

AIRLINE GROUND SERVICE QUALITY: A CASE STUDY OF FULL SERVICE AIRLINES IN THAILAND

Kannapat Kankaew

International College; Suansunandha Rajabhat University, 1 U-Thong Nok, Dusit, Bangkok

E-mail: kannapat.ka@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

The aviation industry in Thailand has growth steadily for a decade. Especially, the emerging of low cost carriers that was tighten the competition. The purpose of this study is to evaluate level of expectation on ground service quality and the performance of the domestic full service airlines in Thailand. The questionnaires were administered to collect 400 domestic passengers who fly with full service airlines in Thailand. Those are Thai Airways International (TG) and Bangkok Airways (PG) at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport. SPSS was used to analyze degree of importance from passengers and the perception of airlines' performance. The Importance-Performance Analysis-IPA technique also was applied to measure the level of expectation and the level of perceived performance. The finding on eight areas of ground services are in high expectation and high satisfaction of airlines service from passengers' perception. Those are ease of reservation, courtesy of ground staff, fast check-in, punctuality of flight, airlines' website is easy to use and informative, efficiency of baggage handling, smart phone reservation user friendly, ground staff efficiency in problem-solving. In comparison, the ground service quality of these two airlines found that passengers perceived TG performance better than PG.

Key words: Airlines ground services, Importance-Performance analysis, Service quality

INTRODUCTION

The customer's expectation and high competitive in today market are crucial that the service provider should take in to account. Since, the cost of losing clients is high, and it is easy that the customer would ignore the firms (Harris, 2010). Moreover, the customers' needs and wants have change overtime. As refer to Atilgan, Akinci, and Aksoy. (2008) explained that customer needs are growth variety. The airlines have to serve various types of people and satisfied their needs in order to gain revenue and competitive advantages in the destructive market. It is one of industries that are highly competitive in the globalization world; both within premium carriers, low cost carriers as well as cross competition between low cost and full service carriers. Hence, the overall service quality is essential

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality perceptions are often defined as the difference between what a consumer expects and what they actually perceive as outcome (Headley, Bowen, 1997). Whereas, Gilmore (2003) defines as the ability of firm to meet or exceed customer expectations. The service quality is headmost of consumer satisfaction and perceiving it always reflect degree of customer satisfaction which has significant effect on purchase intention, prerequisite for success, survival, company can charge higher price and entail lower costs. (Cronin, Taylor, 1992; Cunningham, Young, 2002; Gilbert & Wong, 2003; Edvardsson, 1992)

Airlines' products are alike, but the services process deliver to customer are differ. To better understand and manage customer expectations, the airline service activities have been divided into processes or service stages. For instance, Chen & Chang (2005) identified a set of processes which were divided into ground and in-flight service stages. Notwithstanding, IATA (2012) has defined the flying passenger interaction with customer service into 5 phases; including phase one pre-journey, phase two at origin airport, phase three en route, phase four at destination airport and phase five post journey. At each phase expectations and perceptions will result in some level of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

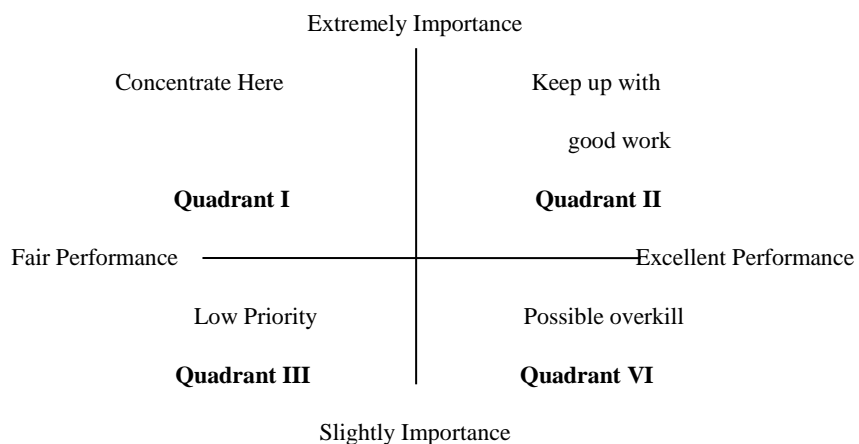
METHODOLOGY

Four hundred samples were collected at Suvarnabhumi airport, administered to domestic passenger departing and arriving from Thai Airways (TG) and Bangkok Airways (PG). The ground service attributes including ease of reservation, courtesy of ground staff, fast check-in, punctuality of flight, airlines' website is easy to use and informative, efficiency of baggage handling, smart phone reservation user friendly, ground staff efficiency in problem-solving were assessed of importance and performance with Likert Scale from 1-5. It means 1 = not important, 2 = least importance, 3 = importance, 4 = high importance and 5 = very importance respectively. SPSS and Importance-performance Analysis (IPA) tool were applied.

The IPA tool used to evaluate what the customer feels important and how well the organization perform. It is divided into four quadrants: (1) Concentrate Here quadrant indicates that the customers consider service attributes important but not satisfied with the service they perceived; (2) Keep Up with the Good Work quadrant indicates that the customers consider service attributes important and they are happy with the service perceived; (3) Low Priority quadrant indicates that the customers care less about the attributes and they are not satisfied with the service; (4) Possible Overkill quadrant indicates that the customers care less about the attributes but the service provider has good performance (Martilla & James, 1977).

Figure 1

Illustrates Importance-Performance Analysis Tool



Source: Adapted from Martilla and James (1977), Importance-Performance Analysis. Journal of Marketing.

RESULTS

There were 396 questionnaires collected with 197 copies from PG's passengers and 199 from TG's passengers. There were 140 males and 256 female accounted for 35.35 per cent and 64.65 per cent respondents. The highest respondents age range between 21-30 were 163 persons accounted for 41.16 per cent, age range between 31-40 were 132 persons accounted for 33.33 per cent, and the age range between 41-50 was accounted 16.16 per cent. Visiting-friends and relatives (VFR) was highest rank as a trip purpose at 40.66 per cent, for leisure 26.26 per cent, for business 21.21 per cent and others 11.36 per cent.

The level of importance and satisfaction of TG and PG were tested by using SPSS as shown in Table 1 for TG and Table 2 for PG accordingly.

Table 1**Illustrates satisfaction and expectation level of ground service attributes of TG.**

Service Attributes	Means (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation of Importance (SD)	Level of Importance	Means (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation of Importance (SD)	Level of Satisfaction
ease of reservation	4.60	0.58	Very High	4.19	0.75	High
courtesy of ground staff	4.60	0.60	Very High	4.13	0.77	High
fast check-in	4.62	0.59	Very High	4.15	0.82	High
punctuality of flight	4.53	0.73	Very High	3.86	0.97	High
airlines' website is easy to use and informative	4.53	0.68	Very High	3.87	1.08	High
efficiency of baggage handling	4.60	0.64	Very High	4.12	0.92	High
smart phone reservation user friendly	4.21	0.92	Very High	3.36	1.20	High
ground staff efficiency in problem-solving	4.58	0.66	Very High	4.08	0.88	High

Table 2**Illustrates satisfaction and expectation level of ground service attributes of PG.**

Service Attributes	Means (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation of Importance (SD)	Level of Importance	Means (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation of Importance (SD)	Level of Satisfaction
ease of reservation	4.18	0.61	High	3.90	0.88	High
courtesy of ground staff	4.15	0.64	High	4.03	0.92	High
fast check-in	4.21	0.68	Very high	3.94	0.98	High

Table 2 (Continue)**Illustrates satisfaction and expectation level of ground service attributes of PG.**

Service Attributes	Means (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation of Importance (SD)	Level of Importance	Means (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation of Importance (SD)	Level of Satisfaction
punctuality of flight	4.25	0.72	Very High	4.09	1.00	High
airlines' website is easy to use and informative	4.15	0.80	High	3.93	1.06	High
efficiency of baggage handling	4.13	0.78	High	3.91	1.01	High
smart phone reservation user friendly	4.04	0.89	High	3.80	1.10	High
ground staff efficiency in problem-solving	4.24	0.68	Very High	3.94	0.99	High

From the table 1 and 2, revealed that passengers have very high importance or expectation on every ground service attributes from TG, whereas they have very high importance on some service attributes from PG (fast check-in, the punctuality of flight and the capability of ground service staff in handling problem effectively; as shown). Howbeit, passengers' level of expectation on every attributes from both airlines were high. Meanwhile, both airlines performed quite good, since the level of satisfaction from passengers for all ground service attributes were high. In addition, from these two table we can interpret that passengers are always have high expectation from the services they paid. And the airlines both TG and PG ground service attributes and workforces performed their duties quite well.

The IPA technique, then plotted to assessed the importance and performance on ground service attributes for both airlines, as shown in Figure 1 for TG and Figure 2 for PG respectively. The following figure of IPA technique for TG found that most of every service attributes fall into Quadrant II (keep up on good work). It means that excellent performance where the passengers feel it is importance to them. There was only one attribute (smart phone reservation user friendly) fall into Quadrant IV (possible overkill). This means that passengers slightly focus on the issue, but the airline perform well.

The IPA of PG revealed that all ground service attributes of the airlines fall into Quadrant II (keep up on good work). This means that the airlines perform well and should follow the same standards. As well as, passengers have high importance and they are satisfied with the services.

Figure 1

The IPA technique plotted on ground service attributes for TG.

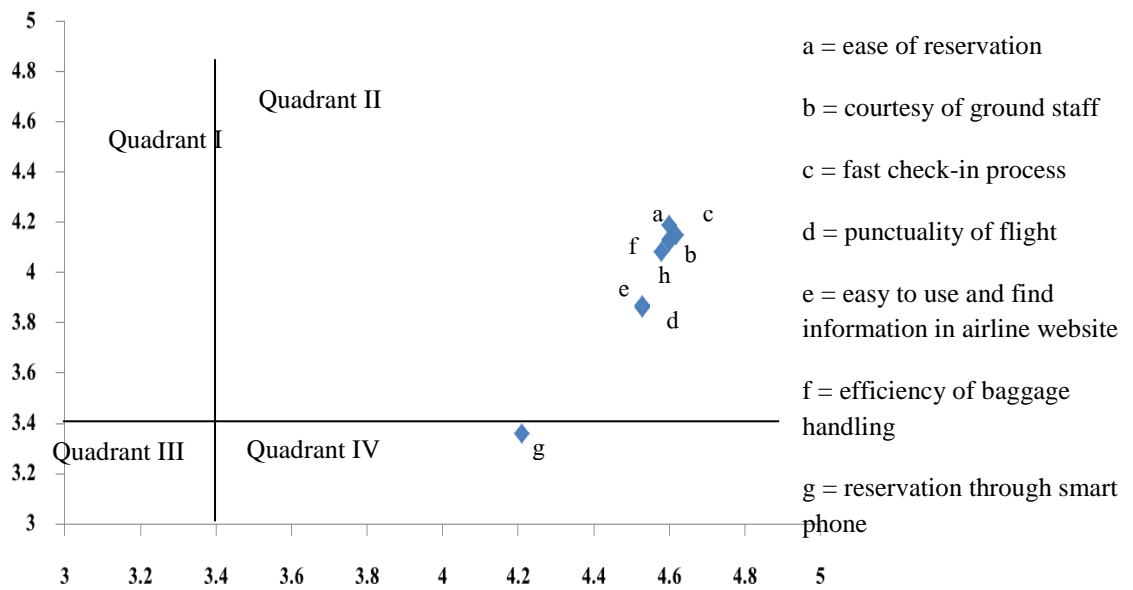
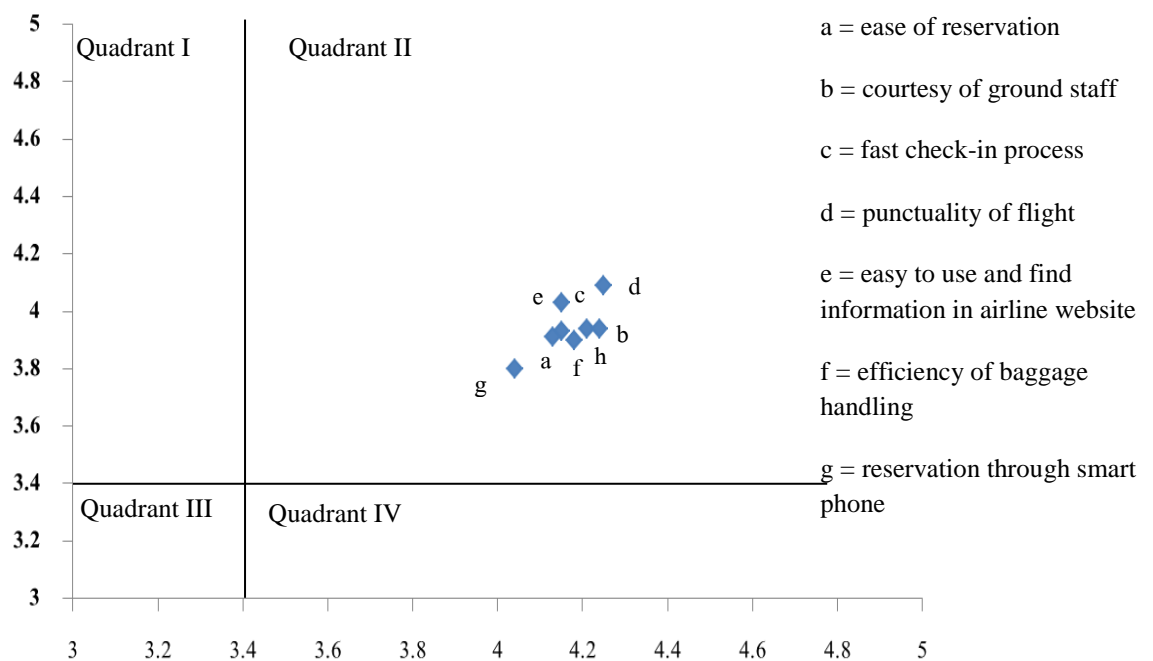


Figure 2

The IPA technique plotted on ground service attributes for PG.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clearly can be seen that passengers have high level of expectation on all airlines' ground service attributes. However, both TG and PG perform well on their services and the customer satisfied. The results also revealed that customers always have high expectation on the services they have paid. There is on issue

that passengers are not focus much. It is the reservation through smart phone was found when plotted on IPA from TG ground services, even the airline still performs well. As overall score level of importance and performance felt into keep up on good work. It does not mean that airline freezing on training and development. Since, today the airline industry is competing intensely. There are various emerging airlines, especially low cost which passenger perceived low level of service and has low level of expectation. So that airlines should take consideration on passengers' behavior and trends that change over time. As well as, the advancement of technology that allow firms innovate and enhancing customer experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank for Research and Development Institute, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for supporting this research. As well as, Dean of International College for the guidelines.

REFERENCES

- Atilgan E., Akinci S., Aksoy S (2008), "Measuring and Mapping Customers' expectations and perceptions for Airlines: The Sunexpress Case with The Gaps Model", *Journal of Global Strategic Management*, Vol. 3, p68-78.
- Chen Yuan-Fang, Chang Hern-Yu (2005), "Examining Airline Service Quality from a process perspective". *Journal of Air Transport Management*. Vol. 11, p 79-87.
- Cronin Joseph J. Jr, Taylor A. Steven (1992), "Measuring Service Quality: A Reexamination and Extension", *Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 56.
- Cunningham F. Lawrence, Young E. Clifford, Lee Moonkyu (2002), "Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Service Quality and Risk in Air Transportation", *Journal or Air Transportation*. Vol. 7, No. 1.
- Edvardsson Bo (1992), "Service Breakdowns: A Study of Critical Incidents in Airline", *International Journal of Service Industry Management*. Vol. 3, No. 4: 17-29.
- Gilbert David, Wong K.C. Robin, (2003), "Passenger expectations and Airline Service: a Hong Kong Based Study", *Journal of Tourism Management*. Vol. 24, p519-532.
- Gilmore Audrey (2003), "Services Marketing and Management", *Response Books*:New Delhi.
- Harris K. Elaine (2010), "Customer Service: A practical approach", *Prentice Hall*, 5th edition, NJ.
- Headley E. Dean, Bowen D. Brent (1997), "International Airline Quality Measurement", *Journal of Air Transportation World Wide*. Vol. 2, No.1.
- IATA (2012), "Airline Customer Service", *International Air Transport Association*, 2nd Edition, Montreal.
- Martilla A. John., James C. John (1977), "Importance-Performance Analysis", *Journal of Marketing*, 41, 78-79.