

Airport Service Quality and Word of Mouth

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ABSTRACT

The study is about the implementation of airport service quality perception and its relation to Word of Mouth (WOM). The main purpose of the study is to develop an understanding of the airport service quality perception developed by Airport Council International. Furthermore, it investigates the relationship between service quality and WOM and analyzes whether the passengers discuss the airport service quality to other passengers; share the airport experience to social media; and recommend the airport to others or not. These raise the questions whether the service quality could affect Word of Mouth (WOM) including the interaction between variables. The results of the study show that the airport service quality has positive impact toward Word of Mouth and some findings related to the problems.

Keywords: airport, service quality, word of mouth

A. Introduction

The ever-increasing importance of service organization to the world economy actually has been recognized by marketing academics by exponential development in services and marketing research. Within the air transport businesses, a prominent research stream has involved the measurement of service quality, such as: Airport Council International (ACI) (Ebrahimi & Tootoonkavan, 2014). They realized that the inability of airports and their customers to understand clear metrics or set clear performance standards would only fuel consumer dissatisfaction (Maemunah, 2020). They concluded that the airport needs to continue to improve the quality of its services. Previous research on service quality at airports has been carried out by several institutions or individuals (Maemunah, 2019a). They do research on service quality issues specific to their or other airports; and various transport and travel industry groups can issue consumer-surveyed rankings of airport facilities. In addition, qualitative efforts to assess airport quality have also been carried out by several

organizations such as the International Air Transportation Association (IATA), among others, which use this research to address the quality of airport services every year.

Other researchers and airports have also explored the issue of service quality at airports that this work pays more attention to airport operators and has little reference to the characteristics and factors that comprise the quality of airport facilities and operations. Although these efforts are considered incomplete, they have provided the basis for constructing a comprehensive study of airport quality (Lawu, 2015). Another problem is the measurement of service quality and its contribution to company performance. Unlike manufactured goods quality, airport service quality is an elusive and distinctive construct. This can be defined from several perspectives, including: the ability to satisfy customer needs and expectations; and the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that influence its ability to satisfy certain needs. This means that researchers must pay more attention to the perspective of airport users on the quality of airport services provided and

their relationship with W.O.M (Bodolica et al., 2021).

Since very little research has been conducted on the airport industry, the main aim of this study is to respond to Zeithaml (2000) an author who has investigated service quality, profitability, and customer economic value for many years concluded that there is still much research to be done to validating early evidence of these service quality measures and an integrated body of knowledge on how to perform those measurements, with particular emphasis on the contribution that service quality makes to W.O.Ms in the airport business, particularly their terminal services. In Indonesia, this need has become even more important especially with the spread of globalization (Fadil, 2015). As Indonesia is surrounded by countries that have very high standards of international airports such as Singapore with its Changi Airport and Malaysia with its KLIA Airport. In addition to increased international competition, the increasing awareness of the service quality in the airport has also imposed pressures to airport operators in Indonesia to improve towards certain quality standards (Maemunah & Syakbani, 2021).

The overall study objective of this research is to find out the relationship between airport service quality and Word of Mouth. The specific objectives are: To hide Airport-Quality of Service-Word of Mouth issues raised by passengers so that improvements can be incorporated into airport policies (Fadil, 2015). There are many empirical studies conducted towards gaining an understanding of service quality, quality systems and quality measurement; and many studies have attempted to relate the importance and relationship of service quality to W.O.M. However, in airport industries, (Ricardianto et al., 2021) very limited number if none of service quality studies really look into the relationship between service quality and W.O.M. Yet, in recent years, the importance of developing service quality measurement has become priority for many airport authorities (Dawna, Blaise & Seth, 2000).

This study aims to provide evidence of

the importance of measuring service quality and its relation to W.O.M in airports. Further, it intends to generate new knowledge of service quality in the airports by investigating the important issues of its service quality. Potential findings resulting from this study should contribute towards understanding the service quality and W.O.M relationship in Bali airport (Ricardianto et al., 2021). This study provides theoretical contribution to the service quality literature as well as contribution to quality management of airports. The conceptual based model on airport data makes a valuable contribution to the effort to establish service quality measurement in airports by incorporating prediction of W.O.M. The findings are also expected to enhance and deepen the understanding of issues relating to service quality in airports. Finally, this research contributes to the literature on quality management by providing airport perspective on the subject.

Global market changes, so does competition. Domestic market steadily becomes part of global market. The supply comes from all places in the world. It is believed that this condition requires quality product to win the customers and market (Siti Maemunah & Puguh Hadi Susanto, 2020). However, discussions about the nature of perceived product quality can be very difficult to understand because they involve identifying what the firm in the industry must provide. Therefore, it is an imperative for a company to identify such needs early in the product/service development cycle. Discussions about the nature of perceived product quality can be quite ambiguous as it involves measuring consumer expectations about what firms in an industry should provide and what consumer perceptions are regarding the provision of this service. Perceptions of quality, however, have changed over time because the concepts of quality are sometimes contradictory.

An organization provides a quality service to its customers when the organization either meets or exceeds customers' expectations. Many companies make the fundamental mistake of assuming that they know what their customers expect and through

that lose customers. Conventional wisdom says that it is five times more expensive to win a new customer, than it is to keep an old customer. Therefore, it is essential that an organization spends time and energy to find out what its customers really want. Also, people will experience services in different ways and each customer has a particular perception of the service provided. Therefore, customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from experiencing a service quality encounter and comparing that encounter with what was expected.

The satisfaction is based on customers' perception on service offered. This means that perceived service quality can be defined as the customer's judgment about the superiority or excellence of a product while perceived value is the customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Consumers may agree that a service should have features but may not personally attach much importance to them.

Airports were established to serve and facilitate aircraft, cargo and passengers. Airports are business organizations; their stakeholders demand that they turn a profit. However, it is a tough situation for the company managing the airport because the airport has to provide some services on the basis of public interest (Bodolica et al., 2021). Sometimes this means that the airport may have to provide services at a loss. The airport is a complex transportation organization serving aircraft, passengers, and cargo. It is customary to classify the components of an airport into two major categories: airside facilities and landside facilities (Wells, 1996)

Airside facilities, sometimes called airfield or aeronautical activities, are those on which aircraft operations are carried out. Basically, they are the runways where aircraft take off and land, the taxiways used for movement between the runway and the terminal, and the apron and gate areas where passengers embark or disembark and where aircrafts are parked (Ricardianto et al., 2021). Lastly is the tower that is meant for airspace management and operation to provide air

traffic control service to ensure a safe, orderly and expeditious flow of aircraft movements within the airport's Flight Information Region (FIR) in cooperation with the International Civil Aviation Organization. As the airport does control the airspace, it is also required to provide Search and Rescue to aircraft in distress within the airport FIR.

Landside facilities are the part of the airport serving passengers, including land surface transportation, usually referred to as terminals. The primary objective of the terminal area is to achieve passenger convenience. However, an airport company needs to consider the balance between passenger convenience, facility investment, operating efficiency and aesthetics. Basically, airports have to provide facilities and services such as airport information assistance, lost & found services, money changing counters, postal & telecommunications services. In the public area, there is usually an airbus service, airport information assistance, banks, lost & found service, money changing counters, postal & telecommunication services unaccompanied baggage and left baggage service, ticket counters, baggage handling, and restaurants.

The largest qualitative effort to examine airport quality is the International Air Transportation Association (IATA) Airline Monitor that conducts an annual, cross-sectional poll of international frequent flyers on issues ranging from airport signposting to washroom conditions. In addition to that Dawna et al. (2000) has summarized specific quality-related aspects of airport design such as walking distance, orientation, capacity levels, and lounge seating (Bazerra & Gomes, 2016). These efforts, while incomplete in and of themselves, have provided a base on which to construct a comprehensive index of airport quality. Many believe that such an index is needed for a number of reasons (Dawna et al., 2000). Then, since early of year 2000 Airport Council International (ACI) has been developing indexes of global airport services (ACI, 2020). This study proposes to investigate Airport Service Quality and its impact on W.O.M in airport industries. This analysis is going to be conducted due to service quality

and W.O.M is believed to be a promising system to achieve a strategic weapon to build profits in every business organization (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

B. Methods

The study preparation phase consisted of information investigation about service quality and W.O.M in the airports. The information gathered in the literature reviews were carefully reviewed to develop the topics to be investigated in the research which is consisted of focus groups. Selected sample of people working in the area is called for, however, it should be considered that it is a waste time to interview those who have little competence or experience. Thus, the information gathering process started with the selection of head of Airport, managers of five local Airlines, managers of five Concessionaires and some Passengers. It is expected that this phase of case study produced richer explanations and illustrative examples that generated insight. Therefore, this research adopted in-depth interviews as the research instrument. It involved asking open ended-questions, listening to and recording the answers, and then following up with relevant questions.

The studies followed the general interview guide approach. The guide consisted of a list of questions and issues that were adapted from the literature review. It helped to keep the interaction focused and promoted systematic data collection. The first part is consisted service quality attributes that should be provided in the airport. Next section is containing the measures of W.O.M: the willingness to discuss airport service quality with others; the willingness to share airport experience to social media; and the willingness to recommend the airport to other. Due to the qualitative nature of inquiry and the respondents have a very limited time, this stage utilizes purposeful convenience sampling.

The actual interviews were conducted for 2 weeks in January 2020, just before the pandemic. The interviews were conducted in

a natural setting. The targeted respondents were passengers in the boarding lounge of Bali Airport. The passenger in the boarding lounge was chosen since they are in the best position to answer the interview questions as they are expected to have gone through all the airport facilities. They represent the highest level of respondents within the airport and would not present problems of involuntary error due to lack of information.

The data analysis involves the process of data verbatim. Data analysis consisted of examining and categorizing or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the propositions of the study. It means that the analysis search for general respondent's statements about service quality perceived in the airport and its relationship to the W.O.Ms. Each question in the section one represented service quality attributes. While the questions in the section two represented W.O.M. Hence, service quality attributes can be displayed in a hypothetical model that indicates its relationship to W.O.Ms.

C Results and Discussion

The discussion begins with a brief explanation of service quality attributes in the airport adopted from ACI. Since there are evidences of the association of service quality toward W.O.M among many industries, the study was aimed at discovering the relation of Service Quality-W.O.M. In addition to that, the study was also aimed at discovering other factors that have a significant impact on W.O.M. Hence, the aim of this part of the study was to find out whether the service quality could be viewed as the major influence on the W.O.M in the airport. Each respondent was asked to qualify services currently offered at Bali airport, within of the Service Quality-W.O.M concept. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the quality of services should be provided at Bali Airport. This provides an indication of how well the airport performs various services.

The information was portrayed in this way to show not only the overall level of agreement, but also the strength of agreement.

These results could be used as an indication of the levels of excellence achieved. As a result, the key attributes were found to exist. These attributes from the prodding of the researcher based on guide list. The service items are clearly critical service elements in the airport. However, qualitative evidence from respondents suggests the existence of negative feeling about some services. Most respondents put stressed on the attributes of “Prices” that they perceived too high.

1. Overall Impression of Service Quality

As well as respondents being asked to assess individual services, they were also asked to assess their overall impression of the airport. Here, most of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the overall impression of Bali airport was favorable. Despite variations in service performance, the favorable overall impression that people have should be encouraging for Bali Airport. The airport is noted as being of a good airport standard. In line with previous result obtained from survey, prices are highly regarded for improvement by respondents. The improvement was considered crucial for passengers not limited only to prices but other areas.

2. An Overview of the Structural Service Quality-W.O.Ms

Unavailable alternatives do not allow airport's consumers easily to switch service providers. It is very much different with consumers visiting to a restaurant. Despite in the case of alternatives are available or switching cost/barriers are very low, consumers still remain loyal if they perceived the service being provided are exceeding their expectation (Maemunah, 2019b). This means that consumers will re-visit to a restaurant or advise others to visit it. In this study, therefore, respondents were requested to answer some open ended questions on their feelings such as: the willingness to discuss airport service quality with others; the willingness to share airport experience to social media; and the willingness to recommend to others.

Respondents were queried about their

reactions to the provision of the willingness to discuss airport service quality with others. The reaction to the concept of discussing airport service quality with others is positive (Ricardianto et al., 2021). Airport users indicated that they would be happy to discuss airport service quality with others; especially if the prices are about the same as in downtown. This is likely to assert that “Prices” were very high in the airport. The results were expected because as service quality rise, it affected the passengers to tell others about the airport. One comment from a respondent was: “A big possibility to discuss about the airport is if I found something interesting in the airport or something else...”

3. Share Airport Experience to Social Media

A set of questions was devoted to asking questions about the willingness to share airport experience to social media. An initial indication of some respondent was gained by asking respondents to indicate their positive feeling about Bali airport. After that, respondents were asked about the likelihood of them to share airport experience to social media. As might be expected, the majority of those who perceived Bali airport had good services indicated that they would be very happy to share their airport experience to their social media (Maemunah & Susanto, 2020). Given the large number of respondents who had positive feeling about the airport, it is not too surprising to find that a high proportion of respondent are, willing to share airport experience to social media, as indicated with the following examples: “I have not visited the airport for a while. Now the airport has a pleasant atmosphere, please check it out...”

4. Recommend The Airport to Others

This study further investigate those respondents who had “an opinion” on Bali airport had good facilities were asked to indicate their likely behavior to asking questions about the willingness of the passengers to recommend others to visit Bali airport. An initial indication of some respondent was gained by asking respondents to indicate their positive feeling about Bali airport. As might be

expected, the majority of those who perceived Bali airport had good services indicated that they would be very happy to talk about the airport with others. Given the large number of respondents who had positive feeling about the airport, it is not too surprising to find that a high proportion of respondent are likely to recommend others to visit Bali airport, as indicated with the following examples: “I have not visited the airport for a while. Now the airport has a pleasant atmosphere, I have to tell my colleagues about it...”

5. The Overall Characteristic of Quality Management within Airport

Reflecting on the qualitative data, one should not neglect what can be the most obvious finding of all, which is the fact that quality management is being perceived important by a number respondent in the airport industry. What is also important to note about the phenomenon of service quality within these industry is that it (quality management) exists. To re-sample some the statements made by the respondents – “The service quality (is a) good idea but prices are too high”, “A vast improvement in services and facilities over the years. I fully support the higher airport tax but not retails and foods prices. Supported by examples of this small yet rather revealing sample of qualitative insights, some specific things can be said about the service quality context of airport.

The first is that one gets a sense that Airport Service Quality are indeed operating within a complex if not challenging in the airport situational. However, they seem unlikely to play a balancing act of managing different variable elements and different forces that require their attention, especially prices in airport. It should be noted that price was not considered in Airport service quality that is developed by ACI. Based on the overall descriptions of the Service Quality-W.O.M in airport, one also gets a sense that, although airports have tried their progressive efforts to improve their quality, not all passengers very much ‘exitedl’ to W.O.M. This is the second point. However, the service quality management should still be understood from

this light. This position may well play pivotal role. In fact, their efforts to institute and implement better quality are in response to the demands of their of common practice in the airport industry which is driven by ACI. Hence, although the aim of this research is not necessarily to map-out the contextual or external factor and dynamics affecting this Service Quality-W.O.M, it is crucial that one has a grasp of what these realities are in understanding the phenomenon in the airports.

6. The Existence of the Service Quality-W.O.M Structures

There are many challenges that airport face in term of increasing their performance. Their customers (passengers) do have limited options and information about the airport they visit, especially for international travelers. However, airport managers are increasingly acknowledging the need for creating service quality in order to counter some of performance pressure that airport brings to bear. As direct reaction to these, airports are dedicating vast amounts of resources to increase their service quality.

This study found that there are evidences of some extent of formalization for Service Quality-W.O.M model as shown by the following excerpts that indicates this scenario: “Now the airport has a pleasant atmosphere, I have to tell my wife about it...” “....and Airport tax should not a problem...”. “When arriving from overseas it is great to come back to an airport we can be proud of. “I was only there to see a friend off but was most impressed with the facilities provided”. “Bali airport is an asset to the area and as a local I am proud of it and to have the use of it and will support any reasonable charge....”. However, through investigations on the qualitative survey, this study has made a better understanding of Service Quality-W.O.M in the airport industry. This study has revealed that service quality is considered very important in the airport. It may lead to result in better W.O.M.

Results from the questionnaire and qualitative responses indicated that the acceptability of W.O.M. The study into

concept of service quality and W.O.M has shown that it could fulfill some consumers' requirements. However, confusion over Prices that are too high, need to be addressed for it to succeed in the airport service quality.

This study has addressed the issues that are important in the management of services in the airport industry, especially in Bali. The research was based on the perceptions of passengers of Bali airport. Other types of service organizations might have produced similar or different findings. Regarding to that, this study, therefore, has some implications. At least this study has two implications, those are: research and academic implications; and managerial implications. Despite, this study should be seen as a preliminary attempt to present a new direction for service-quality research especially in the airport industry, the findings of this study offer some contribution in the sense that it may build some new understanding in the area of study.

The first and the most obvious implication for airport managers is if airport managers plan to develop measures for service quality, they should focus on a fulfillment-oriented approach. This means that they should develop service-quality constructs that will capture results that meet their requirements of their passengers, those that may increase W.O.M. Second, airport managers should research their customer before choosing the items to form the basis of their service-quality instruments., such as retails and foods prices. Such a study would enable them to limit the scope of items that are included in their service-quality instrument to those most relevant to their passengers.

D. Conclusion

This study has actually looked at a number of issues in service quality and W.O.M. In that, this study yielded some very important findings. One of the finding is that there was a positive impact of Service Quality to W.O.M. The results of the study may reveal that W.O.M might be influenced by other factors such as prices. There are some opportunities for future researches in this study area aimed at

understanding more fully the nature of service, its impact on W.O.M. Replication of this study using different airport setting and/or different methodology will extend generalizability of present study.

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