

# **THE MODERATING ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AIRLINE SERVICE QUALITY AND PASSENGER SATISFACTION**

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The purpose of the dissertation is to assess the moderating role of culture in the relationship between airline service quality and passenger satisfaction. The study is carried out in Vietnam, in international services marketing area and airline service context utilized to test measurement scales of research constructs. The conceptual model is developed to depict set of relationships among associated constructs, particularly of that airline service quality impacts on passenger satisfaction, and culture moderates this relationship.

The research methodology complied with positivism philosophy and deductive approach. The methodological choice was quantitative research design with survey strategy using highly structured questionnaires. The research methods employed new generation of multivariate data analysis techniques and tools which possess high accuracy and consistency.

The research conducted through two major phases in terms of pilot study and main survey to assess a number of constructs with their measures: airline service quality, passenger satisfaction, and culture about reliability and validity; and to examine the theoretical model and hypotheses from data collected in Vietnam.

The qualitative pilot study employed qualitative techniques such as experience survey embracing 08 experts who were academics familiar with the airline industry and individual in-depth interviews undertaken with four passengers. The quantitative pilot study was based on the responses of 196 passengers. The scales were evaluated via Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis. The main survey comprised 677 passengers, in which confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), and especially moderated structural equation modeling (SEM to test moderation or moderator variables with metric measurement scales) were applied.

Airline service quality identified in this research was multidimensional construct constituting of six factors, namely reservation and ticketing service, airport service, onboard service, employee service, airline schedule, reliability and safety. The

assessment of three measurement scales indicated that all instruments archived the criteria: (i) coefficient alpha estimates of internal consistency and composite reliabilities; (ii) average variance extracted; (iii) unidimensionality; and (iv) convergent and discriminant validity.

The structural equation modeling results exhibited that the theoretical model showed good fit to the data and hypothesis of the relationship between airline service quality, passenger satisfaction was supported. Airline service quality accounted for 69% of the variance to passenger satisfaction. The SEM results also stated five of six components respectively airport service, reliability and safety, employee service, onboard service, and airline schedule clearly reflected airline service quality.

The moderated structural equation modeling (MSEM) results indicated that the theoretical model fit the data well and three out of five quantitative moderator variable hypotheses were supported. Three moderator variables of culture namely power distance, collectivism, and masculinity caused the strength of the relationship between airline service quality and passenger satisfaction pair to change, and these three negatively moderated this relationship. Moreover, the interaction effects  $f^2$  (or moderator effects) pointed out that these moderators represent empirical supports or significant contributions. Besides, The MSEM outcomes demonstrated the other remaining moderator variables of culture, specifically uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation keep the effect on the relationship of airline service quality and passenger satisfaction unchanged.

In theory, the research findings make new way of thinking and significant contributions to the existing cross-cultural studies in international business/services marketing sphere by investigating the moderating role of culture in the relationship between airline service quality and passenger satisfaction through people from diverse nations/cultures.

In practice, the research findings suggest that airlines do focus on the importance of each airline service quality component and formulate successful strategies diversely to ensure providing premium service quality to passengers. Additionally, the research findings point out that passengers across nations/cultures acquired different individual cultural values do perceive airline service quality differently. To enhance service quality dramatically, airlines should provide front line and bottom line personnel with adequate interdisciplinary professional knowledge and cultural awareness across nations of the world.

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