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How Service Quality Enhances Customer Satisfaction: A Case Study of Low-cost Airlines in Thailand

*Yada Burapharat**

Kasem Bundit University, Thailand

Abstract

The airlines business in Thailand has become a major segment in the tourism industry that significantly affects the economic development of the nation. The market has been more challenging and competitive; therefore, every airline sets goals to improve service quality to increase customer satisfaction. To better understand the customer insights, this study aims to analyse the demographic factors influencing customer satisfaction and how service quality enhances customer satisfaction of low-cost airlines in Thailand what is the level of customer satisfaction measurements and how it can be improved. The respondent were 400 passengers of low cost airline from Don Muang and Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand. The sample size was determined by using Taro Yamane's formula. This research used a qualitative research method. Using questionnaire and interview method were the instruments to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of 2 parts are the demographic information of respondents including the respondents of gender, age, nationality, civil status, educational attainment, occupation and monthly income. The customer satisfaction including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangible related to 5 main points. The study was conducted by purposive sampling method. The findings were presented by descriptive statistics in forms of frequency, percentage and mean. The results revealed that the passengers were male in the middle age between 25-45 years old, the nationality was Thai, the civil status was single than married, the education attainment was bachelor's degree, the occupation was business person follow by private employee and monthly income between 25,000-85,000 baht. In overall, the level of customer satisfaction was medium, the highest level was responsiveness and on the other hand the lowest level was reliability and follow by tangible respectively.

Keywords: Service quality, Customer satisfaction

Introduction

Statement of the Problems

Due to changing lifestyles and priorities, people around the globe are very much inclined towards travelling nowadays. They are open to explore and experience new ideas and new places. This has given a great push to Global air travels with an increase in destinations and routes. Airline industry is going through a dynamic shift facing multiple challenges of reducing costs, attracting and maintaining demand as well as keeping up with quality standards (Baker, 2013). This has also elevated the customer perception and expectation of service quality.

Thailand's air transportation industry tended to grow continuously thanks for the positive factors arising from both domestic and international tourism growth. Airlines increase their flights in respond to an increased in air travel demand. Therefore, the number of aircraft movements at the 6 AOT's airports grew by 5.41% to 833,084 flights. The total number of passengers handled at the 6 airports was greater than 133 million, an increase of 9.37%. The total freight and postal parcel volume amounted to 1.60 million tons, increased by 9.68% when compared with those numbers of the previous year.

Customer satisfaction and service quality are one of the basic opportunities which help to run, to improve business and profit of the company, and especially save the loyalty of its customers (Asya, 2013). Good service is a result of organized corporate culture, which can be considered as a kind of social culture in general. Set-ting the values of a generalized trend of activity, rules, regulations and standards concretize this direction.

Quality service expectations in air travel are extremely important in consumer's behaviour (Parasuraman et al., 1985) as they affect their satisfaction and also lead to buying decisions (Park et al, 2004). Airline passengers understand service quality as a multi-dimensional variable (Parasuraman et al, 1988) and satisfaction is measured by overall service experience based on various factors, including the perception of service quality and also their mood, emotions and other social and economic factors (Tolpa, 2012). This concept, based on the premise that customers' assessment leads to a gap between expectations and perceptions of actual performance, has been used by many researchers to measure airline service quality (Sultan and Simpson, 2000, Fick and Ritchie, 1991). When expectations

are exceeded, customers think that they receive high quality service and this surprises them. When expectations are not met, customers think that service quality is unacceptable while, when expectations are confirmed by perceived service, they find quality satisfactory. However, if quality is less than expected, it results in severe disappointment that has greater effect than the excitement produced by quality that exceeds their expectations (Tolpa 2012, Atilgan et al, 2008 Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 2001).

This means that airlines should only offer services that they are capable of delivering, as this differentiates them from the other airlines in terms of service quality. Furthermore, airlines should adopt strategies that enhance passengers' satisfaction by exceeding desired service levels, dealing effectively with non-satisfied customers and confronting customer complaints positively. Early confront of customers complaints and quick resolution is therefore very important to change customer's impression and increase satisfaction (Makarand 2012). The bottom line is passenger's loyalty; profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty that is a direct result of customer satisfaction (Amiruddin, 2013, Jones et al, 2002, Lee et. al. 2001, Heskett et al, 1997)

Objective of Study

The objective of this research is how service quality enhances customer satisfaction of low-cost airlines in Thailand what is the level of customer satisfaction measurements and how it can be improved.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: The level of service quality does not influence by passenger's profile.

H2: The level of customer satisfaction does not influence by passenger's profile.

H3: The level of service quality influence by customer satisfaction.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of services quality?
2. What is the level of customer satisfaction?
3. How services quality improve customer satisfaction?

Definition of terms

Low cost airline refers to the airline that located in Bangkok, Thailand consists of Don Muang and Suvarnabhumi Airport.

Service quality refers to the service quality of low cost airline in term of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangible.

Customer Satisfaction refers to the customer satisfy in service quality.

Significant of study

This research aimed to find out the significant factors that influence by customer satisfaction and how to improve them.

Literature Review

The theory supports this research are service quality and customer satisfaction as following:

Service Quality

Service quality (Kumaradeepan, V1 and Pathmini, MGS, 2015). World "quality" means different things people and according to (Gravin, 1998), identifies five perspectives on quality; transcendent quality, product- based

quality, user based quality, manufacturing based quality and value based quality. As a result of intangible, multifaceted nature of many services, it may be harder to evaluate service quality than goods. Because customers cannot be separated from service delivery - process. Thus, most scholars were on the view that it as a major determinant to measure the customer satisfaction and some time as a determinant of customer loyalty too (Parasuraman & Berry, 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Service quality defined as the customer's judgment about the superiority or excellence of a product (Zeithaml, 1988). Gronroos, (1998) defined service quality as a "difference between customer expectations of „what they want“ and their perceptions of „what they get“. Also, service quality defined as "assessment of how well a delivered service conforms to the client's expectations. Service business operators often assess the service quality provided to their customers in order to improve their service, to quickly identify problems, and to better assess client satisfaction". Also, definitions of service quality revolve around the idea that it is the result of the comparison that customers make between their expectations about a service and their perception of the way the service has been performed (Lewis and Booms, 1983; Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982; Parasuraman et al., 1994). Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) give a three-dimensional view of service quality; interaction, physical and corporate quality. At a higher level, and essentially from a customer's perspective, they see quality as being two dimensional; process quality and output quality. Among them, Parasuraman was significantly contributed to the development of the service quality area as an important research field. The service quality construct according to Parasuraman et al. (1994) resulted in the development of the original 22-item SERVQUAL instrument that represents one of the most widely used operationalization of service quality. It has provided researchers with the possibility of measuring the performance expectations gap (Gap 5) composed of five determinants namely: reliability; responsiveness; empathy; assurance; and tangible.

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been a popular topic in marketing practice and academic research since Cardozo's (1965) initial study of customer effort, expectations and satisfaction. Despite many attempts to measure and explain customer satisfaction, there still does not appear to be a consensus regarding its definition (Giese and Cote, 2000). Customer satisfaction is typically defined as a post consumption evaluative judgment concerning a specific product or service (Gundersen, Heide and Olsson, 1996). It is the result of an evaluative process that contrasts pre purchase expectations with perceptions of performance during and after the consumption experience (Oliver, 1980). The most widely accepted conceptualization of the customer satisfaction concept is the expectancy disconfirmation theory (McQuitty, Finn and Wiley, 2000). The theory was developed by Oliver, who proposed that satisfaction level is a result of the difference between expected and perceived performance. Satisfaction (positive disconfirmation) occurs when product or service is better than expected. On the other hand, a performance worse than expected results is dissatisfaction (negative disconfirmation). Studies show that customer satisfaction may have direct and indirect impact on business results. Luo and Homburg (2007) concluded that customer satisfaction positively affects business profitability. The majority of studies have investigated the relationship with customer behavior patterns (Dimitriadis, 2006; Olorunniwo et al., 2006; Chi and Qu, 2008; Faullant et al., 2008). According to these findings, customer satisfaction increases customer loyalty, influences repurchase intentions and leads to positive word-of-mouth

Given the vital role of customer satisfaction, it is not surprising that a variety of research has been devoted to investigating the determinants of satisfaction. Satisfaction can be determined by subjective (e. g. customer needs, emotions) and objective factors (e. g. product and service features). Applying to the hospitality industry, there have been numerous studies that examine attributes that travelers may find important regarding customer satisfaction. Atkinson (1988) found out that cleanliness, security, value for money and courtesy of staff determine customer

satisfaction. Knutson (1988) revealed that room cleanliness and comfort, convenience of location, prompt service, safety and security, and friendliness of employees are important. Barsky and Labagh (1992) stated that employee attitude, location and rooms are likely to influence travelers' satisfaction. A study conducted by Akan (1995) showed that the main determinants of hotel guest satisfaction are the behavior of employees, cleanliness and timeliness. Choi and Chu (2001) concluded that staff quality, room qualities and value are the top three hotel factors that determine travelers' satisfaction.

1. Customer Satisfaction Models

Models of customer satisfaction come from a vast literature from the marketing research discipline. This pool of research includes models that integrate the concept of customer satisfaction in a network of related concepts, such as value, quality, complaining behavior, and loyalty. In this paper, we will label these kinds of models as "macro-models." Macro-models have special importance for the policy-level implications of an organization's research in customer satisfaction. Macro-models give the researcher the strategic context of the design and of the results for a study of customer satisfaction. The marketing research literature extensively covers the elements that make up the concept of customer satisfaction, such as disconfirmation of expectations, equity, attribution, affect, and regret. Because these elements explain the composition of the customer satisfaction concept (or "construct"), we will label these kinds of models as "micro-models." Micro-models enable an analyst to properly operationalize measurements of customer satisfaction, thus helping her/him to achieve construct validity in the eventual satisfaction survey.

1.1 Macro-models

Figure below underlies much of the research in customer satisfaction over the past decade. Note the following:

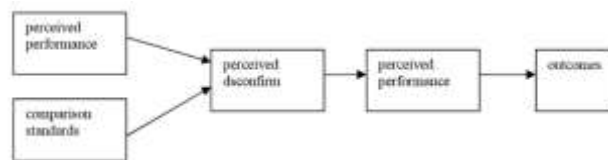


Figure 1: Traditional Macro-Model of Customer Satisfaction

1. Perceived performance often differs from objective or technical performance, especially when a product/service is complex, intangible, and when the consumer is unfamiliar with the product/service.

2. Comparison standards can come from numerous sources that can vary widely by individual, by situation, and by product/service type.

3. Perceived disconfirmation is the evaluation of perceived performance according to one or more comparison standards. Disconfirmation can have a positive effect (generally implying a satisfying result), a negative effect (generally implying a dissatisfying result), or a zero effect.

4. Satisfaction feeling is a state of mind, an attitude. The phrase "mixed feelings" applies here, as a consumer may have different levels of satisfaction for different parts of a product/service experience.

5. Outcomes of satisfaction feelings may involve intent to repurchase, word-of-mouth (the consumer's communication with her/his network of her/his approval/disapproval for a product/service), and complaints. These outcomes also are moderated by other variables.

1.2 Micro-models

The seven types of models they review in their article, and we will briefly comment on each type as following:

1. The Expectations Disconfirmation Model has been the dominant model in satisfaction research. The model has consumers using pre-consumption expectations in a comparison with post-consumption experiences of a product/service to form an attitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction toward the product/service. In this model, expectations originate from beliefs about the level of performance that a product/service will provide. This is the predictive meaning of the expectations concept.

2. The Perceived Performance Model deviates from the above model in that expectations play a less significant role in satisfaction formation. The model performs especially well in situations where a product/service performs so positively that the consumer's expectations get discounted in her/his post-consumption reaction to the product/service.

3. Norms Models resemble the Expectations Disconfirmation Model in that the consumer compares perceived performance with some standard for performance. In this case, however, the standard is not a predictive expectation. Rather than considering what will happen in the consumption experience, the consumer uses what should happen as the comparison standard. This is the normative meaning of "should" rather than its occasional chronological connotation in the English language.

4. Multiple Process Models characterize the satisfaction formation process as multidimensional. That is, consumers use more than one standard of comparison in forming a (dis)confirmation judgment about an experience with a product/service.

5. Attribution Models integrate the concept of perceived causality for a product/service performance into the satisfaction process. Consumers use three factors to determine attribution's effect in satisfaction. These are locus of causality, stability, and controllability. The locus of causality can be external (that is, the service provider gets the credit or blame) or internal (that is, the consumer is responsible for the product/service performance). Stable causes would tend to have more impact in satisfaction because consumers tend to be more forgiving of product/service failures that appear to be rare events. Finally, controllability affects attribution in that a poor outcome in a consumption experience may mean that the consumer will be unsatisfied with the product/service provider if the consumer believes the provider had the capacity, that is, control, to perform in a better fashion.

6. Affective Models differ from previous models in that it goes beyond rational processes. In these models, emotion, liking, and mood influence (dis)satisfaction feelings following the consumption experience.

7. Equity Models emphasize the consumer's attitude about fair treatment in the consumption process. Fair treatment can use the concept of the equity ratio (that is, the amount of her/his return for her/his effort made) or the concept of social comparison (that is, the perceived, relative level of product/service performance that other consumers experience).

Methodology

This research used a qualitative research method. Using questionnaire and interview method were the instruments to collect data.

Participant

The population was passengers of low cost airline from Don Muang and Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand. The sample size was determined by using Taro Yamane's formula.

Instrument

The instrument used in this research are divided into the following

1. The questionnaire consisted of 2 parts:

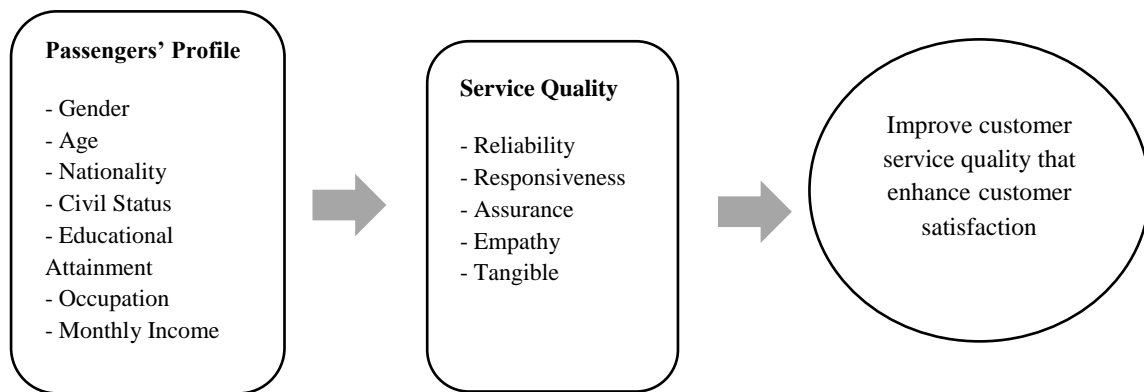
1.1 The questions related with general information, concerned demographic information of respondents including the respondents of gender, age, nationality, civil status, educational attainment, occupation and monthly income

1.2 The questions related to 5 main points of customer satisfaction including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangible.

The research methodology was divided into 3 steps below:

1. Select sample group by purposive sample method. The sample group came from 400 passengers who used low cost airline from Don Muang and Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand
2. Develop the research instrument which were two types of questionnaire and interview.
Collect data and analyze the data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews from key informants.

Research Framework



Data Analysis

The data was processed according to the following steps. The measurement of calculating for average and standard deviation was done by using a computer program and the questionnaire was designed with the five – point Likert scale for the respondents to their level of engagement with the given interpretation as below:

Means Scores	Interpretations
4.50 – 5.00	Highest
3.50 – 4.49	High
2.50 – 3.49	Medium

1.50 – 2.49	Low
1.00 – 1.49	Lowest

Table1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

No.	Variables	Demographic Data	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
1	Gender	Male	163	40.6
		Female	237	59.4
		Total	400	100
2	Age	Below 25 years	30	7.5
		25 – 35	164	41.1
		36 – 45	132	32.8
		46 – 55	74	18.5
		Total	400	100
3	Nationality	Thai	287	71.75
		Foreigner	113	28.25
		Total	400	100
4	Civil Status	Single	184	46.1
		Married	152	38.1
		Divorced/Separated	44	11.0
		Widowed	20	4.8
		Total	400	100
5	Educational Attainment	Below Bachelor's degree	55	13.8
		Bachelor's degree	239	59.6
		Master's degree	106	26.6
		Total	400	100

6	Occupation	Student	30	7.5
		Government officer	83	20.7
		Private Employee	97	24.3
		Freelancer	66	16.5
		Business Person	124	31.0
		Total	400	100
7	Monthly Income	Below 25,000 baht	38	9.5
		25,000- 55,000 baht	150	37.6
		55,001- 85,000 baht	138	34.3
		Above 100,000 baht	74	18.5
		Total	400	100

The Table-1, the sample group consisted of 163 male (40.6%) and 237 female (59.4%) passengers, the proportion of male and female are similar their age were 25 – 45 years old (73.9%), nationality was Thai (71.75%) than foreigner (28.25%), the civil status was single (46.1) than married (38.1), education attainment was bachelor's degree (59.6), occupation was business person (31.0%) follow by private employee (24.3%) and monthly income between 25,000-85,000 baht. (71.9%).

Table 2: *Customer Satisfaction*

Customer Satisfaction	Mean	S.D	Interpret
Reliability			
1. Airline flights always departs on time.	3.10	0.712	Medium
2. Airline flights always arrives on time.	3.37	0.603	Medium

3. Airline solves passenger's problems without delays.	3.15	0.675	Medium
4. Handling of baggage is effective and without loss.	3.48	1.004	Medium
Overall	3.27	0.748	Medium

The Table-2 above presents the item mean ratings on the level of outcome of the customer satisfaction as following:

Reliability, the respondents as a whole obtained a sub mean rating of (3.27), described as “Medium”. The highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “Handling of baggage is effective and without loss.” for the respondents as a whole with (3.48) described as “Medium”. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of (3.10) the item is “Airline flights always departs on time.” described as “Medium”.

Customer Satisfaction	Mean	S.D	Interpret
Responsiveness			
1. The ticketing system is very quick.	3.33	0.663	Medium
2. You have always get help from the airline staff no matter what is the problem.	3.51	0.734	High
3. Airline staff is very friendly	3.46	0.442	Medium
4. The baggage arrives on belt very quickly.	3.48	0.467	Medium
Overall	3.44	0.576	Medium

Responsiveness, the respondents as a whole obtained a sub mean rating of (3.44), described as “Medium”. The highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “You have always get help from the airline staff no matter what is the problem” for the respondents as a whole with (3.51) described as “High”. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of (3.33) the item is “The ticketing system is very quick.” described as “Medium”.

Customer Satisfaction	Mean	S.D	Interpret
Assurance			
1. Airline is a trusted name in the industry.	3.54	0.814	High
2. The airline has a very good safety record.	3.33	0.701	Medium

3. The airline staff are competent.	3.21	0.623	Medium
4. They have a high standard of service.	3.18	0.540	Medium
Overall	3.32	0.669	Medium

Assurance, the respondents as a whole obtained a sub mean rating of (3.32), described as “Medium”. The highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “Airline is a trusted name in the industry.” for the respondents as a whole with (3.54) described as “High”. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of (3.18) the item is “They have a high standard of service” described as “Medium”.

Customer Satisfaction	Mean	S.D	Interpret
Empathy			
1. They have understand the special individual needs.	3.17	0.794	Medium
2. They anticipate the problems of passenger.	3.22	0.886	Medium
3. The airline staff treats everyone individually.	3.40	1.002	Medium
4. The airline staff is cheerful in providing support service.	3.55	1.124	High
Overall	3.34	0.951	Medium

Empathy, the respondents as a whole obtained a sub mean rating of (3.34), described as “Medium”. The highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “The airline staff is cheerful in providing support service.” for the respondents as a whole with (3.55) described as “High”. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of (3.17) the item is “They have understand the special individual needs.” described as “Medium”.

Customer Satisfaction	Mean	S.D	Interpret
Tangible			
1. Airline has state of the art latest aircrafts.	3.11	0.695	Medium
2. Airline cabin crew is efficient.	3.24	0.702	Medium
3. Ticketing counters doesn't have long queues.	3.41	0.761	Medium

4. Airline reservation office is conveniently located.	3.35	0.878	Medium
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Tangible, the respondents as a whole obtained a sub mean rating of (3.28), described as “Medium”. The highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “Ticketing counters doesn’t have long queues.” for the respondents as a whole with (3.41) described as “Medium”. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of (3.11) the item is “Airline has state of the art latest aircrafts.” described as “Medium”.

In overall, it could be seen that the customer satisfaction in term of responsiveness (3.44) described as “Medium” is in high level and on the other hand the mean rating of reliability (3.27) and tangible (3.28) are lowest described as “Medium” which mean this factor should be improved to be better.

Results of Hypothesis Testing

Table 3: *The regression analysis of passenger’s profile toward customer satisfaction*

Variables	Beta	t-value	t-prob
Gender	-.090	-1.766	.078
Age	-.100	-1.995*	.047
Nationality	.014	.256	.798
Civil Status	-.020	-.398	.691
Educational Attainment	-.001	-.023	.981
occupation	.007	.118	.906
Monthly Income	.121	2.350*	.019

MultR = .268 F-ratio = 3.010*

RSq = .072 F-prob = .001

*singificant at 0.05

The Table-3 showing the multiple linear regression analysis of the respondents was tested according to profile of passengers toward customer satisfaction. It was found that 7.2% (R-Square=0.072) and the remaining 93.8% could be due to some factors which do not considered in this study. When considering single variable, it was found that age (beta=-.100), p-value= .047 < .05 hypothesis was accepted at 5% level of significant, and monthly income (beta=.121), p-value= .019 < .05 hypothesis was accepted at 5% level of significant. This finding implies that age and monthly income had a significant relationship between customer satisfactions.

Findings

The passengers were male in the middle age between 25-45 years old, the nationality was Thai, the civil status was single than married, the education attainment was bachelor’s degree, the occupation was business person

follow by private employee and monthly income between 25,000-85,000 baht. In overall, the level of customer satisfaction was medium, the highest level was responsiveness and on the other hand the lowest level was reliability and follow by tangible respectively. Consider each of item of customer satisfaction found that in term of reliability the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is "Handling of baggage is effective and without loss." and the lowest the item is "Airline flights always departs on time. Responsiveness, the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is "You have always get help from the airline staff no matter what is the problem", the lowest mean the item is "The ticketing system is very quick." Assurance, the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is "Airline is a trusted name in the industry." the lowest the item is "They have a high standard of service". Empathy, the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is "The airline staff is cheerful in providing support service." the lowest the item is "They have understood the special individual needs. Tangible, the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is "Ticketing counters doesn't have long queues." the lowest the item is "Airline has state of the art latest aircrafts." The hypothesis testing found that age and monthly income had a significant relationship between customer satisfactions.

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