

Assessing Airport Taxi Customer Satisfaction's Factors: A First Step

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Abstract

This paper reports on an exploratory study made in order to assess the perceptions of airport taxi users about the service delivered. The first impression that stamps the tourists is in relation with their arrival and its journey to their hotel, which justifies the need to study the factors that can influence their perceptions. Many authors have studied the customer service perceived quality, adapting the widely accepted SERVQUAL model to specific situations. This paper suggests a model of customer satisfaction determined by the airport taxi service received. Following these approaches, a questionnaire, based on previous similar researches, was distributed to 251 Thai managers in order to get a better understanding. Computations were made with SPSS 20, namely factor analysis, correlations, t-test. Data analyses suggested that respondents give the greatest importance to security, the behavior and attitudes of the driver and the atmosphere of the taxi.

Key words: taxi, effectiveness, tourism, service quality, airport

Introduction

The tourism industry is of growing importance in most countries and not surprisingly, their government try to promote their travelling places, like beaches and culture, fun, health, and sight-seeing places for the tourists going to visit their countries in order to increase their economy in terms of purchasing power from the tourists who are willing to spend their money for their leisure or professional travels (Ville de Montreal, 2014). The benefits of a well-planned and managed transportation system spread far beyond the transport field, since it is essential for industry, for people's mobility and for good communication (Govender, 2016). In an attempt to satisfy the basic mobility

need of the individuals, the demand for public transport services come into play (Emmanuel and Solomon, 2015), especially in airports where personal cars are not convenient for all, and where more than elsewhere taxi drivers are perceived and act as ambassadors (BTM, 2016). But the rapid increase in urban population and automobile ownership and usage have resulted in urban transportation problems in developing countries (Muhammad et al., 2013) where most of the cities are facing problems of achieving the appropriate standard of urban mobility.

In recent years, the taxi transportation industry has undergone major changes (BTM, 2016), which, to a large extent, have led to increase competition, particularly between the

domestic and foreign companies (Khuong and Dai, 2016). Public transportation modes include high occupancy bus, wagon or minibus, train, airplane, motorcycle, airport taxi, public taxi. Moreover, the business of transportation is developing with severe competition, fluctuations, and new challenges. Among these, and the new peer-to-peer mode UBER, which is seen either as a competitor or a complement taxi. It is more comfortable than public taxi because of well-organized system that the passenger can make a reservation in advance. However, it is still illegal in some countries.

The public transportation is changing from the traditional way of service styles to consumer-oriented service style because its system needs to become market-oriented (BTM, 2016; Beirao and Cabral, 2007), namely since the introduction of UBER, which offers a higher quality of interactions with customers, a reduced price, and shorter waiting time.

To compete, the firms operating in the taxi industry now need to measure the customer's perception to the service quality that the offer in order to better satisfy their customers' needs by offering a better service in today's more competitive market (Ghotbabadi et al., 2015). Thus, service quality and customer satisfaction are very essential factors for enterprises providing transportation and taxi drivers who should understand the problems with the existing services and incorporate the change to improve their service satisfaction (Singh, 2016).

Background literature

The theory of service quality is based on a form of overall evaluation of a transaction

including money and a counterpart, leading to a certain level of customer satisfaction. This refers to the appreciation by the customer of what he or she actually receives from the service provider and to the manner in which the service is delivered, in relation to what he or she pays for and to his or her expectations. Customers are said to be satisfied when actual performance outcome exceeds expectation into positive disconfirmation; a customer will likely be satisfied. Some studies have tried to assess the commuters' perceptions to service quality of public transportation mode and to explore the factors responsible for their effectiveness (Githui et al., 2010; Joweono et al., 2010). Among services rendered to the population, the public transportation services is then essential for developed countries. According to Beard R. (2014), customer satisfaction is a multi-attributes concept. The main researcher in this area is Parasuraman et al. (1998) who developed a model and validated it in the case of retail stores with a scale, known as SERVQUAL, using dozens of attributes. But this instrument is of little use in the context of taxi because many of its scales refer to situation that occurs in a fix context like "excellent bank will perform the service right the first time" or excellent bank will insist on error fee records"... Most of the statements need to be adjusted to the situation under investigation. The SERVQUAL cannot be used in every situation and must be adapted. Therefor a new scale is needed.

Their model was adapted by many subsequent studies to other environments as Dagger et al., (2007) for the health service quality. Moreover, according to Zeithaml (1988),

perceived service quality is the “consumer’s judgement about a service’s overall excellence or superiority”. Therefore, public transport perceived service quality is public transport passengers’ judgement about the public transport service overall excellence or superiority (Yarmen and Sumaedi, 2016). It is also argued that perceived service quality model that is developed for a specific service type will provide better useful knowledge for service provider (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997). Thus, the public transport is essential for the maintenance and well-being of any nation (Govender, 2016).

In this research, the authors have adapted the philosophy of the model but adjust the instrument to the specific needs of a study of airport taxis, as did Dachyar and Rusydina (2015) in their study of quality of services of taxi of several taxi types in Jakarta who found that image was important factor for loyalty as well as perceived value, perceived quality, customer expectations and trust. Ravinchandran et al (2010) also applied the SERVQUAL to the banking sector.

In a very recent study conducted in order to clarify good practices for taxi drivers, BTM (2016), states the following characteristics: the driver understand the importance of the customer and the need to satisfy him; appropriate attire; a clean car in good working state; a friendly welcome attitude; taking into account special needs of customers like elderly; communicating with customers to decide best way; choosing with him the ambiance and temperature; empathic, driving safely up to destination where the driver conclude the payment at customer satisfaction.

Many determinants of the taxi service quality have been mentioned by several other studies, namely:

Mohammad et al. (2012) found that satisfaction that price sensitivity for the cost of transportation are competitive factors for the tourist organization.

Dridi et al. (2005) suggested that public transportation services should guarantee high service quality through following regular schedules, safety and rapidity.

Quality of access to transportation (Fischer & Amekudzi, 2011) could affect both the objective and subjective components of quality of life through the use of time, and the imposition of risks. Reliability, location access, health, safety and the environment affect subjective well-being as the “customer” of transportation systems influences their transportation related to their experiences (Fisher & Amekudzi, 2014). Driver skills in language and communication, according to Thadphoothon (2017), taxi drivers with international speaking literacy skill, especially, world-wide languages such as English and Chinese language are beneficial to the industry compared to the taxi drivers who experienced communication in difficulties when they provide services to foreign passengers, which is often the cases in most of the airport.

Rabiul et al., (2014) revealed that behavior of personnel and specifically behavior of bus driver, frequency of services, reliability of services as well as time and particularly waiting time seem to be the most crucial factors affecting customer satisfaction.

According to Thadphoothon (2017), the attitude of taxi drivers is very important. They have to be well trained to how to take good care of their customers.

Friendliness behavior of the bus can satisfy customers by developing better communication

and knowledge of its customers' needs (Disney, 1998)

Ravichadran et al (2010) measured the service quality as follows; reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurances and tangibles. Many other factors influence customer satisfaction such as courteous employees, knowledgeable employees, service quality, accuracy of billing, billing timeliness, billing clarity, competitive pricing, good value, and quick services are also important.

Service frequency, convenience and responsiveness are service quality variables that are considered to be important factors in

customer satisfaction (Cavana and Corbett, 2007; Taylor et al., 2008).

According to Mai Ngoc Khuong and Ngo Quang Dai, 2016, reliability, responsiveness (Thadphoothon, 2017), price and satisfaction directly affected customer appreciation.

Finally, gender can influence customer perception according to Turnbull et al. (2000) who mentioned variations in purchasing criteria among diverse gender and age groups. It is found that males treated reliability and brand loyalty to be key factors in respect of females who treated expert image and quality as vital.

These candidate factors can be summarized in the following research model :

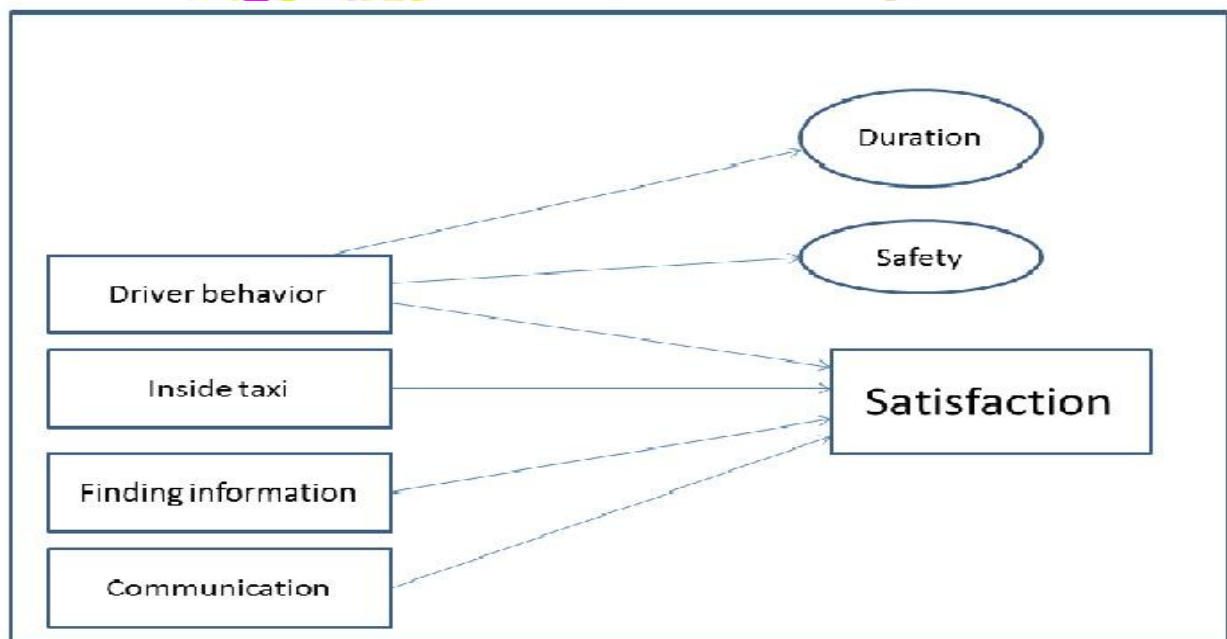


Figure 1: research conceptual model

Methodology

Instrument

This exploratory study is based on the administration of a questionnaire, modified from SERVQUAL. The objective is not to develop a new instrument but to get a better understanding of the factors considered as important by users.

The adaptation (scale development) was made by the author, seeking to keep the soul of each categories of the initial SERVQUAL, while looking at other instrument in other contexts to see how they resolved the needed adaptation.

The instrument consists of three (3) blocks of questions. The first block includes general

mostly open questions about concerns and important factors when arriving in another country airport. The second block comprises 22 statements to be assessed on a 5 points scale of importance by the respondent. It concerns the starting point at the airport (3 questions), the inside of the taxi (4 questions), the driver (5 questions), his behavior in terms of safety (6 questions) and what happen at the destination (4 questions). The last three (3) questions are three aspects of the effectiveness of the journey: the satisfaction which is our main dependent variable as well as a global appreciation of the duration and the safety). Despite the fact that these scales are limited in scope, they represent the intensity of an attitude and we can use them as we can use these variables as parametric data, following the work done by Wong et al (2012) , justifying their choice of 5-point scales as sufficient to estimate sensitivity, and the SERVQUAL instrument it-self, among all those management studies using Likert scales with parametric statistics. The reliability has been computed using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. A global measure, including all the scales, gave the

following Alpha: .908, which is very high. No item removal would increase the alpha significantly so all scales were kept for further analysis.

Sample and data collection

The survey was conducted from ten different groups of MBA students who have experienced as a passenger using an airport taxi service in Thailand. All of them are working adults aged 25 years or older. Before having them to answer the online questionnaire as the respondents, students were asked if they have experienced in using an airport taxi service. Students who never had experience in using the airport taxi service were not allowed to participate in the data collection. . The time frame for data collection was a 4 month period.

Data analysis

Respondents

Our final sample after cleaning the data consists of 261 respondents. Among those, valid answers reveal that the sample is composed of 187 females (72.2%) and 72 males (27.8%). The age distribution is given below:

Age group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30 and less	92	35.2	35.7	35.7
	31 to 50	157	60.2	60.9	96.5
	51 and more	9	3.4	3.5	100.0
	Total	258	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.1		
Total		261	100.0		

Table 1: Age distribution by group

Customers concerns

Customers were asked before any other insight of the survey to qualify the importance of the main elements of a journey: finding information on taxis,

waiting time, inside the taxi, the driver, the arrival at destination. Their answers are presented in Table 2, below:

concern (where 1=most important and 5=not important)	Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
finding information on prices and possibilities about taxis	244	17	1.537	1	1	0.818
waiting time to get a taxi	220	41	1.845	2	1	0.841
cleanliness, atmosphere, temperature, and IT equipment in the taxi	209	52	2.201	2	2	0.980
politeness, attire, language skills of the driver, safety of driving, communication	251	10	1.546	1	1	0.760
at destination payment and duration of the ride	217	44	1.954	2	1	1.096

Table 2: Most important concerns

It appears that the most important concern are finding prices and information about taxis (mean = 1.537) followed by the driver personal appearance, communication skills and its driving style (mean= 1.546). The reader will observe that the median and mode are also equal to 1 in these two cases. The other concerns are also evaluated as very important as they range from 1.8to 2.2, the second most important concern on this scale.

Customer evaluation of the journey at destination

Although problems can occur during the itinerary and even before, the end of the journey is

a significant milestone to assess the performance of the ride. Three measures were taken to assess the effectiveness of airport taxi from the user points of view.

- 1.) The actual duration in regard of the expectations
- 2.) The safety feeling
- 3.) A general satisfaction

A correlation was computed (list wise deletion) between these three indicators (n=256, two-tails), which yields the following results:

variables	R (Pearson correlation)	Significance
Satisfaction & safety	.634	.000
Satisfaction and duration	.439	.000
Safety and duration	.426	.000

Table 3: Correlation to the satisfaction indicators

The three constructs are very closely related. Safety is the most important determinant of satisfaction but many other factors are important to get customer satisfaction at destination. Satisfaction was also correlated to other constructs as follow in Table 4, where the reader find politeness, driving style and behavior, driver empathy, and comfort with appropriate temperature.

The reader will find in Table 4 the results of Pearson correlation coefficients between general satisfaction of users and the candidate independent variables. The factor with low importance are related to communication maybe

since nowadays people are busy with their mobile phone; and easiness to find a taxi or prices does not seem important due to the fact that respondents are business people well educated. A t-test show no significant difference between those of travel for business and those who travel for tourism except for the driver attire and cleanliness where business people find it less important ($t=2.123$, $sig=.035$). Businesspeople also feel less in safety than tourist with $t=-2.031$, $sig=.045$. For most of the statements (17/22), business people answered less important than their counterpart tourists.

statement / pearson correlation (with sig=.000)	r
driver (politeness)	0.508
behave (driver drive with appropriate speed and drive security)	0.479
behave (driver takes "shortcut" which can be danger for customer)	0.450
driver (smiling, effort and friendly attitude)	0.416
behave (driver stop for unexpected reasons (urinate, put gasoline, etc)	0.410
inside (visibility of the meter)	0.406
inside (air conditioned and or heating)	0.353
airport (easiness to find information about prices of taxi)	0.335
inside (atmosphere (smell, cleanliness)	0.324
driver (attire of the driver (jeans vs suit), personal cleanliness)	0.319
behave (driver talks on mobile phone)	0.318
behave (driver offers choice of highway and expected price)	0.306
inside (quality of seating (space and comfort)	0.303
driver (pressure to tip)	0.303
destination (driver can give change for a normal paper money coupon)	0.284
airport (easiness to find the taxi location)	0.264
behave (driver gives explanations about the itinerary)	0.248
driver (effort to communicate in the customer language)	0.238
airport (easiness to find information about different types of taxis)	0.231

Table 4: Correlation to satisfaction of main variables

Components of service quality

The author performed statistical verification of the applicability of factor analysis by computing the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy that yielded .901. , which is marvelous according to one of its creator. The Barlett's test of sphericity determines if the underlying matrix of correlation is an identity matrix. As the approximate Chi2 is high

(=2662) the significance very low (here 0.000), we conclude that there exists a relationship between variables and that a factor analysis is possible.

The analysis produced 4 factors explaining 57% of the variance of the 19 scales, as can be seen in the table below, the four dimensions complies with those of Dagger et al (2007) for the service quality.

Scales / components	1	2	3	4
behave (driver takes "shortcut" which can be danger for costumer	.772			
behave (driver talks on mobile phone)	.761			
behave (driver stop for unexpected reasons (urinate, put gasoline, etc)	.703			
behave (driver drive with appropriate speed and drive security)	.610			
destination (driver can give change for a normal paper money coupon)	.540			
inside (visibility of the meter)	.526	.473		
driver (pressure to tip)	.451			
inside (air conditioned and or heating)		.825		
inside (atmosphere (smell, cleanlines)		.789		
inside (quility of seating (space and comfort)		.703		
driver (politeness)		.593		
driver (smiling, effort and friendly attitude)		.567		
airport (easiness to find information about different types of taxis)			.771	
airport (easiness to find the taxi location)			.749	
airport (easiness to find information about prices of taxi)			.693	
driver (effort to communicate in the customer language)				.750
behave (driver gives explanations about the itinerary)				.733
driver (attire of the driver (jeans vs suit), personal cleanliness)		.404		.584
behave (driver offers choice of highway and expected price)	.356			.478
variance explained	34.7%	8.5%	7.9%	5.9%

Table 5: Factorial scores of the scales

The first dimension refers to the construct: Technical quality of the service. It covers the safety of driving (four scales) plus the financial safety (getting change, possibility to control de meter and no pressure for tip at destination). The second dimension relates to the inside environment quality, mostly determined by the physical or tangible elements of the décor, but also by the politeness of the driver and his attitude. The third factor concerns what Dagger et al (2007) call the

administrative quality, supplied by the airport, namely the ease to get information). Finally the last factor combines the scales relative to the interpersonal quality, here more centered on the communication customer-driver.

It should be noted that the visibility of the meter is split between the "inside" and the "control" dimensions. Similarly the driver attire and cleanliness might be seen as a "non-verbal communication" or as a component if the "inside

environment”. Finally the choice of taking highway is part of the communication and of the “cost” decision with possible impact on the financial security of the passenger.

The four dimensions describe well the quality of service rendered and incorporated adequately the qualities expected at each of the stages of the sort term contract (at airport, during transportation and at destination) as well as the actors (the driver, the airport, the taxi).

It is interesting to compare those results with the ten initial determinants of service quality from Parasuraman et al. (1998) study.

- a) Reliability is taken into account by visibility of the meter and the duration as expected;
- b) Responsiveness: being able to give change
- c) Access: this is mostly present in the airport statements with easiness to find taxis location, and prices of different types of taxis;
- d) Competence: refers to behaving normally (no unneeded stops)
- e) Courtesy: is being captured by smiling effort and attitude, politeness
- f) Communication: giving choice of highway, explaining the itinerary,
- g) Credibility: visibility of the meter, no push on tip

h) Security: behavior of driver (speed, mobile phone, shortcuts)

i) Understanding: trying to communicate in customer language

j) Tangible includes driver attire and cleanliness and inside taxi (temperature, cleanliness, atmosphere and seating, etc.)

As mentioned by Dagger et al (2007), each service or industry will have its own factorial grouping of these variables and relative importance of each statement depends on it, as well.

Supplementary Analysis

Distribution of countries and cities chosen as reference by the respondents

The table X below presents the cities and countries chosen by the respondents to answer the questionnaire and give their impression on the quality of service. Except for USA, most of the airports are from Asia countries, not surprisingly. The left side of table 6 presents a summary of the countries where is the airport that the respondents had in mind when answering the questionnaire. As an example, the 18 respondents mentioned an airport located in South Korea. In a similar way, Kowloon was the reference airport for 10 respondents.

Country	Frequency	Percent	Rank	City	Frequency	Percent
Japan	42	18.6	1	Bangkok	30	13.5
Thailand	39	17.3	2	Tokyo	23	10.3
China	21	9.3	3	Seoul	18	8.1
South Korea	18	8.0	4	Changi	13	5.8
Singapore	17	7.5	5	Osaka	12	5.4
Vietnam	12	5.3	6	Kowloon	10	4.5
Hong Kong	10	4.4	7	Ho Chi Minh	8	3.6

Taiwan	7	3.1	8	Dubai	5	2.2
USA	7	3.1	9	Guangzhou	5	2.2
Malaysia	6	2.7	10	Shanghai	5	2.2
total		79.2		total		57.8

Table 6: Cities and countries of the respondents

An analysis was made in order to determine if the Thailand airport taxis were evaluated in a similar way than international airports. A t-test was computed to see the impact of the “own country” potential impact on the three most important variables:

- Duration vs expected: T-test= -.400, sig (2-tails)=.689
- Customer felt safe during all journey: T-test=.148, sig (2-tails)=.883
- Customer general satisfaction: T-test=1.315, sig (2-tails)= .190

This is why it was decided to keep the “Thailand answers with the rest of the data.

Comparisons for gender and age group

A t-test was made to compare how women and men assess the airport taxis. On the recapitulative questions, few differences are observed, only in regard of the safety (F=5.542, sig=.019). Surprisingly, women felt more safe (mean=4.58) than men (4.40), but this difference is not significant, according to the t-test (1.678). The F-test indicates if the subgroups (males and females) are to be considered from the same sample or not, before reading the t-test results.

Statement	Females			Males			F (sig.)	t	sig(2-tails)
	Mean	StdDev	n	Mean	StdDev	n			
duration is what customer expected	4.04	0.704	184	3.83	0.822	72	3.585 (.059)	1.993	0.047
customer felt safe during the trip	4.58	0.663	185	4.40	0.816	72	5.542 (.019)	1.678	0.096
customer is satisfied	4.32	0.774	184	4.24	0.864	72	0.555 (.457)	0.711	0.478

Table 7: T-test for gender differences

Conclusion

This study has investigated the perception of airport user of taxis, thru the use of a questionnaire distributed to MBA students raveling in several cities and countries. The satisfaction of users appears to be related mostly to the safety feeling but other considerations are important for the satisfaction of

passengers, namely easiness to find a taxi, cleanliness of the driver and the taxi and the behavior of the driver. A model driven from the literature has been suggested in order to integrate several factors often linked to satisfaction.

The self- introduction of UBER in the market and the economic importance of the topic justifies

that airport taxi would be given importance. Our results show the necessity to better manage the airport taxis and taxis drivers in order to increase customer satisfaction at that critical moment. Supplementary training and verifications could be performed to ensure that quality factors are known by taxi drivers. On a theoretical point of view this study has proven the flexibility of the SERVQUAL instrument with the necessity to adapt it to different contexts.

But our research suffers from limitations namely the fact that it has been conducted in a single country with a special type of respondents, a decision that facilitates the data collection but limits the generalization of results. Nevertheless it was a first step that increases our understanding of the phenomenon although further research is needed. In order to complete this exploratory study, the questionnaire should be refined and administrated in different countries and results compared.

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