

EXPLORING TRANSFORMATIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN DIGITAL BANKING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Introduction/background: The increase in digital banking in Nigeria has made it easy for customers to experience self-service. The shift towards digital banking means that banks marketing systems will change, which makes it important for banks to understand the service quality dimensions of digital banking on customer experience. The following study was conducted as a qualitative case study to provide a grounded and more versatile understanding of the context-based phenomenon of customer experience of digital banking using three generations of customers.

Aim of the paper: This study aims to explore customer digital banking experiences in terms of advancements, transformational journey of digital banking and challenges for customers.

Materials and methods: A semi-structured interviews conducted from 25 digital banking customers from Nigeria about their experiences with digital banking. The interviews were thematically analyzed to produce themes around customer experiences.

Results and conclusions: The findings of this study revealed customer digital banking experiences, the advancements through digital banking (convenient, comfort, paperless economy), digital banking transformational experiences (delightful, modern, transparent, reliable), and challenges (network infrastructure, electric power supply). The study contributes to bank marketing research in terms of customer experience in digital banking service. It explores the experiences of customer digital banking service which is important for banking marketing and theory advancements.

Keywords: customer experience, digital banking industry, digital banking experience, customer service, digital banking.

1. Introduction

While technological advancement in the banking organization has an important effect on bank marketing efforts (Dootson et al., 2016), digital banking can affect customer connection. Digital banking through smartphones, mobile devices and internet connections has become a beneficial way to deliver several services to customers, which are gradually rubbing off on the traditional banking methods (Cortinas et al., 2010). Digital banking enables the banks to promote online services for customer convenience and to eliminate the cost of the personal transaction between employees and customers in different subsidiary branches (Dootson et al., 2016).

Moreover, the increase in digital banking in Nigeria has made it easy for customers to experience self-service. The shift towards digital banking means that banks marketing systems will change, which makes it important for banks to understand the service quality dimensions of digital banking on customer experience. Past studies focus on service quality and relationship among satisfaction, loyalty and performance of banks (Keisidou et al., 2013) and customer experience (Klaus, Maklan, 2013) while some research gives little attention to customer experience on performance of banks.

Current research has investigated the quality of mobile banking on the satisfaction of customers (Saleem et al., 2016; Amin, 2016), however, digital banking has not yet been treated in terms of viewing the customer experience journey. Piyathasanan et al. (2015) studied the effect of online experience on the perception of customers. In the research, he argued that there are few guidelines on how to improve the digital experience of the customer. Alalwan et al. (2016) researched perceived usefulness, trust and self-efficacy as a variable of customers' use of telebanking in Jordan banks. Telephone, internet services, and mobile devices are major channels of digital banking.

Some researchers argue that online banking services can promote positive customer service, which will lead to customer retention (Martins et al., 2014). Amin (2016) and Raza (2015) studied electronic banking service quality and its effect on customer loyalty while Jun and Palacios (2016) carried out a study on mobile banking service quality. These studies certainly offer benefits in their context, however, an exploratory study is required to understand the customer experience journey of digital banking services in Nigeria.

Despite the benefit of digital banking, it is still in its early adoption stage. Most of the digital banking studies are quantitative and focuses on the acceptance of these digital services. In order to gain an in-depth understanding and experience of this study, the study aims to answer the research questions:

How customer digital banking experiences are emerging by advancements and transformational journey of digital banking along with challenges?

A qualitative case study will be conducted, which is phenomenological. In line with this, empirical data will be collected using a theme interview method that provides a compound understanding of the experiences of three different generations of customers, which is more versatile compared to other quantitative studies on digital banking.

The main contribution of this study relates to a comprehensive understanding of the adoption of digital banking in Nigeria. It, therefore, contributes to research on digital banking and extends previous research of customer experience on digital banking. The objective of the study is to 1) explore the adoption of digital banking services through three generations in Nigeria; 2) find the most prominent factor influencing their experience of digital banking and 3) discover the challenges and solutions of digital banking services in Nigeria.

This study continues with a literature review, followed by the research methodology, while empirically, the experiences of the users of digital banking are analyzed. Finally, the conclusion will provide answers to the research question, and the next is the theoretical implication followed by the managerial implications, which provide suggestions for future research and gives the limitation of the study.

2. Literature review

Digital banking and its development in Nigeria

Sklyar et al. (2019) noted that the concept involves using a computerized method to provide an innovative way of creating value and generating revenue opportunities for the organization. While digital service is an intangible benefit that can be provided using an electronic or automated system (Gimpel et al., 2018). Digital banking in Nigeria is new and gradually becoming improved.

The banking industry in Nigeria is competitive in the local and international scale as it has enhanced its use of technology to serve customers outside the banking hall. Despite the advantages of these digital technologies to customers, the country is still faced with poor infrastructure. This problem has contributed to the high cost of living, especially in engaging in business activity. Lack of good infrastructure, especially in the digital aspect, can harm the adoption of digital banking services in Nigeria despite being in an era of computer-savvy customers.

Taura, Ede and Ogunniyi, (2019) argue that poor digital infrastructure will make it difficult for Nigerian customers to adopt digital banking services fully. It is noted that if needed attention is given to infrastructural development in Nigeria, it will help to improve the method of digital banking. Nigerians have shown their willingness to accept innovative ways of banking despite the problems that prevail in the continent.

Research has proven that there is a direct interaction or relationship between the online transaction and electronic trust in the banking organization. Most times, it involves the third party (Yap et al., 2010). For organizations to reduce the level of mistrust among Nigerians, the government has provided an agency for fighting crime in the country (Neegaard, Ulhoi, 2006). The economic and financial crime commission has helped to instill some level of trust in Nigerians when it comes to digital banking and has assisted in increasing participation in digital banking.

Therefore, banks must develop their digital service to improve the customer experience and become competitive (Gupta, Zeithaml, 2008). With more than 50 million people living in Nigeria, 60% of them use the internet (Taura et al., 2019), so investing in digital banking services is very vital, improvement of digital banking service would result in attracting numerous users or customers for the service.

Customer service experience

Customer experience is the topmost priority of every organization. The increased focus of customer service experience is prevalent in different organizations through social media platforms or channels that result in a more complicated customer journey. Organizations are now exposed to digital innovation, which has become the norm in our business environment (Verhoef et al., 2015).

The interactions between customers using social media platforms have created important challenges and benefits for the organization (Libai et al., 2010). With the social nature of customer experience, friends, family and relatives have greatly influenced customer experiences.

However, organizations have little control over the customer experience and customer journey, which led to the integration or combination of multiple functions, which include service businesses, financing, IT, supplying, personnel, marketing and manufacturing (Edelman, Singer, 2015). Marketing behaviour has shifted from traditional to digital ways of dealing with customers. This is where customer engagement plays a significant role in creating memorable service experiences (Verhoef et al., 2019).

Customers can play a role during service encounters to create a positive service experience (Dagger et al., 2007). This positive experience will, in turn, increase the profit of the organization (Fornell et al., 2006). The change of service system will also affect customer expectation of service delivered. This brings the research to create the customer experience. Customer experience is highly recognized as a success among service providers at different levels within the organization, which are strategic, tactical and operational level (Verhoef et al., 2009) the creation of service is a current phenomenon which outlines the significance of customer experience in all service organization. Some researchers have argued that customer experience is difficult to achieve and rare to attain (Jaakkola et al., 2015) because it is difficult to expect a higher level of cooperation from all departments in the organization.

3. Research methodology

The study was conducted as a qualitative case study to provide a grounded and more versatile understanding of the context-based phenomenon of customer experience of digital banking using three generations of customers in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. The study was done in an actual setting where digital banking services called UBA Master card and UBA online banking services were chosen as a good example of digital services that are provided by a Nigerian bank. The outcome of this digital customer experience will give a good representation of other digital banking services produced by other Nigerian banks.

The current study has the characteristics of a phenomenological research strategy, which entails the experiences of the customers who are studied. In this present study, the result that has been analyzed is a true understanding of the researcher and the subjects of the phenomenon (Helkkula et al., 2012). This case study is about the choice of the object studied. The object of this study is the UBA Master Card and UBA Internet and Online banking service, which are developed and produced by the United Bank of Africa. This represents an empirical example of the research phenomenon.

In general, the banking service in Nigeria is highly digital and accessible for its citizens. The UBA master card is a unique digital service that comes in a debit card where customers can store their balance, check account and transfer money locally or internationally to their loved ones while UBA online service is an application on the phone that aids customers to transfer money anywhere and anytime they feel the need to.

The interview method was used to collect data that provides in-depth information about the phenomenon. In this study, the targeted group of customers interviewed are active users of UBA digital banking services. In order to avoid bias in the interviews, different groups of respondents were included in the study. The total number of participants was 25. The subjects for the research were 20–50 years old and different professions and different gender, which shows that they have had different experiences from the adoption of digital banking since its inception in Nigeria.

Interviews were carried out in 2021 as semi-structured theme interviews, and the discussion carried a length between 18 and 25 mins. The authors conducted interviews face-to-face (25) on public premises. The interview themes covered broad themes, which include the background information of the participants and their general use of digital banking services as it relates to different phases of UBA digital services, which are their experiences, expectations of future use, and ideas and visions of digital banking development in Nigeria. The reason was to gather as exhaustive data as possible.

Table 1.
Sample profile

Variable	Characteristic	n	%
Gender	Male	12	48.0%
	Female	13	52.0%
Age	20-29	5	20.0%
	30-39	9	36.0%
	More than 40	11	44.0%
Employment	Public	11	44.0%
	Private	14	56.0%
Education	Diploma	10	40.0%
	Bachelor	6	24.0%
	Master	9	36.0%
Digital banking experience	2-3 years	8	32%
	3-4 years	6	24%
	5 years	11	44%

Note: N = 25, in-depth interviews with 20-25 minutes duration.

4. Research findings

Key findings of the current study based on five themes: customer's digital banking advantages, experiences, features, challenges and solutions. Furthermore, the authors have given a presentation of comparison amongst three different generations. The analysis provides the most common features that were highlighted and listed under the digital banking advancements, such as convenience (time saver), comfort (digital transaction ease), and digital cash (paperless economy).

This study carried out to explore the digital banking experiences of regular Nigerian customers in terms of digital banking advancements, transformational experiences, top features, top challenges and top solutions. The thematic analysis employed to understand different themes of customer overall digital banking experiences.

Digital banking advancements

Convenient (time saver)

With digital banking today, transactions are made at any time of the day and anywhere. You do not have to experience the face to face contact with the bank officers. At the convenience of your room, you can make your banking transaction. Through your android phone, you can make your transaction.

You have the convenience of making your transactions (Male, 50, Civil Servant).

It saves me time that I would have used for something else. I do not have to rush to the bank and go through some hopeless traffic (Female, 32, Lawyer).

It saves me time, money, energy (Female, 20, student).

Digital banking is much better than traditional banking because it makes banking easier, saves time and money (Male, 45, Lecturer).

By the use of the word convenience, it can be inferred from these respondents of a different generation that digital banking advancements have truly facilitated and reduced both the economic and psychological cost of modern banking about the traditional banking techniques. The respondent outlines the merits digital banking has over the traditional one along the three specific paths: (i). it saves times; (ii) the possibility of error-free digital banking transaction is extremely high; and (iii) it enjoys the merit of being processed or operated from any location: offices, homes and other controlled environments.

Comfort (digital transactional ease)

You do not need to go to the bank and queue. You can make your transaction and even call customer care to assess your money. Apart from accessing your account, you can also obtain a loan through digital means. Most medium scale enterprises have benefitted from digital banking. You can access a loan between 1 to 5 million nairas. This statement supports their claim of comfort in using digital banking services.

I sit at home on my couch and click on my mobile app, I can obtain a loan, and within 5 minutes, my transaction is complete (Male, 40, Medical doctor).

There is digital ease of transacting business at any time of the day, especially at weekends and after the physical bank closing hours (Female, 35, Security consultant).

It is more advantageous because it is very easy and it is not stressful (Female, 20, Student).

Paperless economy (digital cash)

In modern times, Nigerians are very fearful of carrying a huge amount of money around because of the risk of an armed robbery attack. Customers feel safer anywhere with the ease of transacting business by only carry the credit card. The respondents have expressed their advantages in digital banking applications. In the participant's view, the heavy use of digital banking applications has made economic transactions less and less cashless.

Paperless economy suggests economic, transactional efficiency, as customers' mobility without physical cash on them can still command a great volume of business transactions, speedy productivity and a recipe for checkmating crime and criminality in general and robbery in particular and give a feeling that it is greener or more sustainable approach to modern banking.

In the case of the robbery attack, I am well protected (Male, 50, Civil servant).

It is advantageous over traditional banking because you can move around without physical cash (Female, 32, Lawyer).

Before the advent of digital banking, I was a frivolous spender. Now with the use of my digital bank app, it has prevented me from spending unnecessarily (Male, 21, Student).

It is fast, reliable and convenient (Female, 40, Lecturer).

Digital banking transformational experiences

Delightful (sitting at touch)

The participant acknowledged that during relaxation, he could carry out his transaction, which can be an exciting experience for him. Considering the stress of going to the bank to fill a bank teller and waiting for the customer service officer to attend to customers can be very frustrating.

However, with the mobile bank app, transactions can be easily done faster. The invention of digital banking is revolutionary as we can now initiate economic or business transactions by merely operating his android, mobile phone from the comfort of our home. The statement, 'sitting at a touch' connotes simplicity and ease of carrying out financial transactions. This brings joy to the user and the economy at large.

You sit at the comfort of your home to carry out certain transactions (Male, 51, Accountant).

It is a thrilling experience for me. No stress at all when I want to pay my children's school fees (Female, 35, Teacher).

It is a wonderful experience for me to save better. Otherwise, if I had cash, I would have spent foolishly (Male, 50, Civil servant).

Modern (prestigious style)

The Generation Z respondents perceived digital banking users as occupying a class distinct from the general public. They consider it as something that satisfies their social status. Put differently, digital banking is a product for the rich. The participants learned that using a mobile phone in a transaction business can help to boost their self-esteem when they are around peers and family. The participants have also noticed respect and an association of high social class to be an exciting experience they enjoy as their adoption of digital banking services.

Digital banking considered as a prestigious or sophisticated lifestyle, more like a status symbol (Female, 25, Student).

Using my UBA mobile app makes customer in my town to respect because I do not have to give them cash. I just send money to them through my app (Male, 21, Student).

When I go to the store to shop for my toiletries, I get a pleasing look from customers that shows that I am modern and sophisticated when I do not have to pay in cash (Male, 20, Hairdresser).

Transparent (spontaneous verification)

The banking system all over the world is a global system. For example, Nigerian who travel abroad and need to transact business can easily verify their account information. Verification of account details is available anywhere around the world.

I have realized the benefit of using the UBA master card outside Nigeria (Male, 55, Medical Doctor).

You have the opportunity to verify the information you enter before you finally transact (Male, 50, Civil Servant).

Using my UBA Gold Master card had saved me when I was cash trapped in the UK. I was lucky to pay for my medical bills (Female, 38, Nurse).

When I travelled to the UK, I was able to check my account balance when someone from Nigeria made some payments to my account (Female, 35, security consultant).

I paid for my tuition and medical bills using the UBA Gold master card (Female, 32, Lawyer).

Reliable (privacy)

The respondents for the research acknowledge the reliability in the use of digital banking applications in terms of its speed and ease, and it is dependable at most times. This encapsulates the paperless advantages which can protect you from armed robbery attack. Safe, secured and dependable. The three-generation recognizes the benefit of adopting digital banking service.

It is faster, safer and more secured, it is reliable too (Male, 40, Medical doctor).

Digital banking top challenges

Network infrastructure (delayed communication)

However, a 35 old female security consultant, reveals that the network failure problem is a major challenge rocking the digital banking platform. From her choice of words: 'delayed communication' say much about the real and perceived problem likely to be encountered in the course of using digital banking applications. This may range from system downtime, sparely available infrastructures, poor policy based incentive programs in the organization, etcetera.

The challenges I know when it comes to digital banking is the network problem (Gen Y Female, 35, Security Consultant).

There are sometimes delayed transactions especially when I do a transfer, I get debited, and the receiver does not get the money (Male, 55, Broadcaster).

The network fails every time I am in a crowded area. It can be so annoying, and again it is also difficult to do a transfer most times in day time. I always have to wait at night to do it cos the network is not busy at that time (Male, 21, Barber).

Electric power supply (server disconnection)

The respondent, a 21-year-old, male student laments on the issue of server disconnect. Sadly, a country already grips in the epidemic of epileptic power supply poses a real threat to the digital banking organization. The server disconnect represents frequent failure associated with digital banking services. It reveals digital banking service dissatisfactions on the part of the customers who are almost always at the receiving end of the economy.

We need electricity all times to power server and mobile devices (Male, 21, Student).

I went to the bank to get a new debit card, and the bank had no power supply. I had to wait over 3 hours (Male, 34, Tailor).

The generator at the bank went off, and I was there waiting for hours. Then I realized the banking industry does not rely on the national grid for electricity. It is an appalling situation (Male, 55, Broadcaster).

5. Conclusions

The rapid advancement of digital banking has brought about significant changes in customer experiences within the banking sector. This qualitative case study conducted in Nigeria presents multifaceted dimensions of customer interaction with digital banking services across three distinct generations. The findings demonstrate the advantages, challenges, and transformative experiences of customers engaging with digital banking platforms.

The study reveals that digital banking offers unparalleled convenience, enabling customers to conduct transactions anytime and anywhere. This convenience not only saves time but also eliminates the need for face-to-face interactions, contributing to a more efficient and streamlined banking experience. Moreover, the transition to digital banking introduces a sense of modernity and prestige, especially among younger customers, who perceive it as a symbol of social status. The paperless economy aspect of digital banking emerges as a significant benefit, fostering a safer and more secure financial environment by reducing the need for carrying physical cash. This transition to digital transactions also has the potential to enhance economic efficiency and combat crime, presenting a pathway towards a more sustainable banking ecosystem.

However, the study highlights several challenges that hinder the seamless adoption of digital banking. Network infrastructure remains a critical concern, often leading to delayed communication and interrupted transactions. Furthermore, the frequent occurrence of power outages poses a significant barrier to the uninterrupted functioning of digital banking services. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the reliability and trustworthiness of digital banking in Nigeria.

The three-generation analysis underscores the importance of tailoring digital banking services to the specific needs and preferences of each group of people. While the benefits of digital banking are consistent across generations, certain experiences stand out for each group. Generation X values the convenience and time-saving advantages, Generation Y emphasizes the transparency and verification benefits, and Generation Z identifies with the modern and prestigious lifestyle associated with digital banking.

The results of this study hold important implications for banks and policymakers. To fully capitalize on the potential of digital banking, it is essential to invest in robust network infrastructure and stable power supply. Additionally, efforts should be directed towards enhancing customer education and awareness to foster greater adoption and utilization of digital banking services. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the identified advantages, banks can further enhance customer experiences and drive the continued evolution of the banking industry in Nigeria.

6. Discussion

This study aims at understanding the features, advantages, challenges and solutions of digital banking services among their different generations' in Nigeria. It has provided a deep understanding of digital experience in the largest African economy, Nigeria. Although there has been comprehensive research on customers digital banking experience in the global context (Mbama, Ezequo, 2018) yet the earlier studies did not adopt a qualitative study of three generations developing countries.

Therefore, the findings of the study contribute to research by filling this gap. The overall findings of the study indicate that customer groups from three different generations exhibit different experiences in their adoption of digital banking services. Although Nigeria is blessed with customers of different ethnic groups, they have established some positive and negative experiences.

The findings of the study have indicated that comfortability, convenience, ease of use, cost and time-saving advantages are similar among the three generations. Furthermore, the delightful experience is more prominent with generation X because of the convenience, reliable nature of transacting business in the comfort of the home (no stress), it is also a time and money saver.

Generation Y indicated that transparency is a unique experience for this generation because they tend to transact business outside the country and verify the openness of the transaction. They also engage in paying for their medical bills. While the generation Z emphasizes the experience of (Modern lifestyle) sophistication or an upgrade of social status when they engage in digital banking.

It is also discovered that that network infrastructure and epileptic power supply is a major challenge that affects the three generations. Despite the problems encountered with digital banking, the benefit of digital banking is highly important because of its convenience and time-saving method (Maduku, 2014). The customers revealed that the benefit of adoption outweighs its drawbacks.

Customers of online banking revealed some issues with infrastructural development in the country. If there is no good infrastructure, it will discourage customers from adopting online banking services. Poverty has affected the country's infrastructural services, mostly in the area of providing electricity, which can hinder the adoption of digital banking (Agwu, Carter, 2014).

Therefore, the three-generational cohort has advised that the Nigerian banks should do better by encouraging customers to adopt the digital banking service because the adoption of this service will assist the service providers on what needs to be tackled and improved upon. Another suggestion revealed that the internet connection or availability has to be improved because the speed of making a transaction complete depends on the speed of the internet service (Al-Somali et al., 2009).

For effective digital banking, these banks have to improve on their internet service and bank information security to win customers' trust. The issue of power supply in Nigeria has to be a problem even before the advent of the internet. While the solution to these challenges is to have a good or proper network infrastructure that would enable internet connectivity everywhere and any time of the day and a sustainable electric power supply. The three-generation expressed some similar concern with the problems relating to digital banking services in Nigeria.

7. Theoretical implications

The findings of this study have given some resemblance and divergent experience of three age generations in Nigeria. The study identified three major digital banking experience among the generation: delightful, modern, transparent. The transparent experience is recognized mostly in generation Y. At the same time, it was discovered that the Gen Z had notified some simplicity of transaction, time and cost-saving in terms of being prudent in spending having a sophisticated lifestyle that builds high self-esteem in the adoption of these digital banking services.

Based on the findings of the study, the authors gave a simplistic highlight on the challenges that affect the adoption of digital banking services in Nigeria, which has some similarities between the three generational cohorts. This study identified some solutions for the improvement of digital banking services in Nigeria among three generations.

These are the enhancement of network service and available power supply that would help to improve the adoption and encouragement of digital banking services in Nigeria. These solutions are similar amongst the three-generation.

8. Managerial implications

This study gives a brand new insight and increases the understanding of what a business should require based on the need of customers in each of the different generations. The bank Management should be strategic in its operations to create an outstanding experience for three generations of customers in Nigeria.

The findings of the study have uncovered some problems in adopting digital banking services from the bank manager's point of view. These are delayed communication, server disconnection due to epileptic power supply and lack of available internet services. However, the solution to these findings can provide some significance to bank managers and other financial players.

First, banks must work together with other stakeholders that are affected by this digital service to provide amenities to prevent or eliminate the issues of a failed transaction. In providing good electricity and stable network service, customers can engage themselves in improving the standard of living, for example, in the area of setting up a POS business within the community. This could reduce the crime rate from the youths and reduce internet banking frauds.

Second, since the banking organization is on the exclusive list of the Federal government of Nigeria, the national assembly should come up with a strong policy to regulate the failure of digital banking by imposing some fines on banks that have failed in this area. By so doing, most banks will live up to expectations through the central bank.

These research findings also provide banks with a transparent view of customer's experience in terms of their advantages, benefits, challenges and solutions in adopting digital banking services. This is an opportunity for marketing and managing digital banking services on three different generations.

9. Limitations and future research recommendations

Firstly, this research addresses the digital banking of customer experience among (3) three different generations using phenomenology study from a developing country in West Africa, Nigeria. Future research can investigate customer experience in other developing countries and

compare them. Hassan and Wood (2020) indicated that the perception of digital banking customers could be affected by their culture.

Secondly, the respondents in their study only include active users of digital banking services. Therefore, it would be interesting to include non-users as the subject of the study. Even there may be significant differences among non-users. Thirdly, the current study can also explore only non-users.

Furthermore, the engagement of the non-users of digital banking is an emerging area of interest in developed countries (Komukunenit et al., 2019). Another point here is that this study used a qualitative approach to build a theoretical foundation around digital banking in a developing country.

While it would be have great value to adopt the quantitative approach for future research, this study used a sizeable number of customers in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. It cannot be a representative of the entire customers of digital banking services in Nigeria. However, it would be more interesting to carry out a study in every other state in Nigeria to have a complete view of customer digital banking experiences.

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