



CIHAN
UNIVERSITY-ERBIL

Service quality and customer satisfaction in the airline industry

Alaa salam Jameel
Department of Public Administration
Cihan University Erbil

Introduction

Customer satisfaction (CS) has become a key issue for organizations. Nowadays, customers have more alternatives than ever before, and keeping them is a significant challenge, especially in the airline industry. In the airline industry, meeting the requirements and desires of passengers consistently is a prerequisite for enhancing service quality.

Services Quality (SQ) could provide various benefits to the industry. According to (Rizan, 2010), SQ creates and enhances the connection between the airline and the customer (passengers) as well as SQ leads to re-purchases by promoting the airline through word-of-mouth and increasing passenger loyalty. As a result, airlines must recognize the strategic relevance of quality: Continually improving quality is not an expensive long-term investment, but rather a profitable one (Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015).

Customer satisfaction

- (Famiyeh, Asante-Darko, & Kwarteng, 2018) CS described customer satisfaction as a good emotion or feeling experienced after a purchase.
- Customer satisfaction has become a key component of organizational success and is regarded as a benchmark of performance and a possible level of excellence for every company .
- According to Hoffman and Bateson (2016) , when the customer is dissatisfied will express their bad experience with at least nine other people. thus, this word of mouth highly damage the reputation of the company as well the profitability. On the other hand, if the company acceptably fix the customers' problems, the earlier dissatisfied customers will share this news with at least five other people, and they will be more inclined to do business with the company again (Hoffman & Bateson, 2016).

Service Quality

- SQ is frequently measured using SERVQUAL. SERVQUAL consisted of five main elements proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), i.e. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.
- In addition, SERVQUAL dimensions may not be applicable to measure SQ in the airline industry due to the differences of features of SQ in the airline to other sectors (Hussain et al., 2015).
- According to Culiberg and Rojšek (2010), SERVQUAL five dimensions should be modified based on the sector to be measured because each industry has different characteristics and features (Gursoy et al., 2005).

Author(s) and Year	Service Quality Dimensions
Aksoy, Atilgan, & Akinci (2003)	Personnel, Food and beverage service Internet services Cabin features Country of origin and promotion In-flight activities Speed Punctually Aircraft
Mikulić & Prebežac (2011)	Flight offer Ticket purchase experience Flight experience Price On-time performance
Jiang (2013)	Flight experience Ground service Airfare and schedule Service reliability Consistency
Tsafarakis, Kokotas, & Pantouvakis (2018)	Price policy Website Flight schedule and routes Airport services during the flight Airport services after landing
Shokouhyar et al. (2020)	Tangibility Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy

Service Quality

Ekiz, Hussain and Bavik (2006) proposed a model to measure SQ in the airline industry called AIRQUAL. This model consists of five dimensions; Airline Tangibles, Terminal Tangibles, Personnel Service, Empathy and Airline Image. Several previous studies have examined and validated this model (Ali et al., 2015; Farooq et al., 2018; Shen and Yahya, 2021).

Accordingly, the current study adopts the AIRQUAL model to measure the quality of the service in the Iraqi context due to limited studies that have measured the quality of the service in the Iraqi airline sector and to validate the model of AIRQUAL in the Iraqi context. In addition, this study extended the model of AIRQUAL by introducing Security and Safety as it is considered an important dimension for Iraqi passengers who are prone to personal security issues.

Airline Tangibles

According to Shen and Yahya (2021) and Farooq et al. (2018), Airline Tangibles (AT) is considered one of the essential elements of SQ in the aviation industry. AT refers to all the aircraft's conditions, such as clean cabins, comfortable seats, practical interior equipment, quality service (Ali et al., 2015), decent air-conditioner, and spotless lavatory (Farooq et al., 2018).

The interior atmosphere, including cabin and lavatory, seats, internet availability, and entertainment facilities, is regarded as AT (Tsafarakis et al., 2018). In brief, the physical surroundings are considered tangibles, such as represented by objects and subjects (Kos Koklic et al., 2017).

Terminal Tangibles

TT refers to the visible services provided at a terminal such as conspicuous signboards, behaviour and attitude of security officers, the equipment like air-conditioner, restroom and the information provided for passengers (Ali et al., 2015). Tsafarakis et al. (2018) defined TT as waiting time and desk service during the check-in of passengers, availability of trolleys and duty-free shops in the airport (Shen and Yahya, 2021).

Personnel Services

Personal Services (PS) is an important and useful aspect of airline SQ, which may be defined as the level of service provided by airline employees. Farooq et al. (2018) claimed PS as the airline's most important dimension regarding staff attitudes and behaviours toward passengers.

It includes error-free ticketing, professional flight attendants, responsive cabin crew to individual passenger's requirements, and the willingness to assist others (Farooq et al., 2018; Namukasa, 2013).

PS is also described as assisting customers, giving prompt service, and reacting swiftly to customers' needs (Hussain et al., 2015). Moreover, PS refers to communication skills with passengers during the flight (Shen and Yahya, 2021), especially in different languages (Hussain et al., 2015)

Empathy

Empathy is represented in the airline sector through hassle-free service, which includes attentive luggage handling, courteous ticketing, and considerate compensation arrangements in the event of any loss or danger (Ekiz et al., 2006). Empathy describes the airline's ability to deliver personalized service to passengers. A cabin crew with a high level of empathy will understand the passengers' perceptions, needs, and preferences.

Airline Image

Airline Image (AI) means the associated feelings customers developed about the airline's brand, and such impressions affect the present or future passengers (Shen and Yahya, 2021). The airline industry faces a competitive environment; thus, AI is critical to attracting customers and distinguishing an airline from competitors.

The more reliable an airline is, the more confidence it may earn from its passengers. The passengers' perception of the brand could be enhanced based on their interactions with the company, such as timeliness, safety, and comfort (Shen and Yahya, 2021).

Security and Safety

Safety and Security (SS) is regarded as the airline sector's most valuable asset. Airlines go to considerable lengths to ensure that their customers have the SS they demand. Nowadays, with the advance of technology, airlines should use the latest tools and technology to inform customers about their SS features (Hussain et al., 2015). Other issues related to safety concern with baggage arrival delay (Hussain et al., 2015) or damage during the loading and unloading. Hasisi and Weisburd (2011) reported the SS positively enhanced the passengers feeling of protection during the flights. However, Srinivasan, Bhat, and Holguin-Veras (2006) indicated the success of airline security strategy was highly dependent on the passengers' perception and understanding of it. Therefore, the airport administration should educate the passengers regarding security systems in the airport and airlines through advertising.

Conclusion

In recent decades, changes in the aviation business have compelled airlines to assess the quality of their service performance to improve their competitive edge. But, unfortunately, it's also become one of the most challenging jobs that might affect an airline's long-term performance. This problem necessitates a systematic decision-aid tool that can manage the ambiguity and contradictory nature of service quality evaluation criteria and the strengths of multiple multi-criteria decision-making approaches in a darkened environment. This paper aims to understand CS based on SQ dimensions among Iraqi Airways passengers.