



**THE STUDY OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND
PURCHASING CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING REGIONAL
AIRLINES OPERATING IN THAILAND**

BY

MR. CHONCHOB CHOOCHOTE

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM IN MARKETING
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)
FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ACCOUNTANCY
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2015
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INDEPENDENT STUDY

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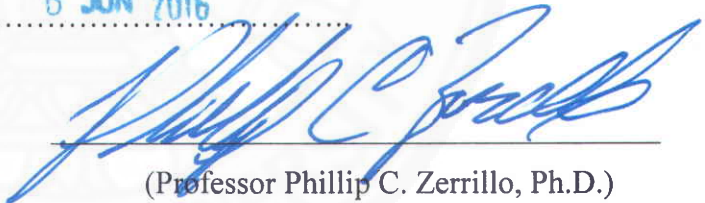
ENTITLED

THE STUDY OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND PURCHASING CRITERIA FOR
CHOOSING REGIONAL AIRLINES OPERATING IN THAILAND

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Science Program in Marketing (International Program)

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| Independent Study Title | THE STUDY OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND PURCHASING CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING REGIONAL AIRLINE OPERATING IN THAILAND |
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ABSTRACT

The investigation entitled “The study of consumer behavior and purchasing criteria for choosing regional airlines operating in Thailand” focuses on the subject area of international business in Thailand and investigates a contemporary topic in applied marketing. The first objective is to understand and define the consumer behavior that involves choosing to fly via regional airlines operating in Thailand.

The second is to determine consumer purchasing criteria for selecting regional airlines operating in Thailand. The third objective is to evaluate the customer satisfaction between two types of airline services operating in Thailand. The final objective is to identify the passenger segments of regional airlines operating in Thailand.

This research was conducted using two methods, the exploratory research method and the descriptive research method, in both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Respondents in this study must have flown via a regional airline operating in Thailand at least one time in the past one year. The results of this research are based on the findings from the data collection that includes secondary research, in-depth interview, and questionnaire survey. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences) was used to analyze the data from the survey, and these data were summarized into a descriptive essay to convey an effective understanding of the results.

The study findings are beneficial to support regional airline operators and people who are interested in the regional airline industry to effectively understand consumer behavior and consumer purchasing criteria when choosing regional airlines, which will assist audiences to develop company-marketing strategies to improve and sustain competitive advantages for these companies.

Key word: Regional airline, Air passenger purchasing criteria, Air passenger satisfaction, Air passenger segment

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Mr.Chonchob Choochote

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BIOGRAPHY

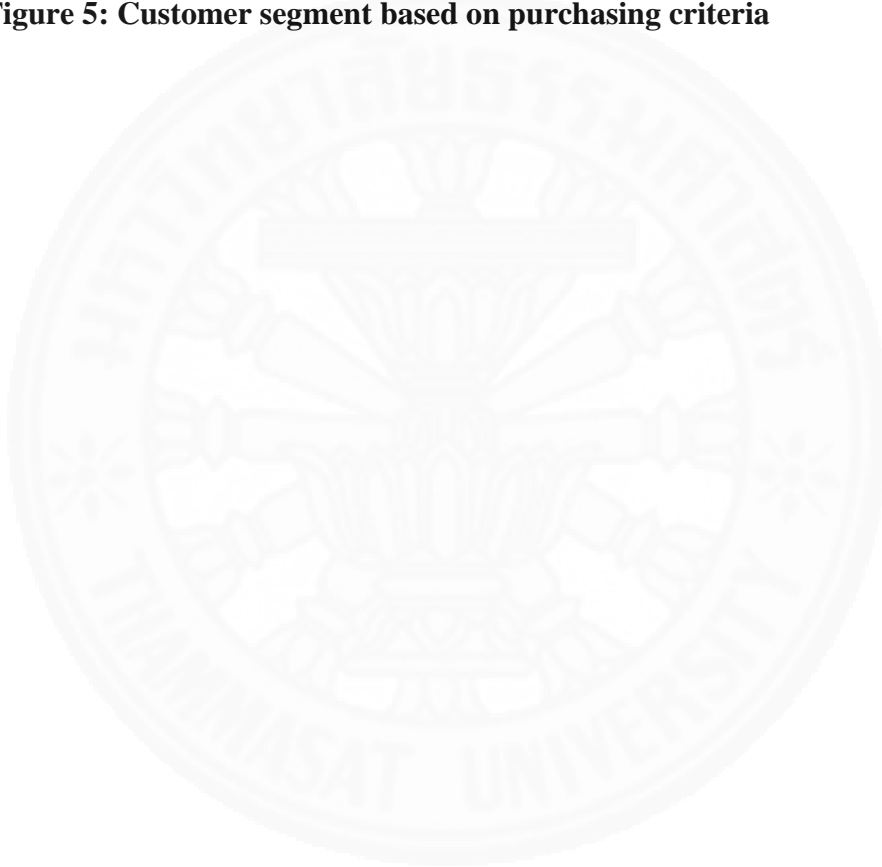


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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The investigation entitled “The study of consumer behavior and purchasing criteria for choosing regional airlines operating in Thailand” focuses on the subject area of international business in Thailand and investigates a contemporary topic in applied marketing.

The Association of Southeast Asia (2008) reported that the members of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) would be integrated into the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015, which will hasten regional economic integration and facilitate movement of capital investment as well as people. To accommodate that movement, the members of AEC have agreed on an open skies policy to decrease the limitations of traveling across the region. In addition, as the Thai government has an initiative to transform Thailand to be a hub of air transportation in this region, it creates a huge expected opportunity for the regional airline industry, which will lead numerous players to become involved.

Key variables of this study are 1) Consumer behaviors such as age, frequency, occasion of travel, and average luggage weight. 2) Criteria of choosing regional airlines operating in Thailand such as being on time, food, and loyalty program. 3) Overall satisfaction between two types of regional airline services operating in Thailand. The purpose of this research is to ascertain the effects of consumer behavior on purchasing criteria and overall satisfaction as well as satisfaction with respect to each criterion.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study.

Research Objective

1. To understand and define the consumer behavior involving the choice to fly via regional airlines operating in Thailand, e.g. frequency, occasion of travel, and average baggage weight.

2. To determine consumer purchasing criteria for selecting regional airlines operating in Thailand, e.g., being on time, food, service, and loyalty program.

3. To evaluate customer satisfaction between two types of regional airline services operating in Thailand:

- Full service carrier, e.g. Bangkok Airways and Thai Smile Airways
- Low-cost carrier, e.g. Thai Air Asia, Nok Air, and Thai Lion Airways

4. To identify passenger segments of regional airlines operating in Thailand.

**Definitions:*

-Regional airline: A carrier that operates scheduled short-haul or regional international flights, with, in some instances, just a few long-haul routes and flight durations of up to six hours.

-Full-service carrier: An air carrier that provides a full range of services including in-flight entertainment, meals and beverages, on-board store, and ground facilities such as waiting lounges for premium class passengers or frequent flyer programmed members.

-Low-cost carrier: An air carrier that operates according to a low-cost model and provides only some services excluding flight entertainment, meal and beverages, ground facilities, and free check-in baggage.

**More details on the Aviation category are provided in Appendix A.*

Theoretical Framework

The buying decision process: The five-stage model

The framework of this study is the five-stage model of the buying decision process. This framework was used as a tool to understand the consumer behavior both before and after purchasing.

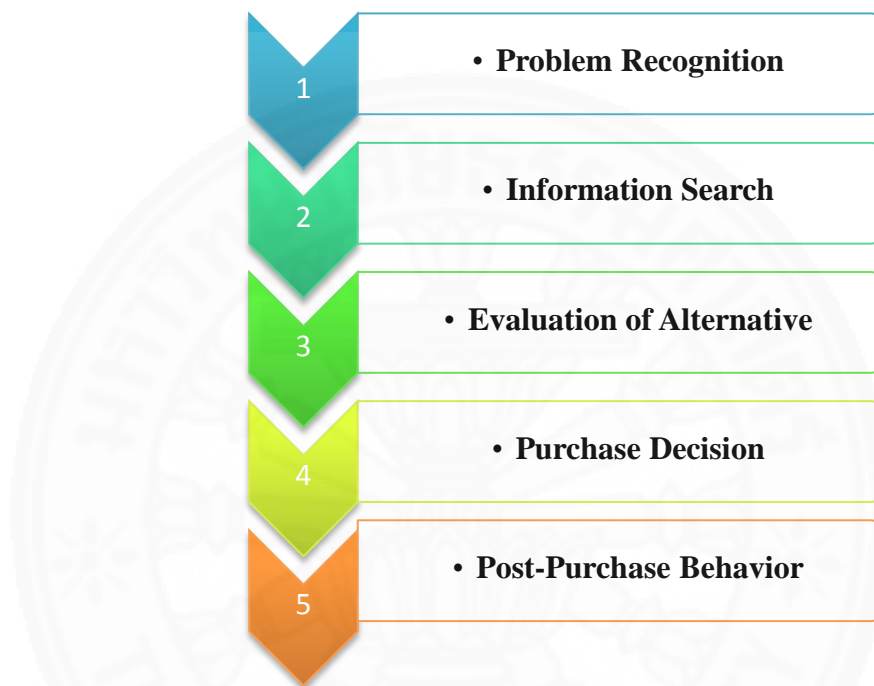


Figure 2: Five-stage model of the consumer buying process.

Problem recognition: The first stage of the buying decision process begins when the consumer faces a problem or need. The consumer's needs can be divided into 2 types, which are internal and external. An internal need is driven by a normal or basic need of humans such as hunger, thirst, or sex. On the other hand, an external need is driven by external incentives such as seeing a friend's new iPhone or viewing advertising of a new product on television. (Kotler. 2012, p 189)

Information search: After the consumer faces a problem or need, he or she often searches for more information. There are four groups of information sources, which are personal, commercial, public, and experiential. (Kotler. 2012, p 189)

Evaluation of alternative: There is no single process that can be applied to all consumers, and in each buying situation, each consumer also engages in different

processes. However, there are three basic steps that help to understand the consumer evaluation process, which are:

First: The consumer tries to solve his or her problem or satisfy his or her need.

Second: The consumer searches for benefit from the production solution.

Third: The consumer sets up the criteria that provide maximum benefit to choose the product. (Kotler 2012, p 190)

Purchase decision: After the consumer knows which product he or she wants to buy, the most preferred brand will be in their purchase intention. However, two general factors can interpose between the purchase intention and the purchasing decision, as shown in the framework below. (Kotler. 2012, p 192)

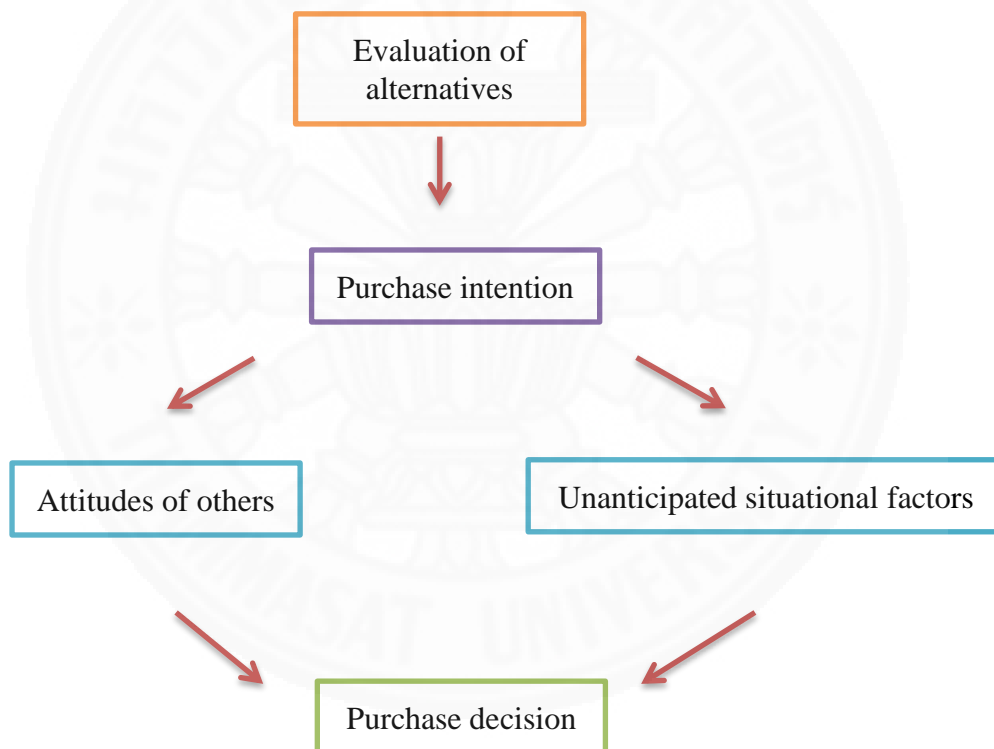


Figure 3: Steps between evaluation of alternative and purchasing decision.

Post-purchase behavior: After purchasing, the consumer will evaluate the benefit from the product or service according to his or her expectation. The consumer might have a mismatch experience from noticing, advertising, or information that supports their decision. (Kotler. 2012, p 194)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Consumer buying behavior

Moutinho (1987) wrote that consumer behavior is the process of gathering and managing information in order to direct the purchase decision and evaluation of products and services. On the other hand, some different points of view are shown by the tourist buying decision that travelers purchase services with no expectation of material and economic return. The travel decision is much more affected by outside forces. There are five major factors that affect travelers' behavior, which are personality, learning, motivation, perception, and attitudes.

Park (2007) reported that most air passengers are price-sensitive, but that service quality also affects consumer buying behavior. However, service quality is very subjective, so it can be measured from the customer perception of value. The perceived value drives consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, customer perception is the most important variable related to buying behavior and passenger satisfaction. According to this research, there are three customer perceptions that have significant effects on passenger behavior in choosing airlines, which are reputation, seat class, and usage frequency.

Airline industry customer segment

Teichert, Shehu, and von Wartburg (2008) said that in the past, airline passengers could easily be segmented into two types, which are business and economy passengers, but these two segments no longer reflect reality. Currently, the customers those same segments do not show the same demand due to the change of preference. The airline has to adapt to the updated segments of its customers in order to satisfy their needs. From this article, the customers can be segmented into five groups according to the preference for different product features, and those segments

can be shaped by attitudinal and socio demographics.

Martinez-Garcia and Royo-Vela (2010) studied the passenger segment of the low-cost airline operating in Spain. Normally, the low-cost segment is perceived as price-sensitive. It seems that passengers in this segment focus only on price; however, this research showed that many attributes result in the buying decisions of this segment; pricing strategy alone cannot satisfy them. Therefore, the low-cost airline passengers can be segmented into four groups by using price as the key element plus other key characteristics. The behavior, socio-economic factors, and occasion of the trip help to identify these segments.

Woodside, Cook, and Mindak (1987) researched the travel industry and segmented those travelers by profitability, variability, and accessibility. The research concluded that the heavy traveler is the most important segment because it creates huge profit for the concerned industries. In addition, most heavy travelers are found to be air passengers. Education, occupation, and income are variables used to distinguish the heavy air passenger segment. Moreover, the heavy airline segment was coming to be more upscale among those three variables during the studied period of time.

Consumer satisfaction

Ruyter, Bloemer, and Peeters (1996) stated that service quality and service satisfaction are related and overlap each other because both use customer judgment, which includes expectation and perception, as a key concept. This research found that service quality is the root of service satisfaction, and that the perception of service performance is the most important indicator of service quality. The company should focus on customer satisfaction as the center of its marketing concept.

Saha and Theingi (2009) reported that most successful low-cost airlines in the world not only use pricing strategy but also focus on service quality and service satisfaction. These directly influence customers' behavioral intentions (word of mouth, repurchase intention, and provision of feedback). Tangibles, schedule, ground staff, and flight staff are four aspects that passengers use to point out their overall satisfaction. The low-cost airline in Thailand has already applied this concept since three of them experienced a financial crisis due to price wars. This study also found

that improvement of flight scheduling has the most significant effect on Thai consumer satisfaction.

An and Noh (2009) said that most passengers evaluate airline performance based on the in-flight service quality, which has a direct impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. The business class passenger and the economy class passenger have different demands with respect to the level of service quality, and the main service quality factors that affect their satisfaction and loyalty are also different. This research found that the business class passenger is the most sensitive to service quality, and that this varies according to income and personal status.

As a summary of the literature, (1) the research on Thai consumers and the aviation industry in Thailand is quite limited, (2) research on air passengers usually segments them into economy class and business class, but currently most of the regional airlines have only economy class, so these two segments cannot apply to regional airlines, (3) research on consumers and the aviation industry has not quite addressed consumer behavior before choosing an airline, and (4) research on consumers and the aviation industry always focuses on in-flight service quality; however, at present, most regional airlines have reduced their in-flight service in order to cut prices. The objective of this research is to provide more information in these four areas.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

This study was conducted by using two methodologies, which were exploratory research and descriptive research:

1. Exploratory Research

This method helped to understand consumers' insights and the overall aviation industry in more detail. Consumer perception and motivation were explored in this stage in order to identify influential factors that drive consumer behavior. This research has the potential to answer the questions such as 'how?' and 'why?'. The finding was used to develop questionnaires for descriptive research. The details of the methods are described below.

1.1 Secondary Research: The objective of secondary research was to ascertain information about customer satisfaction and trends of the aviation industry from external sources that include web pages, articles in the newspapers, magazines, journals, government and trade association statistics, and books. It was conducted to understand the differences between the full service and low-cost service business models.

1.2 In-depth interview: The objective of the in-depth interview was to determine consumer perception, motivation, and key drivers for consumer behavior.

2. Descriptive Research

The purpose of this method was to provide information in a more particular scope on a larger scale of consumers after gaining the big picture and insight from exploratory research. This research has the potential to answer the questions such as 'who?', 'what?', 'when?', and 'where?'. This will be conducted by using a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire will be based on the results from the in-depth

interview and the literature review.

2.1 Questionnaire survey: The objective of this method was to identify consumer behavior, passenger segment, and consumer purchasing criteria. It also evaluated customer satisfaction for key regional airlines operating in Thailand. The data from the questionnaire surveys were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), and these calculations resulted in percentages and other statistical results.

Sampling Plan

Due to time constraints, the convenience-sampling method was used to collect information within the scheduled timeline. The details of the sample size of each methodology are provided below:

| Type of research | Methodology | Pilot test | Sample size |
|------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| | | (people) | (people) |
| 1. Qualitative | In-depth interview | 2 | 6 |
| 2. Quantitative | Questionnaire | 4 | 214 |
| Total | | 6 | 220 |

Table 1: Sampling selection

Sample Selection

Sex: Male and Female

SES: Every socioeconomic status

Age: 18-60 years

Qualification: Must have flown via regional airline operating in Thailand within the past one year.

Data Collection

1. Qualitative research (In-depth interview): The face-to-face interviews were used as a tool in this state. The interviews were arranged at convenient locations with 30-45 minutes scheduled to complete the survey, and all respondents were required to pass the qualifications.

* Details about in-depth interview questions are provided in Appendices B.

2. Quantitative research (Survey Questionnaires): The survey questionnaires were distributed via an online channel (www.surveymonkey.com). In addition, there was a screening question before answering the questionnaire survey in order to collect only respondents who satisfied the qualification. The survey questionnaire required approximately 5 minutes to complete.

* Details for the survey questionnaire are provided in Appendices C.

The demographics of all respondents are shown in Table 2:

| | Characteristic | Frequency | % |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------|
| Gender | Male | 81 | 38.0% |
| | Female | 132 | 62.0% |
| | Total | 213 | 100.0% |
| Income | Less than 20,000 baht | 16 | 7.5% |
| | 20,000-35,000 baht | 80 | 37.6% |
| | 35,001-50,000 baht | 63 | 29.6% |
| | Over 50,0000 baht | 54 | 25.3% |
| | Total | 213 | 100.0% |
| Age | 18-29 | 125 | 58.7% |
| | 30-49 | 72 | 33.8% |
| | 50-60 | 16 | 7.5% |
| | Total | 213 | 100.0% |
| Purpose of air travel | Business | 46 | 21.6% |
| | Holiday | 167 | 78.4% |
| | Total | 213 | 100.0% |

| | Characteristic | Frequency | % |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------|
| Fly frequency | 1-2 | 83 | 39.0% |
| | 3-5 | 79 | 37.0% |
| | 6-9 | 31 | 14.6% |
| | More than 10 | 20 | 9.4% |
| | Total | 213 | 100.0% |
| Buying period | Less than one week | 21 | 9.9% |
| | 1-2 week | 54 | 25.4% |
| | 3-4 week | 51 | 23.9% |
| | More than one month | 87 | 40.8% |
| | Total | 213 | 100.0% |
| Type of regional airline used | Full service | 31 | 14.5% |
| | Low cost | 89 | 41.8% |
| | Both | 93 | 43.7% |
| | Total | 213 | 100.0% |

Table 2: Respondents' demographic data

Data Analysis

1. Qualitative research

1.1 Data management: This process summarizes and displays the findings from the respondent and makes this information simple to understand.

1.2 Analysis & Conclusion: This process analyzed and summarized the data in order to use it as a guideline in designing the questionnaire. It provided ideas for the criteria and factors that affect consumer behavior and consumer satisfaction.

2. Quantitative research

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyze the data from the online survey. The result was focused on frequencies, correlations between variables, and the important statistical numbers.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative Findings

Interviews were conducted with 6 respondents aged between 27-40 years. There were 4 women and 2 men who had used regional airlines operating in Thailand in the past one year. The questions were asked based on the research objective to determine which factors motivated the respondents' behavior. It was found that there were four major factors affecting consumer behavior when choosing an airline.

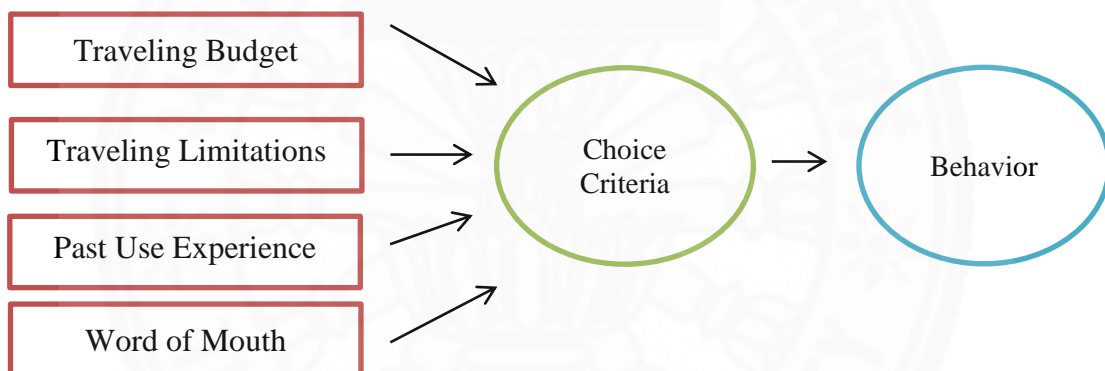


Figure 4: Factors that impact consumer behavior

Traveling budget

Most of the interviews indicated that the traveling budget was the most important factor when choosing the regional airlines. After determining their budget, transportation is the first aspect that they considered. Especially, when they chose to fly, the purchase of air tickets must be completed before planning other aspects of their travels. This behavior occurred because the airfare changed frequently. Therefore, choosing the airline was the first planning task that was considered according to the traveling budget.

“Whenever I plan a travel, air ticket is the first priority in my planning lists because the price of air ticket always cheaper once you buy it a couple months before travelling date. Hence at least two months before the traveling date, I check the ticket

price of each regional airline operators to find the best deal that fit my schedule and budget.”

Ms. Nok, 29 years old

“Even I have to travel tomorrow; I still seek for a cheapest air ticket price among airline operators because I want to maximize utility of my money”

Ms. Faa, 27 years old

Traveling Limitation

Refer to the interviews, there were other important traveling limitations in addition to the budget. The first traveling limitation was traveling date and time because every airline always uses price promotion as a key marketing tool. Airfares on weekdays are usually less expensive than airfare on weekends. Thus, the travelers who had more flexible traveling restrictions could take advantage of this promotion to choose the airline with the lowest cost. Furthermore, some companies had an agreement with allied airlines in order to get the lower price; this agreement forced business travelers to use the alliance airline only.

“I have to fly to Hong Kong twice a month for a business purpose. With a corporate a price agreement my company always buys ticket from Thai airways.”

Mr. Nick, 40 years old

“I found that promotion on weekday is cheaper than weekend for most airlines. Therefore we adjusted our travel schedule to fit with the air ticket promotion.”

Ms. Nok, 29 years old

Past Use Experience

The experience of having used airlines in the past was always mentioned by the interviewees as one of the most important factors. Bad experiences had more effect on consumer behavior than good experiences. However, this effect had less impact on heavy users. The past use experience could be divided into two groups, which were experiences from tangible and intangible causes. The examples of experiences from tangible causes involved food and beverage, seats, and airplane. On the other hand, past experiences from intangible causes were related to ground service and inflight service. Moreover, the interviewees perceived the service starting at the airport but after purchasing the ticket.

“I once flew with Air Asia the flight was rescheduled without prior notice. All passengers were upset and complain for the unnoticed. We had waited half day for the flight, it surely was an unpleasant experience we had with Air Asia. At first I promise to myself I will never fly Air Asia ever again. However during the waiting, Air Asia offered us with a complementary food, drink and discount coupon to use for the next ticket purchase. I took their complementary as an apology so; I will give them another chance to prove their service quality.”

Ms. Yui, 30 years old

“To avoid long check-in queue, I always do the check-in online and prefer to drop off my bag at the baggage drop off lane this help saving time. As a result, I will only choose the airline which provide baggage drop off service only.”

Mr. Woody, 33 years old

Word of Mouth

Most of the respondents said that they would find more information about the airline before considering using it for the first time. The most powerful influencers were members of their family and friends. In addition, they also searched for more information on the internet, and the important areas that they addressed were inflight service quality, flight delays, and lost baggage.

“Before consider to try out any new airline, I always ask my family and friends about their experience and attitude toward each specific airline. Because, I believe our taste and preference are quite similar so, if they like the service then I should do too.”

Ms. Faa, 27years old

“I do internet searching on other people experience to each specific airline; I found that such opinions has relatively positive reflect to real service experience.”

Ms. Ja, 28 years old

Quantitative Findings

Consumer purchasing criteria for choosing regional airlines operating in Thailand

According to the questionnaire survey result of 213 respondents, it was found that there were 57 respondents using full service airlines or using full service more than low-cost airlines operating in Thailand in the past one year. In contrast, there were 156 respondents using low-cost airlines or using low-cost more than full service airlines operating in Thailand in the past year. The samples were asked to rate the purchasing criteria for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand on a scale 1-5 of each criterion (1 is least important, 5 is most important). Then, t-test analysis was used to explain the results as below.

**Definition*

-On time: The regional airline departs and arrives on time as specified on the schedule.

Safety: The regional airline can provide safe service during traveling.

-Price: The total price of an air ticket is reasonable.

-Food and beverage: The quality of food and beverage that are provided during traveling. (Both in-flight and in the lounge at the airport).

-Flight schedule: The suitability of the flight schedule of the regional airline.

-Ground service: The quality of ground service, e.g. staff service quality, queue management.

-In-flight service: The quality of in-flight service except food and beverage, e.g. entertainment on board, flight attendant service quality.

-Baggage allowances: The suitable total baggage allowance.

-Loyalty program: The suitability of the rewards is given to being loyal to the regional airline.

H_0 : Full service airline users and low-cost airline users have equal importance for each criterion.

H_1 : Full service airline users and low-cost airline users have unequal importance for each criterion.

| Criteria | Mean (SD) | | t | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------|-----------------|
| | Full Service (n=57) | Low-cost (n=156) | | |
| On time | 4.33(0.78) | 4.27(0.79) | 0.47 | 0.64 |
| Safety | 4.80(0.61) | 4.62(0.73) | 1.69 | 0.09 |
| Price | 3.77(0.73) | 4.40(0.80) | -5.21 | 0.00 |
| Food and Beverage | 3.21(1.01) | 2.45(0.93) | 5.11 | 0.00 |
| Flight schedule | 4.24(0.68) | 4.19(0.85) | 0.42 | 0.67 |
| Ground service | 4.00(0.92) | 3.59(0.87) | 2.95 | 0.00 |
| In-flight service | 3.89(0.85) | 3.52(0.79) | 2.93 | 0.00 |
| Baggage allowances | 3.54(1.08) | 3.59(1.04) | -0.32 | 0.75 |
| Loyalty program | 3.05(1.07) | 2.80(1.06) | 1.49 | 0.14 |

Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis resulting between full service and low-cost users on purchasing criteria.

From table 3, there were four choosing criteria that had a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the means between these two groups, which were:

1. Price ($t = -5.21$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group with full service mean for this criterion was 3.77, and the group with low-cost mean was 4.40. Thus, price was more important to low-cost carrier users than full service carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.
2. Food and beverage ($t = 5.11$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group with full service mean for this criterion was 3.21, and the group with low-cost mean was 2.45. Thus, food and beverage were more important to full service carrier users than low-cost carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.
3. Ground service ($t = 2.95$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group with full service mean for this criterion was 4.00, and the group with low-cost mean was 3.59. Thus, ground service was more important to full service carrier users than low-cost carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.
4. In-flight service ($t = 2.93$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group with full service mean for this criterion was 3.89, and the group with low-cost mean was 3.52. Thus, in-flight service was more important to full service carrier users than low-cost carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.

Furthermore, the questionnaire survey results of 213 respondents also found that there were 31 respondents using only full service airlines operating in Thailand in the past one year. In contrast, there were 89 respondents using only low-cost airlines operating in Thailand in the past year. The samples were asked to rate the purchasing criteria for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand on a scale of 1-5 for each criterion (1 is least important, 5 is most important). Then, t-test analysis was used to explain the results as presented below.

H_0 : Users of exclusively full service airlines and users of exclusively low-cost airlines have equal importance for each criterion.

H_1 : Users of exclusively full service airlines and users of exclusively low-cost airlines have unequal importance for each criterion.

| Criteria | Mean (SD) | | t | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| | Full Service Only (n=31) | Low-Cost Only (n=89) | | |
| On time | 4.32(0.83) | 4.14(0.89) | 0.96 | 0.34 |
| Safety | 4.70(0.78) | 4.51(0.88) | 1.08 | 0.28 |
| Price | 3.80(0.74) | 4.35(0.89) | -3.08 | 0.00 |
| Food and Beverage | 3.61(0.71) | 2.53(0.93) | 5.85 | 0.00 |
| Flight schedule | 4.00(0.73) | 4.12(0.98) | -0.64 | 0.52 |
| Ground service | 4.09(0.90) | 3.51(0.95) | 2.95 | 0.00 |
| In-flight service | 4.12(0.80) | 3.33(0.82) | 4.63 | 0.00 |
| Baggage allowances | 3.67(0.79) | 3.46(1.04) | 1.05 | 0.29 |
| Loyalty program | 3.41(0.92) | 2.77(0.99) | 3.16 | 0.00 |

Table 4: Summary of t-test results between only full service and only low-cost users on purchasing criteria.

From table 4, there were five choosing criteria that had a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in means between the two groups, which were:

1. Price ($t = -3.08$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group of full service only mean for this criterion was 3.80, and the group of low-cost only mean was 4.35. Thus, price

was more important to exclusively low-cost carrier users than to exclusively full service carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.

2. Food and beverage ($t = 5.85$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group of full service only mean for this criterion was 3.61, and the group of low-cost only mean was 2.53. Thus, food and beverage were more important to exclusively full service carrier users than to exclusively low-cost carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.
3. Ground service ($t = 2.95$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group of full service only mean for this criterion was 4.09, and the group of low-cost only mean was 3.51. Thus, ground service was more important to exclusively full service carrier users than to exclusively low-cost carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.
4. In-flight service ($t = 4.63$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group of full service only mean for this criterion was 4.12, and the group of low-cost only mean was 3.33. Thus, in-flight service was more important to exclusively full service carrier users than to exclusively low-cost carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.
5. Loyalty program ($t = 3.16$, $p = 0.00$, two tail): The group of full service only mean for this criterion was 3.41, and the group of low-cost only mean was 2.77. Thus, loyalty program was more important to exclusively full service carrier users than to exclusively low-cost carrier users for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand.

Customer satisfaction between two types of regional airline services operating in Thailand

According to the questionnaire survey result of 213 respondents, there were 31 respondents using only full service airlines operating in Thailand in the past one year. In contrast, there were 89 respondents using only low-cost airline operating in Thailand in the past year, and 93 respondents used both of them. The respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction score for a regional airline operating in Thailand on a scale of 1-5 for each attribute and for overall satisfaction (1 is the lowest score,

and 5 is the highest). Then, t-test analysis and correlation analysis were used to explain the results as presented below.

Full service carrier

H_0 : Full service airline users and low-cost airline users have equal satisfaction for each attribute.

H_1 : Full service airline users and low-cost airline users have not equal satisfaction for each attribute.

| Attributes | Mean (SD) | | t | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|-------|-----------------|
| | Full Service only (n=31) | Both Full Service and Low Cost (n=93) | | |
| On time | 4.10(0.98) | 4.24(0.67) | -0.89 | 0.37 |
| Safety | 4.52(0.89) | 4.51(0.60) | 0.08 | 0.94 |
| Price | 3.48(0.77) | 3.66(0.91) | -0.94 | 0.35 |
| Food and Beverage | 3.52(1.18) | 3.68(1.05) | -0.72 | 0.48 |
| Flight schedule | 3.87(0.72) | 3.97(0.76) | -0.62 | 0.53 |
| Ground service | 3.93(0.89) | 3.86(0.76) | 0.46 | 0.65 |
| In-flight service | 4.06(0.93) | 3.88(0.83) | 1.03 | 0.31 |
| Baggage allowances | 3.71(0.78) | 3.94(0.86) | -1.30 | 0.20 |
| Loyalty program | 3.23(0.76) | 3.30(1.03) | -0.37 | 0.71 |
| Overall satisfaction | 3.77(0.62) | 3.91(0.54) | -1.20 | 0.23 |

Table 5: Summary of t-test analysis results between full service and low-cost users on satisfaction attributes

Referring to table 5, there were 31 respondents using only full service airlines operating in Thailand in the past one year. In contrast, there were 93 respondents using both full service airlines and low-cost airlines operating in Thailand in the past year. The result from the t-test analysis showed that there was not a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in mean between those two groups for each attribute and for overall satisfaction, as well. Therefore, both groups had equal satisfaction for those nine attributes and for overall satisfaction with the performance of full service airlines operating in Thailand.

| Attributes | n | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------------|-----|---------------------|-----------------|
| On time | 124 | 0.40** | 0.00 |
| Safety | 124 | 0.33** | 0.00 |
| Price | 124 | 0.35** | 0.00 |
| Food and Beverage | 124 | 0.49** | 0.00 |
| Flight schedule | 124 | 0.20* | 0.03 |
| Ground service | 124 | 0.42** | 0.00 |
| In-flight service | 124 | 0.45** | 0.00 |
| Baggage allowances | 124 | 0.40** | 0.00 |
| Loyalty program | 124 | 0.10 | 0.39 |

Table 6: Summary of correlation analysis results between each attribute and overall satisfaction for full service airline.

In addition, table 6 reports the correlation between overall satisfaction with full service carriers operating in Thailand and nine attributes. Eight attributes had a significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) with the overall satisfaction, which were food and beverage, in-flight service, ground service, on time, baggage allowances, price safety, and flight schedule, respectively sorted from high to low importance.

Low-cost carrier

H_0 : Users of exclusively full service airlines and users of exclusively low-cost airlines have equal satisfaction for each attribute.

H_1 : Users of exclusively full service airlines and users of exclusively low-cost airlines have unequal satisfaction for each attribute.

| Attributes | Mean (SD) | | t | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---|------|-----------------|
| | Low-Cost only (n=89) | Both Full Service and Low-Cost (n=93) | | |
| On time | 4.11(0.65) | 3.63(0.83) | 4.32 | 0.00 |
| Safety | 4.37(0.65) | 3.95(0.76) | 4.06 | 0.00 |
| Price | 4.26(0.65) | 4.24(0.80) | 0.20 | 0.84 |
| Food and Beverage | 2.83(0.79) | 2.73(1.01) | 0.74 | 0.46 |
| Flight schedule | 3.99(0.85) | 3.73(0.81) | 2.10 | 0.04 |
| Ground service | 3.49(0.80) | 3.38(0.78) | 1.01 | 0.31 |
| In-flight service | 3.51(0.68) | 3.38(0.87) | 1.12 | 0.27 |
| Baggage allowances | 3.37(1.00) | 3.13(1.10) | 1.55 | 0.12 |
| Loyalty program | 2.92(0.89) | 2.52(1.03) | 2.83 | 0.01 |
| Overall satisfaction | 3.66(0.54) | 3.62(0.61) | 0.41 | 0.68 |

Table 7: Summary of t-test analysis results between exclusively full service and exclusively low-cost users on satisfaction attributes

Referring to table 7, there were 89 respondents using only full service airlines operating in Thailand in the past one year. On the other hand, there were 93 respondents using both full service airlines and low-cost airlines operating in Thailand in the past year. The result from t-test analysis showed that there was not a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in means between those two groups with respect to overall satisfaction. However, four attributes showed a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in means between those two groups, which were:

1. On time ($t = 4.32$, $p = 0.00$): The group of low-cost only mean for this attribute was 4.11, whereas the group of both full service and low-cost mean was 3.63. Thus, the on time attribute that was provided by low-cost airlines operating in Thailand could satisfy exclusively low-cost airline users more than users of both full service and low-cost airlines.

2. Safety ($t = 4.06$, $p = 0.00$): The group of low-cost only mean for this attribute was 4.37, whereas the group of both full service and low-cost mean was 3.95. Thus, the safety that was provided by low-cost airlines operating in Thailand could satisfy exclusively low-cost airline users more than users of both full service and low-cost airlines.

3. Flight schedule ($t = 2.10$, $p = 0.04$): The group of low-cost only mean for this attribute was 3.99, while the group of both full service and low-cost mean was 3.73. Thus, the flight schedule that was provided by low-cost airlines operating in Thailand could satisfy exclusively low-cost airline users more than users of both full service and low-cost airlines.

4. Loyalty program ($t = 2.83$, $p = 0.01$): The group of low-cost only mean for this attribute was 2.92, whereas the group of both full service and low-cost mean was 2.52. Thus, the loyalty program that was provided by low-cost airlines operating in Thailand could satisfy exclusively low-cost airline users more than users of both full service and low-cost airlines.

| Attributes | n | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------------|-----|---------------------|-----------------|
| On time | 181 | 0.41** | 0.00 |
| Safety | 181 | 0.38** | 0.00 |
| Price | 181 | 0.32** | 0.00 |
| Food and Beverage | 181 | 0.48** | 0.00 |
| Flight schedule | 181 | 0.35** | 0.00 |
| Ground service | 181 | 0.37** | 0.00 |
| In-flight service | 181 | 0.29** | 0.00 |
| Baggage allowances | 181 | 0.45** | 0.00 |
| Loyalty program | 181 | 0.35** | 0.00 |

Table 8: Summary of correlation analysis results between each attribute and overall satisfaction for low-cost airlines.

Table 8 presents the correlation between overall satisfaction of low-cost carriers operating in Thailand and nine attributes. All attributes had a significant ($p < 0.0$) correlation with the overall satisfaction which were food and beverage, baggage allowances, on time, safety, ground service, loyalty program, flight schedule, and in-flight service, respectively sorted from high to low importance.

Customer segmentation

According to the results from 213 respondents, they could be divided into 5 segments by their purchasing criteria, and the hierarchical cluster method was used as a tool for analysis. However, there was one segment that had four respondents considered as outliers. Thus, there were four valid segments, which are shown in Figure 5.

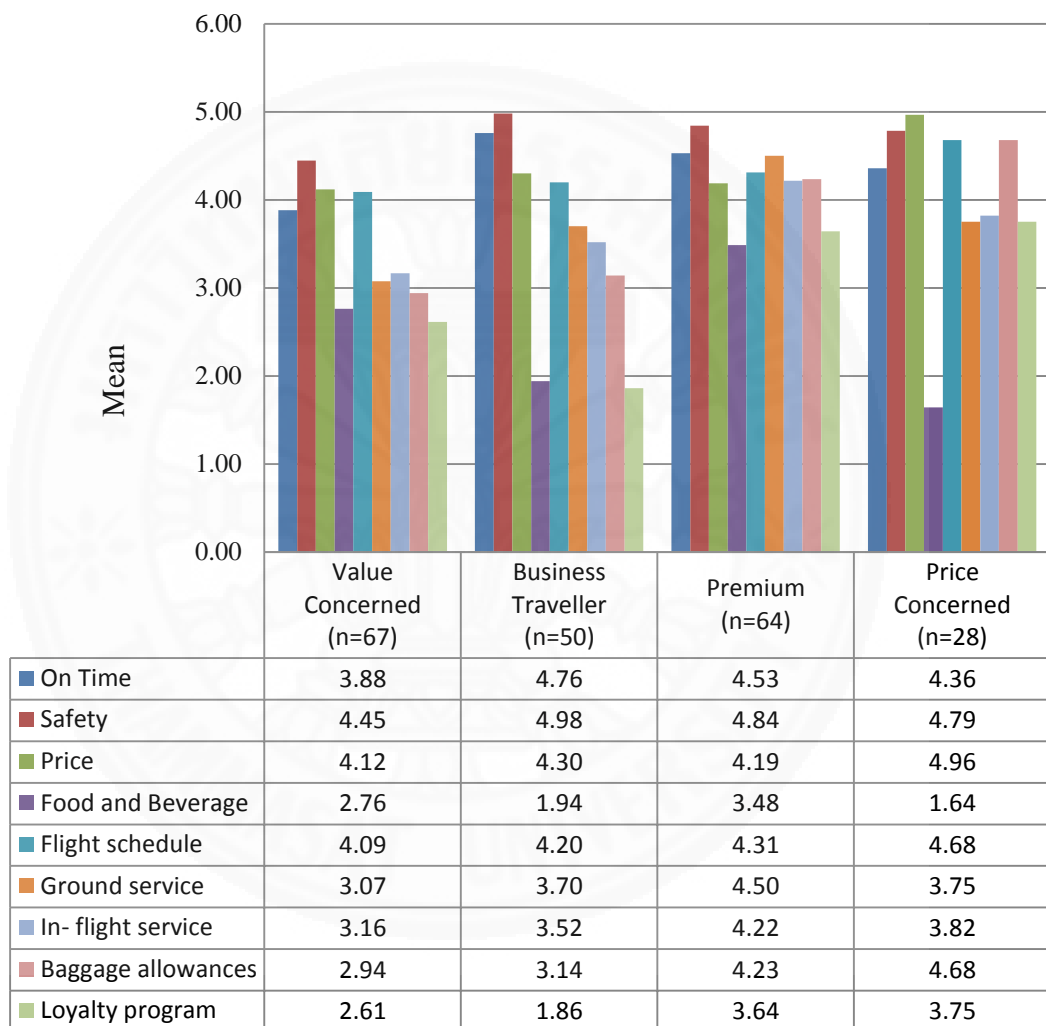


Figure 5: Customer segment based on purchasing criteria

Value-concerned segment: This segment was the largest segment (n=67), and the top three concerned criteria were safety, price, and schedule, respectively. On the other hand, loyalty program, food and beverage, and baggage allowance were the three lowest criteria concerned. This segment did not emphasize any criteria;

moreover, their mean was lowest in almost all criteria except food and beverage, and loyalty.

Business traveler segment: The top three criteria concerned in this segment were safety, on time, and price. The lowest criteria concerned were loyalty program, food and beverage, and baggage allowances. The mean of loyalty program was the lowest among these four segments. Generally, the mean of each criterion was not different from the value segment, but this segment had the highest concern with being on time and with safety criteria.

Premium segment: This segment was the second largest among the four segments (n=64), and this segment emphasized every criterion nearly equally. The top three criteria concerned were safety, being on time, and ground service. In contrast, food and beverage loyalty program and price had the lowest mean for this segment. This segment focused on service quality as well as food and beverage, but did not place much emphasis on price. Although the price criterion mean was not the lowest mean for this segment, the price mean of this segment was the lowest among these four segments.

Price concerned: This was the smallest segment. The top three criteria concerned in this segment were price, safety, and the same number for flight schedule and baggage allowances. On the other hand, food and beverage, ground service, and price had the lowest mean. In fact, this segment had the highest mean comparing among every segment in three criteria which were price, flight schedule, and loyalty. Thus, this segment was quite focused on traveling to the destination with reasonable price more than being concerned with service.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

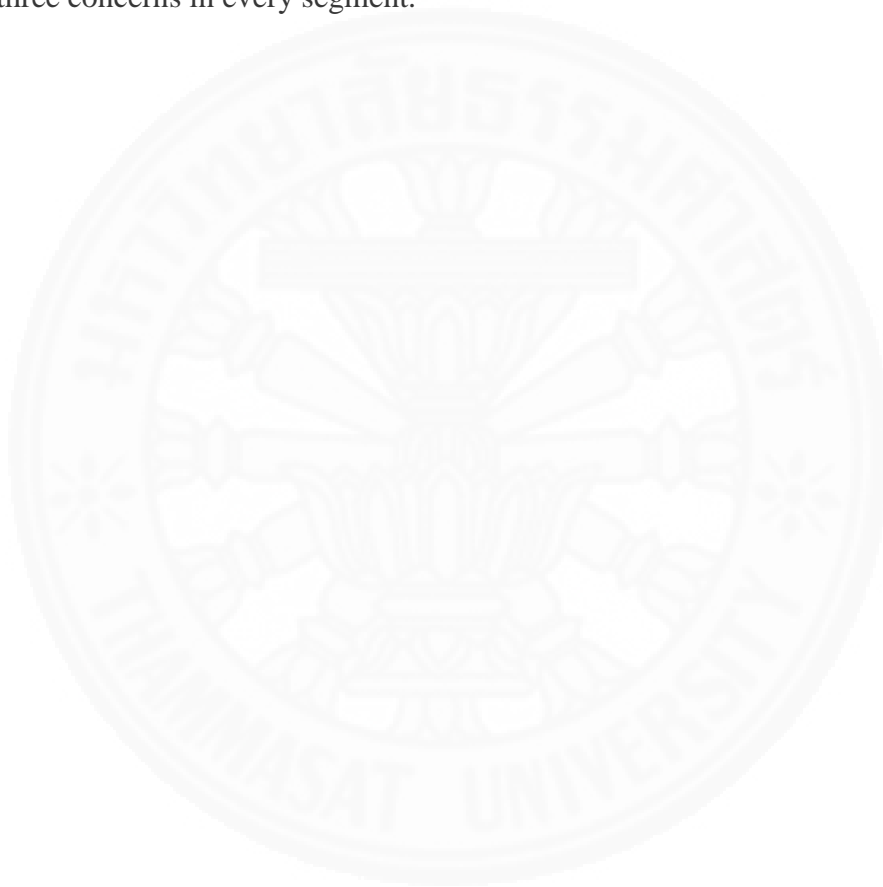
The behaviors of regional air passengers in Thailand are motivated by four major factors, which are traveling budget, traveling limitations, past use experience, and word of mouth. Their behavior directly affects the regional airline choosing criteria. There are nine main purchasing criteria for choosing a regional airline operating in Thailand, which are being on time, safety, price, food and beverage, flight schedule, ground service, baggage allowances, and loyalty program.

From these nine main purchasing criteria for choosing an airline operating in Thailand, four of them have significantly different importance between full service airline users and low-cost airline users. Food and beverage as well as in-flight service are more important to full service users than to low-cost users, but price and ground service are more important to low-cost users than to full service users. On the other hand, five of those nine main purchasing criteria have a significantly different importance between exclusively full service users and exclusively low-cost users. Only price is more important to exclusively low-cost users than to exclusively full service users, but food and beverage, ground service, in-flight service, and loyalty program are more important to exclusively full service users than to exclusively low-cost users.

Furthermore, the customer satisfaction between exclusively full service users and users of both full service and low-cost airlines is not significantly different among those nine attributes and the overall performance of full service carrier. In fact, food and beverage relate to the overall satisfaction of full service airlines the most, whereas flight schedule has the lowest relation. In contrast, four attributes have a significantly different satisfaction level between exclusively low-cost users and users of both service types. Exclusively low-cost users are satisfied with respect to time, safety, flight schedule, and loyalty program that are provided by low-cost carriers more than users of both full service and low-cost airlines. In addition, food and beverage relate

to the overall satisfaction with low-cost airlines the most, which is the same as full service airlines, but in-flight service has the lowest relation.

Lastly, air passengers of regional airlines operating in Thailand can be divided into four segments by their purchasing criteria. There are value-concerned, business travelers, premium, and price-concerned. The value-concerned is the largest segment, and the smallest segment is the price-concerned segment. Only safety remains in the top three concerns in every segment.



CHAPTER 6

LIMITATIONS

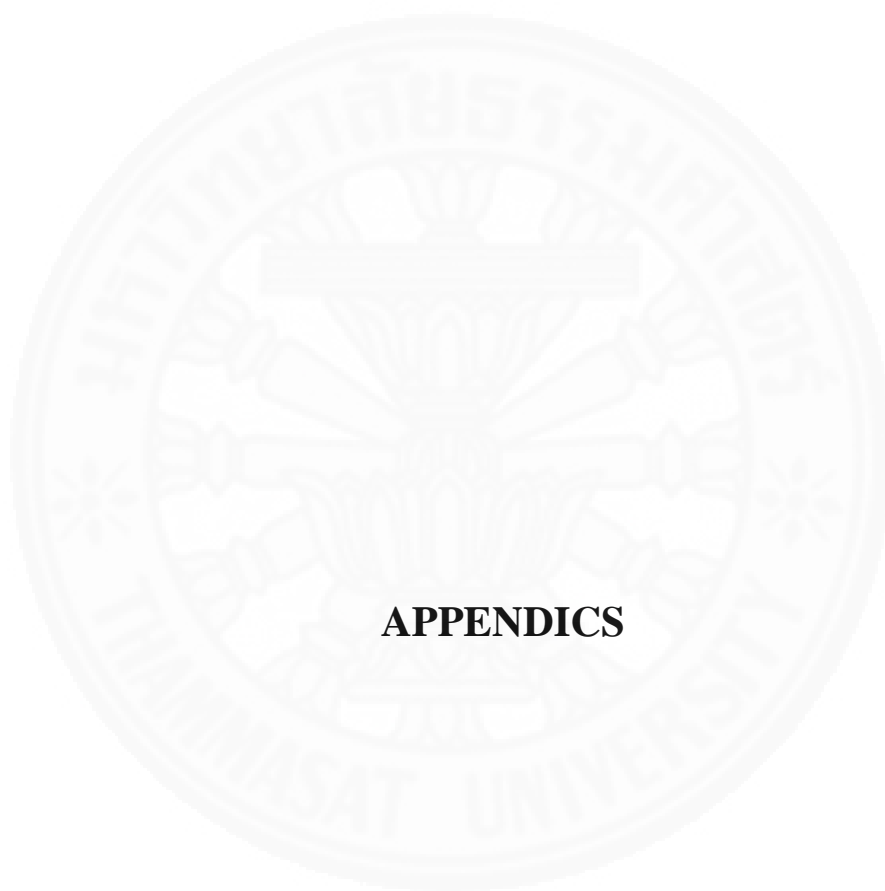
This study had several acknowledged limitations. First, even though the sample size was over the minimum suggested sample size, the results from the questionnaire survey would become more precise had a larger sample size been used. Second, some of the choosing criteria for regional airlines that were used in this research were obtained from the in-depth interview results. Thus, changing of the in-depth interview respondents might have yielded different choosing criteria. Lastly, evaluating customer satisfaction between the full service airline category and the low-cost airline category might not be accurately representing the performance of all of the players in each category. The customer might have a different experience with each airline, even if some airlines were grouped in the same category. Further study should evaluate customer satisfaction for each brand in order to obtain more precise results.

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APPENDICS

APPENDIX A

AVIATION CATEGORY

1. Type of aviation business

The aviation business can be classified into 3 types.

1. Classified by the ownership

1.1 State air carriers

1.2 Private air carriers

2. Classified by the scope of service

2.1 Domestic air carriers

2.2 International air carriers

3. Classified by type of service

3.1 Scheduled air carriers

3.1.1 Long haul air carriers

3.1.2 Regional air carriers (short haul carries)

3.2 Non-scheduled air carriers

3.2.1 Charter service air carriers

3.2.2 Air taxi service air carriers

2. What is the most frequent purpose of your air travel in the past one year?

- a) Business b) Holiday

3. In the past one year, how many times did you fly regional airlines operating in Thailand?

- a) 1-2 b) 3-5 c) 6-9 d) More than 10

4. How long in advance do you usually buy your ticket before traveling?

- a) Less than one week
 b) One or two weeks
 c) Three or four weeks
 d) More than one month

5. Which service type of regional airline do you usually fly?

- a) Full service b) Low cost

6. Please rate the following purchasing criteria in your selecting a regional airline operating on a scale 1-5 (1 is least important, 5 is most important)

| Purchasing Criteria | Least Important | | | | Most Important |
|---------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| On time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Safety | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Price | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Food and Beverage | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Flight schedule | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ground service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In- flight service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Baggage allowances | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Loyalty program | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. Which types of regional airline operating in Thailand have you ever use in the past one year?

- a) Full service (Skip Q.8 and Q.10)
- b) Low cost (Skip Q.7 and Q.9)
- c) Both of them

8. Please score the following attributes for choosing a full service regional airline like Bangkok Airways or Thai Smile (1 is Lowest Score, 5 is Highest Score).

| Attributes | Lowest Score | | | | Highest Score |
|--------------------|--------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| On time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Safety | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Price | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Food and Beverage | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Flight schedule | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ground service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In- flight service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Baggage allowances | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Loyalty program | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9. Please score the following attributes in choosing a low cost regional airline like Thai AirAsia or Nok Air (1 is Lowest Score, 5 is Highest Score).

| Attributes | Lowest Score | | | | Highest Score |
|--------------------|--------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| On time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Safety | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Price | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Food and Beverage | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Flight schedule | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ground service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In- flight service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Baggage allowances | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Loyalty program | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10. Please score your overall satisfaction for a full service regional airline like Bangkok Airways or Thai Smile in the space below. (1 is Lowest Score, 5 is Highest Score)

_____ Overall satisfaction with a full service regional airline

11. Please score your overall satisfaction for a low cost regional airline like Thai AirAsia or Nok Air in the space below. (1 is Lowest Score, 5 is Highest Score)

_____ Overall satisfaction with a low cost regional airline

12. What is your gender?

- a) Male b) Female

13. What range of monthly salary you fall into?

- a) Less than 20,000 Baht
b) 20,001-35,000 Baht
c) 35,001-50,000 Baht
d) Over 50,000 Baht

14. What is your age range (years old)?

- a) Under 18 b) 18-29 c) 30-49 d) 50-60 e) Over 60

BIOGRAPHY

| | |
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