The population of the study consists customers of 13 international airlines operating in Nigeria. Hence the population of the study was an infinite set. The Cochran (1963) method for determining sample size for an infinite population was used to arrive at 385 customers as the sample size for the study. Thus 385 copies of questionnaire were produced and administered, out of which 374 were retrieved and used in the study. Data were collected using structured question to get responses from consumers and data derived from consumers were analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistical tools.

### Data Analyses and Results

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Communication Style**

|   | N   | Sum  | Mean | Std. Dev. | Variance |
|---|-----|------|------|-----------|----------|
| There are distinctions in ways in which individuals and organizations convey and interpret messages across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. | 374 | 1480 | 3.96 | 1.284     | 1.650    |
| Communication styles significantly influence passenger service, internal teamwork, cross-cultural coordination, and brand perception globally.            | 374 | 1528 | 4.09 | .682      | .465     |
| Some cultures are more expressive and use gestures and tone to convey feelings.   | 374 | 1542 | 4.12 | .829      | .687     |
| International airlines often employ English as a lingua franca, but adapt service communication based on regional languages and preferences.              | 374 | 1522 | 4.07 | .3744     | .553     |
| Valid N (listwise)  |     | 374  |      |           |          |

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 1 indicates that the entire responses produced high mean scores greater than 3.00. However, item 3 has the highest sum of 1542 and hence the highest mean score 4.12. Furthermore, item 1 has the highest standard deviation and variance of 1.284 and 1.650 respectively. This means that there are more divergent views in item 1 compared to other items in this section.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Price Sensitivity**

|   | N   | Sum  | Mean | Std. Dev. | Variance |
|---|-----|------|------|-----------|----------|
| I am sensitive to price differences within the international aviation sector.   | 374 | 1455 | 3.89 | 1.294     | 1.6374   |
| My traveling purchase decision for airline tickets is influenced by changes in price, with higher sensitivity indicating that even small price increases may lead passengers to choose a cheaper alternative. | 374 | 1551 | 4.15 | .715      | .512     |
| I measure how demand for specific routes, classes (economy, business), or timeframes fluctuates in response to fare adjustments.  | 374 | 1609 | 4.30 | .889      | .791     |
| Passengers switch airlines based on fare differences, influencing how aggressively an airline must price its routes to remain competitive in global markets.  | 374 | 1506 | 4.03 | .902      | .814     |
| Valid N (listwise)  |     | 374  |      |           |          |

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 2 indicates that the entire responses produced high mean scores greater than 3.00. However, item 3 has the highest sum - 1609 and hence the highest mean score 4.30. Furthermore, item 1 has the highest standard deviation and variance of 1.294 and 1.6374 respectively. This means that there are more divergent views in item 1 compared to other items in this study

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics on Purchase Behaviour**

|  | N   | Sum  | Mean | Std. Dev. | Variance |
|--|-----|------|------|-----------|----------|
| I process my traveling decision when selecting airline tickets, including how they evaluate price, schedule, airline reputation, loyalty programs, and additional services before making a booking.                                  | 374 | 1380 | 3.69 | 1.424     | 2.027    |
| Different customer segments (e.g., business travelers, budget tourists) choose, compare, and buy flight options, and this helps airlines design targeted campaigns and promotions.   | 374 | 1317 | 3.52 | 1.162     | 1.349    |
| Travelers interact with airline websites, mobile apps, and third-party platforms during the booking process, including search behavior, fare comparisons, and responsiveness to upselling of services like baggage or seat upgrades. | 374 | 1387 | 3.71 | .995      | .990     |
| I consider how and when tickets are bought—such as advance purchase windows, preferred booking days, and response to dynamic pricing—which airlines use to forecast demand and optimize revenue.                                     | 374 | 1493 | 3.99 | .665      | .442     |
| Valid N (listwise)   |     | 374  |      |           |          |

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 3 indicate that the entire responses produced high mean scores greater than 3.00. However, item 4 has the highest sum - 1493 and hence the highest mean score 3.99. Furthermore, item 1 has the highest standard deviation and variance of 1.424 and 2.027 respectively. This means that there are more divergent views in item 1 compared to other items in this study.

**Table 4: Correlation between Communication Style and Price Sensitivity**

|                     |                     | Communication Style | Price Sensitivity |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Communication Style | Pearson Correlation | 1                   | .663*             |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                     | .000              |
|                     | N                   | 374                 | 374               |
| Price Sensitivity   | Pearson Correlation | .663*               | 1                 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                |                   |
|                     | N                   | 374                 | 374               |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

A Pearson Correlation Analysis was run to assess the relationship between communication style and price sensitivity of international airlines in Nigeria. Using a sample of 374 respondents, drawn from 13 International Airlines in Nigeria, the analysis revealed - as shown in Table 4 - that, communication style has a strong, positive and significant relationship with price sensitivity of customers of international airlines in Nigeria.

**Table 5: Correlation between Communication Style and Purchase Behaviour**

|                     |                     | Communication Style | Purchase Behaviour |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Communication Style | Pearson Correlation | 1                   | .469               |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                     | .000               |
|                     | N                   | 374                 | 374                |
| Purchase Behaviour  | Pearson Correlation | .469                | 1                  |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                |                    |
|                     | N                   | 374                 | 374                |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

As shown in Table 5, communication style has a moderate, positive and significant relationship with purchase behaviour of customers of international airlines in Nigeria. This result is evident in the correlation coefficients of 0.663 and 0.469 respectively with a probability value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ .

### Discussion of Findings

This study evaluated the correlation between communication style and consumer response of International Airlines in Nigeria. Based on the result obtained from the empirical analyses, it is asserted that communication style has significant relationship with consumer response through price sensitivity and purchase behaviour. These findings agree with the finding of Aziz et al., (2025) found that clear, engaging and responsive communication substantially enhances students understanding and results to academic success.

The findings also cohere with that of Balakrishnan et al. (2024) that assertive communication improve work performance by motivating and encouraging team members. Similarly, the findings confirm the report of Hashim et al. (2023) that organisations that communicates with employees in an atmosphere of trust, honesty experience better performance outcomes.

Relatedly, the current findings support that of Mohammed et al. (2023) that a significant positive relationship between exists between communication style and interpersonal conflict resolution. Specifically, passive, passive-aggressive and assertive communication have significant positive relationship with conflict resolution.

In addition, the current findings align with the findings of De-la Torre et al. (2021) that a positive correlation exists between assertive communication style and d2 attention test performance; and that of Ogunyemi and Olagbaju (2020) that significant difference exists between self-esteem scores of students taught by assertive and aggressive teachers and assertive group. Further, the results of the current study align with the assertion that autocratic verbal communication style has negative relationship with job satisfaction while supportive verbal communication showed a positive relationship with job satisfaction; and that leader's communication style have a significant effect on job satisfaction (Guo et al., 2015).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has examined the relationship between communication style and consumer response within the context of international airlines operating in Nigeria. The study revealed that in a culturally diverse and economically dynamic market like Nigeria, international airlines that employ diverse communication style enhance message resonance, fosters trust, and increases customer engagement. Based on the findings, the study concludes that communication style significantly enhance consumer responses of international airlines. Thus, we recommend international airlines operating in Nigeria to adapt their communication style with high-context preferences that engages emotionally, relationally and subtly as Nigerian consumers often respond more positively to messages that are rich in context and cultural cues. The use of local language, symbols, proverbs and culturally relevant storytelling in advertisements can enhance message effectiveness and emotional connection.

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