

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ASIAN AND EUROPEAN PASSENGER  
SATISFACTION WITH ASIAN AND EUROPEAN AIRLINE SERVICES

A MASTER'S PROJECT

BY

SORAWEE EAKPHAPHAN

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication  
at Srinakharinwirot University

April 2008

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AN ABSTRACT

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Sorawee Eakphaphan. (2008). *A Comparative Study of Asian and European Passenger Satisfaction with Asian and European Airline Services*. Master's Project, M.A. (Business English for International Communication). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University. Advisor: Mr. Leroy A. Quick.

The purposes of this study were to determine the degree of Asian and European passenger satisfaction with Asian and European airline services and identify passenger preferences for Asian or European airlines. The study focused on 11 areas of airline service. A survey was conducted in December 2007 by means of a questionnaire distributed to 30 Asian and 30 European passengers who had flying experience on both Asian and European airlines.

The results of the study were that Asian passengers were somewhat satisfied with both Asian and European airline services; and European passengers were somewhat satisfied with European airline services, but very satisfied with Asian airline services. A clear preference for Asian airlines was shown by both Asian and European passengers, with European passengers showing a stronger preference. The preference for Asian airlines by both groups was largely due to the performance of Asian cabin crews and staff.

การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบความพึงพอใจของผู้โดยสารชาวเอเชียและยุโรป  
ต่อการบริการของสายการบินเอเชียและยุโรป

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

สรวิทย์ เอกภาพันธ์

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา  
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการสื่อสารนานาชาติ

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การศึกษาวิจัยฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์หลัก เพื่อศึกษาเปรียบเทียบถึงระดับความพึงพอใจ  
และแสดงความชอบของผู้โดยสารชาวเอเชียและยุโรปต่อการบริการของสายการบินเอเชียและยุโรป  
โดยผู้วิจัยได้เน้นไปที่ 11 จุดจากการบริการของสายการบิน หนึ่งในการศึกษาถึงความพึงพอใจและ  
ความชอบของผู้โดยสารนั้น ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บข้อมูลเมื่อเดือน  
ธันวาคม 2550 โดยทำการแจกแบบสอบถามให้กับผู้โดยสารชาวเอเชียจำนวน 30 คน และ  
ชาวยุโรปจำนวน 30 คน ที่มีประสบการณ์ต่อการใช้บริการของสายการบินเอเชียและยุโรป

ผลของการศึกษาวิจัยพบว่า ผู้โดยสารชาวเอเชียมีความพึงพอใจต่อการบริการของสาย  
การบินเอเชียและยุโรป และ พบว่าผู้โดยสารชาวยุโรปมีความพึงพอใจต่อการบริการของสายการบิน  
ยุโรป แต่มีความพึงพอใจสูงสุดต่อการบริการของสายการบินเอเชีย ส่วนผลของความชอบต่อสาย  
การบินของผู้โดยสารชาวเอเชียและยุโรปแสดงให้เห็นชัดเจนว่า ทั้งผู้โดยสารชาวเอเชียและยุโรปต่าง  
ชอบสายการบินเอเชียรวมถึงชอบต่อการบริการของพนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินและพนักงานสาย  
การบินเอเชีย

The Master's Project Advisor, Chair of Business English for International Communication, and Oral Defense Committee has approved this Master's Project as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

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This Master's Project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

..... Dean of the Faculty of Humanities

(Associate Professor Chaleosri Pibulchol)

April....., 2008

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Sorawee Eakphaphan

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The world's economy is shifting from an industry base to a service base as people consume more and more services: financial services, communication services, health and well-being services, leisure and life style services, travel services. To survive, service companies must satisfy their customers above all else.

Harris (1996: 122) stated that "to be successful in any service industry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a commitment to excellence in customer service. Excellence must be the goal, anything less is not acceptable. But many companies are talking about the importance of providing excellent customer service and yet are doing little to initiate its offering".

In the airline industry, passengers are the service receivers. If they are not satisfied with the products and the services offered by an airline, they will take their business to another airline. Therefore, excellent passenger service must be a prime consideration for any airline.

Rohm (2006: online) said that the airline industry is a unique and fascinating industry. Growing numbers of passengers, fuelled by increased mobility, reduced barriers to travel, and the entrance of new airlines into the market, have increased the glamour, impact, and reach of this industry. However, airline passengers are very much like customers of other industries, they make an initial ticket purchase, for whatever reason, with a particular airline. They then seek to validate their choice by judging the airline through certain criteria, possibly

overall service quality. For subsequent purchases, passengers become more critical and react more strongly to service failures. If the services remain unsatisfactory, passengers may begin purchasing flights from other airlines. If performance proves satisfactory, passengers tend to remain loyal to the satisfactory service provider and may eventually move to a point where they become advocates for a particular airline which consistently provides satisfactory services.

Kotler (1980: 627) pointed out that up to the 1980s airlines had entered the airline industry in large numbers greatly increasing competition. Competition intensified and ticket costs rose. Airlines began to seek ways to better satisfy their passengers with their products and services. Airlines were one of the first service industries to formally study their passengers' satisfaction, and that of their competitors then take positive steps to make the travelers' trips easier and more pleasant. They first had to build people's confidence in air travel and then try to outperform each other in preflight, in-flight, and postflight services to win customer loyalty.

Harris (1996: 122) explained that if loyal customers are seen as valuable assets that are difficult to replace, they are more likely be cherished. When talking to individuals who interact with customers on a daily basis, most will say that an extremely fulfilling part of their job is creating positive solutions for their customers. Happy customers keep coming back to do business and to renew the relationship that they have previously established. Therefore, customer's satisfaction is at the very core of modern marketing theory and practice which is based on the notion that organizations survive and prosper through meeting the needs of customers and the satisfied customer is an indispensable means of creating a sustainable advantage in the competitive environment (A review of customer's satisfaction. 2006: Online).

The best airlines try to satisfy their passengers. Satisfied passengers return and buy more. In addition, satisfied customers tell other passengers about their experiences, and they may well be willing to pay a premium for the privilege of doing business with as supplier they trust. High passenger satisfaction leads to enhanced profitability.

One way to determine what passengers want and need is to determine if passengers are satisfied with the services currently provided by an airline. One way to determine this is to conduct periodic customer satisfaction surveys (Survey Information. 2006: Online). Such surveys provide an understanding of where attention is required. Surveys must be followed up with action to better satisfy passengers (Business. 2006: online).

Skytrax is a United Kingdom-based research company. It carries out international passenger surveys to identify the best staff, airports, airlines, airline lounges, in-flight entertainment and onboard catering. The on going surveys began in 1990 and now include more than 525 airlines and 550 airports. Over 240,000 traveler opinions have been collected (skytrax. 2006: online).

The Skytrax World Airline Star Ranking is an international survey of passenger satisfaction with ground and in-flight services provided by airlines worldwide. The survey is conducted over an 11-month period from August one year through June the following year. The result of the study is a ranking of the world's airlines from the most satisfying (5 stars) to the least satisfying (1 star).

The results of the August, 2005 to June, 2006 study follow (skytrax. 2006: Online).

**TABLE 1** The 2005-2006 5-star airlines

The 5-Star Ranking recognizes the highest standard across assessment categories, and consistently high standards of staff service delivery in both the onboard and airport environments. A 5-star ranking recognizes airlines at the forefront of product innovation that generally set trends to be followed by other carriers.

Asian airlines	European airlines
1. ANA (All Nippon Airways)	1. British Airways
2. Cathay Pacific	
3. Malaysia Airlines	
4. Singapore Airline	
5. Thai Airways International	

One European and five Asian airlines were awarded 5-star ranking in the 2005-2006 study. No airline from any other region of the world achieved this ranking.

**TABLE 2** The 2005-2006 4-star airlines

The 4-star ranking signifies airlines providing a good standard across all assessment categories, including a good standard of staff service delivery in the onboard and airport environments.

Asian airlines	European airlines
1. Bangkok Airways	1. Air France
2. Dragon Air	2. Austrian Airlines
3. Korean Air	3. Lufthansa
4. Royal Brunei Airlines	4. Swiss International Airlines
5. Silk Air	

Five Asian and four European airlines were awarded 4-star ranking in the 2005-2006 study. One African airline, two Middle Eastern airlines, three Australasian airlines, four American airlines also were given a 4-star ranking.

More Asian airlines and European airlines were ranked as the best/most satisfying than airlines from other regions of the world: Asian, 16; European, 5; American, 4; Australasian, 3; Middle Eastern, 2; and African, 1.

The tendency for Asian and European airlines to dominate the rankings continued in the 2006-2007 skytrax study.

The star rankings for the August, 2006 to June, 2007 study follow (Skytrax. 2007: Online).

**TABLE 3** The 2006-2007 5-star airlines

Asian airlines	European airlines
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Asiana Airlines</li> <li>2. Cathay Pacific Airways</li> <li>3. Malaysian Airlines</li> <li>4. Singapore Airlines</li> </ol>	

Only four Asian airlines were awarded 5-star ranking in the 2006-2007 study. No European airline was awarded 5-star ranking in the 2006-2007 study. One Middle Eastern airline, one Australasian airline also were given a 5-star rankings

**TABLE 4** The 2006-2007 4-star airlines

Asian airlines	European airlines
1. ANA All Nippon Airways	1. Air Berlin
2. Bangkok Airways	2. Air France
3. China Airlines	3. Air Nostrum
4. Dragon Air	4. Austrian Airlines
5. EVA Airways	5. British Airways
6. Japan Airlines	6. BMED
7. Korean Air	7. Iceland Express
8. Royal Brunei Airlines	8. Lufhansa
9. Silk Air	9. Luxair
10. Srilankan Airlines	10. Niki
11. Thai Airways Int'l	11. THY Turkish Airlines
	12. Virgin Atlantic Airways

Twelve European and eleven Asian airlines were awarded 4-star ranking in the 2006/2007 study. Five Australasian airlines, three American airlines, three Middle Eastern airlines, and one African airline also were given a 4-star ranking.

In the 2006-2007 skytrax study, Asian and European airlines continued to be ranked above airlines from other regions of the world: Asian, 15; European, 12; Australasian, 6; Middle Eastern, 4; American, 3; and African, 1.

The Skytrax World Airline Star Rankings for the years 2005-2007 show that Asian and European airlines provide the most satisfying products and services for the world's travelers in both the onboard and airport environments.

Thailand is the home of several Asian airlines, several of which ranked highly on the Skytrax World Airline Star Ranking surveys noted above, and Bangkok is an important Asian hub for the world's best airlines with the Suvarnabhumi Airport first opening on September 28, 2006. It is clear that Thailand and its airlines wish to compete successfully in the world airline industry. Satisfying customers and developing customer loyalty is the key to success.

The researcher is an Asian flight attendant working for one of the Asian airlines ranked in Tables 1 to 4 above, and regularly serves both Asian and European passengers. Many of these passengers have experience flying the best and most satisfying airlines in the world: Asian and European. My airline, like all of the best airlines, conducts regular customer service surveys. The results reveal levels of our Asian and European passengers' satisfaction with our various on-ground and in-flight products and services, but do not reveal the degree to which our products and services are more satisfying than those of our competitors. Airline satisfaction survey results are confidential and for the internal uses of the airline conducting the survey. Comparison between airlines is therefore difficult.

The Skytrax World Airline Star Ranking survey identifies passenger satisfaction with ground and in-flight services provided by the world's airlines. It does not specifically seek to compare passenger satisfaction between airlines. A closer look at the Skytrax survey also reveals that Asian and European airlines are consistently ranked as the most satisfying of the world's airlines, but does not explore this.

The objectives of this study are to determine the degree of Asian and European passenger satisfaction (those passengers most likely to fly the world's most satisfying airlines) with the products and services of Asian and European airlines (the most satisfying airlines), and identify the preferences of Asian and European passengers for Asian or European airlines. Passenger preference translates as customer loyalty which results in enhanced profitability. Enhanced profitability allows further investment in product and service improvement. Those airlines offering the most satisfying products and services will distance themselves from the less satisfying airlines.

This study seeks to compare Asian and European passenger satisfaction with and preference for Asian and/or European airline services. This leads directly to the two proposed research questions.

### **Research Questions**

The two research questions for this study are:

1. To what degree are Asian and European passengers satisfied with Asian and European airline services?
2. Do Asian and European passengers prefer Asian or European airline services?

## **Significance of the Study**

The results of this comparative study will be beneficial in the following ways: first, the Asian and European airlines will gain a better understanding of how well they satisfy Asian and European passengers' needs, as well as which services satisfy Asian and European passengers more. The results of this study also will help develop Asian and European passenger awareness of the quality of the services provided by Asian and European airlines. Finally, this comparative study will be of benefit to researchers studying customer services, and satisfaction in service industries, and the airline industry in particular.

## **Expected Outcomes**

The results of this comparative study will show the degree to which Asian and European passengers are satisfied with Asian and European airline services and their preference for Asian or European airline services.

## Definition of Terms

The terms used in this comparative study are defined below:

1. Passengers: Asian and European travelers who have experience flying both Asian and European airlines
2. Services: eleven more or less tangible activities performed by airlines that provide solutions to passenger needs
3. Passenger satisfaction: the feeling experienced by passengers when their expectations for services are met or exceeded and leading to further ticket purchases, favorable word-of-mouth and customer loyalty
4. Asian Airlines: airlines based in Asian countries such as JAL, Singapore Airline, Thai Airways
5. European Airlines: airlines based in European countries such as British Airways, KLM, Lufthansa
6. Asian Passengers: citizens of Asian countries
7. European Passengers: citizens of European countries

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of the theories and related research which underlie this study. This chapter is divided into five parts.

1. Customer Needs, Wants, Expectations and Customer Satisfaction
2. Customer and Service Definitions
3. Differences and Similarities between Goods and Services
4. Techniques to Assess Passenger Satisfaction
5. Related Literature

#### 1. Customer Needs, Wants, Expectations and Customer Satisfaction

Harris (1996: 123) stated that needs are personal requirements. Some needs are instinctive like the need for air and food; these are primary needs. Other needs are learned, like the specific foods that one enjoys or does not care for; these needs are called secondary needs. Both primary and secondary needs are vital to motivation. Many individuals have difficulty in viewing their real needs and may confuse them with wants. Wants are things or experiences that are desired. Wants have little relationship to needs.

Although, the satisfaction of needs satisfies personal requirements, wants have little or nothing to do with what one must have. Individuals commonly desire what they

do not really need. However, needs and wants are both motivational. Customers want good services from the airline that they choose. Customers expect services to be of a high quality both on the ground and in the air. Customers will use airline services again if their experiences match their expectations for airline services.

Usherwood (2000: 16) stated that there are five identifiable sources of customer expectations. Customer expectations derive from: 1) national culture of the customer, 2) personal needs of the customer, 3) past experience of the customer, 4) word-of-mouth from other customers, and 5) and direct or indirect communication from service providers about what the customer can expect from the services offered.

Usherwood (2000: 16) noted that no research had been conducted to prioritize the five sources of expectations in terms of their influence on customers. However, personal needs vary so much between customers that service providers find it extremely difficult to incorporate any knowledge of individual needs into strategic plans. Customers' personal experiences have emerged as the most important factor impacting on the way that customers form expectations of services and that subsequent expectations are formed as a result of further experience.

Airlines must satisfy customers' expectations by continuously providing satisfying experiences. Airlines must manage and train their staff in service and safety procedures in order to satisfy their customers on a regular basis.

Reid & Bojavic (2006: 62) explained that customer satisfaction exists as the ultimate quality for companies because it leads to brand loyalty, repeat purchases and positive word of mouth. Most companies understand the importance of customer

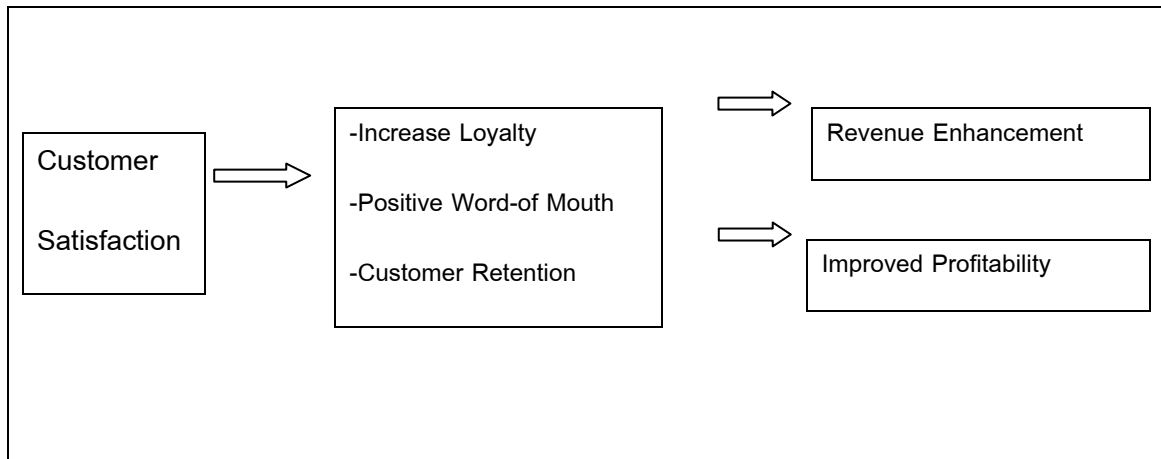
satisfaction and provide basic training to their employees to achieve it. Customer satisfaction should be a top priority of all managers working in the service industry.

Customer satisfaction occurs when a firm's services, as perceived by customers, meet or exceed expectations.

Companies that consistently meet or exceed customer expectations develop good reputations and quality images.

Willingham (1992: 98) stated airline customer satisfaction was greatly influenced by airline staff service skills. Airline staff's ability to make a first and positive impression on customers has a lot to do with their own self-esteem, how airline staff see themselves and what they believe will satisfy passengers with their services. If passengers return to use airline services again is largely dependent on the ability of airline staff, as front line service providers, to satisfy their customers in every way.

Brown (1991: 8) developed the Customer Satisfaction/Revenue Enhancement Model which shows that revenue enhancement and improved profitability are products of customer satisfaction. Figure 1 shows that increased loyalty, positive word of mouth and customer retention are intermediate steps between customer satisfaction and improved profitability and revenue enhancement.



**Figure 1:** Customer satisfaction/revenue enhancement model

Source: Stanley A. Brown. (1946). What Customer Value Most: p. 8

Brown (1946: 8) further explained that positive word-of-mouth from satisfied customers is essentially free advertising. The reverse can prove to be very costly. A dissatisfied customer will tell eight to ten other people about his or her bad experience the same day. And over the next week, possibly 75 more people may become aware of the dissatisfactory experience, who, in turn, become reluctant to do business with the organization. If a customer is lost, it may cost five to twelve times more to get a new customer than to keep an existing one. Customer dissatisfaction represents a significant cost to the organization. The best way to enhance revenue and increase profitability is to “delight” customers and keep them satisfied.

Brown (1946: 103-106) also took a new look at Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in view of its application to customer needs and satisfaction. In brief, Abraham Maslow proposed that a hierarchy of needs exists for all humans, starting with basic biological needs and ascending to more complex psychological motivations that become important only after basic needs have been satisfied. Brown added that customer satisfaction is

analogous to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Customers similarly operate on a hierarchy of needs when they are considering purchasing goods or services from a supplier. In Figure 2, the stages in Maslow's hierarchy are shown on the left and the stages in the satisfaction of customer needs are shown on the right.

Maslow's Hierarchy	Stages of Customer Needs
5. Self Actualization	5. Partnership with suppliers
4. Esteem	4. Supplier developed innovations
3. Belongingness	3. Customer interaction with the
2. Safety	various core products
1. Physiological	2. Basic reliable services the core
	products and services
	1. Core products and services

**Figure 2:** Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Source: Stanley A. Brown. (1946). What Customers Value Most. pp. 103-106.

The level at which the customers' needs fall within the hierarchy together with their level of satisfaction with the supplier, will affect the marketing and customer satisfaction strategies required to attract and maintain these customers. This highlights the importance of a well-designed and institutionalized customer satisfaction research program.

1. Maslow's lowest level human need is physiological: food, air, sleep. The analogous need for someone considering a purchase is for core products or services that work. For instance if passengers stay in the airline lounge on the ground waiting to board an aircraft, the passenger can enjoy free internet access from one of several computer booths. If surfing the web is not their cup of tea, then the reading corner is well stocked with a multitude of magazines and newspapers to pass the time before boarding the aircraft. While sitting in the aircraft, passengers feel comfortable with the cabin temperature, the cabin seat, the clean warm blankets, and the good taste of the airline's meals and drinks.

2. Maslow's next level of basic need is safety-security, protection, freedom from anxiety. The corresponding flight customer need is a set of basic services associated with the core offering. In a service business, the safety equivalent is accessibility, timely hours of operation, or localized service access. Each airline tries to make safety first to show passengers the reliability of using their services. Safety announcements make passengers feel secure while in the air. Safety equipment such as seatbelts, life vests and a first aid kit on board help passengers relax in a sense of well being.

3. Maslow's third basic need, belongingness, can be equated to a customer's need for an accessible, two-way relationship. Airline staff must listen to, and communicate with customers to understand their unique expectations and solve their problems. Customers are the most important people. They are always right. Each airline must train their employees to deal and communicate with passengers in the best possible way. For example, when a flight is delayed, the staff must know how to handle this situation and communicate with the passengers.

4. The fourth need in Maslow's hierarchy is esteem--the need for acknowledgement or for having a sense of prestige or stature. In business, suppliers grant the customer prestige and stature by committing resources to understanding and anticipating the forces of change affecting the customer and then developing new products and/or services to accommodate these forces.

5. Maslow's highest level of is self-actualization. The self-actualized individual has mastery of what he or she does. The self-actualized customer relationship is often described as a true partnership, where the customer has made the supplier a complete and open participant in the detailed, long-term conduct of his or her business. For example, when passengers feel good about flying with the same airlines, it also shows that that airline has the ability to keep their customers for the long term. The trust between the airlines and the passengers forms a bond of loyalty which is in the best interest of both parties to maintain and profit from.

In brief, from Maslow's point of view, as passenger satisfaction is the key to an airline's success, all airline service providers must be fully aware of all of passenger's needs and wants and satisfy them as completely as possible. Different cultures, different personal needs and different past experiences make satisfying all customers fully a challenge for airline staff, yet the success of the airline is dependant on the staff's ability to rise to the challenge. By satisfying passengers at all five of Maslow's levels, the passengers will become loyal and return to the airline the next time travel services are required.

## 2. Customer and Service Definitions

Doole; Perter; & Robin (2005: 25) defined a customer as an individual or organization who buys goods or services. A customer is one who makes a purchase and is therefore important in the buying decision. Customers buy goods and services to satisfy their own personal requirements. Once there is a choice in the market, customers naturally gravitate towards those organizations whose goods most closely meet their requirements. It is important, therefore, that an organization be customer-focused, as opposed to being goods-focused.

Grummeson (1987: 83) defined a service as “something that can be bought and sold but that is not possible to lay your hands on”. Lovelock (1996: 198) added that a service is an experience for the customer. It is a planned event, like a performance, because services are intangible. Marketers provide cues to help customers conceptualize a service offering. A service is an act, or performance, offered by one party to another. Although the process may be tied to a physical product, the performance is essentially intangible and does not normally result in ownership of any of the factors of production. Many services are economic activities that create value and provide benefits for customers at specific times and places, as a result of bringing about a desired change in/or on behalf of the recipient of the service. For example, when Amita Tata Yong, a famous Thai singer gives a concert, customers enjoy the experience and may want to buy her album to relive the experience, or to enjoy new experiences in the future.

Lovelock (2001: 6) pointed out that service companies must find ways to create meaningful competitive advantages for their products by responding to specific customer needs and developing a distinctive service strategy that responds to those needs better than any competing product.

Gronroos (2000: 46) stated that a service is a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always take place in interactions between customers and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider. Services provide solutions to customer needs. Collier (1994: 114) added that a service is not something that is built in a factory, shipped to a store, put on a shelf, and then taken home by a customer. A service is a dynamic, living process. A service is performed. A service is rendered. The raw materials of a service are time and motion, not plastic or steel. A service cannot be stored or shipped; only the means for creating it can. A service cannot be held in one's hand or physically possessed. In short, a service is not a thing.

Kotler (1980: 623-629) stated that a service is any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essential intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product. Thus renting a hotel room, depositing money in a bank, traveling on an airplane, visiting a psychiatrist, having a haircut, having a car repaired, watching a professional sport event, seeing a movie, having clothes cleaned in a dry-cleaning establishment, getting advice from a lawyer--all involve buying a service. So services have a number of characteristics that must be considered when designing service-marketing programs. Kotler identified four

important service characteristics: intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability.

These are described below.

### **Intangibility**

Services are intangible, that is, they cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled before their purchase. A patient walking into a psychiatrist's office cannot know the content or value of the service in advance. In this circumstance, the purchaser requires faith in the service provider who can do certain things to improve the customer's confidence. Service providers can try to increase the service's tangibility in a number of ways. A plastic surgeon can make a drawing or a clay model showing the changes their operation will make in the patient's appearance. Second, service providers can place more emphasis on the benefits of the service rather than just describing its features. For example, a college admissions officer can talk to prospective students about the great jobs its alumni have found instead of only describing life on the campus. Third, service providers can put brand names on their services to increase confidence, such as Magkist cleaning, United Airlines' Red Carpet service or Transcendental Meditation. Finally, service providers can use highly regarded celebrities to personalize and create confidence in their services, as Hertz has done with its O.J. Simpson ads in the USA, and Lay's has done with Paula Taylor for their squid flavored potato chip ads on Thai TV.

**Inseparability**

A service is inseparable from the source that renders it. The very act of being created requires the source, whether a person or a machine. In other words, production and consumption occur simultaneously with the service. This is in contrast to a product that exists whether or not its source is present. Consider going to a Rolling Stones rock concert. The entertainment value is inseparable from the performer. It is not the same service if an announcer tells the audience that Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones or Pongpat Vashirabanjong is indisposed and therefore a record will be played instead. This means that the number of people who can buy this particular service--watching Mick Jagger or Pongpat Vashirabanjong perform live--is limited to the amount of time that these two performers want to give concerts.

Several strategies exist for getting around this limitation. The service provider can learn to work with larger groups. For example, psychotherapists have moved from one-on-one therapy to small-group therapy to groups of over three hundred people in a large hotel ballroom getting "therapies". Another strategy is the service provider can learn to work faster--the psychotherapist can spend thirty minutes with each patient instead of fifty minutes and thus see more patients. Or the service organization can train more competent service providers and build up client confidence in them, as H&R Block has done with its national network of trained tax consultants, or Bangkok Hospital has done by recruiting and training multilingual staff to facilitate communication with foreign patients.

**Variability**

The same service can be highly variable, depending not only on who is providing it but when it is being provided. A heart transplant operation performed by an internationally renowned specialist is likely to be of higher quality than the same operation performed by a recently graduated M.D. Further, the specialist's service quality can vary depending on his energy and mental set at the time of the operation.

Purchasers of services are aware of their high variability and engage in normal risk-reducing behavior by talking to others and trying to select the best provider. Service firms can take two steps to ensure high and consistent quality in their service offers. The first step consists of developing a good personnel selection and training program.

Airlines, banks, and hotels spend substantial sums of money to train their personnel to provide uniform and courteous service. One is supposed to find, for example, the same friendly and helpful personnel in every Marriot Hotel. This is not without creating some "role strain," since the personnel are under cross-pressure to be friendly and at the same time to work fast. The second step consists of developing adequate customer satisfaction monitoring systems. The main tools for this are suggestion and complaint systems, customer surveys, and comparison services.

**Perishability**

Service cannot be stored. Although a product can be kept in inventory until it is sold, the revenue from an unoccupied airplane seat on a particular flight is lost forever. The reason some doctors charge patients for missed appointments is that the service value was lost when the patient did not show up. The perishability of services is not a

problem when demand is steady, because it is easy to staff the services in advance.

When demand fluctuates considerably, service firms have difficult problems.

For example, public transportation companies must use much more equipment because of peak demand hours than they would if public transportation needs were smooth during the whole day. Service organizations have several means available to try to produce a better match between demand and service capacity. Kotler (1980: 623-629) described several strategies for managing demand and supply.

### **On the demand side**

Kotler identified four strategies.

1. Differential pricing can be used to shift some demand from peak to off-peak periods. Examples include low early-evening movie prices and special weekend prices for car rentals.

2. Nonpeak demand can be developed, as when McDonald's opened its Eggs McMuffin breakfast program and hotels developed their mini-vacation weekends.

3. Complementary services can be developed during peak times to provide alternatives to waiting customers, such as cocktail lounges to sit in while waiting for a table and automatic tellers in banks.

4. Reservation systems are a way to pre-sell services and know how much will be needed. Airlines, hotels, and physicians employ such systems extensively.

**On the supply side**

Kotler noted five supply side strategies.

1. Part-time employees can be used to serve peak demand, as when colleges add part-time teachers when enrollment goes up and restaurants call in part-time waitresses when need.

2. Peak-time efficiency routines can be introduced, such as employees' performing only essential tasks during peak periods, or paramedics added to help physicians.

3. Increased consumer participation in tasks can be used, as when patients fill out their own medical records or customers bag their own groceries.

4. Shared services can be developed, as when several hospitals agree to limit and share medical equipment purchases.

5. Facilities with built-in expansion possibilities can be developed, as when an amusement park buys surrounding land in case it is needed for later expansion.

It is important to have strategies to compete with competitors and to attract passengers' attention, to get them to purchase products and services, and to do so again and again. If there are no customers, there will be no business. So many airlines try to find ways to create meaningful competitive advantages for their products and services to satisfy customers' needs and develop clear ties between customers and airlines.

### 3. Differences and Similarities between Goods and Service

Gronroos (2000: 46) created a clear picture of the differences between goods and services. This is presented in Figure 3 below.

GOODS	SERVICES
1. Tangible	1. Intangible
2. Can be demonstrated before purchase	2. Difficult to demonstrate before purchase
3. Can be stored	3. Cannot be stored
4. Production occurs before consumption	4. Production and consumption happen simultaneously
5. Seller produces	5. Buyer and customer take part in production
6. Production, sales, consumption on different locations	6. Production, consumption and (often) sales on the same location
7. Can be transported	7. Cannot be transported (but the producer and the customer can move)

Figure 3: Difference between goods and services

Source: Gronroos C. (2000). Service Management and Marketing: p.4

The above list should not be seen as offering rock solid distinctions. The figure gives a broad overview of the most common differences between goods and services. There are, however, also significant similarities.

Kotler (1980: 392) said that the similarities between goods and services become evident when looking at both goods and services as products. Anything can be offered to a market to satisfy a want or need of a customer. Both goods and services should satisfy a need and have a function for the customer. Both goods and services should be competitive and provide value to the customer so that the customer may choose the specific goods or services from a specific supplier as compared with other functional solutions and other suppliers (Normaan. 1992: 31).

Asian and European airlines provide tangible goods (tickets, meals, magazines...) and intangible service experiences (travel, entertainment, friendly and professional hospitality) to their customers. Providing these goods and services in ways that satisfy their customers best, separates the 5-star airlines from the 1-star airlines and insures the continued survival of the best airline service providers.

#### 4. Techniques to Assess Customer Satisfaction

According to Reid (2006), one of the critical components of a company's commitment to customer satisfaction is feedback that provides an assessment of the firm's performance. The following section describes the most common techniques used by companies to assess customer satisfaction.

1. Spoken comments and complaints: listening to customer comments and complaints remains the most straight forward way to evaluate customer satisfaction so service firms should set up formal systems that encourage customers and employees to give feedback regarding service experiences.

2. Surveys and comment cards. Many service industry companies leave comment cards on counters or in customer rooms, on tables in service places and other points of contact so that they can obtain feedback. Many companies conduct surveys by direct interviews, by telephone or by mail. Surveys are normally more representative than comment cards and provide more detailed information.

3. Another way to evaluate customer satisfaction without direct contact with customers is to examine the firm's sales records. Comparisons can be made on a month-to-month basis and with the same period of the previous year. Higher levels of satisfaction would be associated with increases in sales. However, firms should be careful with this method because there are many possible explanations for increases in sales. There could also be other explanations for changes in market share besides customer satisfaction.

These three techniques are the most common means for companies to assess customer satisfaction. All three techniques are useful for service providers. The first two techniques help service providers see themselves as their customers see them and point out specific areas where customer satisfaction can or must be improved. The third technique helps service providers measure their economic performance, and determines what investments can or should be made to satisfy customers more fully.

The survey of Asian and European passengers experienced in flying Asian and European Airlines included in this study is an example of the second type of customer satisfaction technique and will provide representative and detailed information on their various sources of satisfaction with the airline services offered.

## **5. Related Literature**

No research could be found specifically comparing Asian and European passenger satisfaction with Asian and European Airline services, but several studies on passenger satisfaction with airline services were identified and are presented below.

### Thai studies

Tuangrattanakul (2000: Abstract) studied, "Thai passengers' satisfaction with the services of Thai Airways International Airline: A case study of International routes". The data were collected by means of a questionnaire. The results showed that the majority of respondents were very satisfied with the services of the cabin crew, the punctual arrival and departure times of the flights and the food and beverages served on board. Food quality was especially appreciated. Only ground services dissatisfied the respondents.

Wanwong (2001: Abstract) studied, "Thai Airways' Passenger Satisfaction in Information and Reconfirmation Division: A Case Study of Domestic Terminal at Bangkok Airport". The research objectives were: 1) to determine the level of passenger satisfaction with the Information and Reconfirmation Division of Thai Airways, 2) to identify relevant demographic factors. Four hundred Thai and foreign passengers, who contacted the Information and Reconfirmation Division between February and June, 2000, were surveyed by use of a questionnaire. The respondents were selected by the accidental sampling method. The findings of this research were: 1) overall, passengers were satisfied with the Information and Reconfirmation Division services at a high level, 2) satisfaction with the quality of the service was found at a middle level, and 3) staff verbal and non-verbal communication with passengers were important factors of passenger satisfaction. Passenger income was found to influence respondent satisfaction with services the most.

Mahamongkol (2003: Abstract) studied, "Passenger's Expectation and Satisfaction of Services on Thai Airways International Public Co. Ltd". The objectives of this study were to determine passengers' expectation levels and satisfactions with the services offered. Four hundred Thai and foreign passengers, flying on Thai Airways International flights were surveyed by use of a questionnaire. The findings of this research showed that personal backgrounds, gender, age, nationality, education levels, occupations and incomes, influenced both expectations and satisfactions at statistically significant levels.

Rodjanaugda (2005: Abstract) studied, "Passenger's Satisfaction towards the Service of Air Asia". The purpose of this study is to study passengers' satisfaction with the service of Air Asia. 385 passengers who have used the service of Air Asia at least

once were surveyed by use of a questionnaire. Statistical methods used in analyzing the data were percentages, means, and standard deviations. The research result revealed that most passengers were male, between 45-54 years of age, held bachelor's degrees and had monthly incomes of 10,001-20,000 Baht. Most passengers were satisfied with the service, products, and image of Air Asia at a moderate level.

#### Foreign studies

Fisk (1980: Abstract) studied, "Postchoice Evaluation: An Equity Theory Analysis of Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with service choices". The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of equity on consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Considerable research in marketing during the past five years, sought a better understanding of consumer satisfaction. However, little research sought to understand the consequences of inequity in a marketing exchange. Using equity theory, this research proposed that one major consequence of inequitable marketing exchanges was consumer dissatisfaction. Graduate business students were shown an advertisement for an airline and then allowed to make a reservation. Prior to using the airline's services, the subjects were presented with an advertisement from a competing airline, that offered the same price (\$250) or one or two better prices (\$225 or \$200) for the same flight. The subjects were also informed that they would have to wait as long as they expected, 30 minutes longer than expected, or 90 minutes longer than expected to board the flight. After pretending to board the plane, the subjects were presented with a survey concerning the airline. Equity theory interprets changes in price or waiting times as changes in the consumer's inputs to an exchange. Increases in the consumer's inputs with

no corresponding increase in the consumer's outcome are inequitable and lead to dissatisfaction. Therefore, inequitable waiting times and inequitable price changes significantly influence consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the choice of a service.

Cezard (1999: Abstract) studied, "Determinants of services expectations: An application to the airline industry". The purpose of this study was to understand consumer expectations. The study reviewed the antecedents of consumer expectations discussed in the literature and incorporated some of them into a model. Then it looked at the impact of individualism/collectivism on the formation of expectations related to external and internal sources of information, values, the number of perceived alternatives and other personal characteristics that influence expectations. Interesting theoretical and managerial implications were found concerning the proposed model. The study also revealed that differences exist between individualists and collectivists with regard to the formation of expectations; however, the differences were not as expected.

Tsikriktsis (2000: Abstract) studied, "Service quality: Profitability, learning and variation reduction. Three longitudinal investigations in the United States domestic airline industry". This dissertation provided an empirical investigation of service quality. Much of the existing empirical research had focused on one dimension of service quality: customer satisfaction. However, service quality includes both customer satisfaction and technical quality. The two dimensions of service quality in the U.S. domestic airline industry used longitudinal data concerning the ten major airlines, as classified by the U.S. Department of Transportation. The data included objective measures of technical quality (late arrivals, lost baggage and denied boardings), customer dis/satisfaction (complaints), efficiency (capacity utilization of seats and fleet and cost), and profitability.

This dissertation consisted of three essays: 1) "The Relationship between Service Performance and Profitability" 2) "Customer Satisfaction Improvement" and 3) "The Impact of Variation Reduction on Customer Satisfaction". The findings showed that for high performers, both average performance and variation performance affected customer satisfaction, while only average performance mattered for low performers.

Widzer (2001: Abstract) studied, "Customer Retention of Business Travelers in the Airline Industry". The purpose of the study was to measure the aspects of loyalty and satisfaction that are most likely to impact retention areas of business travelers among their choices of travel providers. Discussed were the importance of an organizational culture that promoted customer loyalty and satisfaction, the effect of customer loyalty and satisfaction on the internal dynamics of an organization, the differences and similarities between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction, and the role that the industrial organizational psychologist plays in bringing about an organizational culture directed toward the servicing of the consumer. The subjects utilized were obtained from an internet-based newsletter that was e-mailed weekly to business travelers. The study questionnaires were linked to the web site so that interested persons might respond easily. A filter was established whereby an individual would only be allowed to respond to the questionnaires once. The final number of respondents numbered 262, including 171 (65.3%) males and 91 (34.7%) females. In each sample, airfare was the most important attribute.

The findings noted in the above research are related to various aspects of this present research, but no research could be found that compared passenger satisfaction between airlines.





## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the participants, the research tool as well as the data collection and data analysis procedure employed in this study.

#### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 30 Asian and 30 European passengers who had flying experience on both Asian and European airlines. Equal numbers of Asian/European and respondents insured a balanced data base for analysis. All respondents had taken a minimum of 1 flight on an Asian airline and 1 flight on a European airline to insure they had familiarity with Asian and European airlines in order to respond concretely to the questionnaire. Respondents were selected by the purposive method, i.e. they appeared to conform to the criteria listed above. Demographic factors such as age, gender, nationality, occupation and income were ignored in this study.

#### **Research Tool**

A questionnaire was used as the instrument to collect the primary data for the study. (See Appendix.) The questionnaire was prepared in English only. Passengers arriving or departing on flights might be reluctant to fill out a detailed questionnaire,

therefore the questionnaire was as simple and brief as possible. The questionnaire was divided into three parts.

### **Part 1: Personal Data**

Respondents was asked to identify their nationality (Asian/European). They were also asked how many flights they had taken on Asian and European airlines. (A minimum of 1 Asian airline flight and 1 European airline flight was required for inclusion in the sample.)

### **Part 2: Passenger Satisfaction with Asian and European Airline Services**

Respondents were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in each of 11 areas of airline services. These are the areas most often explored on passenger satisfaction surveys in the airline industry and are the most common focus of advertising campaigns for airlines. The scale of "Very Satisfied" (4), "Somewhat Satisfied" (3), "Somewhat Dissatisfied" (2), and "Very Dissatisfied" (1) was used to explore the satisfaction levels of the 60 Asian and European respondents.

### **Part 3: Overall Satisfaction**

In this part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate their preference for Asian or European airlines products and services. Space was also provided so that respondents could add any other comments they might have had.

## **Data Collection**

The questionnaire was filled in by the Asian and European respondents in and around the arrival, departure and transit areas of Suvarnabhumi Airport and at two hotels while the researcher was laying over between flights in December 2007. The researcher clarified any language questions the respondents had, but took care not to influence their responses.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics (percentages and means) and the findings are reported in Chapter 4 followed by conclusions, discussion, notes on the limitations of the study and recommendations for further study in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of this comparative study on Asian and European passenger satisfaction with Asian and European airline services, and is divided into the same three parts as the questionnaire: Part 1, Personal data; Part 2, Passenger Satisfaction with Asian and European airline services and Part 3, Overall Satisfaction including other comments.

#### Part 1: Personal data

The personal data of the participants in the study are presented in Tables 5 to 7 below.

Table 5 below presents the nationalities of the respondents.

Table 5 Respondent nationalities

	Respondents	Percent
Asian	30	50.0%
European	30	50.0%
Respondent nationality totals	60	100.0%

Thirty Asian and 30 European respondents completed and returned questionnaires (100.0%).

Table 6 presents the number of flights which the Asian and European respondents reported having taken on Asian airlines prior to participating in this study.

Table 6 Number of flights taken on Asian airlines

	Asian Respondents	Percent	European Respondents	Percent
1-2 flights	4	13.3%	4	13.3%
3-5 flights	10	33.3%	11	36.6%
6-10 flights	1	3.3%	6	20.0%
More than 10 flights	15	50.0%	9	30.0%
Total number of flights taken on Asian airlines	30	100.0%	30	100.0%

Fifteen Asian respondents (50.0%) reported taking more than 10 flights on Asian airlines, but only 9 European respondents (30.0%) reported taking as many flights. Ten Asian respondents (33.3%) and 11 European respondents (36.6%) reported taking 3-5 flights on Asian airlines. Four Asian respondents and 4 European respondents reported taking 1-2 flights on Asian airlines. Only 1 Asian respondent (3.3%) reported taking 6-10 flights on Asian airlines but 6 European respondents (20.0%) reported taking 6-10 flights on Asian airlines.

The following table presents the number of flights which the Asian and European respondents reported taking on European airlines prior to participating in this study.

Table 7 Number of flights taken on European airlines

	Asian Respondents	Percent	European Respondents	Percent
1-2 flights	12	40.0%	1	3.3%
3-5 flights	6	20.0%	1	3.3%
6-10 flights	5	16.6%	3	10.0%
More than 10 flights	7	23.3%	25	83.3%
Total number of flights taken on European airlines	30	100.0%	30	100.0%

Twelve Asian respondents (40.0%) reported taking 1-2 flights on European airlines, but only 1 European respondent (3.3%) reported taking only 1-2 flights on European airlines. Seven Asian respondents (23.3%) reported taking more than 10 flights on European airlines but 25 European respondents (83.3%) reported taking as many flights on European airlines. Six Asian respondents (20.0%) reported taking 3-5 flight on European airlines but only 1 European respondent (3.3%) reported taking these numbers of flights on European airlines. Five Asian respondents (16.6%) reported taking 6-10 flights on European airlines but only 3 European respondents (10.0%) reported taking 6-10 flights on European airlines.

In general, the European respondents appear to have had more flight experience on Asian and European airline flights than did the Asian respondents. Fifteen Asian respondents reported taking more than 10 flights on Asian airlines and 7 reported taking more than 10 flights on European airlines, for a total of 22 reports of taking more than 10 flights on Asian or European airlines. On the other hand, 9 European respondents reported taking more than 10 flights on Asian airlines and 25 reported taking more than 10 flights on European airlines, for a total of 34 reports of taking more than 10 flights on Asian or European airlines. The number of reported flights taken can exceed the number of respondents because some respondents will have taken more than 10 flights on both Asian and European airlines.

As might be expected, the Asian respondents reported taking more Asian airline flights than European airline flights; 15 (50.0%) and 7 (23.3%) respectively reported taking more than 10 flights on these airlines. The same was true for European respondents; 25 (83.3%) reported taking more than 10 flights on European airlines and 9 (30%) reported taking more than 10 flights on Asian airlines.

## Part 2: Passenger Satisfaction with Asian and European Airline services

Part 2 of the questionnaire asked the Asian and European respondents to compare their levels of satisfaction with 11 areas of service offered by Asian and European Airlines.

Asian and European respondent satisfaction was measured by the following weightings:

4 = Very Satisfied

3 = Somewhat Satisfied

2 = Somewhat Dissatisfied

1 = Very Dissatisfied

In Tables 8 to 18, the number of respondent choices are multiplied by these weightings to establish raw scores.

The final column on the right indicates the mean scores, or the mean levels of satisfaction of the respondents with each of the 11 service areas studied. These scores are established by dividing the raw scores by the total number of respondents. The mean scores allow comparison of Asian and European respondent satisfaction levels with all 11 areas of Asian and European airline services.

It is statistically impossible to achieve scores above 4.0 (Very Satisfied) or below 1.0 (Very Dissatisfied), and it is unlikely that a sample of 60 respondents would produce mean scores near either end of the range. For this reason, the findings presented below are described based on the following ranges:

3.51-4.00 = Very Satisfied

2.51-3.50 = Somewhat Satisfied

1.51-2.50 = Somewhat Dissatisfied

1.00-1.50 = Very Dissatisfied

A mean score of 3.25 would indicate that the respondents felt “somewhat satisfied” with a service area. A mean score of 2.25 would indicate a “some what dissatisfied” feeling (Taweerat. 2000: 107-108).

The findings related to Asian and European respondents’ satisfaction with Asian and European airlines are described below.

Tables 8 to 18 show respondent satisfaction with the 11 service areas as offered by Asian airlines and Tables 19 to 29 show respondent satisfaction with the 11 service areas as offered by European airlines.

Table 8 shows the level of satisfaction with flight schedules of Asian airlines.

Table 8 Flight schedules of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	5	23	2	0	30	3.10
European Respondents	24	6	0	0	30	3.80

European respondents were very satisfied with Asian airline flight schedules with a mean score of 3.80, but Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with Asian airline flight schedules with a mean score of 3.10.

Table 9 shows the level of satisfaction with arrival/departure punctuality of Asian airlines.

Table 9 Arrival/departure punctuality of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	8	14	8	0	30	3.00
European Respondents	21	9	0	0	30	3.70

European respondents were very satisfied with a mean score of 3.70, but Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with Asian airline arrival/departure punctuality with a mean score of 3.00.

Table 10 below shows the level of satisfaction with prices of Asian airlines.

Table 10 Prices of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	11	13	5	1	30	3.13
European Respondents	12	14	4	0	30	3.27

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with Asian airline prices with mean scores of 3.13 and 3.27 respectively.

Table 11 below illustrates the level with satisfaction of reservation/ticketing of Asian airlines.

Table 11 Reservation/ticketing of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	8	19	3	0	30	3.17
European Respondents	23	7	0	0	30	3.77

European respondents were very satisfied with Asian airline reservations and ticketing with a mean score of 3.77, but Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with this service with a mean score of 3.17.

Table 12 indicates the level of satisfaction of check-in services of Asian airlines.

Table 12 Check-in services of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	10	17	2	1	30	3.20
European Respondents	26	4	0	0	30	3.87

European respondents were very satisfied Asian airline check-in services with a mean score of 3.87, but Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with this service with a mean score of 3.20.

Table 13 shows the level of satisfaction with cabin crews of Asian airlines.

Table 13 Cabin Crews of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	20	8	2	0	30	3.60
European Respondents	27	3	0	0	30	3.90

Asian and European respondents were both very satisfied with cabin crews with mean scores of 3.60 and 3.90 respectively.

Table 14 illustrates the level of satisfaction of the in-flight food and beverage services of Asian airline

Table 14 In-flight food and beverage services of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	13	10	7	0	30	3.20
European Respondents	14	14	2	0	30	3.40

Asian and European respondents were both very satisfied with Asian airline in-flight food and beverage services with mean scores of 3.20 and 3.40 respectively.

Table 15 shows the level of satisfaction with the cleanliness of Asian airlines.

Table 15 Cleanliness of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	12	15	3	0	30	3.30
European Respondents	22	7	1	0	30	3.70

European respondents were very satisfied with Asian airline cleanliness with a mean score of 3.70, but Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with this service with a mean score of 3.30.

Table 16 indicates level of satisfaction with seating and comfort of Asian airlines.

Table 16 Seating and comfort of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	5	19	6	0	30	2.97
European Respondents	17	12	1	0	30	3.53

European respondents were very satisfied with a mean score of 3.53, but Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with Asian airline seating and comfort with a mean score of 2.97.

Table 17 below illustrates the level of satisfaction with in-flight entertainment of Asian airlines.

Table 17 In-flight entertainment of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	8	14	8	0	30	3.00
European Respondents	8	16	6	0	30	3.07

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with Asian airline in-flight entertainment with mean scores of 3.00 and 3.07 respectively.

Table 18 below shows the level of satisfaction with baggage handling of Asian airlines.

Table 18 Baggage handling of Asian airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	6	18	6	0	30	3.00
European Respondents	22	8	0	0	30	3.73

European respondents were very satisfied with Asian airline baggage handling with a mean score of 3.73, but Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with this service with a mean score of 3.00.

Tables 19 to 29 show respondent satisfaction with the 11 service areas as offered by European airlines.

Table 19 below illustrates the level of satisfaction with flight schedules of European airlines.

Table 19 Flight schedules of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	10	20	0	0	30	3.33
European Respondents	13	13	4	0	30	3.30

European passengers were very satisfied with European airline flight schedules with a mean score of 3.30, but Asian passengers were only somewhat satisfied with European airline flight schedules with a mean score of 3.33.

Table 20 shows the level of satisfaction with arrival/departure punctuality of European airlines.

Table 20 Arrival/departure punctuality of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	13	17	0	0	30	3.43
European Respondents	8	13	9	0	30	2.97

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline arrival/departure punctuality with mean scores of 3.43 and 2.97 respectively.

Table 21 below shows the level of satisfaction with prices of European airlines.

Table 21 Prices of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	3	18	9	0	30	2.80
European Respondents	3	12	13	2	30	2.53

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline prices with mean scores of 2.80 and 2.53 respectively.

Table 22 shows level of satisfaction with reservation/ticketing of European airlines.

Table 22 Reservation/ticketing of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	10	18	2	0	30	3.27
European Respondents	13	11	6	0	30	3.23

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline reservation/ticketing with a mean score of 3.27 and 3.23.

Table 23 illustrates the level of satisfaction with check-in services of European airlines.

Table 23 Check-in services of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	10	17	3	0	0	3.23
European Respondents	7	18	5	0	30	3.07

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline check-in services with mean scores of 3.23 and 3.07 respectively.

Table 24 shows the level of satisfaction with cabin crews of European airlines.

Table 24 Cabin crews of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	8	13	9	0	30	2.97
European Respondents	2	20	7	1	30	2.77

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline cabin crews with mean scores of 2.97 and 2.77 respectively.

Table 25 below shows the level of satisfaction with in-flight food and beverage services of European airlines.

Table 25 In-flight food and beverage services of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	11	14	5	0	30	3.20
European Respondents	5	19	3	3	30	2.87

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline in-flight food and beverage services with mean scores of 3.20 and 2.87 respectively.

Table 26 indicates the level of satisfaction with cleanliness of European airlines.

Table 26 Cleanliness of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	10	16	4	0	30	3.20
European Respondents	13	13	4	0	30	3.30

European and Asian respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline cleanliness with mean scores of 3.30 and 3.20 respectively.

Table 27 below shows the level of satisfaction with seating and comfort of European airlines.

Table 27 Seating and comfort of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	10	19	1	0	30	3.30
European Respondents	4	17	8	1	30	2.80

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline seating and comfort with mean scores of 3.30 and 2.80 respectively.

Table 28 shows the level of satisfaction with in-flight entertainment of European airlines.

Table 28 In-flight entertainment of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	12	15	3	0	30	3.30
European Respondents	8	16	5	1	30	3.03

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline in-flight entertainment with mean scores of 3.30 and 3.03 respectively.

Table 29 indicates the level of satisfaction with baggage handling of European airlines.

Table 29 Baggage handling of European airlines

	Very Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Total Responses	Mean Score
Asian Respondents	8	17	5	0	30	3.10
European Respondents	11	9	7	3	30	2.93

Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline baggage handling with a mean score of 3.10 and 2.93 respectively.

Table 30 provides a summary of the degree of Asian and European respondent satisfaction with Asian airline services totals.

Table 30 Overall Asian and European passengers satisfaction with Asian airline services

Asian airline services	Asian respondents	European respondents
Flight schedules	3.10	3.80
Arrival/departure punctuality	3.00	3.70
Prices	3.13	3.27
Reservation/ticketing	3.17	3.77
Check-in Services	3.20	3.87
Cabin crews	3.60	3.90
In-flight food and beverage services	3.20	3.40
Cleanliness	3.30	3.70
Seating and comfort	2.97	3.53
In-flight entertainment	3.00	3.07
Baggage handling	3.00	3.73
Overall Asian & European respondent satisfaction	3.15	3.61

Overall European respondents were very satisfied with Asian airline services with a mean score of 3.61, while Asian respondents were only somewhat satisfied with Asian airline services with a mean score of 3.15.

Table 31 summarizes the degree of Asian and European respondent satisfaction with European airlines services.

Table 31 Overall Asian and European respondents satisfaction with European airline services

European airline services	Asian respondents	European respondents
Flight schedules	3.33	3.30
Arrival/departure punctuality	3.43	2.97
Prices	2.80	2.53
Reservation/ ticketing	3.27	3.23
Check-in services	3.23	3.07
Cabin crews	2.97	2.77
In-flight food and beverage services	3.20	2.87
Cleanliness	3.20	3.30
Seating and comfort	3.30	2.80
In-flight entertainment	3.30	3.03
Baggage handling	3.10	2.93
Overall Asian & European respondent satisfaction	3.19	2.98

Overall, Asian and European respondents were both somewhat satisfied with European airline services with mean scores of 3.19 and 2.98 respectively.

A closer look at the figures reveals several interesting findings.

Overall, both Asian and European respondents ranked the services of both Asian and European airlines as somewhat satisfying, but European respondents gave generally higher satisfaction scores than Asian respondents.

The findings also indicate that Asian respondents found only a small difference in satisfaction between Asian and European airline services, while European respondents found a larger difference. Asian respondents reported overall satisfaction mean scores of 3.15 for Asian airline services and 3.19 for European airline services; a difference of 0.04. European respondents reported overall satisfaction mean scores of 2.98 for European airline services and 3.61 for Asian airline services; a difference of 0.63.

Related to this, Asian respondents reported higher satisfaction than European respondents with ten of the eleven services provided by European airlines. Only the area of "Cleanliness" were European respondents more satisfied with European airline services than were Asian respondents. Similarly, European respondents reported higher satisfaction than Asian respondents with all eleven services provided by Asian airlines.

Finally, the figures also reveal that Asian respondents were somewhat satisfied with all eleven services provided by European airlines and ten of eleven services provided by Asian airlines; Asian respondents were very satisfied with Asian cabin crews. On the other hand, European respondents were somewhat satisfied with all eleven services provided by European airlines and three of the services provided by Asian airlines, but very satisfied with eight services provided by Asian airlines: flight schedules, arrival/departure punctuality, reservation/ticketing, check-in services, cabin crew, cleanliness, seating and comfort, and baggage handling.

### Part 3: Overall Satisfaction and comments

Part 3 of the questionnaire asked the respondents to “tick” one box that most accurately reflected their preference for Asian and European airlines. The findings are presented in Table 32 below.

Table 32 Airline preferences

	Strongly prefer Asian airlines	Strongly prefer European airlines	Prefer Asian airlines	Prefer European airlines	Total respondents
Asian Respondents	7 (23.3%)	1 (3.3%)	16 (53.3%)	6 (20.0%)	30
European Respondents	8 (26.6%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (66.6%)	2 (6.6%)	30

Eight European respondents (26.6%) strongly preferred Asian airlines while only 7 Asian respondents (23.3%) strongly preferred Asian airlines. Only 1 Asian respondent (3.3%) strongly preferred European airlines and no European respondents (0.0%) strongly preferred European airlines. Twenty European respondents (66.6%) preferred Asian airlines as did 16 Asian respondents (53.3%). Six Asian respondents (20.0%) preferred European airlines but only 2 European respondents (6.6%) preferred European airlines.

Part 3 of the questionnaire also asked the respondents for their comments on overall satisfaction. Ten Asian and 12 European respondents made comments.

Ten Asian respondents made the following comments:

1. European cabin crews perform their jobs strictly; they deal with special cases, people and safety procedures very professionally.
2. Asian airlines are much better in services.
3. Most of the time I travel on Asian airlines, the flight services are very good and well organized, the cabin crew is warm with nice smiles and very friendly.
4. The cabin crew offers service with a smile.
5. Asian airlines have a friendly style.
6. Because I am an Asian, it is very easy to talk to Asian airline staff and our cultures are quite familiar.
7. Asian airlines have more friendly and helpful staff and also offer better services.
8. I prefer Asian airlines because of the cabin crew. They are more friendly, kind and pretty. Furthermore, they know what Asians want.
9. European airline staff sometimes looks down on Asian passengers.
10. I prefer European airlines because European airlines have higher standards and have more money for investments; the price is not very expensive compared to Asian airlines.

Asian respondents generally preferred Asian airlines because of the services provided by cabin crews and airline staff.

Twelve European respondents made the following comments:

1. My first flight with an Asian airline impressed me by the ease of the embarkation and very polite airline staff.
2. I have found that all of the Asian airline staff from airport staff, to check-in, to flight attendants are without exception, friendly and helpful. I have sometimes found that European staff can be surely.
3. Very friendly cabin crew.
4. Thai cabin crew are the most beautiful in the world.
5. Asian airlines offer excellent service beyond words. They have the most friendly, obliging staff. I highly recommend them to friends.
6. Asian airlines have been the most efficient and friendly airlines I've ever had dealings with.
7. Asian airlines put the passengers first more than European airlines.
8. Asian airlines are more friendly and professional.
9. On Asian airlines, the cabin crew smiles more than on European airlines.
10. Service has been very good with Asian airlines.
11. I feel more at home on European airlines.
12. It is the airline and their staff which are important not Asia or Europe.

European respondents also largely preferred Asian airlines because of their cabin crews and airline staff.

In summary, both Asian and European respondents preferred Asian airline services more than European airline services.

Conclusions, discussions, limitations of the study and recommendations for further study are presented in the following chapter.















## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the answers to the two research questions followed by discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for further studies.

#### **Answers to the Research Questions**

The answers to the two research questions are presented below.

Research Question 1: To what degree are Asian and European passengers satisfied with Asian and European airline services?

Asian passengers were somewhat satisfied to virtually equal degrees with both Asian and European airline services with satisfaction mean scores of 3.15 and 3.19 respectively on the satisfaction scale of 0.00 to 4.00.

European passengers were also somewhat satisfied with European airline services, but to a slightly lower degree than Asian passengers, with a satisfaction mean score of 2.98, but were very satisfied with Asian airline services with a satisfaction mean score of 3.61.

Both groups of passengers were more satisfied with the services provided by the other regional service provider: Asians with European airline services and Europeans with Asian airline services. The difference was not great for Asian passenger satisfaction: 3.15 with Asian airline services and 3.19 with European airline services. The difference was

more pronounced with regard to European passenger satisfaction: 2.98 with European airline services and 3.61 with Asian airline services.

Research Question 2: Do Asian and European passengers prefer Asian or European airline services?

A clear preference was shown for Asian airlines; 60.0% of all respondents preferred Asian airlines and 25.0% strongly preferred Asian airlines.

European passengers showed a stronger preference for Asian airlines than did Asian passengers; 20 of 30 European passengers (66.6%) preferred Asian airlines while only 16 of 30 Asian passengers (53.3%) preferred Asian airlines, and 8 of 30 European passengers (26.6%) strongly preferred Asian airline while only 7 of 30 Asian passengers (23.3%) did so.

Comments by both groups of passengers indicated that the preference for Asian airlines was due largely to the performance of Asian cabin crews and staff.

## **Discussion**

With regard to the eleven service areas investigated in this study, it is interesting to note that the satisfaction range of the Asian respondents was much narrower than that of the Europeans. Twenty-one of the 22 Asian respondent scores (11 services for Asian airlines plus 11 services for European airlines) (95.45%) fell within the somewhat satisfied range (2.51 to 3.50); only one very satisfied score (3.51 to 4.00) was awarded. Fourteen of the European respondent scores (63.63%) fell within the somewhat satisfied range and eight (36.36%) scores fell within the very satisfied range. As well as indicating real respondents'

satisfaction, this may also reflect some cultural differences between the Asian and European respondents. Westerners often see Asians as discrete, reserved, even stoic. Asians are sometimes criticized for not saying what they mean; being too indirect in speech, hiding their true feelings and beliefs. Asians often see Westerners as too open and direct. Westerners are sometimes criticized for over stating their views, presenting them too strongly; some believe they are insensitive to Asian people and practices, often insulting Asians by their direct words and acts. Of course, all cultures define themselves by a certain coherence to norms and practices, but it may also be true that Asian cultures are less accepting of behaviors that deviate far from those of the large number of people in the cultural "center" while western cultures may be more accepting of that which deviates from the cultural center. Individualism is prized and rewarded more in the West than in the East. Individuals who "break the rules" and create new fashions, music, words, ideas are rewarded in the West. Those that promote social cohesion and tranquility are rewarded in the East. Thai culture is particularly sensitive to the need for social cohesion; open debate, disagreement and dispute are frowned upon. These same forms of social interaction are often valued in the West. The two cultural traits of discretion vs. openness and social cohesion vs. individual expression may add to the understanding of why the satisfaction range of Asian respondents was much narrower than that of Europeans, and why 21 of 22 Asian scores fell within the somewhat satisfied range while two thirds of European scores fell within that range and one third fell within the very satisfied range, but these two traits do not appear to alter the basic satisfactions of the two groups of respondents. Asian responses may have been more socially cohesive and understated than European

responses which may have reflected more individual satisfactions stated more strongly and directly.

A closer look at the high and low scores offers further insights. The lowest satisfaction score offered by Asian respondents was 2.97 for European cabin crews. The highest Asian respondent score was 3.60 for Asian cabin crews. The range between the two scores is 0.63. The lowest satisfaction score offered by European respondents was 2.53 for European airline prices. The highest European satisfaction score was 3.90 for Asian cabin crews. The range between these two scores is 1.37. The high and low score range was more than twice as large for Europeans than for Asians. Interestingly, European respondents scored their satisfaction with European cabin crews at 2.77, the second lowest European satisfaction score. This strongly suggests that both Asian and European respondents preferred Asian cabin crews over European cabin crews. The only factor that satisfied European respondents less than European cabin crews was European airline prices.

Another interesting finding is that both Asian and European respondents rated their satisfaction levels higher with the airline service providers from the other region (Asian satisfaction slightly higher with European airlines and European satisfaction notably higher with Asian airlines). An American adage states, "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." Basically, this means that one is never totally satisfy with what one is, has or does; is always a little envious of what someone else is, has or does. The crossover satisfaction levels suggest that the adage is true. However, when group preferences for Asian or European airlines are considered, the validity of the adage becomes less clear.

While both groups of respondents rated their satisfaction levels higher with the airline service providers from the other region, both groups of respondents indicated a clear preference for Asian airlines. The European respondent position seems consistent; they were more satisfied with Asian airline services and preferred using them. The Asian position appears less straight forward; they were more satisfied with European airline services but preferred Asian airlines.

This can be explained by the size of the difference in satisfaction with Asian and European airline services. Asian respondent levels of satisfaction with Asian and European airline services were roughly equal, no clear preference for regional airline services could be made. On the other hand, the difference in European levels of satisfaction with Asian and European airline services was large enough to allow the Europeans to establish a clear preference for Asian airline services.

In terms of the American adage, the grass may always be greener on the other side of the fence, but it must be enough greener to attract the viewer to climb over the fence. It appears that for the Asian respondents, the grass was not enough greener on the European service side to attract them to form a preference for European airlines. On the other hand, the services provided by Asian airlines were enough better to allow at least some European respondents to form a preference for them. The preferences of the two groups, or lack thereof, are an important finding. Regardless of whether a preference has been formed, or not formed, because of, or in spite of cultural differences, the facts remain; by and large Asians do not prefer European airline services and a suitable number of Europeans do prefer Asian airline services.

In terms of the Asian and European airline industries, this study suggests that European airline services are roughly as satisfactory to Asian passengers as are Asian airline services, but not satisfactory enough for Asian passengers to form a preference for them. On the other hand, Asian airline services are satisfactory enough to European passengers that many have already formed a preference for them. To paraphrase Brown (1946), customer satisfaction leads to a product or brand preference and to customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth and customer retention, this leads to revenue enhancement and improved profitability. In turn, this allows further investment in products and services, which will further satisfy customers.

In conclusion, Asian airlines seem to have opened a lead over European airlines in Asian and European passenger satisfaction and preference. This is due, to a certain extent, to the performance of Asian cabin crews. Asian and European airlines may well wish to consider the findings of this study as they prepare their strategies for future competition.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to only a small group of Asian and European passengers familiar with Asian and European airline services.

## **Recommendations for Further Study**

Other studies should be undertaken to:

1. compare passenger satisfaction with airlines from other regions of the world such as Africa, America, and the Middle East in order to obtain a more global view of passenger satisfaction.
2. compare passenger satisfaction between low-cost airlines and traditional airlines in order to explore the levels of passenger satisfaction.
3. compare specific services (flight schedules, check-in services, in-flight entertainment...) between airlines in order to discover differences in passenger satisfaction levels with specific services. This information will be valuable to the airlines studied, as they will be able to improve the services which satisfy passengers least and there by improve customer loyalty and retention.
4. determine the importance of demographic factors such as age, gender, nationality, occupation and income on passenger satisfaction.



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## **APPENDIX**

# QUESTIONNAIRE

This passenger satisfaction questionnaire is designed for a Master's Degree research project in Business English for International Communication at Srinakharinwirot University. Thank you very much for your kind cooperation in completing this questionnaire.

## Part 1: Personal data

Mark  in the appropriate box.

1. Nationality:  Asian  European

2. Number of flights taken on Asian Airlines:

1-2 flights  3-5 flights  
 6-10 flights  More than 10 flights

3. Number of flights taken on European Airlines:

1-2 flights  3-5 flights  
 6-10 flights  More than 10 flights



**Part 3: Overall satisfaction**

Tick the ONE box that most accurately reflects your opinion.

Overall, I...     strongly prefer Asian airlines.     strongly prefer European airlines.  
                   prefer Asian airlines.                     prefer European airlines

Other comments:

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**VITAE**

## VITAE

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