

Airport Service Quality; ‘an Overview on Airport Service Quality Benchmarking Agencies - a Global Scenario’.

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Abstract

The service quality of an airport can be construed as the quantity of satisfaction or convenience extended to the airport users. There exists a significant nexus between service industry and GDP of a nation which motivates Foreign Direct Investment as well as economic development. An airport terminal provides services to multiple user groups which includes passengers, airlines, commercials entities and visitors etc. Among them the passengers are the most important group and it can be considered as the primary consumers of airport services. It is an undoubted fact that the service quality plays a vital role in service marketing segment. If people get a positive experience from a service, it will be propagated by them to choose the same among his kith and kin and on the other side the negative experience also will have opposite and negative effect. Hence every service provider wants to improve their service delivery based on the customer needs and importance. Moreover, the customers act as a judge in evaluating the services extended to them. Thus this paper makes an attempt to look into the various studies on airport service quality globally and the role of international agencies like ACI, SKYTRAX, etc. in evaluating the airport terminal service quality and its impact on global airports.

Keywords: Airport Service Quality, Airport Councils International, Skytrax, World Airport Economic Report, Airport Star rating

INTRODUCTION

Airport terminal infrastructure and its facilities are the first and last point of contact of most of the passengers and the perception and impression on the airport services available in the terminal will certainly affect in deciding the future travel choices of a traveler. The recent trends show that the customer satisfaction has become a primary goal to attain for all airport managers for surviving the higher competitiveness of the airport industry. The concept of measuring service quality has been largely discussed in the goods industry. The Japanese philosophy says that “quality is a zero defects – doing it right the first time. According to Crosby (1979) quality can be defined as “conformance to requirements”. A. Parasuraman et al. (1985), a pioneer in the service quality explorer, reveals that there are three well documented features of the services are a) intangibility b) heterogeneity and c) inseparability. The quality of service is not manufactured in the factory or a plant and the consumers’ inputs are very crucial to maintain the service performance.

Parasuraman et al. (1985), by analyzing the different authors literature formulates a theme that;

- ❖ Service quality is more difficult to evaluate the consumer than the goods industry.
- ❖ Service quality perceptions show a comparison of consumer expectations with the actual service performance.
- ❖ Quality assessments cannot be made solely on the basis of a service, but they involve evaluations of the process of service delivery.

The author further suggests that focus group interview with consumers and in-depth interviews with executives will help in developing a conceptual model of service quality.

IMPORTANCE OF MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY OF AIRPORT

Lee, K., & Yu, C. (2017) comments that the increased competition among airports has triggered the need for a more effective and comprehensive measure of airport service quality (Rhoades et al. 2000) over the last two decades. Airport service quality is a multi-dimensional construct representing a wide range of passenger experiences from physical facilities, interactions, and services (Brady and Cronin Jr 2001). Airport Service Quality that cares with due importance to meet the travelers need is a key success point in the airport business strategy. Varuna Adikaraiwattage (2015) quoted that Correia and Wiransinghe (2004) have emphasized the need and importance of overall measures of airport service quality and its effect in airport planning, management and bench marking purposes.

Basically an airport management is having two kinds of revenues viz., aeronautical revenues and non-aero nautical revenue. The non-aeronautical revenues are generated mainly from the commercial activities in the terminals and land sides. So the airport management gives more focus on the service quality enhancement and thereby increase the quality services inside the airport, then the non-aeronautical revenue will increase to a great extent. The Airport Service Quality Program (ASQ) has been initiated in 2006 by the leaders in the filed, Airport Councils International (ACI) aimed at extending the assistance to the airports for establishing standards and indices for assessing the service quality and to boost their development process. The service quality is being measured by the customers experience and satisfaction on the services encountered by them. Further the ACI has put forwarded a standard questionnaire pattern to their member for analyzing the service quality on the service attributes that are being encountered by the airport travelers during their travel.(ACI official website).

Most of the literature related to the Airport service quality measurement, as well as the commercial survey conducted for airports, rely on offline data collection using survey questionnaires rather than online. But now the influence of various digital and social media channels has caused to generate the review on the

services. Hence it is imperative on the airport managers to adopt those kinds of methods to leverage such technological change and to gain the insights of the travelers live experience directly without any procrastination. It has been seen that only few researchers have done attempts to study the airport service quality analysis based on online surveys.

The Airports Councils International (ACI) develops standards, policies and recommended practices for airports and provides information and training opportunities to raise the standards around the world. The studies reveal that the ACI is having its standard established research approach on the commercial aspects of the airports. It has been noticed that since 2006, the Airport Councils International conducts periodical annual survey programmes globally and declare the awardees. Usually ACI conducts passenger survey using third party data collection agents on the basis of the ACI strict standard plan. Further it shows that usually more than 250 airports participate in the survey programmes every year. Their study is mainly focused on the airport service areas such as airport access, check in, passport checking, security, way finding, airport facilities, airport physical environment etc.

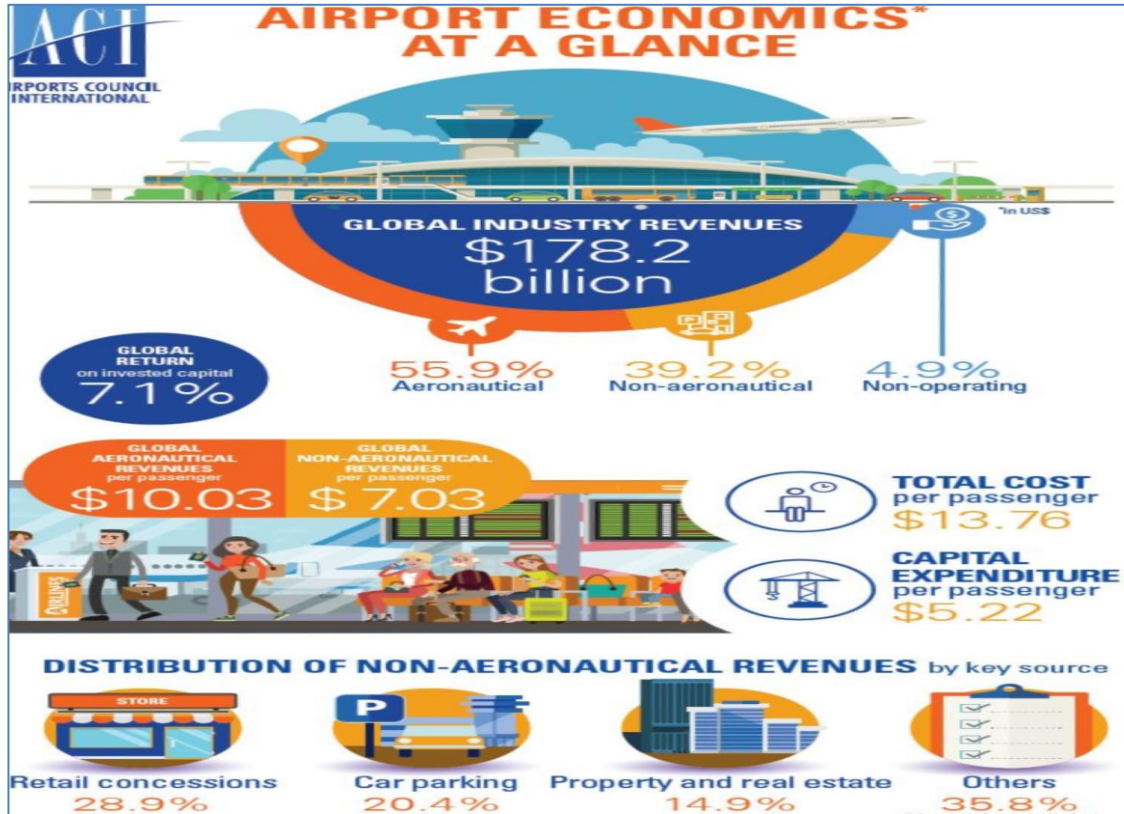


Fig. 1. Airport Councils International Airport Economic Report 2020.

The Airport Economic Report 2020 (fig 1) is the presentation of ACI which describes the global analysis of airport activity for the financial year 2018 based on the data of 936 global airports which is equal to 79% of worldwide passenger traffic. The report is comprised of in depth analysis, summaries and commentary on industry revenues (aeronautical and non-aero nautical) by source and costs (both operating and capital) and their evolution over time. Thus the periodical initiative of ACI gives an elaborate planning and assessments to the global airports and to increase the airport service quality as well as airport aeronautical and non-aero nautical revenues.

Lee, K., & Yu, C. (2017) in their study on ‘Monitoring Airport Service Quality: A Complementary Approach to Measure Perceived Service Quality Using Online Reviews’ has inserted the following 36 airport

service quality matrices used by Airports Councils International for the evaluation of airport service performance.

OVERALL SATISFACTION: Overall satisfaction with the airport, Overall satisfaction with the airport passenger, Overall satisfaction with the airport leisure passenger.

ACCESS: Ground transportation to/from the airport, Parking facilities, Parking facilities value for money, Availability of baggage carts/trolleys

CHECK-IN: Waiting time in check-in queue/line, Efficiency of check-in staff, Courtesy, helpfulness of check-in staff.

PASSPORT / PERSONAL ID CONTROL: Waiting time at passport / personal ID inspection, Courtesy and helpfulness of inspection staff, Courtesy and helpfulness of Security staff, Thoroughness of Security inspection, waiting time at Security inspection, Feeling of being safe and secure.

FINDING YOUR WAY: Ease of finding your way through airport, Flight information screens, Walking distance inside the terminal, Ease of making connections with other flights.

AIRPORT FACILITIES: Courtesy, helpfulness of airport staff, Restaurant / Eating facilities, Restaurant facilities value for money, Availability of bank / ATM facilities/money changers, Shopping facilities, Shopping facilities value for money, Internet access / Wi-fi, Business / Executive lounges, Availability of washrooms/toilets, Cleanliness of washrooms/toilets, Comfort of waiting/gate areas.

AIRPORT ENVIRONMENT: Cleanliness of airport terminal, Ambiance of the airport

ARRIVALS SERVICES: Arrivals passport and visa inspection, Speed of baggage delivery service, Customs inspection

Skytrax is a UK based (London) international airport service quality benchmarking agency established in the year 1989. They usually conduct specialist research in quality assessment in air transport industry. They provide comprehensive advises on airline and airport service quality improvement standards around the globe. They are having their professionals to keep up their ethos of working without fear and favor. The

effective solutions and innovative ideas have witnessed to achieve consistent change and improvement in the service quality management of airlines and airports. Skytrax world airport rating system is focused on classification of airports by quality of airport facilities and staff service standards. The Skytrax world airport star rating system started in the year 2000 and has been recognized as a global airport service quality benchmarking system over the last few decades.

Skytrax corporate website shows that its prestigious 5-star airport rating is being awarded to those airports achieving the highest overall Quality performance and is a benchmark of global excellence. The top rating airports recognizes those airports providing excellent facilities and high quality staff service to the customers. From 2017 onwards Skytrax extends its rating programme to the regional airports also to enable the airports proper quality recognition to those airports having predominant in regional routes and/ or domestic operations. Skytrax awarded its World's best airport of the year 2019 award to Changi airport (Singapore) for the 7th consecutive year.

CONCLUSION

It is an undoubted thing that there have been considerable developments in the area of airport benchmarking in last few decades and the aviation sector no longer lags so much behind other industries in the knowledge and practical use of performance indicators. The literature reviews evidences that many airports, particularly within Europe, are making much greater use of benchmarking techniques widely. Further research is very much essential in this field as the global aviation and airport industry is being expected to go through the commercialization and privatization stages.

It has been seen from the reviews on functioning of ACI and Skytrax that they are the dedicated teams committed for improving quality of the customer experience through the service quality improvement of the airport as well as airport staff. Furthermore, they have been conducting world audit report for the improvement of the global airport industry. These world benchmarking agencies adopts a well-researched

approach to deliver accuracy of ratings and world wise standards. It can be understood that the quality measures are a mixture of delivered service measures and passenger survey indicators and in the future it is planned that a measure of aircraft delay will also be used for analyzing the airport service quality. Thus this paper implies the need for a comprehensive periodical service quality analysis by the world bench marking agencies for understanding the customer need and importance of airports and to enhance airport service performance level to the world standard.

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