The Role of Airport Service Quality Toward Passenger Electronic Word-Of-Mouth

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Abstract. This research examines the impact of airport service quality on passenger satisfaction and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in aviation. Airport service quality encompasses dimensions of check-in, security, convenience, ambiance, availability of facilities, and intra-airport mobility. As airports play a vital role in travel, enhancing airport service quality is imperative yet empirical research on its outcomes is limited. Grounded in theory linking service quality, satisfaction and behavior, this study hypothesizes airport service quality positively affects passenger satisfaction and eWOM. Data from air travelers was analyzed using PLS-SEM. Results confirm airport service quality dimensions positively influence satisfaction. Furthermore, satisfaction strongly predicts eWOM. This study contributes by comprehensively investigating airport service quality and its effects. Findings offer theoretical and practical implications for improving airport service quality and passenger experience.

Keywords: Airport service quality, Passenger satisfaction, Electronic word-of-mouth, Aviation industry, PLS-SEM.

1. Introduction

In the realm of global transportation, the aviation sector has rapidly evolved, experiencing dynamic shifts and growth trajectories unparalleled in its history. As the skies become busier each year, the nexus between airline operations and passenger experiences continues to play a more prominent role (Prentice & Kadan, 2019). Airports, the veritable gateways to regions and nations, are no longer mere points of embarkation or disembarkation; they represent complex ecosystems of commerce, technology, and user experience (Lubbe *et al.*, 2011). As the number of air travelers continues its upward trend, the pivotal role of airports in shaping and influencing passenger satisfaction cannot be understated.

At the heart of this evolving dynamic is the concept of airport service quality. The multifaceted dimensions of this quality, encompassing elements such as check-in procedures, security protocols, overarching convenience, ambient atmosphere, provision of basic facilities, and mobility within the vast airport confines, collectively contribute to the holistic airport experience (Bezerra & Gomes, 2016). While distinct in its operations and impact, each dimension interweaves to shape the passenger's perception of the airport, subsequently molding their overall travel experience.

The modern-day passenger is not a passive consumer of transportation services. With the advent of digital platforms and the rapid proliferation of internet connectivity, passengers are empowered, active participants in the global dialogue on service quality. The phenomenon of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) stands as a testament to this empowerment. eWOM has transformed from a novel concept to an omnipresent force in the decision-making processes of consumers worldwide. In the context of the aviation industry, passengers readily share, evaluate, and base decisions on shared online experiences (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021; Shin *et al.*, 2020). The ripple effect of a singular review, comment, or shared experience can echo through the vast digital realm, influencing potential passengers' perceptions and decisions, making the examination of its roots and triggers an area of profound academic and commercial interest.

Historical data on passenger satisfaction often pivoted on tangibles like punctuality, baggage handling, and flight comfort. However, with the maturation of the industry and the increase in the number of touchpoints a passenger interacts with, the assessment parameters have expanded (Zainal & Al-Eideh, 2021). Today, an hour's delay might be forgivable if the airport offers a seamless check-in experience, or if its ambiance resonates with comfort, or if there's an efficient mobility system reducing transit fatigue (Wang & Park, 2020). On the contrary, the absence of basic amenities, or an overly complicated security procedure, can taint the perception of even the most loyal travelers. Drawing the bridge between airport service quality and eWOM is the mediating factor of passenger satisfaction. Satisfaction, a complex construct affected by numerous variables, in this context, serves as both an outcome (of airport service quality) and a precursor (to eWOM) (Seetanah *et al.*, 2018). The interplay between these variables — how service quality facets influence satisfaction and how that satisfaction, or the lack thereof, catalyzes eWOM — forms the crux of this research paper.

Given the profound implications for airport management, airline operators, policymakers, and even city planners, understanding this relationship is of paramount importance. High-stakes decisions about infrastructural investments, technological upgrades, staff training, and policy amendments are influenced by insights into passenger preferences and behaviors. In an era where a tweet, review, or blog post can sway public opinion and affect passenger choices, airports cannot afford to be mere spectators in the unfolding narrative of passenger experience. They need data, insights, and actionable intelligence to stay ahead of the curve, to mold passenger perceptions positively, and to ensure sustained growth in an industry rife with competition.

This research, therefore, embarks on a comprehensive exploration of how airport service quality influences passenger satisfaction and how this satisfaction subsequently determines the nature and intensity of eWOM. Through this academic endeavor, we seek not only to contribute to the existing body of literature but also to provide tangible, actionable insights for industry stakeholders, ensuring

the continual enhancement of the global passenger experience

2. Literature Review

2.1. Airport service quality

Airports, as the primary gateways for travelers, significantly influence the overall travel experience through their quality of services (Bakır *et al.*, 2022). Key facets of this experience include the check-in process, which sets the initial tone for travelers, and security measures that need to balance thoroughness with respect and efficiency (Fodness & Murray, 2007). Additionally, convenience factors such as clear signage, integrated technology for real-time updates, and the overall ambiance—including cleanliness, lighting, and aesthetics—are instrumental in shaping passenger perceptions. Essential facilities like clean restrooms, charging stations, and efficient mobility within the airport's confines further enhance this experience. In the complex ecosystem of an airport, every touchpoint, from the basic amenities to the larger structural processes, plays a role in determining passenger satisfaction. As the aviation industry continues its upward trajectory, airports that masterfully integrate and optimize these service quality elements will distinguish themselves, fostering both positive memories and loyalty among global travelers.

The current study assessed the quality of airport services from the passenger's perspective using six dimensions inspired by the work of Bezerra and Gomes (2016). It includes check-in, security, convenience, ambiance, basic facilities, and mobility

2.2. Research Framework

The S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theory, traditionally rooted in environmental psychology, serves as a guiding framework for understanding the relationship between Airport Service Quality (Stimulus), Passenger Satisfaction (Organism), and eWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth, the Response) within the aviation context. Airport Service Quality encapsulates a passenger's experience, from check-in procedures to mobility within the airport, which subsequently influences their overall satisfaction. This satisfaction, or lack thereof, dictates the nature and sentiment of eWOM, or online feedback, that passengers share on various digital platforms.

In essence, the research posits that the quality of airport services directly impacts how passengers feel about their experience, which in turn influences the feedback they share online. The study seeks to quantify these relationships, with the ultimate aim of providing actionable insights to airports on enhancing service quality, elevating passenger satisfaction, and managing their digital reputation effectively.

2.3. Hypotheses development

In the evolving landscape of the aviation industry, passenger experience at airports has taken center stage. While airlines and flight experiences remain crucial, airports are increasingly recognized as significant touchpoints influencing travelers' overall satisfaction (Graham, 2023). The multifaceted dimensions of airport service quality—including check-in processes, security measures, overall convenience, ambient environment, provision of basic amenities, and intra-airport mobility—are integral components of this experience (Bezerra & Gomes, 2016; Wattanacharoensil *et al.*, 2016). Given the heightened emphasis on improving airport services worldwide, it becomes essential to empirically ascertain the influence of these service quality dimensions on passenger satisfaction. Thus, based on preliminary observations and existing literature (Caves & Pickard, 2001; Wattanacharoensil *et al.*, 2016), this research proposes the hypothesis: Airport service quality, encompassing check-in efficiency, security procedures, convenience, ambiance, availability of basic facilities, and mobility within the

airport, has a positive impact on passenger satisfaction. Through this hypothesis, the study aims to deepen the understanding of the direct relationship between service quality attributes and the resultant passenger contentment.

H1: Check-in at the airport positively impact on passenger satisfaction.

H2: The airport's security positively impact on passenger satisfaction.

H3: Convenience in the airport positively impact on passenger satisfaction.

H4: Ambiance in the airport positively impact on passenger satisfaction.

H5: Basic airport facilities positively impact on passenger satisfaction.

H6: Mobility in the airport positively impact on passenger satisfaction.

In today's interconnected digital era, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) stands as a potent force in shaping perceptions and influencing decisions (Litvin *et al.*, 2018). Within the aviation industry, airports are not merely transit points but are integral elements affecting a traveler's overall journey (Prakash & Barua, 2016). Passenger satisfaction, derived from their cumulative experiences at these transit hubs, naturally plays a pivotal role in the narrative they share online (Ban & Kim, 2019). Considering the power of eWOM in swaying potential travelers' choices and the increasing reliance of consumers on online reviews and feedback, understanding the relationship between passenger satisfaction and eWOM becomes paramount. Building upon this premise and informed by existing literature, this research postulates the hypothesis: Higher passenger satisfaction at airports leads to a positive surge in electronic word-of-mouth from these passengers. Through this hypothesis, the study seeks to elucidate the direct correlation between the satisfaction levels of airport passengers and the subsequent digital endorsements or feedback they provide.

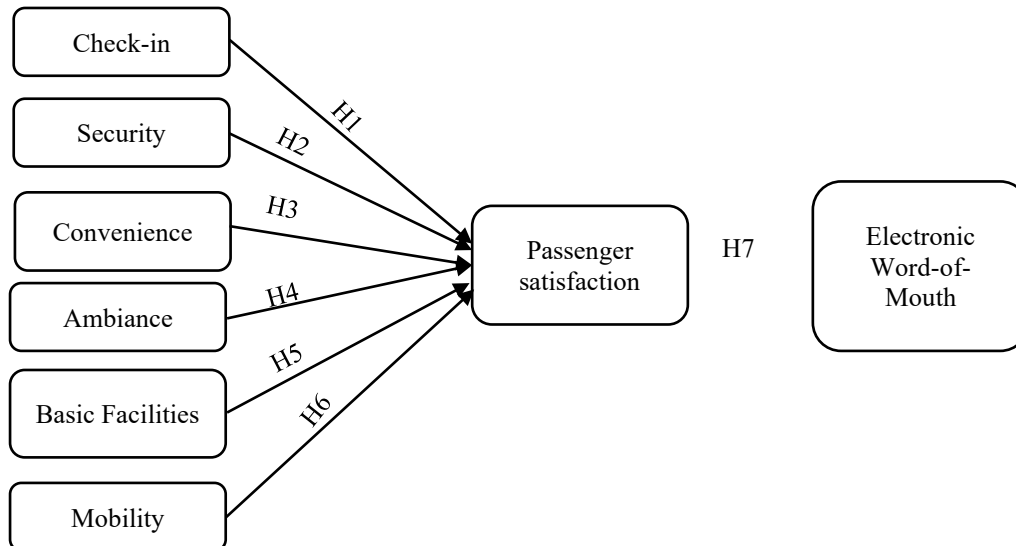*H7: Passenger satisfaction positively impact on electronic word-of-mouth behavior*

Fig.1: Theoretical model

3. Methodology

Purposive sampling was utilized to recruit participants for this research who commented on their most recent experience with airport service quality in Vietnam. Participants were vetted to verify they had gone through a Vietnam international airport during the previous six months. To collect information from air passengers who had recently used airport services, a web-based questionnaire was designed and disseminated statewide. Participants willingly consented to participate in the study at the time they purchased their plane tickets, from which email addresses were gathered. 820 email addresses were

gathered in total. Between September 2021 and June 2023, participants were sent an invitation and survey link that explained the objective of the research. Of the 800 replies submitted, 56 were discarded owing to incomplete or erroneous responses, leaving 744 surveys that were legitimate.

Table 1. Respondent's descriptive statistic

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	368	49.5
	Female	376	50.5
Age	18 – 25	166	22.3
	26 – 35	305	41.0
	36 – 45	131	17.6
	> 45	142	19.1
Occupation	Business	167	22.4
	Office-worker	233	31.3
	Student	179	24.1
	Homemaker	165	22.2
Airport Using Times/3 months	1	301	40.5
	2	197	26.5
	3	119	16.0
	4	71	9.5
	5	56	7.5

As table 1, the sample contained 368 male participants (49.5%) and 376 female participants (50.5%), indicating a nearly equal gender distribution. The most common age group was 26-35 years old, representing 305 participants (41.0%) as well as the second most common age group was 18-25 years old with 166 participants (22.3%). The most common occupation was office worker with 233 participants (31.3%). This was followed by students with 179 participants (24.1%), business professionals with 167 participants (22.4%), and homemakers with 165 participants (22.2%). In the 3 months prior to the survey, the most common airport usage frequency was 1 time, represented by 301 participants (40.5%). This was followed by 2 times with 197 participants (26.5%), 3 times with 119 participants (16.0%), 4 times with 71 participants (9.5%), and 5 times with 56 participants (7.5%). In summary, the sample contained nearly equal genders, was predominantly 26-35 years old, employed in office jobs, and had used the airport once in the past 3 months.

In order to collect information, a two-part online questionnaire was constructed. The first component of the survey included of 26 items gauging respondents' perceptions on six aspects of air service quality (check-in, security, convenience, environment, basic amenities, and mobility), passenger happiness, and electronic word-of-mouth. The survey questions for each component were derived from prior research conducted by Bezerra and Gomes (2016) on service quality dimensions, Bogicevic *et al.* (2013) on customer satisfaction, and Lee *et al.* (2022) on eWOM activities. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4. Results

The models used in this investigation were complicated. The researchers are interested in discovering whether the theories around endogenous latent variables are, in fact, the driving theories behind electronic word-of-mouth behavior. For model evaluation purposes, the present study used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2016).

In reflective measurement models, outer indicator loadings reveal the fundamental contributions of indicators to their corresponding constructs. A reflective model requires outer loadings threshold of 0.708 or above (Henseler *et al.*, 2017). All indicators of their respective constructs in this research had outer loadings greater than 0.708. The degree of Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR)

were more than or equal to 0.70 (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2016). It is widely accepted that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test is the best way to test for convergent validity if at least an AVE is 0.50. The AVE of 0.50 for exogenous and endogenous latent variable construct values was above the cutoff. The results in Table 2 meant that all measurement models' constructs got convergent validity. The PLS Algorithm is the best method for guaranteeing conceptual separation from confounding factors when evaluating discriminant validity. Comparing the square of the correlations between variables to the AVE allowed to assess discriminant validity. The measurement models must be calculated before the structural model can be evaluated. One of the most prevalent approaches to evaluating discriminant validity is the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (2018), which compares the square root of AVE. Following Table 3, there is discrimination between the research constructs.

Table 2. Reliability, convergent validity test

	CA	CR	AVE	OL
Ambiance (AME)	0.724	0.723	0.645	[0.765-0.850]
Basic Facilities (FAS)	0.817	0.817	0.733	[0.818-0.891]
Convenience (COE)	0.777	0.797	0.691	[0.772-0.874]
Check-in (CHN)	0.781	0.782	0.696	[0.793-0.868]
Mobility (MOY)	0.812	0.812	0.726	[0.845-0.860]
Passenger Satisfaction (SAT)	0.833	0.836	0.666	[0.791-0.831]
Security (SEY)	0.774	0.786	0.596	[0.687-0.825]
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)	0.829	0.837	0.745	[0.837-0.900]

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	AME	FAS	COE	CHN	MOY	SAT	SEY	eWOM
AME	0.803							
FAS	0.507	0.856						
COE	0.368	0.372	0.832					
CHN	0.444	0.482	0.347	0.834				
MOY	0.495	0.597	0.442	0.507	0.852			
SAT	0.656	0.636	0.557	0.689	0.702	0.816		
SEY	0.431	0.357	0.443	0.509	0.449	0.644	0.772	
eWOM	0.519	0.609	0.526	0.437	0.573	0.636	0.431	0.863

Table 4 presents the values of R^2, Q^2, VIF and f^2. The explanatory power, predictive relevance, and collinearity of the PLS-SEM model were assessed using several recommended guidelines (Hair et al., 2016; Henseler et al., 2017). The R^2 values were moderate, ranging from 0.404 to 0.779, indicating acceptable explanatory power of the exogenous variables on the endogenous constructs. Q^2 values calculated using the cross-validated redundancy approach were above zero, demonstrating the model's predictive relevance. The f^2 effect sizes suggested weak to strong relationships between the constructs, with the channel (CHN) having the largest effect on satisfaction. All VIF values were below 5, showing no critical collinearity issues. Overall, the PLS-SEM model demonstrated adequate explanatory power and predictive ability based on the R^2 and Q^2 values, as well as minimal collinearity concerns based on the VIFs, providing support for the model's quality and validity in explaining the relationships in line with recommended thresholds for social science research.

Table 4. R^2, Q^2, f^2, and VIF value

Relationship	f^2	R^2	VIF	Q^2
AME -> SAT	0.135		1.586	
FAS -> SAT	0.05		1.795	
COE -> SAT	0.069		1.401	
CHN -> SAT	0.179	0.779	1.666	0.503
MOY -> SAT	0.118		1.922	
SEY -> SAT	0.117		1	
SAT -> eWOM	0.678	0.404	1.601	0.296

The PLS-SEM analysis revealed positive and statistically significant relationships between all hypothesized paths in the structural model in Table 5. Specifically, the results demonstrated that Ambiance (β = 0.218, p < 0.001), Basic Facilities (β = 0.141, p < 0.001), Convenience (β = 0.146, p < 0.001), Check-in (β = 0.257, p < 0.001), Mobility (β = 0.224, p < 0.001), and Security (β = 0.203, p < 0.001) positively influenced passenger satisfaction. Furthermore, passenger satisfaction had a strong positive effect on electronic word-of-mouth (β = 0.636, p < 0.001). All path coefficients were significant at the 0.001 level, providing support for the proposed relationships. Among the service quality factors, the in-flight entertainment channel exhibited the strongest effect on satisfaction. Overall, the PLS-SEM results confirm the positive, significant impacts of airline service quality on passenger satisfaction and subsequent eWOM behavior, consistent with the hypothesized model. The findings make important theoretical contributions by providing empirical evidence on the drivers of satisfaction and eWOM in the airline industry

Table 5. The PLS-SEM result

Relationship	Beta	Standard deviation	p-value	Result
AME -> SAT	0.218	0.027	0.000	Accepted
FAS -> SAT	0.141	0.026	0.000	Accepted
COE -> SAT	0.146	0.021	0.000	Accepted
CHN -> SAT	0.257	0.026	0.000	Accepted
MOY -> SAT	0.224	0.025	0.000	Accepted
SAT -> eWOM	0.636	0.028	0.000	Accepted
SEY -> SAT	0.203	0.024	0.000	Accepted

*Note: ***p-value < 0.001*

5. Conclusions

The PLS-SEM results provide valuable insights into the drivers of passenger satisfaction and electronic word-of-mouth in the airline industry. Overall, the findings support the hypothesized relationships in the research model by demonstrating the significant positive effects of airline service quality on satisfaction and eWOM.

Specifically, the analysis shows ambiance, facilities, convenience, check-in, mobility, and security positively influence satisfaction. This aligns with studies since 2015 highlighting tangibles, reliability, responsiveness as pivotal for satisfaction (Akamavi *et al.*, 2015). The strong check-in impact reinforces recent research indicating it is critical for airline passenger satisfaction (Koklic *et al.*, 2017). By confirming check-in's role, the results stress the need for airlines to prioritize check-in as a vital touchpoint. Furthermore, the positive satisfaction-eWOM link corroborates recent studies. In the airline context, satisfied customers are more likely to engage in favorable post-purchase behaviors like recommendations (Mostafa *et al.*, 2015). The current findings extend this by linking satisfaction to electronic word-of-mouth specifically. As social media and review platforms grow, eWOM is

increasingly critical for service providers (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014; Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Demonstrating satisfaction as a driver of eWOM assists theory and practice.

Overall, by establishing the antecedents of satisfaction and eWOM, these findings make key contributions. The research adds to knowledge on service quality and satisfaction in airlines. While recent studies have examined service quality and satisfaction (Liou *et al.*, 2011; Loureiro, 2013), few integrated service factors, satisfaction, and eWOM in one model. This addresses a gap and provides a more comprehensive understanding of how airline services shape satisfaction and eWOM. For practice, the results help airlines identify focus areas to improve satisfaction and eWOM. Check-in requires attention as a priority. Investing in self-service and automation could be beneficial. The findings also emphasize enhancing staff skills to improve basic facilities and ambiance. By targeting key service dimensions, airlines can achieve distinction.

There are limitations providing future research directions. The sample of long-haul economy class passengers restricts generalizability. Testing the model with business class or low-cost carriers could offer insights. The cross-sectional design also limits determining causality. Longitudinal approaches could better assess causal relationships. Future studies can explore satisfaction outcomes like loyalty or test the model in different cultural settings

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