

An Assessment of the Passengers' Satisfaction from Service Quality of Onboard Employees of Saudi Airlines – An Empirical Study

Dr. Zaid Ahmad Ansari

Associate Professor of Marketing

Head, Department of Marketing, College of Business

University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Purpose: The main objective of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the Saudia crewmembers in delivering services to the passengers. **Methodology:** This is quantitative study based on primary data collected from the passengers of Saudi Airlines. A close-ended structured questionnaire had been distributed randomly. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into Arabic for high response among the passengers who ever travelled by Saudi Airlines. The researcher used Convenience sampling technique to identify the respondents who came from across the country for counseling classes at college of business and writing their final exams. The study sample size was 400 respondents. **Findings:** The results show that the passengers of the Saudi airlines were only somewhat satisfied not satisfied or highly satisfied. The satisfaction for business class passengers were much less in comparison to economy class passengers, the AlFursan loyalty program members were also comparatively less satisfied than the members, and old passengers satisfaction level was less than the new passengers. **Managerial Implications:** The onboard employees' service quality need to be enhanced in general and specially in the business class to improve the passengers' satisfaction to retain them with Saudi Airlines.

Keywords: Saudi Airlines, Saudi Arabia, Onboard employees, Passengers satisfaction, Service quality

INTRODUCTION

Services are intangible and cannot be inventoried and transported (Karmarkar, 1996) thus produced and consumed at the same time in the presence of the consumer which complicates the marketing of services (Chase 1978), as production and consumption is a spontaneous activity. Services are delivered through an employee of the company, the contact employee represents the entire company, their behavior, knowledge, expertise, skills is perceived by the consumer to be the behavior, knowledge, expertise, and skills of the company. As such the entire company consolidates into an employee. This critical involvement of the employee in service industry enhances the role of service contact employee. The role of contact employee representing the company during the service transaction gets even more critical due to the fact that each consumer's need, want, and demand may differ. The fact that on International airlines passengers are from diverse cultural background speaking different languages, different food, various financial and educational background, therefore more diverse in their need, want and demand. Satisfying such a diverse group of consumers enhances the challenge for the service contact employee, which may be even more in airlines onboard services. Pine (1993) highlighted the fact and said the employees' role gets more challenging due to the fact

that each customer's need and expectation may differ therefore demanding customization in delivery of services to various customers.

Employees' behaviour is defined as various sequences of actions carried out by employees within the organization (Hanna et al., 2004). King (2004) states that negative employees' behaviour has ruined many businesses and cost employers millions of dollars every day. It also has consequence of driving away customers, damaging employees' morality and increasing their turnover assets. Juwaheer (2004) regarded employees as having a greater impact than other factors on customer satisfaction.

In service companies such as the airlines industry the employees are the face of the company, they deliver services to the customers and therefore their behaviour is immensely critical. According to Gwinner et al., 1998) employee's behaviour is important in a service company as they connect the organization with its customers and they represent a critical factor in developing effective working relationships with customers.

A study in UK revealed that 68% of the customers leave because of poor employee attitude, 41% of the employees are loyal because of a good employee attitude and 70% of customer brand perception is determined by experience with people. UK retailer revealed that 1% increase in employee commitment is equal to 9% increase in monthly sales. The behaviour of an employee may help a customer forget lacking in company's physical environment, and at the same time may also ruin the positive impression of the company's great physical infrastructure by his negative behaviour. Thus, the success of a service company strongly depends on the employees of the company. In this research the researcher investigated the satisfaction of the Saudi Airlines passengers with the onboard employees' behaviour.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are so many studies that show customer's loyalty as a useful tool to further enhance profitability, and this loyalty is generated from satisfaction of customer (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) making Customer satisfaction an important concept in the service literature (Douglas and Fredenall, 2004). It is this reason that all the firm's mission statement mention commitment to enhancing customer satisfaction (Babakus et al., 2004). Customer assess the elements of service and decide whether or not what they received is quality service (Harvey, 1998; Brady and Robertson, 2001).

Earlier studies showed customer satisfaction with the establishment is determined by their satisfaction with the contact employee delivering the service (Crosby & Stephens, 1987; Singh, 1991). Customer's satisfaction with employees affect their satisfaction with the establishment, thus for the customer contact employee is the company, which may draw positive behaviours from them towards the company (Singh 1991). Therefore, employee behaviour is the key element of customer satisfaction.

Employees are the most important resource for any organization, they represent the company to the customers (Paulin et al., 2004) because the customers are present at the time of service production (Chase 1978), delivery and consumption. Employees' behaviour defined as the sequence of actions carried out by employees with the organization (Hanna et al., 2004) significantly influence the customer satisfaction irrespective of their gender, nationality, purpose of visit, number of visits, and length of stay (Hanan et al., 2008). In service companies it is the employee who establishes the relationship between the customer and the company (Bitner, 1995). The study of Brown et al., (1996) concluded that positive employee behaviour

increased customer service satisfaction. The customer contact employee, responsible for the service delivery are critical resource.

The behaviour of the employee includes their responsiveness, smile, personal warmth, personalization, and attitude, problem solving skills, knowledge, language, and cooperation. According to Tahir and Abubakr, (2007) Responsiveness is rated as the most critical dimension of service quality. Jones and Dent (1994) found that a smiling face has a beneficial effect on customer satisfaction. May be the smiling face and responsiveness of the employee can help the customers forget any lacking in the infrastructure of the company and even may help forget any incidental bad experience of the customers. Lemmink and Mattson (1998) demonstrated that the degree of personal warmth displayed by service employee toward customers was related significantly and positively to service quality perceptions and customer satisfaction. Kong and Jogaratnam (2007) confirmed that employee personalization and courtesy were significant predictors of customer satisfaction. Customers are very sensitive to employees' working environment in service organizations (Brown and Michell, 1993). It was found that correct match between staff skills and customers' expectations resulted in better service quality towards customers (Gallow and Ho, 1996). Service recovery and problem solving are recognized as important parts of services quality (Hart et al., 1990; Dabholkar et al., 1996; Swanson and Kelly, 2001). Thus, the problem solving skills of the employees are important.

Many literature established that the customer satisfaction is strongly influenced by the interaction between customers and employees (Boshoff & Tait, 1996), therefore, examining employee behavior gets critical. Employee behavior, though, is strongly influenced by the operating organizational culture (Chow et al., 2002; Ferris et al., 1998; Pratt & Beaulieu, 1992; Schein, 1996), "a system of shared values and beliefs that produces norms of behavior and establishes an organizational way of life" (Koberg & Chusmir, 1987). Where the existing literature relates organizational culture and customer satisfaction, those links are either theoretical or indirect (Gowing & Lindholm, 2002; Gupta et al., 2005). Boshoff and Mels (1995) argue that contact employees are uniquely aware of the special challenges posed by customer interaction and that their perceptions of service delivery should receive more attention. Indeed, contact employees' perceptions of service delivery have been used effectively in previous researches (Iverson, et al., 1996; Schneider et al., 1980; Ulrich et al., 1991). However in this study the researcher focusses only of the satisfaction of Saudi Airlines passengers from service quality of its onboard employees keeping the factors such as organizational culture constant. The rest of the paper has been organized in the following order, hypothesis, methodology, empirical results, discussions, conclusions, and implications.

HYPOTHESIS: Based on the foregoing literature the researcher in this study proposed the following hypothesis to test from the empirical results.

- H1:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employee's Behaviour
- H2:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employees' Cooperation
- H3:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employees' Knowledge
- H4:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employees' Attitude
- H5:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employees' Language
- H6:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employees' Availability
- H7:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employees' Assistance to families with children
- H8:** Saudi Airlines passengers were satisfied with the onboard employees' Problem solving skills

METHODOLOGY

Survey Instrument: This research is a quantitative study based on primary data collected from passengers of Saudi airlines. The researcher collected data through a structured close-ended questionnaire, originally developed in English and translated into Arabic for the convenience of the respondents, high response rate, and reliability of data as the respondents were predominantly Arabic speakers. Eight variables were identified from literature to represent the various aspects of employee behaviours expected from customers given in table 1. Level of passenger's satisfaction was measured on five point Likert scale. The rating used were 5 to 1 on which, 5 equal to Highly Satisfied, 4 equal to Satisfied, 3 equal to Somewhat Satisfied, 2 equal to Dissatisfied, and 1 equal to Highly Dissatisfied.

Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling methodology identified the respondents to administer the questionnaire. The sample consisted of group of individuals pursuing bachelor degree in various specializations in business from College of Business Rabigh, King Abdulaziz University. The respondents came to the campus for counseling classes before the exam and then for the exam. They came from different parts of the country to write the final exam, thus representing almost the entire country of Saudi Arabia. All the respondents were employees in various companies in the country including government and private. The respondents were in all age groups. The researcher administered questionnaires on confirmation that the respondent had travelled by Saudi Airlines. The sample size was 400 respondents.

Analysis of Data: Percentage, frequencies, mean and standard deviation were the statistical tools for analysis. For the testing of hypotheses ANOVA and t-test, tested the variance and significance of the results. Cronbach Alpha measured the reliability of data.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

To get detailed appropriate results the data had been analyzed across the following parameters namely; reliability test, mean value, frequency, and percentage for the entire respondents, ANOVA analysis across the nationalities – Saudis Vs Non Saudis; experience of travelling by other airlines; Destination of travelling – Domestic, International, and both; years of experience of travelling by Saudi airlines 1 to 5, 6 to 10, and more than 10 years; Class of travel – Business class, economy class and both; membership of Loyalty program – Members of AlFursan and Non-members of AlFursan.

Reliability of Data

To assess the internal consistency and reliability of the data Cronbach's Alpha was used. Results in Table 1 showed that the collected data was highly consistent and reliable with the value of .924. Pallant (2004) said that reliability scores more than 0.70 are acceptable but in this case, the result in table 1 is very high at 0.924 indicating the high consistency and reliability of data.

Table No. 1: Reliability Test of Data

Employees – On Board	.932
Behaviour	
Cooperation	
Knowledge	
Attitude	
Language	
Availability/responsiveness	
Assistance to families with children	
Problem solving skills	

Passengers' Satisfaction from Service Quality of Onboard Employees

The satisfaction of customers with the onboard employees (crewmember) services of Saudi Airlines is presented in the following two tables namely; table 2, and table 3. Eight variables were analyzed to measure the services of the crewmembers and satisfaction of the customers in this category. The variables were "the behaviour of the crew members, their cooperation, their knowledge, their attitude, their language, their availability in case of need (Responsiveness), their assistance to family with children, and their problem solving skills whenever needed. The results show that for all the eight variables the mean value is above three which indicates the somewhat satisfaction of the customers from the services of crewmembers on board. Table 3 show that more than 60% of the customers were satisfied with the following variables namely; behaviour 69.3%, cooperation 66.0%, knowledge 62.5%, attitude 65.8%, language 61.8%. For the other three variables the percentage is less than 60% such availability of the crew members 49.3%, Assistance to family with children, 57.0%, and problem solving skills only 48.8% were satisfied.

Table 2: Passengers' satisfaction from service quality of on onboard employees

Services	N	Mean	SD	HD	DS	SS	S	HS
Behaviour	400	3.86	1.162	27	22	74	135	142
Cooperation	400	3.81	1.129	23	25	88	135	129
Knowledge	400	3.68	1.161	27	35	88	141	109
Attitude	400	3.72	1.200	35	23	79	144	119
Language	400	3.70	1.208	32	28	93	122	125
Availability/responsiveness	400	3.38	1.214	40	46	117	116	81
Assistance to family with children	400	3.56	1.231	36	38	98	121	107
Problem solving skills	400	3.33	1.276	54	38	113	114	81

SD = Standard deviation/ HD = Highly Dissatisfied/ DS=Dissatisfied/ SS=Somewhat satisfied/ S= Satisfied/ HS= Highly satisfied

Table 3: Passengers' satisfaction from service quality of on onboard employees

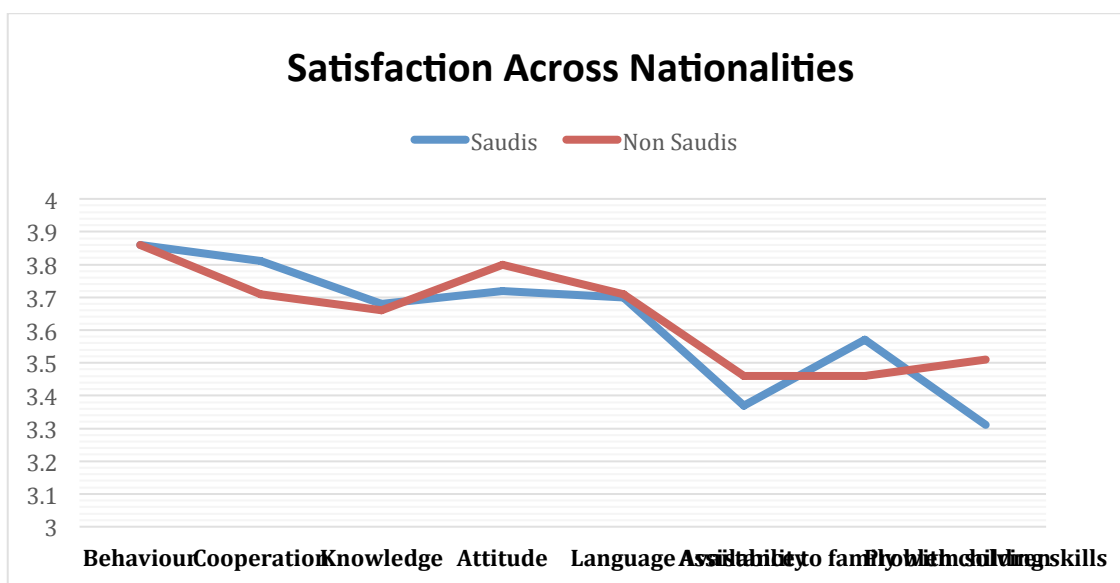
Services	Percentage
Behaviour	69.3
Cooperation	66.0
Knowledge	62.5
Attitude	65.8
Language	61.8
Availability/responsiveness	49.3
Assistance to family with children	57.0
Problem solving skills	48.8

Passengers' Satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the nationality – Saudis Vs Non Saudis

The results in table 4 and figure 1, indicate that there is no much difference in satisfaction of passengers across the nationalities namely Saudis and Non Saudis passengers. For all the eight variables the satisfaction is not much different. However, the mean value in both the categories for all the eight variables under investigation are above 3 indicating somewhat satisfaction of the passengers. The results are not statistically significant.

Table 4: ANOVA - Passenger satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across nationalities

Services	Saudi			Non Saudi			F	df	Sig.
	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev			
Behaviour	365	3.86	1.189	35	3.86	.845	.000	1	.998
Cooperation	365	3.81	1.150	35	3.71	.893	.247	1	.619
Knowledge	365	3.68	1.181	35	3.66	.938	.009	1	.924
Attitude	365	3.72	1.225	35	3.80	.901	.160	1	.690
Language	365	3.70	1.237	35	3.71	.860	.005	1	.942
Availability/responsiveness	365	3.37	1.237	35	3.46	.950	.154	1	.694
Assistance to family with children	365	3.57	1.251	35	3.46	1.010	.281	1	.597
Problem solving skills	365	3.31	1.300	35	3.51	.981	.844	1	.359

**Figure 1**

Passengers' Satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the experience of travelling Airlines – Saudi Airlines Vs Other Airlines

The results in table 5 and figure 2, show that there is difference in satisfaction of passengers who have the experience of travelling by other airlines as well. There were 130 respondents travelled by other airlines. The satisfaction of the passengers travelled by other airlines was high for all the variables indicated by high mean value in comparison to those who travelled only by Saudi Airlines. Though the mean value for all the variables in Saudi Airlines category are above 3 indicating somewhat satisfaction of the passengers it is low when compared to the service quality experience of passengers travelled by other airlines. The mean value for two variables namely behaviour was 4.10 and for Cooperation was 4.02 indicating satisfaction of the passengers. The result for these variables were statistically significant. Satisfaction of other airlines passengers from 'Knowledge and Attitude' of the onboard employees were also much high and statistically significant. Except for language were the passengers' satisfaction was almost same (mean 3.69 and mean 3.72), the satisfaction was high for the other airlines in comparison to Saudi airlines

Table 5: ANOVA - Passenger satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the experience of travelling airlines – Saudi airlines Vs. other airlines

Services	Travelled by other Airlines 'Yes'			Travelled by other Airlines 'No'			F	df	Sig.
	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Deviation	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Deviation			
Behaviour	270	3.74	1.163	130	4.10	1.126	8.544	1	.004
Cooperation	270	3.70	1.138	130	4.02	1.085	6.782	1	.010
Knowledge	270	3.54	1.162	130	3.95	1.116	10.764	1	.001
Attitude	270	3.62	1.201	130	3.94	1.173	6.325	1	.012
Language	270	3.69	1.185	130	3.72	1.259	.031	1	.860
Availability/responsiveness	270	3.29	1.198	130	3.56	1.233	4.341	1	.038
Assistance to family with children	270	3.50	1.206	130	3.70	1.274	2.412	1	.121
Problem solving skills	270	3.21	1.216	130	3.55	1.370	6.276	1	.013

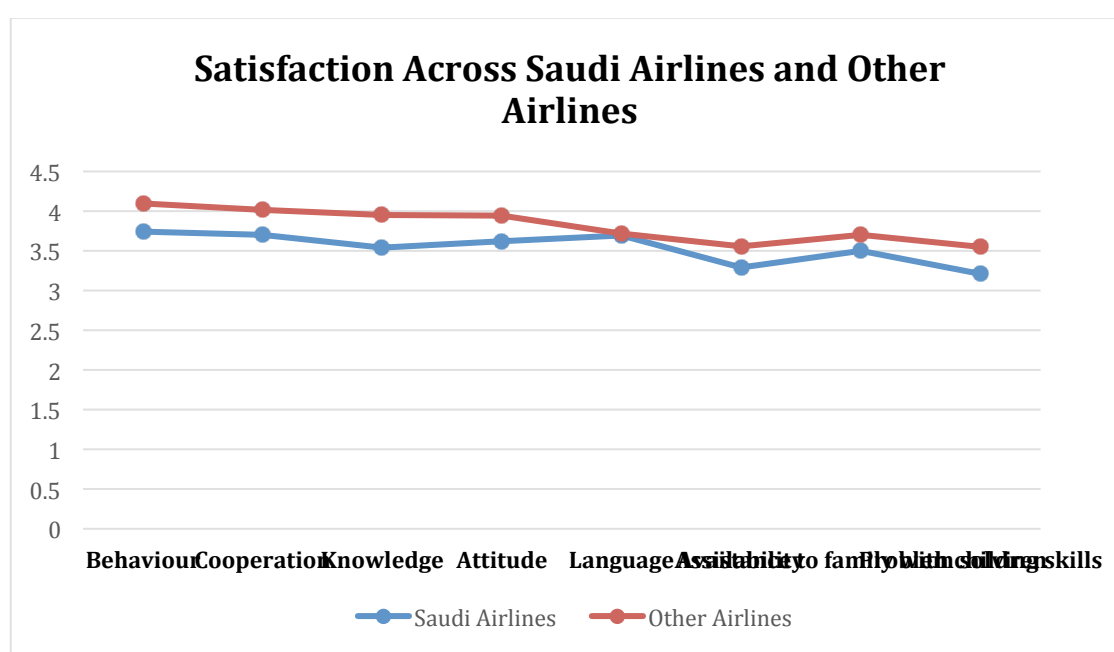


Figure 2

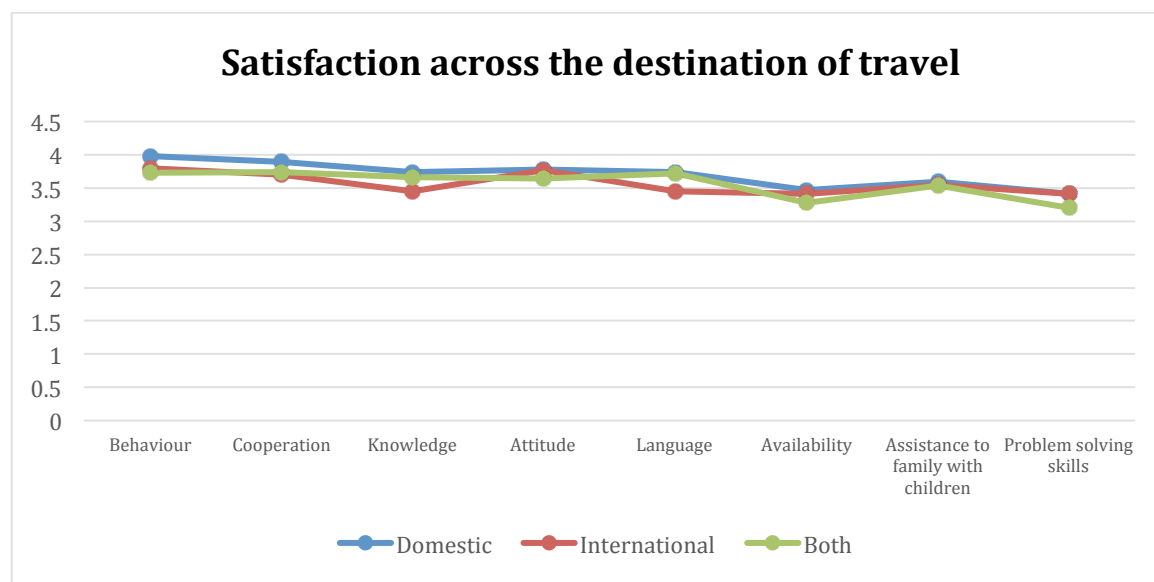
Passengers' Satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the destination of travel – Domestic, International, and Both

The results in table 6 and figure 3, strongly indicate that there is no much difference in satisfaction of passengers across the destination of travel namely; domestic, international, and both. The passengers in all the three categories have almost same level of satisfaction. The mean value is not much different for all the three categories across the eight variables indicated by overlapping points in figure3. However the results were not statistically significant for all the eight variables across the three categories.

Table 6: ANOVA - Passenger satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the destination of travel – Domestic, International, and Both

Services	Domestic			International			Both			F	df	Sig.
	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev			
Behaviour	189	3.98	1.137	44	3.80	.904	167	3.73	1.239	2.194	2	.113
Cooperation	189	3.89	1.117	44	3.70	.930	167	3.74	1.188	1.003	2	.368

Knowledge	189	3.74	1.172	44	3.45	1.022	167	3.66	1.181	1.113	2	.329
Attitude	189	3.78	1.199	44	3.77	.985	167	3.64	1.253	.666	2	.514
Language	189	3.74	1.225	44	3.45	1.088	167	3.72	1.217	1.036	2	.356
Availability/responsiveness	189	3.47	1.187	44	3.41	.996	167	3.28	1.293	1.102	2	.333
Assistance to family with children	189	3.59	1.237	44	3.55	.875	167	3.54	1.307	.073	2	.930
Problem solving skills	189	3.41	1.312	44	3.41	1.064	167	3.20	1.283	1.300	2	.274



Passengers' Satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the years of travel – 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, and more than 10 years

The results in table 7 and figure 4, indicated an interesting pattern. The grey line in figure 4 represents the satisfaction of those passengers who had been travelling by Saudi Airlines for more than 10 years. This grey line represented by mean value is lower than the other two categories of newer passengers of the Saudi Airlines who had the experience of less than 10 years travelling by Saudi airlines. For language all the three categories of travelers have the same level of satisfaction. This indicates that the old passengers of Saudi airlines are less satisfied compared to newer passengers. The other two categories of passengers are almost the same on satisfaction except for availability, assistance to family with children, and problem solving skills were the new passengers were more satisfied indicated by the comparatively higher mean value.

Table 7: ANOVA - Passenger satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the years of travel

Services	1 to 5 years			6 to 10 years			More than 10 years			F	df	Sig.
	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Deviation			
Behaviour	165	3.93	1.143	105	3.95	1.172	130	3.68	1.168	2.152	2	.118
Cooperation	165	3.96	1.041	105	3.85	1.158	130	3.57	1.181	4.619	2	.010
Knowledge	165	3.75	1.139	105	3.78	1.143	130	3.49	1.189	2.423	2	.090
Attitude	165	3.79	1.161	105	3.80	1.212	130	3.57	1.232	1.577	2	.208
Language	165	3.72	1.229	105	3.68	1.205	130	3.70	1.192	.033	2	.967
Availability/responsiveness	165	3.60	1.120	105	3.25	1.277	130	3.21	1.243	4.728	2	.009
Assistance to family	165	3.68	1.200	105	3.50	1.279	130	3.46	1.227	1.291	2	.276

with children

Problem solving skills 165 3.48 1.233 105 3.32 1.290 130 3.13 1.302 2.727 2 .067

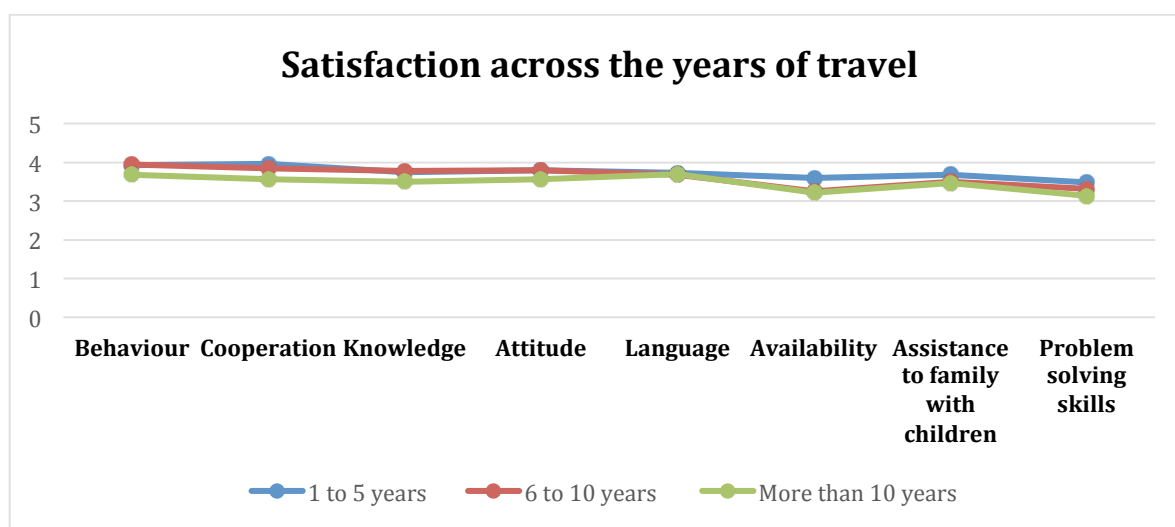


Figure 4

Passengers' Satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the class of travel – Business, economy, and both

Results in table 8 and figure 5, show that business class passengers were comparatively less satisfied than economy class passengers. The business class passengers were more satisfied than the economy class passengers only for the problem solving skills of the onboard employees. For other variables they were obviously and clearly less satisfied. However the difference were not statistically significant.

Table 8: ANOVA - Passenger satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the class of travel

Services	Business Class			Economy			Both			F	df	Sig.
	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev			
Behaviour	39	3.54	1.354	229	3.90	1.150	132	3.89	1.116	1.636	2	.196
Cooperation	39	3.64	1.267	229	3.81	1.137	132	3.84	1.076	.481	2	.618
Knowledge	39	3.49	1.275	229	3.64	1.141	132	3.79	1.159	1.229	2	.294
Attitude	39	3.38	1.426	229	3.76	1.158	132	3.76	1.192	1.720	2	.180
Language	39	3.49	1.295	229	3.71	1.194	132	3.74	1.208	.697	2	.499
Availability/responsiveness	39	3.36	1.246	229	3.39	1.229	132	3.37	1.188	.015	2	.985
Assistance to family with children	39	3.51	1.189	229	3.57	1.239	132	3.57	1.237	.035	2	.966
Problem solving skills	39	3.59	1.208	229	3.30	1.278	132	3.29	1.293	.934	2	.394

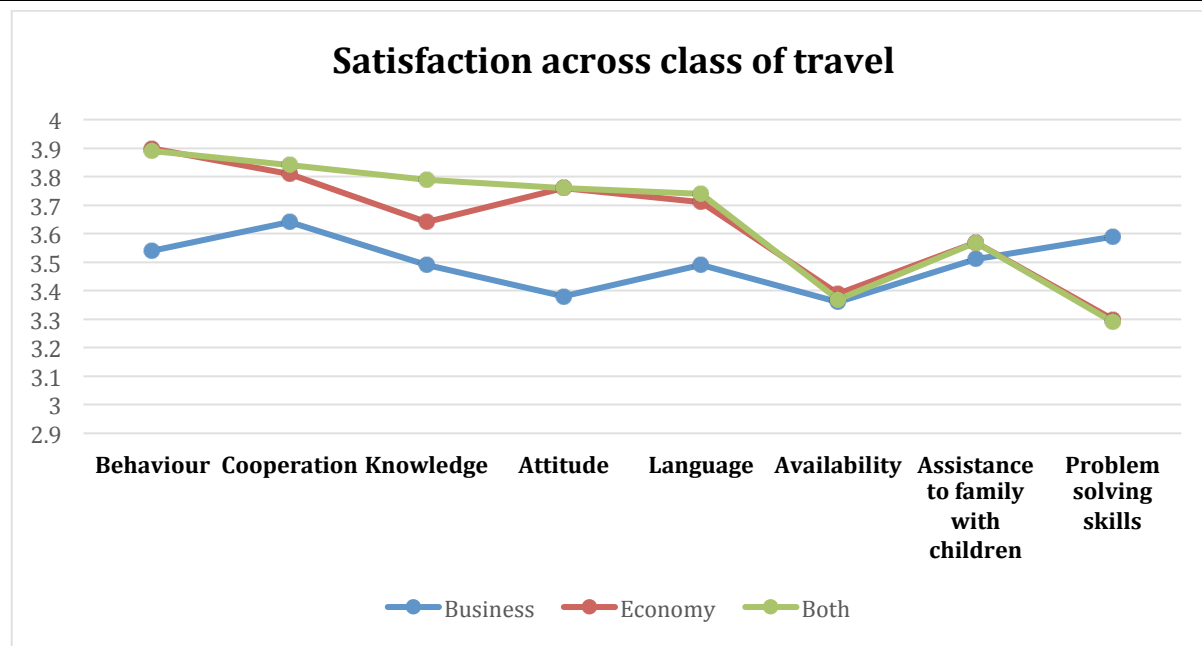


Figure 5

Passengers' Satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees across the members of AlFursan and non-members of AlFursan

AlFursan is the loyalty program of the Saudi airlines, which offers various facilities to the members. The results in table 9 and figure 6, present the satisfaction across the members and non-members of AlFursan loyalty program of Saudi airlines. In both the categories of respondents the mean value for all the eight variables were more than 3 and less than 4 indicating somewhat satisfaction of all the passengers irrespective of members. The difference in satisfaction of AlFursan members and Non-members is not much however there was difference in satisfaction for attitude, language, availability, assistance to families, non AlFursan members were more satisfied than AlFursan members. The results were statistically significant for attitude, language, and availability.

Table 9: ANOVA - Customer satisfaction on onboard services (Crew members) of Saudi Airlines – AlFursan Membership

Services	AlFursan Member			Not AlFursan Member			F	df	Sig.
	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev			
Behaviour	169	3.80	1.197	231	3.90	1.137	.603	1	.438
Cooperation	169	3.76	1.141	231	3.84	1.122	.398	1	.528
Knowledge	169	3.62	1.190	231	3.71	1.140	.626	1	.429
Attitude	169	3.57	1.238	231	3.83	1.162	4.526	1	.034
Language	169	3.58	1.266	231	3.79	1.158	2.909	1	.089
Availability/responsiveness	169	3.20	1.207	231	3.52	1.205	6.874	1	.009
Assistance to family with children	169	3.47	1.244	231	3.63	1.219	1.748	1	.187
Problem solving skills	169	3.26	1.329	231	3.37	1.237	.751	1	.387

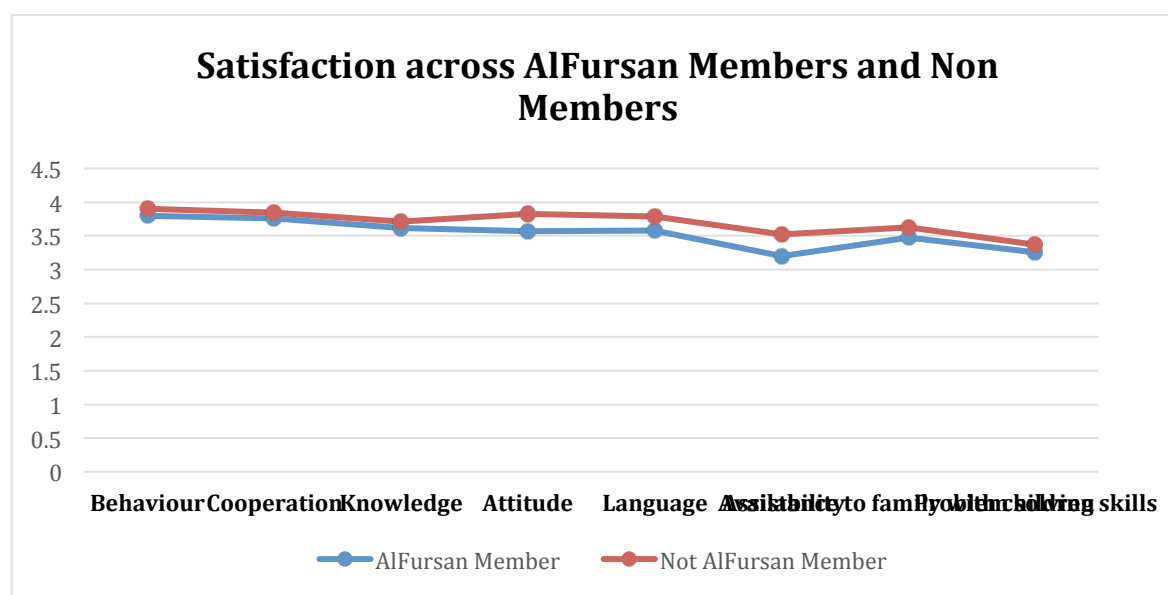


Figure 6

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to assess the satisfaction of passengers from service quality of onboard employees of Saudi airlines. Eight hypothesis were proposed for test with the primary results drawn from the respondents through questionnaires. T test results in table 10 show the results. In general for all the eight variables the mean value are more than 3 ranging between 3.33 for problem solving skills to 3.86 for behaviour of employees. Thus the eight hypothesis namely H1; H2; H3; H4; H5; H6; H7 and H8 were partially accepted. As suggested by the earlier studies loyalty of customers (passengers) is generated from their satisfaction (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) the current state of somewhat satisfaction of passengers need to be improved to retain them from moving to competitors. According to (Harvey 1998; Brady and Robertson, 2001), customers assess the elements of service and decide whether or not what they received was quality service. Thus, the above assessment of the passengers about the service quality of onboard employees is not very encouraging. The critical role of contact employees in service organization has been well established, according to Crosby and Stephens, 1987; Singh 1991, customer satisfaction is determined by their satisfaction with the contact employee. Paulin et al., 2004 said that employees are the most important resources of an organization as they represent the company to the customers. To clarify it further the passengers in this case see the entire company in the serving employee.

The results in the earlier sections showed that passengers with experience of travel by airlines said that comparatively the service quality of onboard employees of Saudi airlines is less than other airlines as they were more satisfied with the service quality of employees of other airlines. Given the importance of the employees it is critical for issue to be taken care of by the Saudi airlines management to enhance the service quality perception on the one hand and on the other side should improve the comparative service quality.

The satisfaction of the passengers using services of Saudi airlines for more than 10 years are less satisfied as compared to the newer passengers. It is again important that service perceptions of these passengers should improve because they are oldest and customers of the company. As Bitner, 1995 found that it is the employee in the service company who is responsible for establishing relationship between the company and customers. After ten years of service if the passengers are only somewhat satisfied it indicates that employee's failure in providing service quality and their failure to build relation between the company and the

passengers. These passengers may not be the loyal passengers, it is only that they don't have other options to travel and may switch to other airlines on availability.

The results in table 7 showed that the business class passengers were comparatively less satisfied than economy class passengers from the onboard employees. The low satisfaction of the business class passengers can be attributed to number of factors such their own characteristics and high expectations, and also to the performance of employees in business class. The business class passengers are expected to be more educated in managerial positions with high income. The behaviour of the employees include their responsiveness, smile, personal warmth, personalization, and attitude, problem solving skills, knowledge, language, and cooperation. Tahir and Abubakr (2007) rated responsiveness as the most critical dimension of service quality but the results in table 7 show the lowest mean value in business class is for availability and responsiveness. Service recovery and problem solving are recognized as important parts of services quality (Hart et al., 1990; Dabholkar et al., 1996; Swanson and Kelly, 2001) the problem solving skills of the employees in business class were high.

Table 10: One sample t test - Passengers satisfaction from service quality of onboard employees of Saudi Airlines

Services	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Behaviour	400	3.86	1.162	14.757	399	.000
Cooperation	400	3.81	1.129	14.257	399	.000
Knowledge	400	3.68	1.161	11.629	399	.000
Attitude	400	3.72	1.200	12.045	399	.000
Language	400	3.70	1.208	11.592	399	.000
Availability/responsiveness	400	3.38	1.214	6.259	399	.000
Assistance to family with children	400	3.56	1.231	9.140	399	.000
Problem solving skills	400	3.33	1.276	5.094	399	.000

CONCLUSION

From the results and discussions in the foregoing sections it is obvious that the passengers are only somewhat satisfied with the service quality of onboard employees of Saudi airlines indicated by the mean value results ranging between 3 and less and 4. Table 3 showed that only 49.3% of the passengers were satisfied from the 'availability of the crew members', 57.0% passengers were satisfied from the 'Assistance to family with children', and 48.8% were satisfied with 'problem solving skills'. There was no difference in the passengers across the nationalities however the passengers using Saudi airlines for more than 10 years were less satisfied as compared to newer passenger group. Also the business class passengers were less satisfied compared to the economy class passengers. Very interestingly the AlFursan members were less satisfied for few variables in comparison to non-AlFursan members.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study strongly suggest measures needed in improving the customer experience from the onboard employees. First overall level of service quality needs to enhanced, to improve the passengers' satisfaction. Secondly, the business class service needs special attention as their satisfaction was much lower than the economy class passenger. Thirdly the loyalty program membership 'AlFursan' services need to be improved as it does not seem to have much impact on the passengers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project was funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research (DSR), King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, under grant no. (121/849/14333). The authors, therefore, acknowledge with thanks DSR technical and financial support.

References

- Bitner, M.J., (1995). Building service relationships: It's all about promises, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 23, 246-251.
- Brown K.A., and Mitchell T.R. (1993). Organizational obstacles: links with financial performance, customer satisfaction, and job satisfaction in a service environment, *Hum Relat*, 46 (3): 725 – 727.
- Brown, S., Cowles, D. and Tuten, D. (1996). Service Recovery: Its value as a retail strategy, *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 7 (5), 32 – 46.
- Chase, Richard B. (1978). Where Does the Customer Fit in a Service Operation? *Harvard Business Review*, 56(6), 137-43.
- Cronin JJ, Taylor S.A., (1992). Measuring service quality: a reexamination and extension, *Journal Marketing* 56(3), 55-68.
- Crosby, L.A., & Stephens, N. (1987). Effects of Relationship marketing on satisfaction, retention and prices in the life insurance industry, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 24, 404-411.
- Dabholkar PA, Thorpe DI, and Rentz JO (1996). A measure of service quality for retail stores: scale development and validation, *J. Acad Mark Sci*, 24(1): 3-16.
- Gallow L, and Ho S. (1996). The model of service quality for training, *Training for Quality*, 4(1): 20-26.
- Gwinner, K., Gremler, D. and Bitner, M. (1998). Relational benefits in services industries: The customers' perspective, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing science* 26(2), 101-114.
- Hanna, V., Backhouse, C. and Burns, N. (2004). Linking employee behaviour to external customer satisfaction using quality function deployment, *Journal of Engineering Manufacturing*, 218, 1167-1177.
- Hart CWL, Heskette JL, and Sasser WE, Jr (1990). The profitable art of service recovery. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(4): 148-156.
- Jones, P. and Dent, M. (1994). Improving service: managing response time in hospitality operations, *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 14(5), 52-59.
- Juwaheer, T.D. (2004) Exploring International Tourists Perceptions of Hotel Operations by using a modified SERVQUAL approach – A case study of Mauritius, *Managing Service Quality*, 59(2), 71-82.
- Karmarkar, Uday S. (1996). Integrative Research in Marketing and Operations Management, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18, 125-33.
- Kattara H.S., Weheba D. and El-Said O. A. (2008). The impact of employee behaviour on customers' service quality perceptions and overall satisfaction, *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 8 (4), 309-23.
- King, C. (2004). *Do It Yourself business plan work-book*, John Wiley and Sons, New York.
- Kong, M. and Jogaratnam, G. (2007). The influence of culture on perceptions of service employee behaviour, *Managing Service Quality*, 17(3) 275-297.
- Lemmink, J., and Mattsson, J. (1998). Warmth during non-productive retail encounters: The hidden side of productivity, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 15(5), 505-517.
- Paulin, M., Ferguson, R.J., & Payaud, M. (2000). Business effectiveness and professional service personnel relational or transactional managers? *European Journal of Marketing*, 34, 453-471.
- Pine, B. Joseph (1993). *Mass Customization: The New Frontier in Business Competition*, Boston: Harvard Business School.
- Singh, J., (1991). Understanding the structure of consumers' satisfaction evaluations of service delivery, *Journal of the academy of Marketing Science*, 19(3), 223-244.

Swanson S.R. and Kelly S.W. (2001). Service recovery attributions and word of mouth intentions, *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(1/2): 195-211.

Tahir IM and Abubakr NM (2007). Business students' beliefs in learning mathematics, *Journal Kemanusiaan, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*.