Research Paper

Customers' Service Perceptions in Automotive Repairs Industry in Nigeria

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Abstract

Private car owners in Nigeria are estimated to be about 4.8 million according to Nigeria Bureau of Statistics. Car owners amongst the academic and non-academic staff run into thousands and because these cars are bought secondhand, or even third. These cars are prone to frequent breakdowns which make car owners to visit auto-repair shops frequently. No thanks to bad roads in Nigeria. Experiences of these car owners in term of quality of customer' services in the auto repair industry appear not to be palatable resulting in poor perceptions of quality of customer service in the industry.

This research investigated customers' service perceptions in the auto-repair sector in Nigeria. It was a survey of private car owners working in tertiary institutions in Edo State, South-South Nigeria. Specifically, it surveyed owners of Honda, Mercedis-Benze, and Toyota brand of cars. Four research objectives and correspondingly four research questions were raised. There were also three hypotheses.

Descriptive survey was adopted in the study. Consequently, research population was identified using the snowball method and purposive sampling technique was used to select 250 car owners for the study.

Questionnaire which collected both quantitative and qualitative data was designed, vetted, and validate. The instrument was reliable at approximately 87% based on Cronbach Alpha. Research assistants were employed to distribute and retrieve questionnaires. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as bar chart, pie charts, cross tabulation, simple percentage. Furthermore, one-sample test and ANOVA were used to test the hypotheses. Findings show amongst others that majority of the study respondents bought their cars second han; Toyota cars are popular amongst participants. Also, although rarely done, mechanical faults are the common faults repaired by the car owners and their service perceptions of auto mechanic in the country is moderate – though a little above average. It therefore recommended that auto mechanics should up their game in customers' services and this topic should be in the curriculum of polytechnics and technical schools.

Key words: *Quality, customer service, perception, Auto-mechanics, car owners.*

I. Background to the Study

For the individual in Nigeria, purchasing a new car is almost impossible. No thanks to the high Naira-Dollar exchange rate that now stands at N750.00 per Dollar as well as the low per capita income in the country. As an alternative, most Nigeria workers now resort to second or third hand cars popularly called *tokunbos* cars. Africa Automotive News (2019) alluded to this fact when it noted that because of high cost of new vehicles, most Nigerians come to used car stands to buy their first, or second, and probably their third vehicles.

These vehicles (tokunbos) have been used overseas for between 10 to 15 years if not more in some cases (Aleke, 2018). And because they are used cars, they are purchased with lots of mechanical, electrical, and

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other sundry faults. As a result, these vehicles are susceptible to frequent breakdown, obviously due to bad roads in the country. Africa Automotive News, (2019) has earlier opined that if you are purchasing over 10 years old vehicle in Nigeria of today, be rest assured that in the next three years there is 80% chance that you are likely to face mechanical or electrical malfunctioning that need to be repaired

With regard to the kind of faults that usually come with tokunbos, Abiodun (2018) listed them as follows: damaged wheels and flat tyres, electrical and mechanical faults, expired batteries, kick starter problems, and air-conditioning system that have parked up. Often times, most of the electrical and computerized cars are not only costly but also, faults in them are difficult to troubleshoot and fix.

Statement of Problems

There are about 11.5 million vehicles in Nigeria out of which 4.7 million of them are private cars and there are about 500,000 vehicle mechanics (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics Report, 2020). These vehicle technicians in the Nigeria automotive industry are supposed to rectify these faults but unfortunately, experiences of car owners appear to be unpalatable. Rather than fix customers' vehicles' problems, these mechanics take advantage of their customers – particularly the ignorant ones. It can also be observed that most of these mechanics do not listen to their customers very well and therefore cannot troubleshoot and diagnose vehicles' faults correctly. Most times, they end up with wrong diagnosis and use trial and error which, in most cases, further damage vehicles they were supposed to repair. Many car owners have either abandoned their vehicles or forced to auction them because they were declared *beyond repairs* by technicians. The problems have become complex as more sophisticated vehicles with sensor, actuators, and mecha-tronics systems are being churned out yearly. It can be observed too that most vehicle mechanics/technicians in the country find it difficult to repair the modern cars; they appear not to have the equipment and know-how to do so. Apart from technical skills, they seem not to have customer service skills as well.

On top of these, mechanics and motor technicians in Nigeria are perceived as generally dishonest and untrustworthy. Many of them have been found to collect money from their clients for new vehicle parts only to buy fake ones. They sometimes condemn good parts and make owners to buy "new" ones to replace them only for them to still fix the 'condemned' parts! According to Naijauto.com (2018), for every 50 honest mechanics in Nigeria, about 30% or 60% of them are dishonest. Alluding to this fact recently, Aleke (2018) noted that, for mechanics, their ways is to create a phantom problem from healthy vehicles; they will fix the said vehicle but will proceed to keep the supposedly "faulty parts they sought to replace and sell to another customer." They are so tricky that many customers are now apprehensive of many auto repairers because they have reputation of making car owners pay for unnecessary repairs and charges for work that is never performed (Onuba, 2021). Instances abound where mechanics are arrested by their customers for poor jobs done and for cheating.

These nefarious attitudes of mechanics in the country have made many car owners to spend or waste money on car repairs; money that could either be saved for economic or development use. However, the questions are: are all these allegations against Nigeria's mechanics factual? Are mechanics and technicians in Nigeria competent? Are mechanics in Nigeria generally dishonest? These questions cannot be answered without recourse to empirical data. It is therefore imperative to have empirical statistics on the service quality perceptions of customers of auto-mechanics/technicians. These allegations against Nigeria auto technicians are yet to be studied empirically. And besides, there are over 15,000 studies on quality of customer service perceptions across the globe but to the best of our knowledge none reflect the Nigerian experience (Pizam & Ellis (1999) cited in Onuba, (2021).

With the above problems in mind, this research is aimed at evaluating customers service perceptions in the automotive repair industry in Nigeria. It will be a case study of some private car owners working in tertiary institutions in Edo State, South-South Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the quality of customer service perception of private car owners in the auto repairs industry in Nigeria with a view to providing empirical data base to support or disprove the poor general perceptions of the public of auto repairers in the country. However, the specific objectives are:

i.   to ascertain the popular brand of cars amongst the population studied.

ii.   to find out the faults (mechanical or electrical) that are commonly taken to auto-repairers by private car owners.

iii.   to find out how often these car owners visit auto-workshops per month.

iv.   to find out customers service quality perceptions of car owners in the auto-service subsector.

Research Questions
  To achieve the objectives, the following research questions will guide the study:
i. which brand of car is popular among the car owners studied?
ii. which faults (mechanical or electrical or body) that are commonly repaired by private car owners surveyed?
iii. how often these car owners visit auto-workshop per month?
iv. what is the customers service quality perceptions of these car ownersmin the auto industry in Nigeria?

Hypotheses
The following hypotheses, stated in null form only, will also guide the study:

i. auto-mechanics in Nigeria do not generally lack expertise to troubleshoot and repair vehicles.

ii. the common faults reported by respondents will not be majorly mechanical faults.

iii. quality of customer service perceptions of these categories of car owners may not be significantly different from one another.

Significance of the Study
  The issue raised in this research concerning customer service experience of private car owners in the hands of auto technicians/mechanics in Nigeria are of great importance today and expected to be even more important in the future with sophisticated vehicles being churned out yearly by major foreign automakers. For example, more than 15,000 academic and trade articles have been published on the topic of customer service (Pizam& Ellis, 1999 cited in Onuba, 2021), but none of these articles, to the best of our knowledge, relayed Nigerians' experiences. This research, in our opinion, will be the first attempt to do so.
  Secondly, the outcome of this research may help to situate the public (car owners) perceptions of the mechanics in Nigeria that are generally perceived as dishonest and dubious. It may also deepen the understanding of the auto-mechanics of their impacts on their customers' satisfaction which may lead to improvements.
  In every administrative setup, strategic goal setting and planning cannot be effectively done without data gathering, analysis, interpretation and application. It is our hope therefore that the outcome of this research will assist the National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) to enrich the curricula of technical colleges, institutes, and technical workshops that are located in every major cities and sub-urban areas in Nigeria. NADDC is a federal government agency established in 2014 primarily to initiate, recommend, supervise, and regulate policies and program for locally manufactured vehicles and components. In fact, Bugaje, the Executive Secretary of NBTE has issued a matching order to all polytechnics to establish skills development centres before the end of 2023 (Idoko, 2023).
  Finally, the curricula of technical courses in polytechnics and technical schools in the country lacks topics in customer services. Students graduate with either national or higher national diplomas without the knowledge and skills of how to satisfy customers.

II. Literature Review
The review started with customers service perception and concluded with common faults repaired in vehicles.

Customers Service Perceptions
 . Customer perception is the opinions, feelings, and beliefs customers have about a brand. It plays an important role in building customer loyalty and retention as well as brand reputation and awareness. "Regardless of their actual experience, customer perception is all about how the customer feels about a brand and their interactions with you and the business," (Chandler, 2020). To create and maintain positive customer perception, you have to offer an exceptional experience and form a connection with buyers at every stage of the customer journey. According to *The Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report* (2020), if you leave the wrong impression, you risk losing a significant chunk of your customers. Over 50 percent of consumers would switch to a competitor after just one bad experience with a brand (Suuroja, 2003).
  Customer perception is important because it impacts a business's bottom line. As customer becomes so frustrated with a brand they decide to end their subscription with it which mean loss of business. You might think it is a small loss - just a single subscription - but that way represents much more value. Once you realize how much impact a single customer can have on your bottom line, their perception of your company will seem like anything but a small matter (Chandler, 2020). Consumers are more likely to share poor experiences than good ones.

The development of service-oriented concepts and models gained popularity in marketing literature around the 1970s. Suuroja (2003) argued that the conceptualization and measurement of service quality perception have been the most debated and controversial topics in the service marketing literature. Using Europe as a reference, two internationally recognized schools of service marketing research started to develop in the early 1970s (Berry & Parasuraman, 1993). One was based on Nordic countries in Northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. It has been noted that the Nordic/Scandinavian school model and North American school model have been integrated into one hierarchical model (Brady & Cronin, 2001). However despite over three decades of study and much serious debates, conceptual work on service quality can be described as conflicting and there is still much debate and many of the concept are still in flux (Schneider & White, 2004; Brandy & Cronin, 2001).

The Nordic school of services research emphasizes the interactive nature of service. The central idea is rooted in Gronroos' (1984) research, where service quality was describe as comprising functional and technical dimensions with image quality mediating the impact of these two dimensions. The organisation's image works as a filter and can positively or negatively modify the customers' perceptions of service quality. Gronroos (1984) argues that the process/function relates to how the service is being delivered (i.e., how customers were served while the outcome/technical dimension refers to what is being delivered. Subsequently, Gronroos(1990) modified his customers' perception of quality to reflect six specific dimensions which include professionalism and skills, reliability and trustworthiness, attitude and behavior, accessibility and flexibility, recovery and reputation and credibility he added *servicescape* in year 2000 (Gronroos, 2000) which he explained to create expectations and to build on impression of a service as soon as, or even before customers enters the physical environment where the service is offered.

However, managing perceived service quality (PSQ) means that firms have to match the expected services and perceived service to each other so that consumers' satisfaction is achieved. If this is the case, it means firms must continuously improve on functional quality so as to close the gap between technical quality and the expected service. This can be achieved by improving the interactive quality of the service encounter and the nature this interaction will strongly influence the customers perception of service quality (Hartline & Farrel, 1996). Another implication of the PSQ model is that companies must be careful about what they promise to deliver to the customers. They must make realistic promises because, as observed by Onyekachi (2012), the discrepancy between actual and promised service has an adverse effect on the customer gap. A safer strategy therefore is to promise less and deliver more (Izogo, 2015).

One major criticism of the Nordic model is that it only conceptualized PSQ not measurement (Coghlan,Shale, & Dyson, et al, 2007; Schembri & Sanberg, 2002). In this regard, Schembri and Sanberg (2001) argued that a standard instrument for measuring generic service quality dimension is an oversimplification and predefinition of what consumers are indeed looking for. Cronin and Taylor (1992) are of the view that the conceptualization of service quality as a gap between expectations and performance is inadequate. They argued that the concept of service quality should be customers attitude toward the service since the concept of satisfaction is defined as a gap expectation and performance or disconfirmation of expectations. An attitude based conceptualization would argue for an importance-weighted evaluation of performance on a specific service attributes (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) and they suggested that service quality should be measured by performance-only measure. This led to the development of the performance-only measurement of service quality popularly known as SERVPERF. Precisely, they confirm that performance instead of *performance expectation* determine service quality. Hence, in an emerging economy like that of Nigeria, the SERVPERF technique will be more efficient and applicable.

Customer service and service quality are some of the topics in business and marketing fields that have been subject of immense academic research over three decades (Izogo, 2015). The importance of quality of service in European economy as well as in USA for example is increasing with nearly two-third of the European Union workforce in the service sector (Dibb & Simkin, 2009). With respect to Nigeria, a recent publication, the CIA World Factbook (2012), reveals that the sectoral contributions of services to Nigeria gross domestic product was estimated at 38% in 2010, being the highest as industry and agriculture pararelled 32 and 30 per cent respectively in the same year (Lamb, Hair, & McDaniel, 2012).

Dealing with the occasional headache is an unavoidable reality when you own a vehicle. As a car owner, you are bound to get your own share of car problems, which you cannot just brush off as they could compromise your safety, comfort, and peace of mind while on the road (Onyechachi, 2012).

Common Faults Repaired in Vehicles

Anaviso (2022) identified 10 common car faults, their causes, as well as their effects on vehicles; and suggested strategies to fix them. However, only five will be explained in order not to make this paper unduly lengthy. Damaged components can be replaced before they cause any trouble.

Faulty Starter. The starter motor is a car component that works together with the battery to crank up the engine when you start your vehicle. A starter is usually built to last a decade or so, depending on the car model and the frequency of use. Occasionally, though, starters can fail due to certain factors. When the starter motor fails, it is usually a result of one of three things: a damaged electrical solenoid, a broken motor, or a faulty electrical system. Starter motor components could also stop working due to wear and tear. When the starter motor is damaged, you will hear a clicking or rattling sound every time you turn on your car's ignition. When the starter motor is dead, you will not be able to start your car at all. As a prevention tip, Anaviso (2022) opined that it is not always easy to predict and assess when the starter motor is going to break. To prevent any issue, get your vehicle inspected by a professional roughly every 48,000 km drive.

Dead Battery. Together with the alternator, the battery powers the engine to start your vehicle. Batteries are not made to last long—you can get them going for three to five years before they give out. A dead battery is a common cause of panic among car owners, although it should not be if you know your basic automobile troubleshooting. You will end up draining your car battery when you leave your headlights or other lighting components on for too long, especially when your car is not running. Car batteries can also die during hot or cold weather. Another possible cause is natural wear and tear, especially when it has been a while since you have repaired or replaced your car battery. Experts cautioned running a car with a faulty or dead battery means your vehicle can stall at any time. Look for warning signs like dimming headlights and a malfunctioning stereo or air conditioner. Also, if you have trouble starting your car in the morning, a dead battery is a likely culprit. These are some of the effects, says Anaviso (2022).

If your battery is still good, you just need jumper cables and another car battery to help jump-start it. Or invest in a portable car jump starter for a more convenient fix. It is a simple and quick solution to get your car running again. But the best way to avoid a dead battery is to replace it every three to six years or before you hit 80,000 km.

Damaged Alternator. The alternator keeps your battery charged and enables your vehicle to run. A damaged alternator is one of the common vehicle problems that car owners are likely to encounter the older the vehicle gets. Causes includes: the alternator tends to get damaged over time as the brushes inside start to wear out. A broken alternator is one of the common car problems among old units.

A faulty alternator can wear out your battery and cause your car to resist any charge. That means you will have difficulty starting your vehicle. Signs of a failing alternator include an unusual rattling noise coming from the engine and frequent issues with your battery. As prevention tips, keep track of how long your alternator has been running; know when it is time to replace it, so you would not be caught off guard by sudden issues. Occasionally, you can just replace the brushes inside the alternator. But most of the time, it is more ideal to replace the whole thing to ensure maximum performance.

Worn Spark Plugs. This automotive problem is inevitable since spark plugs are known to have a limited service life. Past a certain point, spark plugs can wear out until they can no longer supply the spark needed for the engine to produce power. Wear and tear are usually the main causes of faulty spark plugs. This problem occurs when you have been using your car a long time without replacing any of the original parts.

Worn spark plugs can cause your car to run at slower speeds and consume more fuel in the process. Your car also gets more prone to misfires. To overcome plug challenges, maintain peak performance by going for a tune-up every six months or replacing your spark plugs every five to 10 months. This will prevent long-term damage to your car electronics as well as ensure high gas mileage.

Flat or Worn Tyres. This is one of the more common car problems faced by motorists, so there is no need to panic if you ever come across it. Think on your feet and assess the situation at hand. Knowing the causes of a flat or worn tire brings you a step closer to avoiding or addressing it. A flat tire can be caused by manufacturing defects, although it is more common by external factors like punctures. Driving on potholes or running your car over sharp objects can cause your tires to blow out. Normal wear and tear can also cause your tires to lose air pressure after continued use.

A flat tyre will dampen the quality of your ride. You cannot fully accelerate your car as you will feel a sluggish tug that will cause you to lose momentum easily. A flat tire also makes you susceptible to a car breakdown on the road.

Follow the manufacturer's tyre maintenance instructions to extend the service life of your tires (e.g., changing them every 16,000 to 80,000 km) are some of the ways to overcome tyre challenges. Also, check your tires' air pressure roughly every two to four weeks to make sure your tires aren't over-inflated or under-inflated. When push comes to shove, it's best to know how to at least change a flat tire. Make sure that you have a spare tire at the ready.

Research Method

Descriptive survey was adopted in the study. Consequently, a close-ended questionnaire of the Likert's Scale types of strongly agree to strongly disagree was designed, vetted and validated using the research

objectives, research questions, and hypotheses as bases. The questionnaire was reliable at approximately 87% based on Cronbach Alpha.

Population/Sampling Technique
The population of the study was all car owners in the study locations. Preliminary survey shows they are very many. Snowball method was used to identify about 400 car owners before purposive sampling technique was use to draw 250 of them for the study.

Data Collection Method
Research assistants were employed to distribute and retrieve questionnaire from the population in each of the study locations. The one-on-one research interview with some of the participants was done by the researchers.

Method of Data Analyses
The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as bar chart, pie charts, cross tabulation, simple percentage. The hypotheses were tested using one-sample t-test, and   analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Data Analysis
This research utilized qualitative and quantitative measure that yielded descriptive results. The results of the analysis are presented under different subheadings. Holistic discussion of the findings concludes the section. There were recommendations as well.

Demographic Distribution of Respondents
Biographic and educational attainment of the respondents set the pace for the analyses. Table I shows the analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	165	66.0
	Female	85	34.0
	Total	**250**	**100.0**
	Category	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	20-30 years	41	16.4
	31-40 years	68	27.2
	41-50 years	85	34.0
	51-60 years	47	18.8
	60 and above	09	3.6
	Total	**250**	**100.0**
Educational Attainment	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	PhD/Master's Degree	140	56.7
	First Degree/HND	98	39.7
	ND/NCE	06	2.4
	WAEC	03	1.2
	Total	**247**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 1 show analyses of the sex, the age, and the education attainment of the respondents. One hundred and sixty-five (165) or 66% of them were males while the remaining 85 or 34% were females. As for age, 41 or 16.4% are between age 20-30; 68 representing 27.2% are between age 31-40; 85 or 34% were between age 41-50. Furthermore, 47 of the respondents representing 18.8 are between 51-60 years and the remaining 09 or 3.6% are 60 years and above.

For educational attainment, majority of the respondents (140 or 56.7%) have Phd/Masters' Degrees; 98 or 39.7% had first degrees/higher national dip[lomas; 06 or 2.4% have National Certificate of Education (NCE); while 03 or 1.2% of them are West Africa School Certificate (WAEC) holders.

How Many of the Respondents Bought Their Car Brand New?
The study also sought to find out how many of the respondents bought their car s brand new, secondhand, and third hand. Figure 1 below shows the analyses.

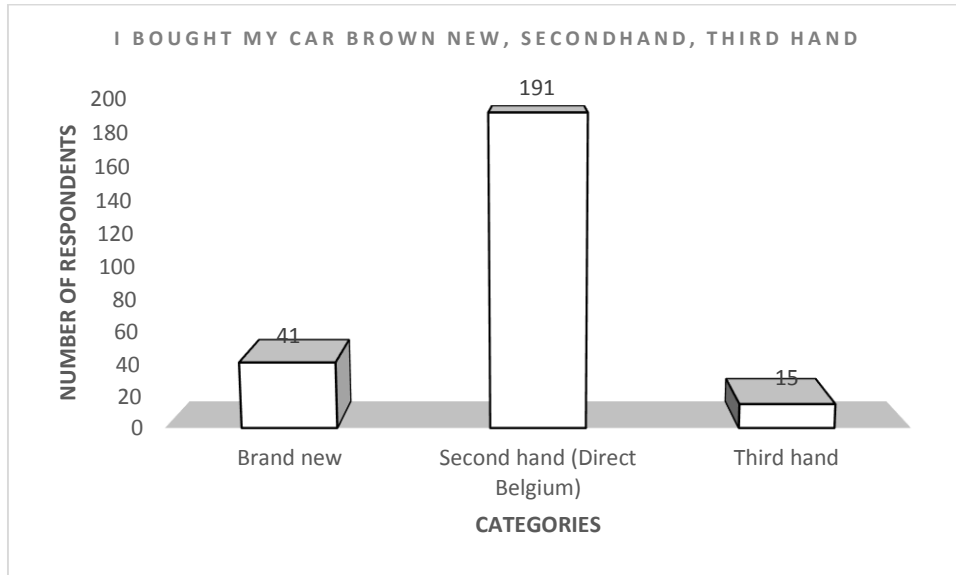**I BOUGHT MY CAR BROWN NEW, SECONDHAND, THIRD HAND**

Figure 1: Bar-chart on respondent's nature of car when they bought it

As the bar-chart in Figure I indicates, 41 or 16.5% of the respondents reported buying their car *brand new;* 191 representing 76.4% reported buying their vehicles *secondhand*; while the others 15 or 06% purchased their cars *third hand.* Also, for how long they have been using their vehicles, Figure II below shows the results.
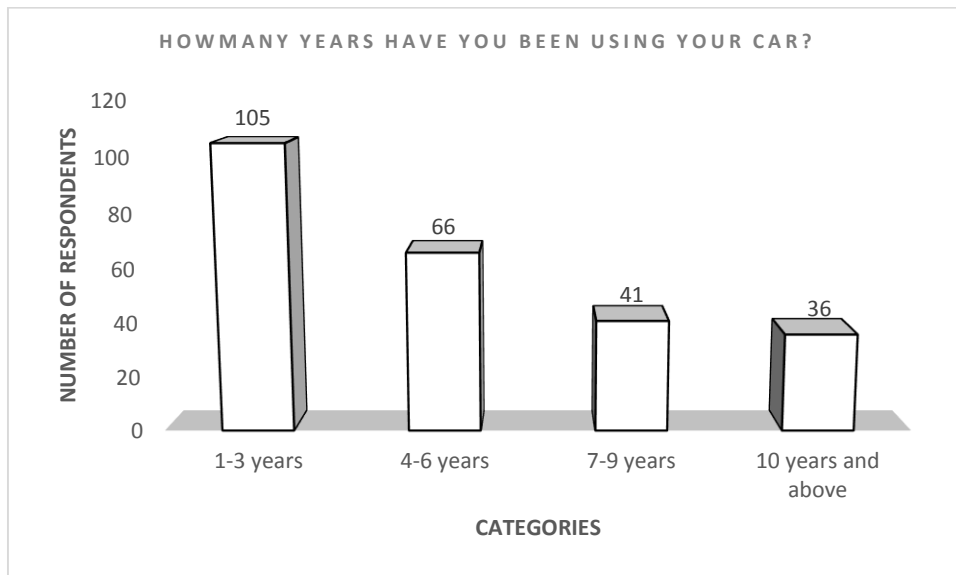
HOWMANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN USING YOUR CAR?

Figure II: Bar-chart on how many years they have been using the car

As the bar-chart in Figure 2 indicates, 42.3% representing105 respondents have used their cars for between 1 – 3 years; 26.6% or 66 respondents have use their cars for between 4 – 6 years. Furthermore, 16.5% or 41 respondents have used their cars for between 7 – 9 years and only 14.5% or 36 of them have used their cars 10 years and above.

The brand of cars that is popular amongst the car owners surveyed was also revealed by the study. The pie-chart in Figure III below shows this.
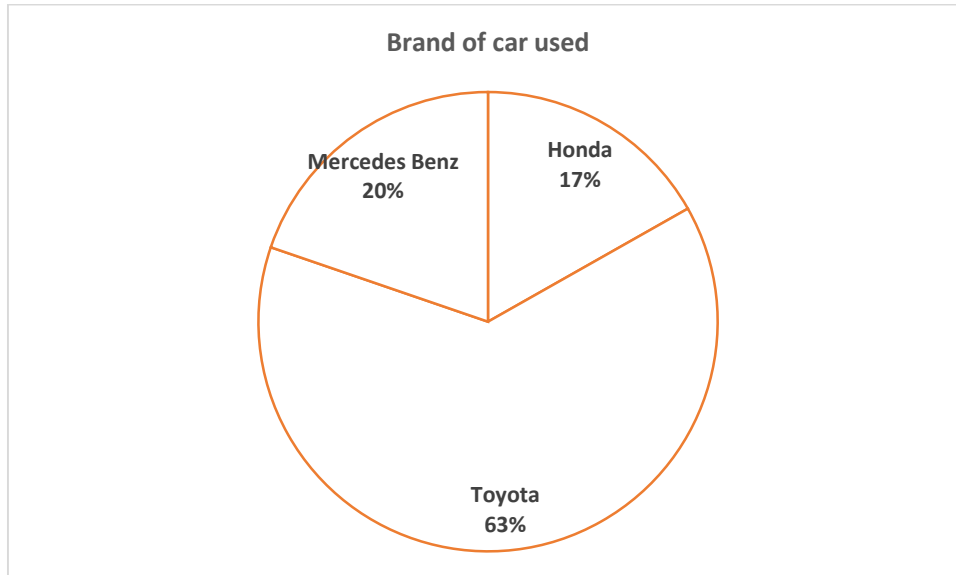
Figure III: Pie-chart showing the distribution of respondents by brand of cars

At a glance, Toyota cars is the most popular amongst the car owners (151 or 63%), followed by Mercedes Benze cars with (50 or 20%), and Honda cars lag behind with (43 or 17%) respectively.

Common Faults Repaired in Vehicles

The clustered Bar Charts in Figure IV below shows the analyses of the common faults respondents repaired in their cars.
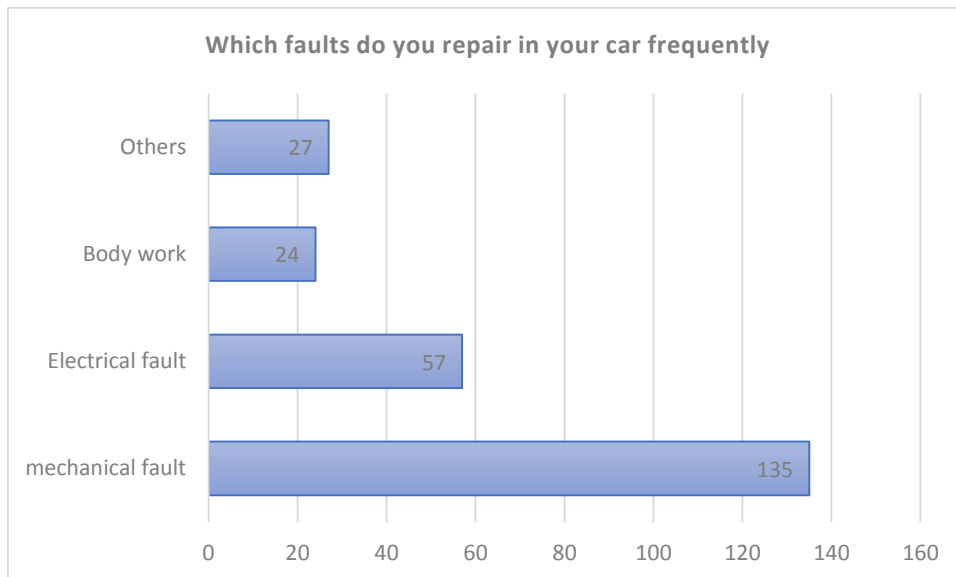

Figure IV: A Clustered Bar Graph showing the frequently repaired fault

As shown in the clustered bar chart, 135 respondents representing approximately 56% reported repairing *mechanical* faults in their cars most of the time; while 57 or 24% of them reported repairing *electrical* challenges in their vehicles most of the time. Furthermore, 24 or 10% of participants reported fixing *bodywork* in their cars. Finally, for repairs that was classified as *others,* 27 respondents or 11% reported repairing this in their cars.

Regularity of Visits to Workshop and Types Of Faults Repaired

Which vehicle faults regularly repaired is not only evaluated in the research as shown in Figure IV above, the frequency of repairs was also ascertained in the study. Cross tabulation in Table II below shows the analysis.

Table II: Cross Tabulation: How often do you visit your mechanic for car repairs and which faults do you repair in your car frequently?

		which faults do you repair in your car frequently?				
		mechanical fault	Electrical fault	Body work	Others	Total
How often do you visit your mechanic for car repairs?	Rarely	37(54%)	11(16%)	8(12%)	12(18%)	68
	Sometimes	75(59%)	29(23%)	12(9%)	13(10%)	129
	Often	17(45%)	16(42%)	3(8%)	2(5%)	38
	Always	5	1	1	0	7
Total		134	57	24	27	242

In Table II, n= 242 , 68 or 27% o *rarely* visit their mechanics (workshop) for repairs and of these, 37(54%) visit for *mechanical* faults; 11 (16%) visit for *electrical* faults; 08 (12%) visit for *body* work and, 12(18%) go to workshops for *other* reasons. Furthermore, 128 or 51% said they *sometime* visit workshops; and in terms of percentage, 75 (59%) visit for mechanical faults; 29 (23%) go for electrical faults; 12 (09%) visit for *body*work; while the remaining 13 (10%) go for other repairs. 38 *often* visit workshops and the breakdown of these in percentage terms is: 17(45%) go for mechanical faults; 16(42%) go for electrical faults; 03(8%) and 02(5%) go for bodywork and other repairs respectively. Only 7 car owners *always* go to workshop for car maintenance.

Customer Service Quality Perceptions

The main aim of the study is to instigate the customer service quality perceptions in the auto-repair subsector in Nigeria. Table III below is the analyses of responses to the five customer satisfaction domain evaluated.

Table III: Mean response and Ranking of customer's service quality perception

Descriptive Statistics

Empathy	N	Mean	Ranking
My auto mechanic give me individual attention	248	3.9637	2nd
My auto repairer deal with me in a caring manner.	248	3.9798	1st
My auto mechanic apologizes when mistakes are made	247	3.8785	3rd
Tangibles	**N**	**Mean**	**Ranking**
My auto repairer use of modern equipment in troubleshooting and repairing cars,	247	3.0972	3rd
My auto repairer has enough parking space for customers	249	3.6827	2nd
My auto repairer appears professional in their place of work	249	3.7590	1st
Assurance	**N**	**Mean**	**Ranking**
My auto repairer creates confidence in me after fixing my car	249	4.1325	1st
My auto repairer fixes faults in my car at the promised time	249	3.6827	3rd
My auto repairer services me promptly	246	3.8293	2nd
Responsiveness	**N**	**Mean**	**Ranking**
My auto repairer is always willing to rectify faults in my car	249	4.1245	1st
My auto repairer's charges are reasonable	249	3.8353	3rd
My auto repairer usually respond promptly to my distress calls.	248	3.9798	2nd
Reliability	**N**	**Mean**	**Ranking**
My auto repairer repairs my car right the first times	249	3.8594	1st
in terms of honesty and reliability, which of the following phrase would you use to describe your auto repairer?	249	3.3052	2nd
on a scale of 1-10, rate the quality of services you receive from your auto repairer	244	6.6598	

Source: field Survey, 2023

The customer service quality perception based on *empathy* shows that on the average respondents are of the opinion that their auto repairers deal with them in a caring manner. With regard to *Tangibles*, the analyses show that on the average respondents *perceived* that auto repairers appear to be *professional.* Customers service quality as measured by *assurance* shows that respondents are assured as a result of the confidence created by their auto repairer after the car have been fixed. Measuring customers service quality perception with regard to *responsiveness,* respondents perceived that their auto repairer is always willing to rectify faults in their cars.

Test of Hypotheses

The null hypotheses raised in the study were: (i) auto-mechanics in Nigeria do not generally lack expertise to troubleshoot and fix vehicles; (ii) the common faults reported by respondents will not be majorly mechanical ones, and (iii) customers' service perception in the auto-repair industry may not be very low.

In the analysis in Table III, the car owners reported that their mechanic deal with them in a *caring manner* (empathy); the mechanics appear *professional* in their jobs (tangibility); the mechanic create *confidence in them* after fixing their cars (assurance); and for responsiveness, the car owners report their mechanics *are always willing fix their cars.* The respondents' responses shows that Nigeria auo-repairers do not lack the knowledge, skills, and experiences to troubleshoot and fix vehicles' faults – whether mechanical, electrical, and body work.

Hypothesis 2

The common faults reported by respondents are not majorly mechanical faults. The one- sample t-test in Table IV below tested this hypothesis.

Table IV: One-Sample T-Test

	Test Value = 1.8					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
H$_0$: common Fault will not majorly be mechanical faults.	23.606	246	.000	1.12308	1.0294	1.2168

Based on the test result, it is observed that respondents are 95% confidents that the major fault repaired in vehicles is mechanical fault. This is further explained by the significant value at 5%. Since the level of significance is less than 5%, we reject the null hypothesis that says: *mechanical faults will not be the common faults repaired in vehicles,* and accept the alternative hypothesis, hence concluding that the common fault repaired in vehicles is majorly mechanical faults which strongly corroborated the results in Figure IV above.

Hypothesis 3

The hypothesis which states: *car owner' perceptions of quality of service may not be significantly different from one another.* The analysis of variance (ANOVA) in Table V below tested the hypothesis.

Table V: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.394	4	1.349	1.478	.280
Within Groups	9.124	10	.912		
Total	14.518	14			

The ANOVA results in the Table V above indicate that at 5% level of significance, the degree of freedom for the five treatments studied is 4 while the degree of freedom within groups (Error) is 10. However, the result from the table explains the significant value is greater than 5% which indicates that there is no significant difference in the car owners service perception in the auo-repair industry in Nigeria. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

Interpretation and Discussion of Results

As a caveat, the findings of the study should be used with caution due to some limitations. First. The findings are based on small sample size from also a small locality (scope). Second. The economic, social and political atmospheres in the last two months in Nigeria almost marred data collection. But nevertheless, the findings from the study will not only be insightful, but its usefulness may have far reaching implications for auto repairs in Nigeria.

Starting from the biodata of the respondents, majority of the car owners were not only males they were also between age 41-50 years. This is not surprising because males still dominate the work arena in Nigeria and

because of the low per capita income, most civil servant work for a very long time before being able to save to afford a car. It was not also surprising to know that majority of the respondents had master degrees and above because the study focused on car owners in academic environment.

As noted in the background to this study and indicated in Figure I above, majority of the car owners bought their cars second hand (tokunbo) because new cars are far beyond the reach of Nigerians. Furthermore, Toyota brand of tokunbo is not only popular amongst the participants (which clear research questions one), but most of them have been using these cars for between 1-3 years which indicates that even though the cars are bought secondhand, buying them is not still easy.

Since these cars are tokunbo, they come with lots of mechanical, and electrical faults as well as body problems. The study however shows that the common fault repaired in tokunbos cars is mechanical faults (which clear research question two) but interestingly, these faults are *rarely* repaired (see Table 2). No wonder some tokunbos cars can still serve long time.

With respect to the hypotheses tested in the study, the null hypotheses which states that auto-mechanic in Nigeria do no generally lack expertise to troubleshoot and fix vehicles was accepted because from the ana;lysis there was no adverse report from respondents (see Table 4); while hypothesis two which state states that the common faults repaired will not be mechanical faults was rejected (See Table 5) and, finally, the hypothesis which states that customers service perceptions of the car owners may not be significantly different was accepted because their perceptions were symmetrical in the positive direction.

Findings

From the analyses, the following conclusion can be drawn from the study. First. Toyota brand of cars are the most popular amongst car owners in the study area, and the major fault repaired in these cars are mechanical ones; but this is rarely repaired. Also, the auto-repairers in the study locations do not generally lack the knowledge, skills, experience and equipment to troubleshoot and fix vehicles.

Finally, the poor general perception of auto-repairers in the Nigeria auto market is not true but there is still gaps between expectations and service delivered.

Recommendations

Auto mechanic and other technicians that render intangible services should be well trained in auto repairs and customers service skills to be able to bridge the huge gaps between expectations and service delivered in the auto-repair industry as evident in the study. This can also be achieved if polytechnic and technical schools curricula can be enriched with modern methods ofd fixing vehicles and customers service knowledge and skills.

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