

How Service Quality Enhances Customer Satisfaction: A Case Study of Hybrid Airlines in Thailand

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The purpose of the study aim to fill this gap by examining managerial views of service quality and customer's satisfaction of hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok, Thailand. The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman et al. is a benchmark in the measurement of service quality across the industries for the last three decades. The five-dimensional SERVQUAL model, appreciated for measuring consists of five factors reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

Design/Methodology Approach. Paper is empirical in nature. A Sample population of 400 participant's sample who traveled through hybrid airlines, Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand, the sample size was determined by using the Taro Yamane (1976) formula with 95% confidence level. Data was collected through the questionnaire and was analyzed using SPSS Statistics 21. Originality/Value: The study has made a comprehensive literature review in the area of service quality in context of Airlines industries and used empirical data to support the findings. The descriptive-correlational research design will be used in this study. The data in this study will be gathered through a questionnaire checklist. The data that will be gathered in this study will be treated using frequencies, percentages, mean, and simple correlation analysis.

Findings. Majority of passengers low cost airlines in Thailand are male, their age is 31-40 years and nationality is Thai and Chinese, Singaporean, English etc., most of them are married. Educational attainment is bachelor's degree, their occupation is business person and are private employee. Monthly income is 55,001-85,000 baht, the reason to fly is leisure and personal reason.

Most respondents agreed that the service quality of hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand still in a high level. When taken as a whole obtained an overall mean rating by each item found that the reliability, responsiveness, and, assurance, and tangible also in a high level. And the customer satisfaction of hybrid airlines are in a high level, when taken as a whole obtained an overall mean rating by each item found that the check-in, security screening, boarding, transit screening, baggage transfer, and baggage claim also in a high level.

A significant relationship between the level of **SERVQUAL** and a factor of the profile of passenger. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated significant negative association between level education attainment ($r = -0.158$, $p = 0.027$) and monthly income ($r = -0.148$, $p = 0.003$). The result implies that the group of passengers have high education attainment and high monthly income trend to more expected of airline's service quality and customer satisfaction. A significant relationship between level of **SERVQUAL** and customer satisfaction of hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand. Overall result and the result analyzed of respondents. Strong positive association between level of **SERVQUAL** and customer satisfaction on passengers ($r = 0.460$, $p < 0.01$).The result implies that, if hybrid airlines have high service quality management, It lead to more customer satisfaction which correspond to Zhicheng Qin, 2012 reveal that the service marketing mix and service quality are the most important factors that affect the low-cost airline passenger satisfaction and loyalty in Thailand.

Keywords: Service Quality (SERVQUAL), Customer Satisfaction, Hybrid Airlines

Introduction

The airlines adapted to provide a comprehensive and diverse service. Both in the form of a full airline full-service carrier and the low cost carrier includes airliners that combine the characteristics of the above two forms, known

as hybrid carriers. In line with changing trends in the global aviation business, with the growth of services sector in every economy of the world, the significance of quality of services is also growing. In the study we try to identify and assess service quality to enhance the airline business practice in term of customer's satisfaction. And in order to measure the quality of services, researchers have been developing instruments to measure service quality so that its relationship with customer satisfaction could be established. Most researchers have come to the conclusion that the actual quality of service cannot be measured and that the quality of service should be assessed from the perspective of customers. The difference between the expectations of the customers from a service offered and the perceptions developed after the service is consumed or availed forms the core of the definition of service quality and is most widely accepted (Levis and Booms, 1983; Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al, 1988).

Purchasing decision of customers are influenced by quality of goods or services (Anderson and Zeithaml, 1984). And service quality increases satisfaction of customers and satisfaction in turn leads to customer loyalty and brings in profitability for firms (Szwarc, 2005). However, service quality is itself a very subjective term and is used differently in different contexts and industries with no universal definition of service quality (Liou et al., 2011). The Influence of customer purchase decision toward the customer loyalty. The result of research shows that customer purchase decision is significantly influence the customer loyalty. Cronin (2009) observed that loyalty is measured through some indicator such as satisfaction, linking to the brand, and commitment.

Servqual

Service quality is a composite of various interactions between customers and airlines, with employees seeking to influence customers' perceptions and the image of the carriers (Gursoy et al., 2005; Ishaq, 2012). Service quality is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations. Delivering quality service means conforming to customer expectations on a consistent basis (Parasuraman et al., 1985). In 1988 Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry developed a generic instrument called SERVQUAL to measure service quality based on input from focus groups. It consists of five factors (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and contains a two-part, 22 scale items regarding expectations and performance. These five factors have been tested through numerous empirical studies in so various industries by many researchers (An & Noh, 2009) that it is also used in a variety of organizational settings, including libraries and information centers (Landrum et al., 2009).

The SERVQUAL scale is a survey instrument which claims to measure the service quality in any type of service organization on five dimensions which are tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVQUAL scale was developed by Parasuraman et al. in 1985, and refined in 1988, 1991 and 1994. Realizing the significance of service quality for survival and success of service companies and the need for a generic instrument which would be used to measure service quality across a broad range of service categories, Parasuraman et al. (1985) began a research program to develop such a tool. The research program began with a series of in-depth interviews conducted with executives from nationally recognized service firms in four selected service categories. The four service categories selected included appliance repair and maintenance, long distance telephone, retail banking, and credit cards. In conjunction with the executive interviews, the researchers conducted interviews with three customer focus groups for each of the selected service categories. The exploratory study comprised of interviews and focus groups led Parasuraman et al. to make a definition of service quality as the discrepancy between customers' expectations and perceptions and to identify 10 general dimensions that represent the evaluative criteria customers use to assess service quality. The researchers named these dimensions as "tangibles", "reliability", "responsiveness", "competence", "courtesy", "credibility", "security", "convenience", "communication" and "understanding the customer" (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Customer's Satisfaction

Many researchers have revealed that the rapid change of the business environment makes customer satisfaction a significant issue for marketing practitioners. Reid and Bojovic (2001) stated that customer satisfaction is the highest goal for every business. It should be a top priority for working in the service industry to build their strong strategies and generate repeat purchases, brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. There are important factors to basically generate the desire for goods or services that are "Needs" and "Wants". Harris (1996) stated that needs are personal requirements. Needs are divided into two types. The first one is primary needs - some needs are instinctive such as the need for air and food and the other is secondary needs - needs that can be learned such as what someone will enjoy eating or does not care for a specific food. Wants are things or experiences that are desired. Individuals commonly desire what they do not really need. However, needs and wants are both motivational. Customers want good services from the airline they choose. They anticipate getting a high quality of service both on the ground and on board. They will repeatedly use that airline if their experience matches their expectations. For airlines, customer satisfaction is triggered when an airline's services consistently meet or surpass expectations and are perceived by passengers as contributing to a good reputation and a quality image.

Marketing literature has focus on improvement of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is defined by different studies in different ways. Customer satisfaction is defined as “overall affective response to a perceived discrepancy between prior expectation and perceived performance after consumption” (Oliver, 1980). Parasuraman et al. (1991) say that satisfaction is a decision made after experience while quality is not the same. Fornell (1992) defined satisfaction as an overall evaluation dependent on the total purchase and consumption experience of the target product or service performance compared with repurchase expectations over time. Rust (1994) defined satisfaction as the customer’s fulfillment response which is an evaluation as well as an emotion-based response to a service.

Objective of Study

This study aim to fill this gap by examining managerial views of service quality and customer’s satisfaction of hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok, Thailand.

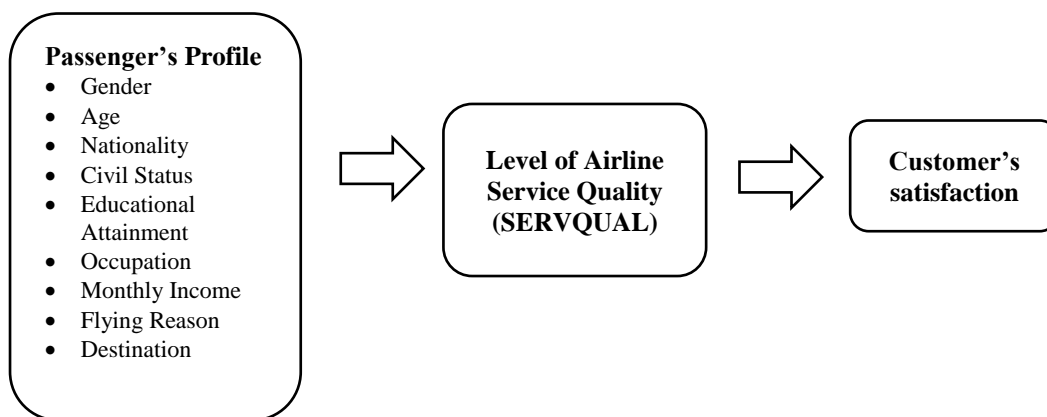
H1: The level of service quality does not influence by passenger’s profile.

H2: The level of customer’s satisfaction influenced by the level of service quality.

Research Question

1. What is the level of airline’s service quality of passengers?
2. How service quality enhance the airline business practice in term of customer’s satisfaction?

Research Framework



Definition of Terms

1. **Hybrid Airline** refers to airlines that combine characteristics of full-service carrier and low cost carrier.
2. **Service Quality** is a customer's perception of services provided by airline companies.
3. **Customer Satisfaction** is a measurement of how a product or service meets or surpasses customer expectations.

Instrument

The instrument used in this research are divided into the following:

1. The questionnaire consisted of three parts:
 - 1.1 The questions related with general information, concerned demographic information of respondents including gender, age, nationality, civil status, educational attainment, occupation, monthly income, flying reason, and destination.
 - 1.2 The questions related to service quality of hybrid airline in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand.
 - 1.3 The questions related to customer satisfaction of hybrid airline in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand

Methodology

This research used the descriptive quantitative method using questionnaire and interview as the research instruments for data collection.

Participant

A Sample population of 400 participant's sample who traveled through hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand. The sample size was determined by using Taro Yamane's formula with 95% confidence level.

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 traveled through hybrid airlines, Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand
2. Develop the research instrument which were two types of questionnaire and interview.
3. Collect data and analyze the data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews from key informants.

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 the followings the score of 4.50 – 5.00 means highest level, 3.50 – 4.49 means high level, 2.50 – 3.49 means medium level, 1.50 – 2.49 means low level, 1.00 – 1.49 means the lowest level.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

| Variab les | Demographic Data | Frequenc y (f) | Percent (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Gender | Male | 263 | 65.8 |
| | Female | 137 | 34.3 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Age | Under 21 years | 46 | 11.5 |
| | 21-30 years | 108 | 27.0 |
| | 31-40 years | 169 | 42.3 |
| | 41-50 years | 65 | 16.3 |
| | 51 and over | 12 | 3.0 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Nationality | Thai | 371 | 92.8 |
| | Foreigners | 29 | 7.3 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Civil Status | Single | 122 | 30.5 |
| | Married | 217 | 54.3 |
| | Divorced/Separate d | 45 | 11.3 |
| | Widowed/widower | 16 | 4.0 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Educational Attainment | below bachelor's degree | 32 | 8.0 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 233 | 58.3 |
| | Master's degree | 103 | 25.8 |
| | Doctor's degree | 32 | 8.0 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Occupation | Student | 61 | 15.3 |
| | Government officer | 66 | 16.5 |
| | Private Employee | 112 | 28.0 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Freelancer | 44 | 11.0 |
| | Business Person | 117 | 29.3 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Monthly Income | below 25,000 baht | 58 | 14.5 |
| | 25,000-55,000 baht | 130 | 32.5 |
| | 55,001-85,000 baht | 150 | 37.5 |
| | above 85,000 baht | 62 | 15.5 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Flying Reason | Business | 93 | 23.3 |
| | Personal reason | 103 | 25.8 |
| | Leisure | 165 | 41.3 |
| | Visit friends or relatives | 39 | 9.8 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |
| Destination | Domestic | 278 | 69.5 |
| | Oversea | 122 | 30.5 |
| | Total | 400 | 100 |

According to Table-1, Majority of the respondents are male (263 or 65.8%) and (137 or 34.3 %) are female. Their age are 31-40 years old (169 or 42.3%) follows by 21-30 years (108 or 27.0%). The nationality is Thai (371 or 92.8%) and foreigners (29 or 7.3%). Most of them are married (217 or 54.3%) follows by (122 or 30.5%) are single, the education attainment is bachelor's degree (233 or 58.3%) and master's degree (103 or 25.8%). The respondents are business person (117 or 29.3%) and (112 or 28.0%) are private employee. They have monthly income 55,001-85,000 baht (150 or 37.5%) follows by (130 or 32.5%) is 25,000-55,000 baht. The reason to fly is leisure (165 or 41.3%) and follows by (103 or 25.8%) is personal reason. The destination is domestic (278 or 69.5%) and follows by (122 or 30.5%) is overseas.

Table 2: The Level of Hybrid Airlines Service Quality

| SERVQUAL | Passengers | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Interpretation |
| Reliability | | | |
| 1. Airline flights always departs on time. | 4.43 | 0.57 | Highest |
| 2. Airline flights always arrives on time. | 4.20 | 0.65 | High |
| 3. Airline solves passenger's problems without delays. | 3.62 | 0.67 | High |
| 4. Handling of baggage is effective and without loss. | 3.80 | 0.69 | High |
| Overall | 4.01 | 0.62 | High |
| Responsiveness | | | |
| 1. The ticketing system is very quick | 3.72 | 0.88 | High |
| 2. You have always get help from the airline staff no matter what is the problem | 4.16 | 0.61 | High |
| 3. Airline staff is very | 4.40 | 0.57 | Highest |

| | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|---------|
| friendly | | | |
| 4. The baggage arrives on belt very quickly | 3.85 | 0.70 | High |
| Overall | 4.03 | 0.59 | High |
| Assurance | | | |
| 1. Airline is a trusted name in the industry. | 4.34 | 0.54 | Highest |
| 2. The airline has a very good safety record. | 4.48 | 0.57 | Highest |
| 3. The airline staff are competent. | 4.08 | 0.67 | High |
| 4. They have a high standard of service | 3.73 | 0.66 | High |
| Overall | 4.16 | 0.78 | High |
| Empathy | | | |
| 1. They have understand the special individual needs | 4.40 | 0.61 | Highest |
| 2. They anticipate the problems of passenger | 4.23 | 0.60 | Highest |
| 3. The airline staff treats everyone individually | 4.19 | 0.67 | High |
| 4. The airline staff is cheerful in providing support service. | 3.87 | 0.74 | High |
| Overall | 4.17 | 0.64 | High |
| Tangibility | | | |
| 1. Airline has state of the art latest aircrafts | 4.35 | 0.51 | Highest |
| 2. Airline cabin crew is efficient | 4.26 | 0.72 | Highest |
| 3. Ticketing counters doesn't have long queues | 3.69 | 0.63 | High |
| 4. Airline reservation office is conveniently located | 3.95 | 0.75 | High |
| Overall | 4.06 | 0.81 | High |
| Grand Mean | 4.09 | 0.65 | High |

Table 2 present the item mean ratings on the level of service quality (SERVQUAL)

Most respondents agreed that the service quality of hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand still in a high level with grand mean score of 4.09 (S.D. = 0.63). In term of the reliability, we found that is in a high level with an overall score of 4.01 (S.D. = 0.62). And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “airline flights always departs on time” in a high level of 4.43 (S.D. = 0.57). On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.62 (S.D. = 0.67) when taken as a whole the item is “airline solves passenger’s problems without delays” This results show that the passengers’ expectations are the convenience and speed in picking baggage and they don't want a lost them, besides, should improve on flight delay or postponed flight.

The level of service quality in term of the responsiveness the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 4.03 (S.D. = 0.59) in a high level. And 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” 4.16 (S.D. = 0.61). On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.72 (S.D. = 0.88) when taken as a whole the item is “the ticketing system is very quick”. This results show that the passengers need more help from airline staff such as check-in via Kiosk (self-check-in), or scanning passport because some passengers did not know how to process it.

The level of service quality in term of the assurance the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 4.16 (S.D. = 0.78) in a high level. And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “the airline has a very good safety record” (4.48) (S.D. = 0.57). On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.73 (S.D. = 0.66) when taken as a whole the item is “they have a high standard of service”. This results show that the assurance dimension of service quality indicates employees' competence, knowledge and courtesy, and the ability to build bridges of trust with customers.

The level of service quality in term of the tangible the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 4.06 (S.D. = 0.81) in a high level. And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “Airline has state of the art latest aircrafts” 4.35 (S.D. = 0.51). On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.69 (S.D. = 0.63) when taken as a whole the item is “ticketing counters doesn’t have long queues”. This results show that the passengers expect cabin crew has a good service, aircraft standards, and efficiency of service quality is of great importance in the management of an airline.

Table 3: The Level of Customer Satisfaction

| Customer Satisfaction | Passengers | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Interpretation |
| Check-in | | | |
| 1. Perception of waiting time or queue length. | 3.82 | 0.68 | High |
| 2. Staff courtesy or helpfulness. | 4.41 | 0.60 | Highest |
| 3. Check-in efficiency. | 4.08 | 0.72 | High |
| 4. Online check-in. | 4.29 | 0.62 | Highest |
| Overall | 4.15 | 0.66 | High |
| Security Screening | | | |
| 1. Staff courtesy. | 4.07 | 0.72 | High |
| 2. Secure feeling/thoroughness. | 4.21 | 0.66 | Highest |
| 3. Perception of waiting time or queue length. | 3.81 | 0.72 | High |
| 4. Fast and convenient. | 3.70 | 0.62 | High |
| Overall | 3.95 | 0.58 | High |
| Boarding | | | |
| 1. Efficiency of boarding procedure. | 4.51 | 0.54 | Highest |
| 2. Staff courtesy. | 4.23 | 0.64 | Highest |
| 3. Availability of aerobridge. | 3.93 | 0.78 | High |
| 4. Fast and convenient. | 4.00 | 0.71 | High |

| | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|---------|
| Overall | 4.17 | 0.67 | High |
| Transit Screening | | | |
| 1. Staff courtesy. | 4.12 | 0.68 | High |
| 2. Secure feeling/thoroughness. | 4.45 | 0.66 | Highest |
| 3. Perception of waiting time or queue length. | 4.21 | 0.55 | Highest |
| 4. Fast and convenient. | 3.82 | 0.72 | High |
| Overall | 4.15 | 0.88 | High |
| Baggage Transfer | | | |
| 1. Availability of automatic baggage handling. | 4.21 | 0.66 | Highest |
| 2. Secured baggage. | 4.09 | 0.65 | High |
| 3. Time of baggage transfer is proper. | 3.99 | 0.70 | High |
| 4. Fast and convenient. | 3.82 | 0.70 | High |
| Overall | 4.03 | 0.69 | High |
| Baggage Claim | | | |
| 1. Perception of baggage delivery time. | 4.09 | 0.62 | High |
| 2. Secured baggage delivery. | 4.36 | 0.60 | Highest |
| 3. Baggage claim are new and modern. | 3.62 | 0.62 | High |
| 4. Fast and convenient. | 3.84 | 0.69 | High |
| Overall | 3.97 | 0.84 | High |
| Grand mean | 4.07 | 0.88 | High |

Table 3 present the item mean ratings on the level of customer satisfaction

Most respondents agreed that the customer satisfaction of hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand still in a high level with grand mean score of 4.07 (S.D. = 0.88). In term of the check-in, we found that is in a high level with an overall score of 4.15 (S.D. = 0.66). And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “staff courtesy or helpfulness.” describe as a highest level of 4.41 (S.D. = 0.60). On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.82 (S.D. = 0.68) when taken as a whole the item is “perception of waiting time or queue length” describe as a high level.

The level of customer satisfaction in term of security screening the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 3.95 (S.D. = 0.58) in a high level. And 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” 4.21 (S.D. = 0.66) describe as a highest level. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.70 (S.D. = 0.62) when taken as a whole the item is “fast and convenient” describe as a high level.

The level of customer satisfaction in term of boarding the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 4.17 (S.D. = 0.67) in a high level. And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “efficiency of boarding procedure” 4.15 (S.D. = 0.54) describe as a high level. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.93 (S.D. = 0.78) when taken as a whole the item is “availability of aerobridge” describe as a high level.

The level of customer satisfaction in term of transit screening the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 41.5 (S.D. = 0.88) in a high level. And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “secure feeling/thoroughness” 4.45 (S.D. = 0.66) describe as a highest level. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.82 (S.D. = 0.72) when taken as a whole the item is “fast and convenient” describe as a high level.

The level of customer satisfaction in term of baggage transfer the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 4.03 (S.D. = 0.69) in a high level. And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “availability of automatic baggage handling” 4.21 (S.D. = 0.66) describe as a highest level. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.82 (S.D. = 0.70) when taken as a whole the item is “fast and convenient” describe as a high level.

The level of customer satisfaction in term of baggage claim the respondents as a whole obtained an overall mean rating of 4.97 (S.D. = 0.84) in a high level. And the highest mean rating is obtained by the item is “Secured baggage delivery” 4.36 (S.D. = 0.60) describe as a highest level. On the other hand, the lowest mean rating of 3.62 (S.D. = 0.62) when taken as a whole the item is “baggage claim are new and modern” describe as a high level.

Table 4: Output of simple correlation analysis illustrating relationship between the level of SERVQUAL and the profiles of passengers-related factors

| Profile of passenger-related factors | Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) | Sig |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Gender | -0.055 | 0.27 |
| Age | 0.044 | 0.377 |
| Nationality | 0.042 | 0.405 |
| Civil Status | 0.004 | 0.941 |
| Educational Attainment | -0.158* | 0.027 |
| Occupation | -0.014 | 0.780 |
| Monthly Income | -0.148* | 0.003 |
| Flying Reason | -0.009 | 0.86 |
| Destination | -0.081 | 0.106 |

Table 4 shows a significant relationship between the level of SERVQUAL and a factor of the profile of passenger. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated significant negative association between level education attainment ($r = -0.158, p = 0.027$) and monthly income ($r = -0.148, p = 0.003$). The result implies that the group of passengers have high education attainment and high monthly income trend to more expected of airline’s service quality and customer satisfaction.

Table 5: Output of simple correlation analysis illustrating the relationship between the level of SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction

| Variables | Pearson’s correlation | Sig |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----|
|-----------|-----------------------|-----|

| | coefficient (r) | |
|---|-----------------|-------|
| Overall (n=400) | 0.460* | 0.000 |
| Level of SERVQUAL vs customer satisfaction | | |

Table 5 shows a significant relationship between level of SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction of hybrid airlines in Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand. Overall result and the result analyzed of respondents. Strong positive association between level of SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction on passengers ($r = 0.460$, $p < 0.01$). The result implies that, if hybrid airlines have high service quality management, It lead to more customer satisfaction which correspond to Zhicheng Qin, 2012 reveal that the service marketing mix and service quality are the most important factors that affect the low-cost airline passenger satisfaction and loyalty in Thailand.

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