HS008

Relationship between Desirable Characteristics and Service Quality of Ground Service Personnel towards the Image of Suvarnabhumi Airport

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the personal information, desirable characteristics, service quality, and corporate image perception of ground service personnel at Suvarnabhumi Airport. A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing a questionnaire to collect data from 400 personnel working at Suvarnabhumi Airport. Statistical analyses, including frequency distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation coefficient, were conducted.

The research findings revealed variations in personal data such as sex, education level, marital status, and income among the service workers. Interestingly, opinions regarding Suvarnabhumi Airport's image differed based on the workers' age and years of service, with statistical significance at the 0.05 level. The study identified a positive relationship ($r = 0.650$) between overall desirable characteristics and Suvarnabhumi Airport's image. Moreover, a highly positive relationship ($r = 0.815$) was found between overall service quality and the airport's image. In terms of theoretical and policy implications, the study suggests that airline executives and relevant staff should prioritize regular staff training, focusing on skill development and service enhancement. This proactive approach ensures that employees are well-prepared to deliver superior service, thereby positively impacting the corporate image of Suvarnabhumi Airport.

Keywords: Desirable Characteristics, Service Quality, Ground Service Personnel, Image

1. Introduction

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) predicts that the global airline industry will be profitable again in the year 2023. This positive outlook comes after the industry managed to reduce losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the year 2022, IATA forecasts that the total revenue of the airline industry will be around 727 billion US dollars, showing a 43.6% increase from the year 2021. The Passenger Yield, which measures the return per passenger, is expected to expand by approximately 8.4% in 2022. Additionally, the revenue from cargo transportation is projected to reach 201.4 billion US dollars, significantly higher than the 100.8 billion US dollars recorded in 2021, doubling in figures. The passenger volume in 2022 is expected to recover to 70.6% of the pre-pandemic levels, and the volume of cargo transportation is estimated to be 98.4% of the 2020 levels, an increase of 11.7% from the year 2021 (Civil Aviation Training Center, 2022).

The aviation industry is a reflection of a nation's economic potential due to its substantial revenue generation. Thailand, in particular, has three major airlines: Thai Airways International Public Company Limited, Bangkok Airways Public Company Limited, and Thai Smile Airways Company Limited. Each of these airlines has demonstrated significant organizational growth, as illustrated in the following figures:
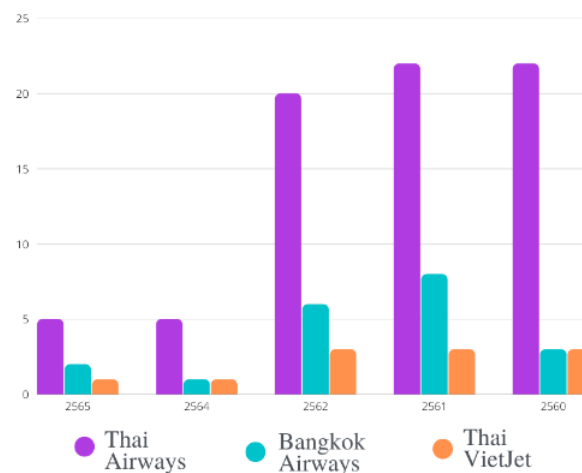

Figure 1: Skytrax Awards for Thailand's Top 3 Airlines

Nearly all airlines operating in Thailand have chosen Thai Airways as their in-flight catering service provider. Thai Smile Airways received prestigious awards from Skytrax in 2021, including: 3rd place in World's Best Airline Cabin Crew: Recognizing the airline's exceptional cabin crew service, 4th place in World's Best Airport Services: Acknowledging

outstanding airport services provided in airport facilities, 5th place in Best Airline Staff in Asia: Highlighting excellent service from staff in the Asian region, 6th place in World's Best Economy Class: Commending top-notch services in the economy class section, 9th place in Best Economy Class Airline Catering: Recognizing the airline's excellent catering services for economy class passengers (Thai Airways, 2021).

Ground service personnel and support staff within the airport have a primary responsibility to facilitate convenience for passengers within the airport premises, adhering to regulations and guidelines set by airlines and organizations. Ground service personnel and support staff must have knowledge of crucial tasks such as seat reservations and ticket issuance. Furthermore, they must understand the vital roles of ground staff in passenger reception. Presently, safety is paramount, aligning with aviation standards. Ground service personnel and support staff must be well-versed in air travel safety aspects, both physically and mentally, to perform duties in a constantly changing work environment (Professional Qualifications Institute, 2021).

Nilthaisong and Hempholchom (2018) identified desirable characteristics for ground service personnel in airlines, including moral integrity, knowledge and skills, and personal qualities. Wiriyo (2017) emphasized that these desirable characteristics and the quality of service provided by ground service staff, even though varying across different airlines, share fundamental service quality criteria essential for their tasks. These criteria include personality, interpersonal skills, communication, professional ethics, vision, social communication abilities, multilingual proficiency, and the inherent quality of service, often referred to as having a 'Service Mind.' This 'Service Mind' is considered the heart of service-oriented jobs.

Ground service personnel and support staff within the airport have a fundamental duty: to provide convenience to passengers within the airport premises while adhering to the regulations and guidelines set by airlines and relevant organizations. These staff members are tasked with essential responsibilities such as seat reservations, ticket issuance, and ensuring the safety of air travel. Safety is of paramount importance and is aligned with aviation standards. Ground service personnel and support staff must have knowledge of important tasks such as seat reservations and ticket issuance, as well as the vital roles of ground staff in passenger reception. They need to be well-versed in air travel safety aspects, both physically and mentally, to handle their duties in a constantly changing work environment.

The COVID-19 situation has emphasized the significance of preparedness in the aviation industry. As the aviation sector gradually rebounds, Suvarnabhumi Airport must be

prepared to handle the increasing number of passengers. Therefore, this research delves into the topic previously studied and aims to explore further in the field of "Desirable Characteristics and Service Quality of Ground Service Personnel and Their Relationship with the Image of Suvarnabhumi Airport." The research question posed is: "Is there a relationship between the desirable characteristics and service quality of ground service personnel and the image of Suvarnabhumi Airport?"

The problem of the study lies in the need for comprehensive understanding and enhancement of the efficiency and effectiveness of ground service personnel at Suvarnabhumi Airport. With the aviation industry resurging after the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a crucial requirement for preparedness within the industry. Suvarnabhumi Airport, being a central hub in Thailand, anticipates an influx of passengers as air travel returns to normalcy. Ensuring seamless passenger experiences and maintaining high standards of service within the airport premises are vital components of this preparedness.

The research aims to address the problem by investigating the relationship between the desirable characteristics and service quality of ground service personnel and the image of Suvarnabhumi Airport. The underlying motivation for studying this topic is grounded in the recognition of the pivotal roles played by ground service personnel. These individuals are responsible for tasks such as seat reservations, ticket issuance, passenger reception, and, most importantly, ensuring the safety of air travel. Moreover, their interactions with passengers significantly contribute to the overall image of the airport.

By delving into this area, the research aims to uncover insights that can inform strategies for enhancing the efficiency of ground service personnel. Understanding how their characteristics and service quality impact the airport's image is essential for stakeholders in the aviation industry. Through this study, valuable knowledge will be generated, providing actionable insights that can be employed by airport authorities and airline executives to improve passenger experiences and bolster the positive image of Suvarnabhumi Airport. Ultimately, the research endeavors to bridge existing gaps in the literature and offer practical solutions for optimizing ground service operations in the context of Suvarnabhumi Airport.

2. Objectives

1. To Investigate the Personal Characteristics of Ground Service Personnel
2. To Explore Desirable Characteristics of Ground Service Personnel
3. To Evaluate the Service Quality Provided by Ground Service Personnel

4. To Assess the Image of Suvarnabhumi Airport

5. To Explore the Relationship Between Desirable Characteristics, Service Quality, and Organizational Image

3. Research Question

Is there a relationship between the desirable characteristics and service quality of ground service personnel and the image of Suvarnabhumi Airport?

4. Literature Reviews and Research Frameworks

Characteristics of Desirability:

Desirable characteristics refer to traits that society desires in terms of moral values and ethical principles that individuals should possess to coexist happily with others in society. According to Nilthaisong and Hempholchom (2018), desirable characteristics encompass qualities such as honesty, integrity, respect, empathy, and the ability to make decisions, work diligently, and maintain mental well-being. Employees who exhibit proper language use, appropriateness, and effective communication are able to interact efficiently. In their research, Wongwanich and Chienwattanasook (2020) found that the characteristics and qualities desired in ground service staff according to user requirements were generally high. The comparison of desirable characteristics and qualities of ground service staff between low-cost and premium airlines did not significantly differ overall. However, when considering specific characteristics, only interpersonal relationships showed significant differences.

Service Quality:

Collins (1995: 1344) stated that to determine if something is of good quality, it must meet high standards. Quality is the level of action or practice according to standards, and it is defined by customer satisfaction received from the service. Therefore, service is considered efficient when it meets the highest standards. Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) developed a framework to measure customer perceptions of service quality, summarized into five details: 1) Tangibles: Services provided to customers must be clearly visible and tangible. 2) Reliability: Service providers must be able to perform tasks, making customers feel secure and confident in the accuracy and consistency of the service. 3) Responsiveness: Service providers must be prepared and willing to assist customers promptly. 4) Assurance: Service providers must have knowledge and establish good interpersonal

relationships to build customer trust. 5) Empathy: Service providers must understand the feelings of customers, show interest, and take care of them.
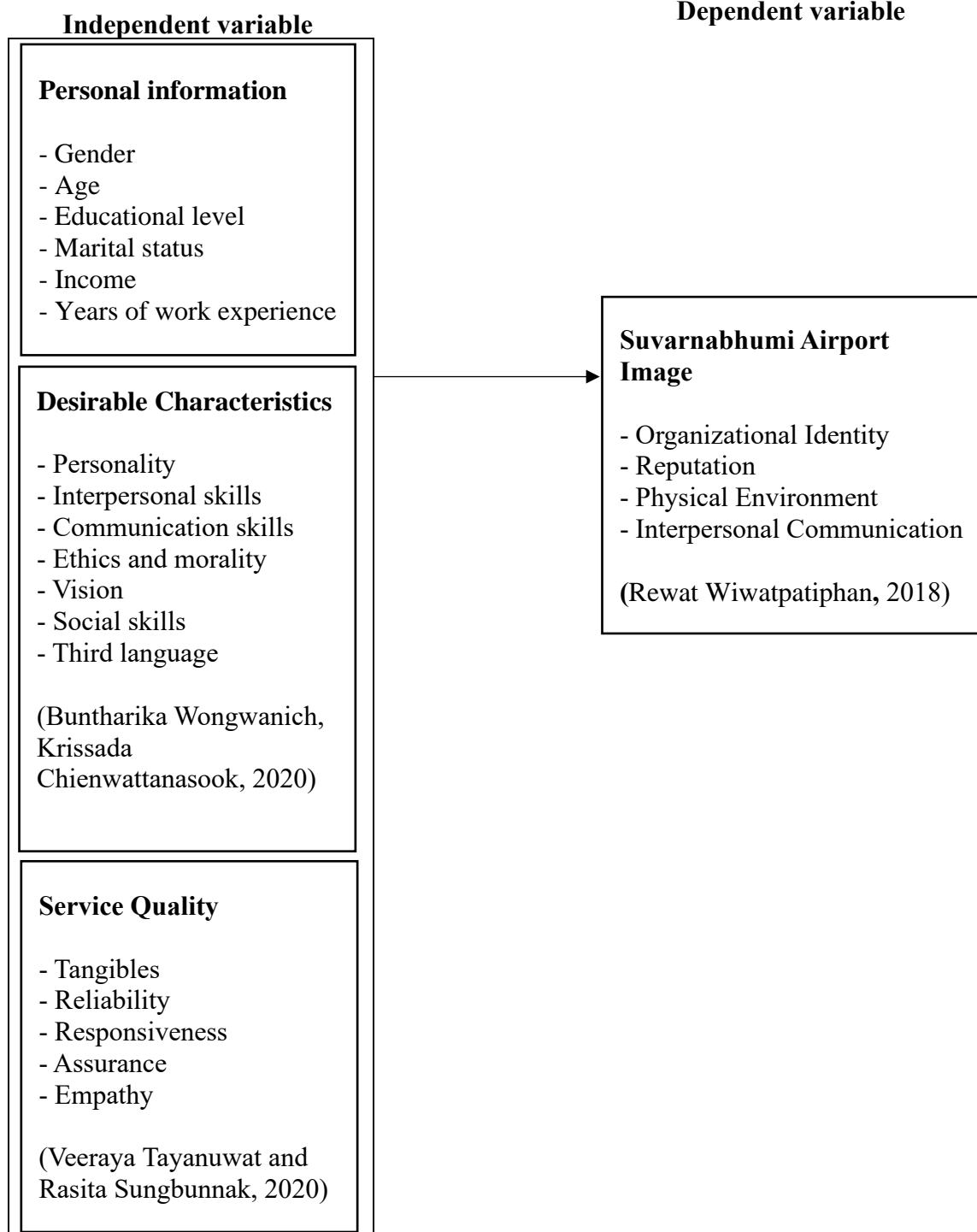
Image Perception:

Kotler (2000) explained image perception in the context of marketing as consumer perceptions of an organization or product, influenced by various factors controlled by the organization. From a marketing promotion perspective, image perceptions can be categorized into three types: 1) Product or Service Image: This image arises from consumers' memories of products or services, unrelated to the organization. For organizations with diverse products, it refers to the overall image of all products and services under the organization's responsibility. 2) Brand Image: This image stems from consumers' memories of a brand or trademark, often used in sales promotion and advertising to highlight specific product or service features. 3) Corporate Image: This image reflects consumers' perceptions of the organization alone, not related to a specific product or brand. It mirrors the organization's operations, management, personnel (management and staff), social responsibility, and customer service. In a study by Wiwatpatiphan (2018), the level of organizational image perception was high, significantly affecting customer loyalty at a statistically significant level of 0.05, with an effective prediction rate of 75.90%.

Research Framework:

Independent variable

Dependent variable

Personal information

- Gender
- Age
- Educational level
- Marital status
- Income
- Years of work experience

Desirable Characteristics

- Personality
- Interpersonal skills
- Communication skills
- Ethics and morality
- Vision
- Social skills
- Third language

(Buntharika Wongwanich, Krissada Chienwattanasook, 2020)

Service Quality

- Tangibles
- Reliability
- Responsiveness
- Assurance
- Empathy

(Veeraya Tayanuwat and Rasita Sungbunnak, 2020)

Suvarnabhumi Airport Image

- Organizational Identity
- Reputation
- Physical Environment
- Interpersonal Communication

(Rewat Wiwatpatiphan**,** 2018)

5. Methodology

Population:

The population studied consisted of service employees at Suvarnabhumi Airport. The population size was unknown (Infinite Population) due to the inclusion of employees under the Airports of Thailand Public Company Limited, employees under affiliated airlines, and outsourced personnel.

Sampling Method:

The researchers employed Cochran's (1977) formula with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% to determine the sample size, resulting in a sample of 385 participants. The questionnaire, validated through Instrument Objective Criteria (IOC) testing (with a reliability range of 0.67-1.00), was further refined based on feedback from three experts. This refined questionnaire was then tested on a pilot group similar to the actual sample (try out) to assess its reliability, yielding a reliability score of 0.925. The researchers collected an additional 15 sets as backup, resulting in a total of 400 sets. The sampling method used was non-probability sampling, specifically accidental sampling.

Statistical Analysis:

Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive analysis was conducted on individual data such as brand reputation and customer satisfaction. This included Frequency Distribution, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation.

Inferential Statistics: Inferential analysis involved hypothesis testing. T-Tests were utilized to examine gender-related differences influencing brand reputation. F-Test (One-way ANOVA) was employed to test differences related to variables such as age, average monthly income, and flight frequency affecting brand reputation. Correlation coefficients were calculated to assess relationships between these variables and brand reputation.

The study applied a comprehensive statistical approach, encompassing both descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive statistics provided a detailed overview, while inferential statistics facilitated a deeper understanding of relationships and differences within the variables. These statistical analyses were essential for drawing meaningful conclusions and insights from the collected data.

6. Results

Section 1: Personal Data Analysis of Ground Service Employees

n=400

Personal Information	Number (People)	Percentage (%)
1. Gender Male	165	41.25
Female	235	58.75
2. Age 20-29 years	214	53.50
30-39 years	119	29.75
40-49 years	60	15.00
50 years and above	7	1.75
3. Education Level Below Bachelor's Degree	32	8.00
Bachelor's Degree	338	84.50
Master's Degree	25	6.25
Doctorate Degree	5	1.25
4. Marital Status		
Single	296	74.00
Married	104	26.00
5. Monthly Income Less than 20,000 Baht	132	33.00
20,001 - 30,000 Baht	171	42.75
30,001 - 40,000 Baht	61	15.25
Above 40,001 Baht	36	9.00
6. Years of Experience 1-2 years	109	27.25
3-4 years	91	22.75
5-6 years	70	17.50
Other	130	32.50
7. Airlines Worked Full-service	262	65.50
Low-cost	138	34.50

The analysis found that the ground service staff predominantly consists of females, totaling 235 individuals. Among them, 214 individuals are between the ages of 20-29 years. A significant majority of the employees have attained a bachelor's degree, constituting 84.5% of

the group. Concerning marital status, 74.0% of the staff are single. In terms of monthly income, employees earning between 20,001 - 30,000 baht per month make up 42.75% of the workforce. Additionally, most of the employees have work experience falling outside the specified age range, accounting for 32.5%. Furthermore, the employees' area of work involves full-service operations, with 262 individuals, representing 65.50% of the workforce.

Section 2: Analysis of Desirable Characteristics of Ground Service Staff

n=400

Desirable Characteristics	Average	S.D.	Level of Opinion	Rank
Personality	4.28	0.582	Very High	(2)
Interpersonal Skills	4.29	0.679	Very High	(1)
Communication Skills	4.22	0.668	Very High	(4)
Ethics, Morality, and Professional Integrity	4.26	0.745	Very High	(3)
Vision	4.12	0.718	High	(5)
Social Skills	4.12	0.736	High	(5)
Third Language Proficiency	2.50	0.877	Low	(6)
Overall	**3.97**	**0.715**	**High**	

The respondents found interpersonal skills to be the most desirable trait with an average score of 4.29, followed closely by personality traits with an average score of 4.28, and least desirable was proficiency in a third language with an average score of 2.50.

n=400

Section 3: Ground Service Staff Service Quality

Service Quality	Average	S.D.	Level of Opinion	Rank
Ethical Conduct	4.04	0.674	High	(3)
Reliability and Trustworthiness	4.02	0.711	High	(4)
Responsiveness to Passengers	3.99	0.715	High	(5)
Passenger Confidence	4.09	0.729	High	(2)
Customer Care	4.10	0.724	High	(1)
Overall	**4.05**	**0.711**	High	

Service quality overall is rated highly with an average score of 4.05. When examining specific aspects, the highest-rated aspect is customer care with an average score of 4.10, whereas the aspect with the lowest high rating is responsiveness to passengers with an average score of 3.99.

Section 4: Analysis Results of Suvarnabhumi Airport Image

n=400

Suvarnabhumi Airport Image	Average	S.D.	Level of Opinion	Rank
Organizational Uniqueness	4.00	0.712	High	(2)
Reputation	3.92	0.725	High	(4)
Physical Environment	3.93	0.744	High	(3)
Interpersonal Communication	4.10	0.721	High	(1)
Overall	**3.99**	**0.726**	High	

The overall image of Suvarnabhumi Airport is rated highly with an average score of 3.99. When examined in detail, interpersonal communication scores the highest at 4.10, while the lowest score is attributed to the reputation aspect with an average of 3.92.

Section 5: Analysis of the Relationship between Desirable Characteristics, Service Quality, and Suvarnabhumi Airport Image

n=400

Desirable Characteristics	Suvarnabhumi Airport Image	
	r	Sig.
Personality	0.553**	0.000
Interpersonal Skills	0.617**	0.000
Communication Skills	0.588**	0.000
Ethics, Morality, and Professional Integrity	0.632**	0.000
Vision	0.624**	0.000
Social Skills	0.611**	0.000
Third Language Proficiency	-0.081	0.104
Overall	**0.650****	**0.000**
Service Quality	Suvarnabhumi Airport Image	
	r	Sig.

Desirable Characteristics	Suvarnabhumi Airport Image	
	r	Sig.
Ethical Conduct	0.669**	0.000
Reliability and Trustworthiness	0.690**	0.000
Responsiveness to Passengers	0.723**	0.000
Passenger Confidence	0.705**	0.000
Customer Care	0.708**	0.000
Overall	**0.815****	**0.000**

It was found that the overall desirable characteristics are highly positively correlated with the image of Suvarnabhumi Airport, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.650. When considering specific aspects, it was discovered that the desirable characteristics, including personality, human relations, communication skills, professional ethics and morality, vision, and social skills, significantly relate to the image of Suvarnabhumi Airport at the 0.05 significance level. Additionally, the overall service quality is highly positively correlated with the image of Suvarnabhumi Airport, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.815. When examining individual aspects, it was revealed that service quality, including professionalism, reliability, responsiveness, confidence-building, and customer care, significantly correlates with the image of Suvarnabhumi Airport at the 0.05 significance level.

7. Discussion

Examining the personal data of ground service staff provided valuable insights into the demographic composition of Suvarnabhumi Airport's workforce. Predominantly female (84.5%), the staff members are primarily young adults, with 214 individuals falling within the 20-29 age bracket. This demographic alignment with earlier studies by Nilthaisong and Hempholchom in 2018 underscores the consistency in the age and gender distribution in the aviation sector.

In evaluating the desirable characteristics of ground service staff, interpersonal skills emerged as the most coveted trait, as evidenced by the high average score of 4.29. Personality traits closely followed with a score of 4.28, emphasizing the significance of emotional intelligence in customer-facing roles. Conversely, language proficiency was rated lowest at 2.50, suggesting a potential area for improvement. This resonates with the findings of

Wongwanich and Chienwattanasook in 2020, indicating a correlation between user expectations and desired qualities in service personnel.

When analyzing the service quality provided by ground service staff, the overall average score of 4.05 indicated a commendable performance. However, a closer inspection revealed nuances within specific attributes. Customer care received the highest rating at 4.10, underlining the staff's empathetic and attentive approach. In contrast, responsiveness scored relatively lower at 3.99, suggesting room for enhancement. These results align with the research by Tayanuwat and Sungbunnak in 2020, emphasizing the pivotal role of responsiveness and tangible experiences in influencing customer decisions for low-cost domestic airlines.

The assessment of Suvarnabhumi Airport's image shed light on the overall perception of passengers. With an average score of 3.99, the airport's image was generally positive. Interpersonal communication garnered the highest score at 4.10, emphasizing the significance of staff-passenger interactions. However, the reputation category scored lowest at 3.92, indicating a potential disconnect between public perception and the airport's actual standing. This aligns with Kotler's assertion in 2000, emphasizing the importance of consumer perception in shaping an organization's image.

Additionally, the exploration of the relationship between desired characteristics, service quality, and Suvarnabhumi Airport's image revealed compelling insights. A strong positive correlation (r = 0.650) was found between overall desired characteristics and the airport's image. Similarly, a highly positive correlation (r = 0.815) existed between overall service quality and the airport's image, indicating a significant relationship at the 0.05 level. This aligns with Tayanuwat and Sungbunnak's study on service quality's impact on decision-making for low-cost airlines and Kotler's perspective on organizational image as consumer perception. The study by Nilthaisong and Hempholchom in 2018 further supported these findings, emphasizing the substantial influence of qualifications matching job requirements on job performance.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive analysis of Suvarnabhumi Airport's ground service staff, encompassing their demographic characteristics, desirable characteristics, service quality, and the airport's image. The alignment of the staff's demographic profile with previous research signifies a consistent workforce composition. The

emphasis on interpersonal skills and customer care aligns with passenger expectations, highlighting the importance of staff training programs focusing on emotional intelligence and responsiveness. Addressing the language proficiency aspect, which scored relatively lower, should be a priority, potentially through language training initiatives. Moreover, ongoing training programs focusing on enhancing responsiveness can further elevate the service quality, aligning it with user expectations.

Strategic communication efforts aimed at improving the airport's reputation, coupled with continued emphasis on positive interpersonal interactions, can bridge the perceptual gaps. By understanding the intricate interplay between staff attributes, service quality, and public perception, Suvarnabhumi Airport can continue its journey toward becoming a paragon of customer satisfaction and positive brand image in the aviation industry.

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