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# THE INFLUENCE OF SERVICE QUALITY, BRAND IMAGE, TRUST, AND PRICE ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: CASE OF AIRLINE SERVICES

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**ABSTRACT:** The aims of this paper is to measure the relationship between service quality, brand image, trust and price towards customer satisfaction. The study focused on the customer perceptions in the airline industry, Malaysia. Customer satisfaction have becoming important issues especially when the competition is stiff and customer have more bargaining power. This study used questionnaires to collect data. 200 respondents participated in the data collection exercises. Survey forms consisted of several part in which split by the variables. Questionnaire were distributed at the major airports in 3 major state in Malaysia. It took all together one months to complete the data collections process. Participants was based on voluntary basis for the purposed of research. The results indicate that price was not significant towards customer satisfaction. The rest of factors remain positive and important in leading customer satisfaction. The results can be used not only by the airlines industry but all logistic service providers.

**KEYWORDS:** Brand image, trust, price, service quality, satisfaction

#### I. INTRODUCTION

In the industrial world today, transport plays an extensive role and helps to eliminate the distance barrier. After all, an effective transport network is crucial for the sustainable economic development of a country and plays an important role in promoting national and global integrations[1]. The airline industry is a major contributor to the country's economic growth[2]. Being an efficient means of transport (but at a higher cost), air transportfacilitates foreign trade and indirectly benefits the tourism industry. Apart from increasing world trade activities by allowing quicker and easier movement of passengers and visitors, the airline industry also enhances the quality of life by extending leisure and tourism uses, which have substantially expanded across the world[3]. Moreover, airline transport services have become thebasic means for both daily activities and travel needs. Most customers choose air transportwhen it comes to a long-distance journey due to its flexibility and efficacy of time[1].

An airline company provides travel and freight air transport services. The companyeither leases or owns aircraft to provide these services and may also establish linkages or partnerships with other airline companies for mutual benefits[3]. Moreover, airline companies vary from a single aircraft carrying cargo and passengers to hundreds of aircraft engaged by full-service international airline companies. Airline services can be categorised as intercontinental, domestic, regional, or international and are engaged as scheduled or charter services[4]. The airline industry consists of a dynamic market since the industry focused on customer experience[1]. There are different understandings and standards that can be modified and updated in different ways. Thus, market researchers have moved away from the literal meaning of happiness and choose to explore and define the term "customer experience" instead[4]. It is a decision that a product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related performance, includinglevel of under- or over-performance [5]. In this case, this study viewed airline customer experience as a mechanism in line with the company offering that involves only a few variables, such as on-time performance and check-in customers.

In the last decade, the global airline industry has experienced a roller-coaster operation due to various factors, such as higher fuel prices[1], increased protection premiums[3], rapid industry deregulation[5], and natural disasters (ranging from disease outbreaks to volcano eruptions). These factors impede the growth of air travel. With the rapid advances in the competitive business climate, the growing demands and expectations of customers leadto a situation where many companies in the airline industry encounter issues of retaining their customers[6]. The tough market environment today has compelled airline companies to concentrate on cost savings in order to achieve efficient business operations with the possible need to sacrificeaspects of service quality and customer satisfaction[7].

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Customer reviews can help airline companies to strengthen their services and make the right choices to satisfy customers. However, customer reviews may also have negative effects. Customers can make use of their family and friends through word of mouth. Certain customers would condemn the services provided because theywant the organisations to be negatively known. In addition, service quality can directly affect the behavioural intention and leads towards customer satisfaction. Hence, airline companies need to take the established standards seriously.

This study aimed to understand the influence of service quality, brand image, trust, and price on customer satisfaction in the case of airline services from the customer perspective. Malaysia Airlines Berhad or previously known as Malaysian Airline System was selected for this study. Malaysia Airlines is recognised as the only national flag carrier in Malaysia. Its international and domestic flight routes cover 100 destinations globally. Furthermore, Skytarx awarded Malaysia Airlines as one of the six five-starrated airlines. Malaysia Airlines aims to tackle its shortcomings through behavioural expectations, service quality, and customer satisfaction. This study also explored the values of service efficiency, price policy, and airline service escapes as well as how these factors influence customer satisfaction.

#### 2.1 Customer Satisfaction

In different situations, customer satisfaction in relation to both products and services can be achieved. It is a highly personal judgment that is greatly influenced by customer satisfaction theories regarding clients. Customer satisfaction depends on the familiarity of both business connections and personal events with the customers[8]. It reflects the degree to which a customer agrees that a person, business, or organisation sufficiently delivers a product or service that meets the standards of the customer in the context where the customer is familiar with the product or service[9]. Customer satisfaction is not deeply rooted in the customer or the product or service, but a socially generated reaction to the relationship of the customer, product or service, and the business or organisation[10]. In this case, customer satisfaction can be more comprehensively defined by the perception of the quality of product, service, and price as well as the factors of circumstances and personal factors[11].

Besides that, customer satisfaction reflects the overall demand of customers for the product or service of a company or organisation or an emotional reaction [12]to the discrepancy between what customers lack and what they get[13], Thisaffects consumer actions in terms of the purpose and expectation of the proposed product or service[14]. Customer satisfaction can also be characterised as experience based on a specific service encounter[10], which contributes to customer loyalty[11], repeat purchase, favourable wordofmouth (WOM)[6], and ultimately, greater achievements and profitability[14]. It is a dynamic experience in the service industry and can be described as a customer experience assessment[10]. Customers set the requirements of products or services and these standards become the norm prior to the purchase[12]. Knowing what customers expect from the service industry is important as a reference standard in evaluating the performance of an organisation[15].

In the service industry, as the characteristics of services are intangible, reviews are particularly relevant. Upon the purchase of a product or service and as the product or service is used, the effects or impressions may be contrasted with the pre-purchase expectations[11]. The content produced by customers can be in various forms and types of media. Customer reviews reflect how customers describe and share their experiences in different ways, which are valuable for organisations to understandwhat customers think[16]. Through online platforms, customers caneasily express their experience, information, opinions, and knowledge about the products, services, and brands they use. In this case, online reviewsare particularly useful for airline companies to implement effective strategies to improve their services considering the diverse background of their customers[10].

The interactions between customers and employees strongly influence customer satisfaction. Hence, it is critical to examine the behaviour of employees that can be heavily influenced by the organisational cultureof the business operation[17]. The value of customer satisfaction comes from the generally accepted concept that consumers must be pleased in order for an organisation to be successful and profitable. Customers are more likely to return when they are satisfied, while disappointed customers are more likely to go elsewhere[11]. Customer satisfaction often results in favourable WOM that provides valuable indirect advertising for an organisation. Satisfied customers often ensure the collection of fewer customer complaints; thereby, reducing the costs of managing service failure[12].

In conclusion, by pleasing customers, the organisational productivity can be increased through the business operation and a higher market share, as well as by repeating and referring businesses[11]. In order to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction, most studies highlighted that the service provider should offer a high level of service quality, as service quality is usually considered a precedent of customer satisfaction. Moreover, the value of service is one of the main factors in attracting and retaining loyal customers. As a result, airline

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companies tend to critically innovate their system and technology in order to retain competitive performance and meet the needs and desires of customers[18].

# 2.2 Service Quality

The term "service" can be defined in several ways, depending on the region where the term is used. The service provided depends on the product type, which differs for different organisations [19]. Meanwhile, quality is one of the aspects that customers look for in a product or service. Quality can also be defined as the overall features and characteristics of a product or service, which depend on its ability to satisfy specified or implied needs of customers [20]. Service quality can be described as an overall perception of the organisation's relative output by consumers. In management and marketing literature, service quality is the perception of customers towards the service that achieves or surpasses their standards [21]. These standards of service may refer to the way customers are handled, which can be either good or bad.

# 2.3 Brand Image

Brand image is more than a symbol that identifies an organisation, product, or service. Today, brand image is a mix of customer relationships based on their prior experience with an organisation. Being more than a logo or slogan[22], brand image requires visual elements as well as brand connections that involve speed, reliability, and consistency the best brand images can be easily recognisable and instantly deliver theright message of the organisations these brands represent[23]. When customers start to recognise and purchase a product or service, customers would return for a good brand and stay loyal to that brand[24]. If a great product comes with engaging message that hits all the right notes with the customers, customer satisfaction would start to grow.

#### 2.4 Trust

Brand trust as an "insurance policy" is not a new idea. Most organisations know that customer trust would not only build or break an organisation but also ensure the sustainability of the organisations[23]. However, only a few organisations achieve sufficient brand trust; as others choose to pay lip service, rather than delving into what it really means to truly care for customers and their needs[25]. Brand trust has been more critical than ever, as customers today have many choices to select from. Trust has a huge impact on loyalty and influence. Building trust lies in authenticity—a mere claim of a product or service without proper steps to support the claim is likely to result in business failure. In order to build trust, organisations have to control what they do; identify the expectations of customers; and assess how they perform in meeting the customers' trust and expectations[26]. Prior to a purchase, customers would first consider the brand; loyal customers would support and even protect the integrity of the brand they trust. Therefore, as a brand gains trust from customers, the benefits are massive. High-quality products and services are the leadingfactors for customer trust. Besides that, great ratings and feedback as well as efficiency in addressing customer-related issues contribute to positive customer experience if these aspects are properly handled[27]. The values of creating better customer interactions, getting to know the demographic information, desires, and expectations of customers, and offering better flexibilityare critical in building brand trust.

#### 2.5 Price

Studies have shown that the perceived quality of a product or service offered increases with the increase of price. Price sends an important message to customers. Exceptionally low price of a product or service offered may indicate that the product or service may not be particularly desirable or of a poorer quality as compared to a similar product or service with higher price. A very low price for a product or service may raise the consumer perception of its overall quality in the likelihood of finding any flaws or perceived shortcomings.

Under-priced products or services can be harmful to the profit margins, particularly when the under-priced products or services fail to attract customers and eventually fail to cover other costs, such as ordering costs[25]. However, settinga very low price and unexpectedly increase the price comes with the risk of losing customers who now believe that the product or service offered is no longer the best value in the market[23]. There are a few aspects to consider prior to enforcing a high price for the product or service. Although a higher price may seem intuitively discourage purchase, this may not be the case, as a higher price may imply extremely high-quality or well-made product or service. However, fixing a high price can also backfire and leads to a lack of customer retention. Therefore, it is important for the management to apply a pricing strategy that balances the two extremes of price in order to send a positive message on the quality and value of products and services offered to the customers[24].

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#### III. METHODOLOGY

For this study, an online survey in Google forms was conducted through WhatsApp. Using the simple random sampling technique, 200 respondents of age 17 and above who experienced using airline services were selected to provide their views onthe performance of airline services and customer satisfaction. The self-administered questionnaire in this study exclusively focused on customer expectation towards the airline services offered and the airline company itself as well as customer opinion on the airline service quality, including the physical facilities provided, airline staff (e.g. appearance, problem solving, and understanding of customer needs), brand image, trust, and price (e.g. whether the price for the service offered isdeemed worth or not).

#### IV. FINDINGS

#### Analysis of the Research Model with the Method Partial Least Square (PLS)

This study uses the PLS analysis technique with the SmartPLS Program. From the results of data processing, PLS analysis can be done by evaluating the structural equation model. In this evaluation, there are two basic evaluations. *First*, evaluating the measurement model (*outer model*) to find out the validity and reliability of indicators that measure latent variables; the instrument validity and reliability test criteria in this study refer to discriminant validity, convergent validity, and composite reliability. Second, assess the inner model or structural model to see the relationship between constructs, the significance value and the *R-square* of the research model. Testing *Inner model* in PLS analysis is done through bootstrap resampling.

# Discriminant validity

Apart from a series of assessments on reliability and validity of all the reflective items and constructs used in the study. This study finds it essential to further assess on its discriminant validity that is complementary to the prior assessments. Testing discriminant validity in research using score square root of average (AVE) to check (testing) whether the research instrument is valid in explaining or reflecting latent variables. Discriminant validity used is square root of average variance extracted ( $\sqrt{AVE}$ ). If the square root of the average variance extracted ( $\sqrt{AVE}$ ) value of each variable is greater than the correlation value between the latent variable and other latent variables, the instrument variable is said to be valid discriminant.

Table 4.1 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

No	Construct	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
1	Brand Image	0.790
2	Customer Satisfaction	0.749
3	Price	0.828
4	Service Quality	0.779
5	Trust	0.817

Test results in Table 4.1 show that the value of average variance extracted (AVE) are more than 0.5. According to Hair, Sarstedt, & Ringle (2017) the average variance extracted (AVE) of each latent construct should 0.5 or higher. All constructs showed a satisfactory which explained more than 50% of variances of its items that ranges from 0.749 to 0.828.

**Table 4. 2 Fornell Larker's Criterion in Establishing Discriminant Validity (√AVE)** 

	Brand Image	Customer Satisfaction	Price	Service Quality	Trust
Brand Image	0.824				
Customer Satisfaction	0.818	0.813			
Price	0.803	0.845	0.809		
Service Quality	0.727	0.815	0.727	0.722	
Trust	0.718	0.734	0.803	0.856	0.901

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The table show that the *square root of average variance extracted* ( $\sqrt{AVE}$ ) values of all variables are greater than the correlation between latent variables and other latent variables so that the instruments of each variable are valid discriminant. In compliance to the Fornell-Larker's criterion this study is keen to report that the constructs and items used in this study had confirmed its discriminant validity.

# **Convergent validity**

Convergent validity measures the validity of an indicator as a measure of construct, which can be seen from outer loading. From the value outer loading, it can also be interpreted as the contribution of each indicator to the latent variable. Outer loading of an indicator with the highest value means that the indicator is the strongest measure of the latent variable in question. More clearly follows the results of the analysis and evaluation of measurement models for each research variable.

**Table 4.3 Outer Loading Each Indicator** 

	Brand Image	Customer Satisfaction	Price	Service Quality	Trust
BI1	0.817				
BI2	0.833				
BI3	0.929				
BI4	0.914				
CS1		0.858			
CS2		0.866			
CS3		0.865			
CS4		0.818			
CS5		0.859			
PR1			0.916		
PR2			0.924		
PR3			0.900		
PR4			0.855		
SQ1				0.828	
SQ2				0.860	
SQ3				0.772	
SQ4				0.758	
SQ5				0.836	
TR1					0.903
TR2					0.904
TR3					0.865
TR4					0.888

All indicators in each variable have value *outer loading* above 0.70, which means that the indicators are valid and able to measure latent variables.

# **Composite Reliability**

Composite reliability tests the value reliability between the indicators of the construct that constitutes it. Results are composite reliability said to be good, if the value is above 0.70. Test results of composite reliability the measurement model are presented in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 Composite Reliability of Constructs** 

No.	Construct	Composite Reliability
1	Brand Image	0.921
2	Customer Satisfaction	0.916
3	Price	0.930
4	Service Quality	0.892
5	Trust	0.915

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0.085

2.512

0.012

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Based on the test results in Table 4.4 obtained the value of composite reliability of all variables above 0.70. These results mean that the six latent variables analyzed have good composite reliability and it is concluded that all instruments used in this study have met the criteria or are suitable for use in the measurement of the five latent variables: brand image, customer satisfaction, price, service quality, and trust.

Table 4.5 Path coefficient on direct relationship between variables

Relationship Original Sample Standard T -Statistics Mean (M) Deviation sample  $(\beta)$ **STDV** Brand Image -> Customer 0.249 0.245 0.119 2.098

0.213

P-Values 0.036 Satisfaction Price -> Customer 0.170 0.172 0.116 1.464 0.144 Satisfaction Service Quality -> 0.294 0.302 0.112 2.712 0.007 **Customer Satisfaction** Trust -> Customer

0.224

Result for path coefficients on relationship between BI (brand image) and CS (customer satisfaction) was  $\beta$ 0.249. The result on t-value and p-value explicated that BI has strong positive relationship on customer satisfaction where t-value = 2.098 and p-value = 0.036, hence, this had confirmed that the relationship of BI (brand image) toward CS (customer satisfaction) is significant because the t-value more than 1.96 and p-value of less than 0.05. Considering the assessment result of the path relationship of structural model had delineated that BI has positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Result for path coefficients on relationship between PR (price) and CS (customer satisfaction) was β0.170. The following test on significant result through bootstrapping procedure showed t-value = 1.464 which less than cutoff of 1.96 and p-value = 0.144 that is more than 0.05, hence, this had confirmed that the relationship of PR (price) toward CS (customer satisfaction) is not significant. Considering the assessment result of the path relationship of structural model had delineated that PR has negative impact on customer satisfaction. Result for path coefficients on relationship between SQ (service quality) and CS (customer satisfaction) was β0.302. The result on t-value and p-value explicated that SO has strong positive relationship on customer satisfaction where t-value = 2.712 and p-value = 0.007, hence, this had confirmed that the relationship of SO (service quality) toward CS (customer satisfaction) is significant because the t-value more than 1.96 and p-value of less than 0.05. Considering the assessment result of the path relationship of structural model had delineated that SO has positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Result for path coefficients on relationship between TR (trust) and CS (customer satisfaction) was β0.213. The result on t-value and p-value explicated that TR has strong positive relationship on customer satisfaction where t-value = 2.512 and p-value = 0.012, hence, this had confirmed that the relationship of TR (trust) toward CS (customer satisfaction) is significant because the t-value more than 1.96 and p-value of less than 0.05. Considering the assessment result of the path relationship of structural model had delineated that TR has positive impact on customer satisfaction.

### V. DISCUSSIONS

Satisfaction

The findings highlighted that only one variable was not positively influence towards customer satisfaction. Price was not significant towards customer satisfaction and as such there could be a strong reason why respondents react in such a way. The rest of the variables indicated positive roles towards customer satisfaction. Brand image, service quality and trust remains important in leading to customer satisfaction. The results is similar to the previous research conducted in other part of the world except for price.

Possible reason on the price elements is because of the continuous promotions and campaign made by local airlines providers. In Malaysia, there are at least 3 major service providers and customer have ample choices to choose based on the preferences [29]. The online purchases and booking services provided customer more time to compare and find the best rates for their travel. There is also online applications that can help customer to

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compare the prices and recommend to them the best offer based on the date of travelling posted. Based on that, price could be no longer an issue as customer may choose what type of services they wanted to satisfy their needs.

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