

The Correlation among 5 Aspects of Service Quality in Thailand's Low-cost Airlines

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Abstract— The purpose of this research was to study the relationship between five aspects of service quality factor of low-cost airlines in Thailand. The population of the research was people who had experience traveling with low-cost airlines in Thailand. 380 respondents are the sample size of this research. Information is collected through social media such as Facebook, Line. The research tool was a questionnaire developed from a review of the relevant literature. The main descriptive statistical analysis was frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis and the researcher analyzed the inferential statistics by using the Structural equation model analysis. Firstly, the results of the general data analysis showed that most of the respondents were female (64.7%), aged 20-40 years (76.2%), had a bachelor's degree (50.8%), and had a monthly income of more than 900 US dollars (39.5%). Secondly, it was found that the overall mean of the service quality variables was considered the highest level. When considering each aspect of service quality, it was found that all five aspects of service quality were at the highest level as well. And finally, the results of the study revealed a significant correlation between the five factors of low-cost carrier service quality. The results suggest that low-cost airline executives need to focus on high service quality in all five aspects: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Paying attention to the customer needs and five aspects of service quality will contribute to the good performance of low-cost airlines such as having good competitiveness, higher growth, better operating results, and better business sustainability.

Keywords—Service Quality; Low-Cost Airline Business; Correlation; Structural Equation Model; Thailand.

I. INTRODUCTION

The airline business is one of the most important businesses in the world. Air travel is a very popular type of travel for business, sightseeing, or personal travel. In the past, airline travel was considered expensive, making it difficult for the general person to decide on alternative travel options. The emergence of low-cost airlines has opened up more opportunities for air travel at lower costs. Low-cost airlines have thus grown significantly in recent years, including low-cost airlines in Thailand. There are new routes that have emerged so that Thai people, in general, can travel more comfortably. However, focusing solely on lower fares may not benefit the growth of the low-cost airline business. Because people tend to have the same perceptions, feelings, and attitudes about

low-cost airlines' operations as other airlines. Recent research shows that low-cost airlines need to focus on many factors besides lower fares, such as passenger satisfaction, passenger expectations, airline service quality, etc. (Ali, Dey, & Filieri, 2015; Hasan, Khan, & Farooqi, 2019; Jahmani, 2017; Saleem, Zahra, & Yaseen, 2017; Simsek & Demirbag, 2017). Therefore, low-cost airlines need to study and research issues related to passengers' decision-making in choosing an airline.

Middle-income people are a big market segment that businesses need to focus on. Therefore, low-cost airlines should have clear goals in this market segment. Marketing planning in terms of the right price is an important thing that businesses need to do and must study the decision-making process of this target customer group as well. Service quality is one of the key factors affecting the decision of low-cost airline passengers. A detailed study of the quality of service is, therefore, an interesting research topic and will be of great benefit to the low-cost airline business. Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying the relationship between the five variables of service quality factor of low-cost airlines in Thailand. The research results will provide recommendations to low-cost airline executives in planning marketing strategies and planning to ultimately create sustainable growth for low-cost airlines.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aviation business is a service business where it is necessary to use service quality as a competitive factor. Service quality is a very important factor for business success by creating business competitiveness for the organization (Chilembwe, 2014; Krishnankutty & Kalita, 2011). In addition to the competitiveness of the business, the benefits from the service quality of the business that customers perceive will also affect the marketing strategy and branding of the organization (Prayag, 2007). And including other benefits such as generating good business performance, profitability, and better control of business costs (Chen & Liu, 2017). Therefore, the aviation business must focus on service quality, which is what customers perceive and affects the attitude of the airline's customers (Ali, Dey, & Filieri, 2015; Jahmani, 2017; Singh, 2015). If the aviation business performs well in terms of service quality, it will affect customer satisfaction and lead to long-term good relationships such as customer loyalty, customer support, etc. (Alfin, Alhabsji, Nimran, & Suharyono, 2013; Ali, Dey, & Filieri, 2015; Jahmani, 2017; Krishnankutty & Kalita, 2011; Nadiri, Hussain, Ekiz, & Erdogan, 2008; Saleem, Zahra, & Yaseen, 2017; Singh, 2015). In addition, good service quality will be a factor that connects customers to the business, resulting in more service use with the organization (Saleem, Zahra, & Yaseen, 2017; Simsek & Demirbag, 2017). Since the good and impressive customer experience affects the quality of travel service, the airline must create a positive experience for its passengers (Ali, Dey, & Filieri, 2015). Understanding the expectations and needs of passengers, especially in regards to service quality, is therefore very important for corporate strategy planning (Chilembwe, 2014; Hasan, Khan, & Farooqi, 2019; Krishnankutty & Kalita, 2011).

Service quality consists of five key areas: tangibility, reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness (Chilembwe, 2014; Hasan, Khan, & Farooqi, 2019; Jahmani, 2017; Krishnankutty & Kalita, 2011; Prayag, 2007; Simsek & Demirbag, 2017). Tangibility is what appears and feels tangible to customers who come to use services such as facilities, equipment, staff, tools, and cleanliness, etc. (Neupane & Devkota, 2017; Othman, Harun, Rashid, & Ali, 2019). Reliability is the ability of an organization to provide its customers with its commitments (Naik, Gantasala, & Prabhakar, 2010; Neupane & Devkota, 2017; Othman, Harun, Rashid, & Ali, 2019). Responsiveness is the ability and effort of the employees of the organization who want to respond appropriately and correctly to help their users (Neupane & Devkota, 2017; Othman, Harun, Rashid, & Ali, 2019). Assurance is about knowledge, courtesy, respect, friendliness, safety, and trustworthiness (Naik, Gantasala, & Prabhakar, 2010; Othman, Harun, Rashid, & Ali, 2019). Empathy is about listening to the customer's voice, communicating properly, and providing accurate information. (Naik, Gantasala, & Prabhakar, 2010; Neupane & Devkota, 2017; Othman, Harun, Rashid, & Ali, 2019). The study of Ali, Dey, and Filieri (2015) showed that the tangibility aspect of service quality influenced customer satisfaction in the aviation business and the study of Chilembwe (2014) found that the reliability aspect of service quality was the key factor of the good services in the aviation business.

The study of Msosa and Govender (2015) revealed that all aspects of service quality were correlated. The result showed that the variable pairs of service quality with high correlations were: Reliability and Empathy, Reliability and Assurance, Reliability and Responsiveness, Responsiveness and Empathy, Responsiveness and Assurance, and Assurance and Empathy. This finding was consistent with the study of Nafei (2016) who found a correlation in all dimensions of service quality. The result showed that the pairs of variables that were highly correlated were: Tangibility and Reliability, Tangibility and Empathy, Responsiveness and Assurance, and Reliability and Empathy. The pairs of service quality variables that were moderately interconnected were: Tangibility and Responsiveness, Tangibility and Assurance, Reliability and Responsiveness, Reliability and Assurance, Responsiveness and Assurance, and Responsiveness and Empathy. Also, the study of Baniya (2016) revealed the correlation of five

aspects of service quality. It found the high correlation of four variable pairs included Tangibility and Assurance, Reliability and Assurance, Responsiveness and Assurance, and Responsiveness and Empathy. In addition, it was consistent with the study of Neupane and Devkota (2017) who found five variable pairs of service quality were significantly correlated. The result showed that the pairs of service quality that were highly correlated included Tangibility and Reliability, Tangibility and Responsiveness, Reliability and Responsiveness, Reliability and Assurance, Responsiveness and Empathy, Responsiveness and Assurance, and Assurance and Empathy. Other pairs were moderately interconnected. This was consistent with the study of Jahmani (2017) who found the significant interconnection among five aspects of service quality. The result showed that all variable pairs of service quality were moderately correlated. From the previous studies mentioned above, the researchers concluded that it had a correlation among the five aspects of service quality in service businesses.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The population of the research was people who had experience traveling with low-cost airlines in Thailand by collecting data online via social media such as Facebook, Line, etc. The research used a sample size for statistical analysis at 380 people because the data was collected back according to that number, which was close to the sample size calculated by Cochran's formula. For Cochran's formula at the confidence level and error of 95% and 5 %, the calculated sample size was 385. The formula for calculating this sample size is based on the unknown actual population (Cochran, 1977).

Research Tool

This research is quantitative research in which the research tool is a questionnaire developed from a review of the relevant literature. The questionnaire was divided into two main parts: the general information of the respondents and the information on the service quality variables. Table 1 provides detailed information about the quality of service and the reliability test results of this section of the questionnaire, where Cronbach's Alpha statistic was found to be greater than 0.7, thus concluding that the questionnaire was reliable and good enough for further research data collection (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014).

Table 1. The questionnaire details and reliability analysis

Constructs	Variables	Symbols	sources	Cronbach's Alpha
Service Quality	Tangibility (6 items: TA1-TA6)	TANGIB	Krishnankutty and Kalita (2011), Naik, Gantasala, and Prabhakar (2010), Neupane and Devkota (2017), Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988)	0.899
	Reliability (6 items: RE1-RE6)	RELIAB		
	Responsiveness (4 items: RS1-RS4)	RESPONS		
	Assurance (5 items: AS1-AS5)	ASSURA		
	Empathy (4 items: EM1-EM4)	ENPATH		

Research Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was used in the first part of the research data analysis. The main descriptive statistical analysis was frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. In terms of estimating the mean from the statistical analysis, the researcher used the evaluation criteria according to Table 2.

Table 2. The criteria for the key variables analysis

Means	Evaluation criteria
4.21 – 5.00	Highest level
3.41 – 4.20	High level
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate level
1.81 – 2.60	Low level
1.00 – 1.80	Lowest level

After that, the researcher analyzed the inferential statistics by using the Structural equation model analysis using the Amos

program. This analysis was to test the relationship between sub-variable pairs of service quality factors. Prior to this analysis, the researchers tested the fitness of the models with the criteria in Table 3, based on references from Karakaya-Ozyer and Aksu-Dunya (2018)'s criteria.

Table 3. The goodness-of-fit criteria

Criteria	Values	Evaluation
Chi square/df	< 3	Perfect fit
GFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
CFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
TLI	>0.95	Perfect fit
RMR	< 0.05	Perfect fit
RMSEA	< 0.05	Perfect fit

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings are shown in Tables 4 through 8 and Figure 1. The first part is the result of descriptive statistical analysis and the second part is the result of inferential statistical analysis which is the analysis of the structural equation model. The results of the general data analysis of the respondents shown in the fourth table showed that most of the respondents were female (64.7%), aged 20-40 years (76.2%), had a bachelor's degree (50.8%), and had the monthly income more than 900 US dollars (39.5%).

Table 4. The result of the descriptive data analysis

Variables	Frequencies	%
Gender		
Male	134	35.3
Female	246	64.7
Age		
< 20 years	4	1.1
20-30 years	148	38.9
31-40 years	142	37.3
41-50 years	68	17.9
51-60 years	14	3.7
> 60 years	4	1.1
Education		
Below Bachelor Degree	27	7.1
Bachelor Degree	193	50.8
Above Bachelor Degree	160	42.1
Income per month		
< 300 USD	31	8.2
300 - 450 USD	30	7.9
451 – 600 USD	70	18.4
601 - 750 USD	51	13.4
751 – 900 USD	48	12.6
> 900 USD	150	39.5

The results of the analysis of the service quality variables are shown in the fifth table. It was found that the overall mean of the service quality variables was equal to 4.29. This mean result is considered the highest among respondents' opinions. When considering each aspect, it was found that all sub-variables of service quality factors were between 4.25 – 4.35. It represents the opinions of the research participants who responded to the opinions on all aspects of service quality at the highest level. When considering the normal curve of the data with the skewness and kurtosis values in Table 5, it was found that the data on all aspects of service quality had a good normal curve.

Table 5. The analysis result of the service quality factor

Variables	Means	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
TANGIB	4.26	0.52	-0.22	-0.63
RELIAB	4.26	0.58	-0.74	0.69
RESPONS	4.32	0.60	-0.90	1.64
ASSURA	4.35	0.58	-0.92	1.68
ENPATH	4.25	0.68	-1.09	1.86
Service Quality	4.29	0.52	-0.76	0.85

The results of the structural equation model analysis are shown in Tables 6 through 8 and Figure 1. Table 6 shows an assessment of the measurement model in which the observed variables were able to describe all latent variables with statistical significance at the 0.001 level. Tangibility (TANGIB) can be described by six observable variables: TA1-TA6, Reliability (RELIAB) can be described by six observable variables: RL1-RL6, Responsiveness (RESPONS) can be described by four observable variables: RS1-RS4, Assurance (ASSURA) can be described by five observable variables: AS1-AS5, and Empathy (EMPATH) can be described by six observable variables: EM1-EM4. Based on these results, the next step is to analyze the relationship model between sub-variables in service quality factors.

Table 6. The evaluation result of the measurement model

Measurement model	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
TA6 <--- TANGIB	1			
TA5 <--- TANGIB	1.317	0.233	5.648	***
TA4 <--- TANGIB	1.518	0.269	5.651	***
TA3 <--- TANGIB	1.212	0.223	5.428	***
TA2 <--- TANGIB	1.629	0.265	6.144	***
TA1 <--- TANGIB	1.414	0.248	5.704	***
RL6 <--- RELIAB	1			
RL5 <--- RELIAB	1.156	0.078	14.772	***
RL4 <--- RELIAB	1.228	0.084	14.627	
RL3 <--- RELIAB	1.268	0.096	13.202	***
RL2 <--- RELIAB	1.363	0.096	14.202	***
RL1 <--- RELIAB	1.241	0.092	13.563	***
RS4 <--- RESPONS	1			
RS3 <--- RESPONS	0.774	0.060	12.961	***
RS2 <--- RESPONS	0.939	0.066	14.123	***
RS1 <--- RESPONS	0.942	0.074	12.696	***
AS5 <--- ASSURA	1			
AS4 <--- ASSURA	1.139	0.081	14.109	***

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AS3	<---	ASSURA	1.276	0.095	13.484	***
AS2	<---	ASSURA	1.487	0.107	13.930	***
AS1	<---	ASSURA	1.469	0.098	15.012	***
EM4	<---	EMPATH	1			
EM3	<---	EMPATH	1.059	0.049	21.79	***
EM2	<---	EMPATH	1.000	0.054	18.610	***
EM1	<---	EMPATH	1.014	0.053	19.004	***

Note: *** is significant at the 0.001 level

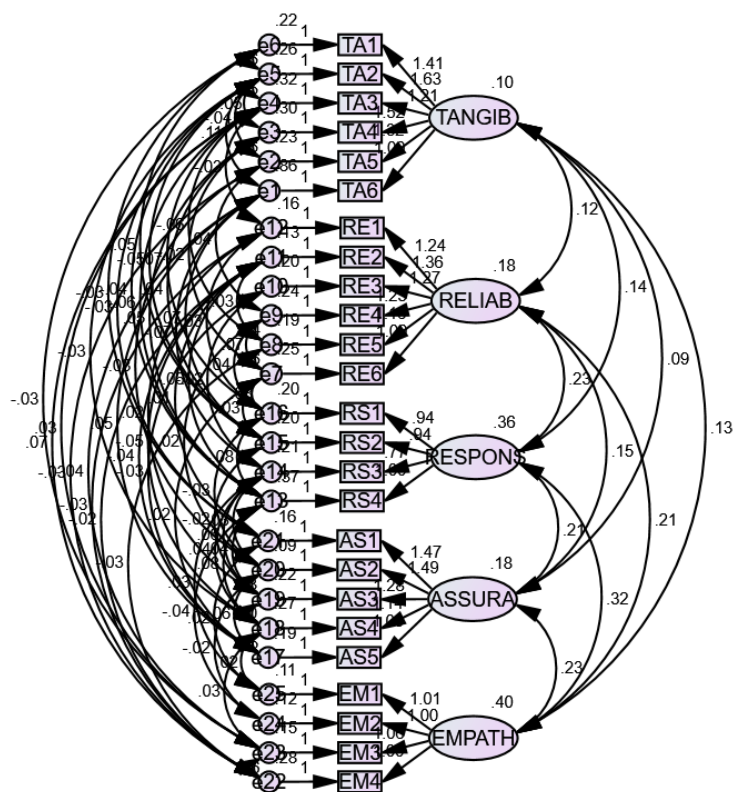
After analyzing the structural equation model to prove the correlation between the variables of the study, the covariance study results are shown in Table 7. It was found that all covariance of the sub-variable pairs of service quality factors were clearly correlated at a statistically significant 0.001 level. The results of this analysis implied that all sub-variables of service quality were significantly correlated.

Table 7. The result of the covariance analysis

Covariance			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
TANGIB	<-->	RELIAB	0.120	0.023	5.197	***
TANGIB	<-->	RESPONS	0.145	0.028	5.160	***
TANGIB	<-->	ASSURA	0.094	0.019	4.929	***
TANGIB	<-->	EMPATH	0.125	0.025	5.029	***
RELIAB	<-->	RESPONS	0.230	0.026	8.724	***
RELIAB	<-->	ASSURA	0.153	0.018	8.386	***
RELIAB	<-->	EMPATH	0.207	0.024	8.694	***
RESPONS	<-->	ASSURA	0.213	0.024	8.860	***
RESPONS	<-->	EMPATH	0.322	0.034	9.351	***
ASSURA	<-->	EMPATH	0.230	0.024	9.394	***

Note: *** is significant at the 0.001 level

The structural equation model showing the relationship between the pairs of variables is shown in Figure 1. This figure shows all ten correlation pairs of the service quality sub-variables and shows the observed variables in each of the five latent variables. From the structural equation model, it was found that the fitness of the model was the best by assessing the goodness-of-fit index included Chi-square/df, GFI, CFI, TLI, RMR, and RMSEA. Therefore, the researcher will summarize the relationship between the variable pairs from the analysis results in the next table.



Chi-square = 277.790, Chi-square/df = 1.410, df = 197, p = .000
GFI = .947, CFI = .988, TLI = .981, RMR = .016, RMSEA = .033

Fig. 1 The final model of this research.

Table 8 shows the results of the correlation analysis between the subvariable pairs of service quality factors in the low-cost airline business. A total of ten pairs of subvariables were analyzed, most of which had a high degree of correlation. It was found that the pairs of variables that were highly correlated were: TANGIB < > RELIAB = 0.892, TANGIB < > RESPON = 0.771, TANGIB < > ASSURA = 0.717, RELIAB < > RESPON = 0.893, RELIAB < > ASSURA = 0.849, RELIAB < > EMPATH = 0.765, RESPON < > ASSURA = 0.848, RESPON < > EMPATH = 0.852, and ASSURA < > EMPATH = 0.870. There was only one sub-variable pair of service quality with a moderate correlation: TANGIB < > EMPATH = 0.637. In summary, all subvariable pairs of service quality were significantly correlated.

Table 8. The correlation result of the model

Correlation			Estimate
TANGIB	<-->	RELIAB	0.892
TANGIB	<-->	RESPON	0.771
TANGIB	<-->	ASSURA	0.717
TANGIB	<-->	EMPATH	0.637
RELIAB	<-->	RESPON	0.893
RELIAB	<-->	ASSURA	0.849
RELIAB	<-->	EMPATH	0.765
RESPON	<-->	ASSURA	0.848
RESPON	<-->	EMPATH	0.852
ASSURA	<-->	EMPATH	0.870

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the research study show the highest level of consumer opinion of low-cost airlines in terms of service quality, both in general and in individual aspects, showing the expectations or needs of airline passengers towards the services of those airlines. This reflects the need for the airline industry to focus on providing high-quality services to satisfy the airline's passengers. In addition, the correlation between the five sub-variables of service quality showed that they were highly correlated. Therefore, the aviation business must pay attention to the five aspects of service quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Focusing on the quality of service in each area will have a positive effect on others. This synergistic effect will have a positive effect on the operating results and growth of low-cost airlines through satisfying or meeting the needs of low-cost carriers. The results of this study are consistent with the results of several previous studies included the study of Msosa and Govender (2015) showed that all aspects of service quality were interconnected. The result revealed that the variable pairs of service quality with high correlations such as Reliability and Empathy, Reliability and Assurance, Reliability and Responsiveness, Responsiveness and Empathy, and Assurance and Empathy, the study of Nafei (2016) showed a correlation among all aspects of service quality. The result revealed that the pairs of variables that were highly correlated such as Tangibility and Reliability, Tangibility and Empathy, and Reliability and Empathy, the study of Baniya (2016) found the correlation of all five aspects of service quality. It found the significant correlation of four aspect pairs included Tangibility and Assurance, Reliability and Assurance, Responsiveness and Assurance, and Responsiveness and Empathy, the study of Neupane and Devkota (2017) found all five aspect pairs of service quality were significantly interconnected. The result found that the pairs of service quality that were highly correlated such as Tangibility and Reliability, Tangibility and Responsiveness, Reliability and Responsiveness, Reliability and Assurance, and Assurance and Empathy, and also the study of Jahmani (2017) revealed the interconnection among five aspects of service quality. Therefore the researchers concluded that it had a significant correlation among the five aspects of service quality in low-cost aviation businesses in Thailand.

RECOMMENDATION

The results of the study reveal the customer needs of low-cost carriers and the correlation between the five factors of low-cost carrier service quality. The results of this study suggest that low-cost airline executives need to focus on high service quality in all five aspects of service quality factor: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Paying attention to the passenger needs and five aspects of service quality will contribute to the good performance of low-cost airlines. In addition, the focus on service quality in the five areas will result in the low-cost aviation business having good competitiveness, higher growth, better operating results, and better business sustainability.

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