



**A STUDY ON SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION: A COMPARISON BETWEEN
A PREMIUM AIRLINE AND
A LOW-COST LONG-HAUL AIRLINE**

BY

MR. WITTAWAT WONGSUWAN

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH FOR CAREERS
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
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ENTITLED

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ABSTRACT

The airlines business in Thailand has become a major segment in the tourism industry that significantly affects the economic development of the nation. The market has been more challenging and competitive; therefore, every airline sets goals to improve service quality to increase customer satisfaction. To better understand the customer insights, this study aims firstly to analyze the demographic factors influencing customers behavior when choosing the airline, secondly, to explore the customer satisfaction level towards the service quality of a premium airline compared to a low-cost long-haul airline and eventually, to examine the most important factor affecting customer decisions when choosing the airline. The subjects were 90 passengers of a premium airline (THAI Airways) and a low-cost long-haul airline (Thai AirAsia X) travelling to/from Tokyo (Narita), Japan. Survey questionnaires were employed as an instrument comprised of four parts; participants' demographic background, customer satisfaction towards the airlines' services, the important factors affecting customer decisions when choosing the airline and comments and suggestions. The study was conducted by purposive sampling method both at airports and during flights from March to April, 2016. The findings were presented by descriptive statistics in forms of frequency, percentage and mean. The results revealed

that THAI Airways' passengers were most satisfied with quality and taste of food and beverages as well as language and communication skill of cabin attendants. Furthermore, excellent service was the most important factor to fly with THAI. On the other hand, Thai AirAsia X passengers were most satisfied with cleanliness of cabin and lavatory and safety awareness of cabin attendants, meanwhile, attractive sales promotions or discounts most encouraged passengers to fly with Thai AirAsia X. The findings of this study will be useful for the management to better understand customers for improving strategies to achieve the highest customer satisfaction level and sustainably compete with other airlines in this challenging time.

Keywords: Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Airline Business,
THAI Airways, Thai AirAsia X



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Mr. Wittawat Wongsuwan



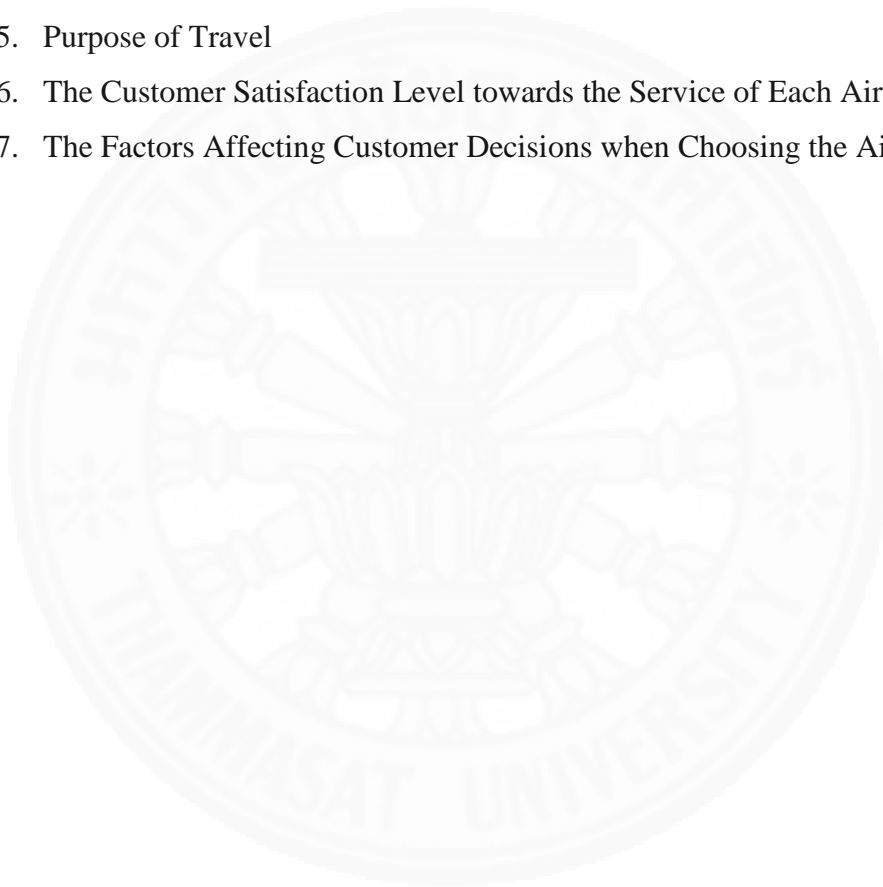
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Thailand's aviation industry has currently become one of the most important segments in the economic development of the nation especially in the tourism industry. It mainly consists of **THAI Airways International (THAI)** that provides premium or full services, other regional airlines and low-cost airlines. THAI is operated with a hundred of aircraft of several types by approximately 20,000 employees, with flights to domestic as well as to international destinations covering five continents around the world.

Since 2002, low-cost carriers joined the market after Thailand's airline industry was opened. Consequently, there are many new emerging low-cost airlines in Thailand nowadays. As Thailand's national flag carrier, THAI need to raise the customer satisfaction level and overcome other competitors, not by decreasing ticket price, but by improving high-quality services. Moreover, comparison with the main low-cost competitor - **Thai AirAsia X (TAAX)**, which extended their routes to be a long-haul low-cost carrier to Thai's most favorite destinations namely Japan, South Korea, and China, is the next step to build stronger strategies.

This study focuses on the specific route that is to/from Tokyo, Japan (Narita Airport: NRT) known as the golden route for most airlines in Thailand. According to statistics from Japan National Tourism Authority (JNTO), the number of Thai tourists travelling to Japan has increased to 28.1 per cent or, in total, 800,000 people in 2015. This is the highest record in these three consecutive years since 2013 resulting from the visa application exemption policy and tourism promotional campaigns throughout the year. Likewise, the number of Japanese tourists travelling to Thailand has increased to 14.97 per cent (year-on-year) and they are in the third rank of foreign tourists in our country after Chinese and Malaysians, respectively.

In the past decade, Thailand's aviation industry market has been more challenging and competitive; many airlines set a goal to improve the service quality to increase customer satisfaction. Gitman and McDaniel (2005) stated that customer

satisfaction is a key performance indicator in the business and determines how successful the company is. Importantly, it is a measurement of how a product or service meets or surpasses customer expectations. Service quality is a customer's overall impression of the organization and its services. The most significant step to define is to understand what customers actually need and deliver high-quality services.

Thus, the outcomes from this study will help the management to improve the service quality provided to their passengers and develop to achieve their highest customer satisfaction level.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.2.1 What are the demographic factors influencing customer behavior when choosing the airline?

1.2.2 What is the customer satisfaction level towards the service quality of a premium airline compared to a low-cost long-haul airline?

1.2.3 What is the most important factor affecting customer decisions when choosing an airline?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 To analyze the demographic factors influencing customer behavior when choosing the airline.

1.3.2 To explore the customer satisfaction level towards the service quality of a premium airline compared to a low-cost long-haul airline.

1.3.3 To examine the most important factor affecting customer decisions when choosing an airline.

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.4.1 **Premium airline** refers to “*THAI Airways International*” which is generally known as a full-service airline providing a checked bag allowance, an allocated seat, a meal and beverage service as well as an in-flight entertainment.

1.4.2 **Low-cost long-haul airline** refers to “*Thai AirAsia X*” which is a low-cost carrier that operates longer flights of more than four hours. Moreover, it is known as a budget or discount airline with lower ticket fares, limited comforts and extra charges for food, baggage allowance, seat selection, etc.

1.4.3 **Service Quality** is a customer's perception of services provided by airline companies.

1.4.4 **Customer Satisfaction** is a measurement of how a product or service meets or surpasses customer expectations.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this study will help THAI's management and stakeholders to know overall aspects of their service delivery as well as the customer satisfaction level. Furthermore, this is a comparison study with Thai AirAia X, thus the results will lead to the adjustment of service, monitoring and developing to achieve the highest customer satisfaction level and sustainably compete with other airline companies in this challenging time.

The rest of the paper is arranged as follows. The second chapter explains related studies, concepts and theories about service marketing and customer satisfaction. The third chapter describes the methodology and the analysis of the data, whereas the fourth presents the results. The last chapter draws some conclusions, explains the limitations of this research and makes proposals for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature in four main parts together with a summary: (1) Theory and Concept of Customer Satisfaction (2) Concept of Service Quality (3) Theory of Service Marketing Mix – 7P's (4) Relevant Research and (5) Summary.

2.1 THEORY AND CONCEPT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Many researchers have revealed that the rapid change of the business environment makes customer satisfaction a significant issue for marketing practitioners. Reid and Bojavic (2001) stated that customer satisfaction is the highest goal for every business. It should be a top priority for working in the service industry to build their strong strategies and generate repeat purchases, brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

There are important factors to basically generate the desire for goods or services that are “**Needs**” and “**Wants**”.

Harris (1996) stated that needs are personal requirements. **Needs** are divided into two types. The first one is **primary needs** - some needs are instinctive such as the need for air and food and the other is **secondary needs** - needs that can be learned such as what someone will enjoy eating or does not care for a specific food.

Wants are things or experiences that are desired. Individuals commonly desire what they do not really need. However, needs and wants are both motivational.

Customers want good services from the airline they choose. They anticipate getting a high quality of service both on the ground and on board. They will repeatedly use that airline if their experience matches their expectations.

For airlines, customer satisfaction is triggered when an airline's services consistently meet or surpass expectations and are perceived by passengers as contributing to a good reputation and a quality image.

2.2 CONCEPT OF SERVICE QUALITY

Another critical dimension is about service quality, Leonard and Sasser (1982) said service quality has become a major area during the past two decades. It impacts business performance and higher profit. Furthermore, Lewis (1989) stated that service quality is seen as an important aspect of competitiveness and a significant issue in the service industry. Zahari et al (2008) claimed that both the public and private sectors, in business and service industries, should consider the service quality as an important subject of development.

There are five dimensions of service quality according to Gabbott (2006) called **RATER**.

2.2.1 Reliability is an accurate ability to perform the service. For instance, passengers can get through the check-in process efficiently, the airlines operate flights on time as scheduled and offer the right service since the first time.

2.2.2 Assurance is credible and secured services are performed by skillful and knowledgeable personnel with competence and courtesy.

2.2.3 Tangible is an appearance of service equipment, physical facilities and personnel, namely cleanliness of service areas, staff grooming and the appropriate environment such as lounge decoration, seats and on-board facilities.

2.2.4 Empathy is an effective communication and understanding of every dimension such as signage, direction boards, information leaflets, instructions and especially people management.

2.2.5 Responsiveness is a willingness to assist customers and ability to ensure that customers remain involved in every enquiry.

2.3 THEORY OF SERVICE MARKETING MIX – 7P's

Marketing mix is an effort created by a management team to enhance the number of activities such as communication or sales promotion, pricing, and providing the service (Hartono, B. 2010). One of the most practical marketing strategies is 4Ps which are Product, Price, Place, and Promotion created by the American Professor of Marketing Jerome McCarthy (1960). Meanwhile, Bernard

and Bitner (1981) have developed the traditional marketing mix (4Ps) into a further services marketing mix called 7P's model which adds another 3 Ps: People, Physical Evidence and Process. These can highlight the purchasing needs, customer satisfaction and experience and also determine the success as well as the existence of a service company. All components will be illustrated as follows.

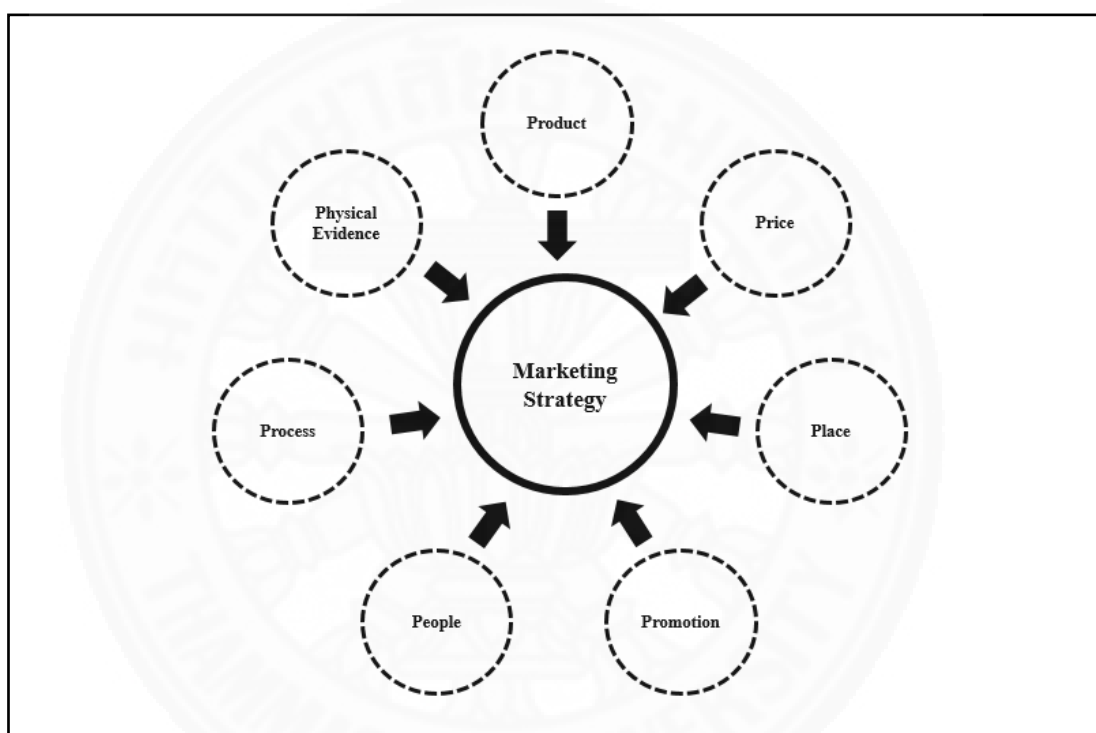


Figure 1: *Service Marketing Mix "7 P's model"*

Adapted from Jonathan Ivy, (2008). *A new higher education marketing mix: the 7Ps for MBA marketing*, International Journal of Educational Management, Vol. 22 Iss: 4, pp.288

2.3.1 Product

Armstrong and Kotler (2006) defined that product in the service marketing mix is intangible in nature and produced in a specific volume of units on a large scale. Importantly, service products are heterogeneous, perishable and cannot be owned. While, Borden (1984) stated that products are characterized by brand name, quality, design, size, attributes and features. For the airline business, product means the services provided by the companies.

2.3.2 Price

It means the price that customers pay for a service or product at a price set by various factors such as material costs, market share, product identity, labor and overhead costs (Booms and Bitner, 1981). It may change depending on market developments. The most important measurement of repurchase intentions is the price (Oh, 2000; Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000). The price for the airlines is a ticket price that includes all costs and margin.

2.3.3 Place

According to Booms and Bitner (1981), place means where the service product going to be sold, distributed or be available for the customers. The company should pay attention to the place so that it can transfer or deliver the product or service at the right place and time (Copley, 2004). Sometimes it is called a marketing channel which actually is the airport of each city or country.

2.3.4 Promotion

Promotion refers to sales promotion or discount, advertising, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing (Borden, 1984). It has become a critical factor in the service industry especially airlines business because it can generate the popularity of the product in the marketplace that reflects the ticket price of the airline (Lovelock and Wright, 2002).

2.3.5 People

Hartline and Ferrell (1996) said that the personnel factor or people refers to the company employees who produce and deliver the service to customers.

While, Armstrong and Kotler (2006) claimed that they are the service providers that transfer a physical service into a visible result. They are the front line of the organization to transfer quality into a service. For the airline industry, the people are cabin crew, ground staff and customer service call center workers, etc. It is very significant in service companies because there are various variables relating to the performance of the customer contact employee. These will lead to efficient service delivery (Mankongvanichkul, 2010).

2.3.6 Process

The process is a significant factor within the whole service marketing mix (Booms and Bitner, 1981). The component of process can be procedure and all activities in which the related persons play an important role. Moreover, Hirankitti et al (2009) said that the process and the skill or expertise of the service staff are obvious to the customer and it creates the core of satisfaction with the purchase such as online booking, online check-in, call center and staff handling skill.

2.3.7 Physical Evidence

According to Mittal (2001), physical evidence refers to the environment where a service comes from or in which the services production is in. It is where an interaction between customers and a company's staff occurs. A good example is an airline; the lounge and cabin interior decoration and design, lighting and furnishings, staff grooming and appearance and also the attitudes of the company's employees can affect the service quality and, importantly, the customer experience. In addition, the physical evidence is seen as a visual metaphor of what the company represents, what services the company facilitates and the relations between customers and service providers (Rathmell, 1974).

In conclusion, the 7 Ps components are part of the service marketing mix that indicate the existence and success of each company. They can actually generate the purchasing needs, customer satisfaction and experience (Kotler et al, 1999). As for the service providers, customer feedback and quality are always the most important criteria to serve their best to customers, retain user rates and develop the essential processes of their service.

After review, three related theories and concepts contribute to the concrete idea of this study. To make the research generalizable and efficient, they should be applied with the following relevant researches.

2.4 RELEVANT RESEARCH

There are many interesting studies about service quality and customer satisfaction from various countries and different market environments globally that would be advantageous to create guidelines and further develop this study of the airline business in Thailand.

Firstly, Archana and Subha (2012) studied service quality influences on passengers' satisfaction in air transportation in India. The study investigated which dimensions, as perceived by airline passengers, had a positive influence on service quality and also had the least or most important impact on service quality in international air transport. The results suggested that there were different influences including in-flight services, in-flight entertainment facilities and airline back-office operations.

Moreover, Khan (2014) researched how the five dimensions of customer satisfaction are applied in the airline industry. The proposition was airlines with satisfied customers will have more passengers. All customers were satisfied by a respected airline which the passengers traveled with again resulting in not only increased traffic but also the good will of company.

In contrast, Baker (2013) studied customer satisfaction and service quality in the airline business comparing between legacy airlines (full-service airline) and low-cost airlines in the U.S. which revealed that the service quality of low-cost airlines was perceived to be higher than that of legacy airlines. The results reflected their customer service operating costs, market share and infrastructure.

2.5 SUMMARY

In conclusion, customer satisfaction has become an essential issue for service industries especially for the airlines business since it results in brand loyalty, repeat

purchases and positive word-of-mouth. It should be a top priority to build strong marketing strategies. To combine a critical dimension of service quality called **RATER** which are Reliability, Assurance, Tangible, Empathy and Responsiveness, will impact the front-line or core business performance that customers can feel and realize contributing to higher income and profit of the companies in the long term.

In fact, the original marketing mix or 4Ps model developed by McCarthy (1960) does not really relate to services marketing but was extended by Booms and Bitner (1981) who created 7Ps by adding People, Process and Physical Evidence to that 4Ps. Thus, they can influence purchasing needs, customer satisfaction and customer experience and precisely determine the success of the service companies.

The review of theory and concepts of customer satisfaction, concepts of service quality, theory of service marketing mix – 7Ps and certain previous research studies have found a significant role for service quality and customer satisfaction that impacts the airline business. Therefore, the literature reviews from all relevant research studies in this study paved the way to create a more valid questionnaire with different topics to answer the two questions in the research objectives. The next chapter concerns the methodology used in this study. The methodology describes the subjects, the materials, the procedures that were used for the data collection and the data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains: (1) Participants, (2) Research Instrument and (3) Data Analysis.

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

The sample of the study was 90 people in total of both Thai and foreign passengers that were separated into two groups: 45 THAI Airways' passengers and the other 45 passengers were from Thai AirAsia X. The study was conducted both on the ground (at the airports) and on board (during the flights). All participants must be passengers who were travelling to/from Tokyo, Japan (Narita Airport: NRT), in economy class only, in order to compare the same elements of these two airlines. The structured questionnaires were used for data collection and distributed by the purposive sampling method.

3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The research instrument was a survey questionnaire divided into four parts:

Part I: Demographic Information

This part was designed using closed-ended questions based on the demographic record of each participant regarding general information namely gender, age, occupation, income and purpose of travel.

Part II: The Customer Satisfaction towards the Airlines' Services

The questionnaire was composed of closed-ended questions asking about satisfaction in these two main areas;

- 1) In-flight services
- 2) Cabin attendants

The scale is designed using a five-point Likert Scale as shown below.

Rating of Satisfaction	Interpretation of the Scale
5	Excellent
4	Good
3	Average
2	Fair
1	Poor

Part III: The Most Important Factors Affecting Customer Decisions when Choosing the Airline

The third part asks the respondents to rate seven important following factors that affect their decision making when choosing the airline. All factors were adapted from *Service Marketing Mix or 7P's model* by Booms and Bitner (1981) which includes product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence.

Part IV: Comments and Suggestions

This section is an open-ended question allowing the respondents to write in their own words and provide more details relying on their opinions or suggestions about the ways to improve services.

After testing the questionnaire with five people, it was revised accordingly. Then, one hundred and forty questionnaires were distributed to the aforementioned respondents with the expectation to get back at least 45 questionnaires from each airline.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

This research study gained data from the questionnaires for comparing the mean scores between the satisfaction levels of these two airlines and rating the factors affecting their decision making. The results of the study were computed in terms of frequency, percentage and mean.

To be measured by a five-point Likert Scale, the interval of ranges to measure each variable was calculated from *poor* to *excellent* as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Highest Point} - \text{Lower Point}}{\text{Scale Point}} = \frac{5 - 1}{5} = 0.8$$

This means the interval value between each level is 0.8, the items with interval value have been decreasing and the criteria for interpreting the levels of satisfaction are shown in the following range of mean scores:

Intervals of Satisfaction Level

Rating Scale	Satisfaction Level	Mean Score
5	Excellent	4.21 - 5.00
4	Good	3.41 - 4.20
3	Average	2.61 - 3.40
2	Fair	1.81 - 2.60
1	Poor	1.00 - 1.80

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter reports the results of the questionnaire divided into four parts relying on (1) demographic information of the respondents, (2) the customer satisfaction level towards the service of the airlines, (3) the factors affecting customer decisions when choosing the airline, (4) additional comments and (5) discussion.

In this study, the data was obtained from 90 people, both Thai and foreign passengers, travelling to/from Tokyo, Japan who were 45 THAI Airways' passengers and 45 other passengers from Thai AirAsia X. The study was conducted both on the ground and on board during March to April 2016.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In the first part of the survey questionnaires, there were five questions asking respondents about demographic information including gender, age, occupation, monthly income and purpose of travel. The results of each question are described and shown in each table in terms of frequency and percentage.

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Frequency		Percentage	
	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X
Male	24	25	53.33	55.56
Female	21	20	46.67	44.44
Total	45	45	100	100

From table 1, THAI Airways passengers were 24 males which accounted for 53.33% of the respondents and 21 females which accounted for 46.67% of the respondents. Thai AirAsia X passengers were 25 males which accounted for 55.56% of the respondents and the rest were 20 females which accounted for 44.44% of the respondents.

Table 2. Age

Age	Frequency		Percentage	
	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X
< 20	2	3	4.44	6.67
21 - 40	15	27	33.33	60.00
41 - 60	24	12	53.33	26.67
> 60	4	3	8.89	6.67
Total	45	45	100	100

The ages of respondents were grouped into four categories as displayed in Table 2. For THAI Airways passengers, the majority of respondents, 24 (53.33%), were aged 41-60 years old, followed by 15 respondents (33.33%), who were aged 21-40 years old. Those respondents whose ages were over 60 years old made up 8.89% by 4 respondents, while the smallest group of the total respondents was aged below 20 years old, shown at 4.44% by 2 respondents. For Thai AirAsia X passengers, the majority group was aged 21-40 years old which were 27 respondents (60%), followed by 12 respondents (53.33%) who were aged 41-60 years old. The other two groups of age below 20 and over 60 had the same amount at 6.67% or 2 respondents for each.

Table 3. Occupation

Occupation	Frequency		Percentage	
	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X
Government official/ State enterprise	6	8	13.33	17.78
Business Employee	10	22	22.22	48.89
Business Owner	25	9	55.56	20.00
Student	2	5	4.44	11.11
Retiree	2	1	4.44	2.22
others	0	0	0.00	0.00
Total	45	45	100	100

According to Table 3, the majority of respondents of THAI Airways passengers were 25 business owners which accounted for 55.56%, 10 respondents (22.22%) were business employees, 6 respondents (13.33%) were government officials and state enterprise employees. The other two groups of the respondents were students and retirees and each group accounted for 4.44% or 2 respondents. For Thai AirAsia X passengers, most of the respondents were business employees which were 22 or 48.89%, 9 respondents (20%) were business owners, 8 respondents (17.78%) were government officials and state enterprise employees, 5 respondents (11.11%) were students and the smallest amount was from 1 respondent (2.22%) as a retiree.

Table 4. Monthly Income

Monthly Income (Thai Baht)	Frequency		Percentage	
	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X
Up to 20,000	3	7	6.67	15.56
20,001 - 40,000	11	22	24.44	48.89
40,001 - 60,000	20	13	44.44	28.89
60,001 and above	11	3	24.44	6.67
Total	45	45	100	100

From Table 4, the monthly income was categorized into 4 groups. For THAI Airways passengers, it was found that the majority of the respondents, 20 (44.44%), had income at 40,001 – 60,000 baht per month. Another two groups, which were 20,000 – 40,000 baht and 60,001 baht and above, had the same amount of respondents that were 11 or 24.44% for each. There were 3 respondents having monthly income up to 20,000 baht which accounted for 6.67%. For Thai AirAsia X, the highest amount of respondents received 20,001 – 40,000 baht per month which were 22 (48.89%), 13 respondents (28.89%) had 40,001 – 60,000, 7 respondents (15.56%) had up to 20,000 and the rest of respondents, 3 (6.67%), had 60,001 and above.

Table 5. Purpose of Travel

Purpose of Travel	Frequency		Percentage	
	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X	THAI Airways	Thai AirAsia X
Business Trip	15	11	33.33	24.44
Holiday	27	33	60.00	73.33
Visit	2	1	4.44	2.22
Others	1	0	2.22	0.00
Total	45	45	100	100

As illustrated in Table 5, 27 respondents or 60% travelled with THAI Airways for holiday, 15 respondents (33.33%) travelled for business trip, 2 respondents (4.44%) went for a visit and there was 1 respondent (2.22%) who had other reasons for travelling.

As for Thai AirAsia X, the majority of respondents, which were 33, or 60% travelled for holiday, 11 respondents (24.44%) travelled for business trip and there was 1 respondent going for a visit which accounted for 2.22%.

4.2 THE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION LEVEL TOWARDS THE SERVICE QUALITY OF THE AIRLINE

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of fourteen questions focusing on the customer satisfaction level towards the service of each airline in two main areas. The first one is in-flight services and the second one is cabin attendants. The results from all respondents were shown in the table below in terms of mean scores and satisfaction level which is matched with the intervals of satisfaction in the research methodology.

Table 6. The Customer Satisfaction Level towards the Service of Each Airline

Customer Satisfaction	THAI Airways		Thai AirAsia X	
	Mean (\bar{x})	Satisfaction Level	Mean (\bar{x})	Satisfaction Level
◆ In-Flight Services				
1. Quality and taste of food and beverages	4.24	Excellent	3.00	Average
2. Assistance with special needs (Elderly, wheelchair, children, etc.)	3.67	Good	3.13	Average
3. Assistance from in-flight cabin attendants in general	3.67	Good	3.40	Average
4. Seat comfort/ seat facilities	4.16	Good	3.27	Average
5. Cabin and lavatory cleanliness	4.22	Excellent	3.67	Good
6. Choice of in-flight magazines/ newspaper	3.18	Average	1.93	Fair
7. In-flight entertainment provided i.e. music and movies	3.78	Good	1.93	Fair
Total	3.84	Good	2.90	Average

(Table Continued)

Table 6. (Continued)

Customer Satisfaction	THAI Airways		Thai AirAsia X	
	Mean (\bar{x})	Satisfaction Level	Mean (\bar{x})	Satisfaction Level
◆ Cabin Attendants				
8. Available throughout the flight	3.91	Good	3.53	Good
9. Friendly, polite and helpful	4.36	Excellent	3.53	Good
10. Responsiveness in serving your needs	3.67	Good	3.27	Average
11. Ability to solve your problems	3.64	Good	3.62	Good
12. Language and communication skills	4.38	Excellent	3.53	Good
13. Professional appearance	4.36	Excellent	3.73	Good
14. Safety awareness	4.27	Excellent	4.22	Excellent
Total	4.08	Good	3.63	Good

Table 6 illustrated the respondents' satisfaction towards the service of THAI Airways and Thai AsiaAsia X in aspects of in-flight services and cabin attendants. As for the in-flight services, the respondents of THAI Airways were most satisfied with excellent quality and taste of food and beverages ($\bar{x} = 4.24$), followed by excellent cabin and lavatory cleanliness ($\bar{x} = 4.22$) and good seat comfort/ seat facilities ($\bar{x} = 4.16$). The respondents perceived that THAI Airways provided good in-flight entertainment such as music and movies ($\bar{x} = 3.78$). Moreover, the respondents saw that THAI Airways offered good assistance with special needs such as elderly, wheelchair, children, etc. equal to the assistance from in-flight cabin attendants in general ($\bar{x} = 3.67$). Meanwhile, the satisfaction of choice of in-flight magazines/ newspaper was in average level ($\bar{x} = 3.18$).

On the other hand, the results of the respondents' satisfaction towards the in-flight services of Thai AirAsia X indicated that the respondents were satisfied with good cabin and lavatory cleanliness ($\bar{x} = 3.67$). Furthermore, the respondents perceived that the services were in average level in aspects of assistance from in-flight cabin attendants in general ($\bar{x} = 3.40$), seat comfort/ seat facilities ($\bar{x} = 3.27$), assistance with special needs ($\bar{x} = 3.13$) and quality and taste of food and beverages ($\bar{x} = 3.00$). The mean score was the same at 1.93 ($\bar{x} = 1.93$) in terms of choice of in-flight magazines/ newspaper and in-flight entertainment such as music and movies.

As for the cabin attendants, the results from the respondents of THAI Airways revealed that the respondents were most satisfied with the excellence of language and communication skills ($\bar{x} = 4.38$), followed by professional appearance ($\bar{x} = 4.36$), friendliness, politeness and helpfulness ($\bar{x} = 4.36$) and safety awareness ($\bar{x} = 4.27$). In addition, the respondents perceived that the cabin attendants performed a good duty on availability throughout the flight ($\bar{x} = 3.91$), responsiveness in serving passengers' need ($\bar{x} = 3.67$) and ability to solve passengers' problems ($\bar{x} = 3.64$).

According to the results of the respondents' satisfaction towards the cabin attendants of Thai AirAsia X the cabin attendants performed excellent duty regarding safety awareness ($\bar{x} = 4.22$), had good professional appearance ($\bar{x} = 3.73$) and showed good ability to solve passengers' problems ($\bar{x} = 3.62$). Besides, the results revealed that the respondents perceived that the cabin attendants were good, with the same mean score at 3.53 ($\bar{x} = 3.53$) in terms of availability throughout the flight, friendliness, politeness and helpfulness, and language and communication skills.

4.3 THE FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMER DECISIONS WHEN CHOOSING THE AIRLINE

This section provided seven key factors adapted from "*Service Marketing Mix or 7P's model*" and asked the respondents to rate all factors ranging from the most to least importance that affect their decision making when choosing which kind of airline. The results were shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The Factors Affecting Customer Decisions when Choosing the Airline

Factors Affecting Customer Decisions	THAI Airways		Thai AirAsia X	
	Mean (\bar{x})	Rating No.	Mean (\bar{x})	Rating No.
1. Excellent Service	6.40	1	2.20	7
2. Reasonable Price	2.80	5	5.80	2
3. Good Location of the Airport	2.40	6	4.40	3
4. Attractive Sales Promotion or Discount	1.40	7	6.80	1
5. Well-Trained and Professional Airline Staff	5.40	3	2.40	6
6. Convenient and Easy-to-Access Services	3.80	4	3.27	4
7. Great Facilities and Equipment both In-Flight and Ground Handling	5.80	2	3.20	5

According to Table 9, the most important factor regarding why the respondents chose to fly with THAI Airways was excellent service ($\bar{x} = 6.40$). Secondly, the respondents preferred to fly with THAI because of great facilities and equipment both in-flight and ground handling ($\bar{x} = 5.80$) and well-trained and professional airline staff ($\bar{x} = 5.40$) was in the third rank. The fourth was its convenient and easy-to-access services ($\bar{x} = 3.80$), followed by reasonable price ($\bar{x} = 2.80$). Some of the respondents chose to fly due to good location of the airport ($\bar{x} = 2.40$), meanwhile an attractive sales promotion or discount ($\bar{x} = 1.40$) was the least important factor that the respondents used for making the decision to fly with THAI Airways.

On the contrary, the respondents were attracted by the sales promotion or discount of Thai AirAsia X, thus it was the most important factor with highest mean score at 6.80 ($\bar{x} = 6.80$). The second importance was reasonable price ($\bar{x} = 5.80$) and good location of the airport ($\bar{x} = 4.40$) was the third important factor. While, some of the respondents chose to fly with Thai AirAsia X because of its convenient and easy-to-access services ($\bar{x} = 3.27$), followed by great facilities and equipment both in-flight and ground handling ($\bar{x} = 3.20$). The sixth importance was well-trained and professional airlines staff ($\bar{x} = 2.40$) and finally, excellent service ($\bar{x} = 2.20$) was the least important factor to fly with Thai AirAsia X.

4.4 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

In the last section, there was an open-ended question asking for opinions and suggestions about the satisfaction and the ways to improve services of the airline. The respondents provided their suggestions in this part. The comments are summarized as follows:

4.4.1 THAI Airways

- 1) The airline should improve the in-flight entertainment devices to be more effective and updated with more choices of movies and music.
- 2) Cabin attendants should offer more help and assist passengers when boarding, for example finding and arranging more space for carry-on luggage.
- 3) Some of the cabin attendants should maintain standard grooming during the service especially on an overnight flight.

4.4.2 Thai AirAsia X

- 1) The airline should improve the taste and quality of the on-board meal service to be suitable with the high selling price.
- 2) Some of the cabin attendants showed improper facial expressions when communicating with some passengers or dealing with some cases.
- 3) Cabin attendants should show up more in the cabin during a long or overnight flight to offer help or examine unsafe situations.

4.5 DISCUSSION

In this part, the study results will be discussed in accordance with these three research questions.

4.5.1 The Demographic Factors Influencing Customer Behavior when Choosing the Airline

Based on the results, the findings revealed that most THAI Airways' passengers were aged between 41 and 60 with a high monthly income of around 40,001 to 60,000 baht per month. As business owners or company executives, the passengers may have more purchasing power to pay for higher ticket prices to get more comfortable and premium services for their vacations or business trips. This is the main target customer that THAI Airways should pay more attention to and design attractive sales and marketing strategies for to retain existing customers and gain more newcomers. The passengers might have a good bond with the airline as the company has been operating for almost 60 years, thus the passengers were quite familiar with and still trusted in THAI.

As for Thai AirAsia X, most of the passengers were younger, aged between 21 and 40 years old, working as company employees and some are first jobbers with monthly income ranging from 20,001 to 40,000 baht per month. The passengers were most attracted by lower ticket prices for holidays and pay less attention to the details of other services. This is the guideline for the airline management to provide effective strategies for these target customers as well.

4.5.2 The Customer Satisfaction Level towards the Airlines' Services

In the aspect of in-flight services, the findings discovered that THAI Airways passengers were satisfied with the excellent quality and taste of food and beverages, the cleanliness of cabin and lavatory and comfortable seats and facilities respectively. These are the strengths of THAI Airways they should keep and develop this highly reputable and premium standard of in-flight services, especially Thai cuisine and also comfortable facilities provided on board to compete with other competitors, both domestically and internationally.

Thai AirAsia X passengers were most satisfied with cabin and lavatory cleanliness, assistance from in-flight cabin attendants in general and seat comfort and seat facilities respectively. This showed that the passengers focused on core services and standard facilities of the airline that directly concerned passenger safety and comfort. As a low-cost carrier, Thai AirAsia X has to keep this standard of services to maintain customer satisfaction towards these aspects. On the other hand, the airline should improve the quality and taste of food and beverage sold on board to gain more satisfaction in terms of in-flight catering.

As for cabin attendants, the passengers were most satisfied with THAI Airways' cabin attendants in that the cabin crew members had excellent language and communication skill, were friendly, polite and helpful and provided a professional appearance. This reflects the unique service of THAI Touch and the good reputation of THAI's cabin attendants. The airlines should maintain this standard and also provide more training courses to improve the cabin attendants' abilities in every aspect especially problem solving skills, since the cabin attendants are front-line personnel dealing with passengers.

Thai AirAsia X's cabin attendants provide excellent safety awareness, which is the first priority of every airline. Also, the cabin attendants had professional appearances and good ability to solve problems. This can assure that the passengers will be safe and get standard in-flight services from the airline's cabin attendants. The company should encourage cabin attendants to have more responsiveness in serving passengers' needs, especially on long-haul and overnight flights to fulfill customer satisfaction.

4.5.3 The Most Important Factors Affecting Customer Decisions when Choosing the Airline

The main reasons why the passengers chose to fly with THAI Airways were that the airline had excellent service, great facilities and equipment, both in-flight and ground handling and well-trained and professional staff. The company management should maintain and keep developing these strengths of the company. The passengers focused more on full and premium services from both hardware (facilities and equipment) and peopleware (company staff). Importantly, the

passengers expect to have the finest Thai cuisine on board provided by the legendary Thai national carrier to justify the higher price the passengers pay. Even though the sales promotion or discount had the least important effect for THAI Airways, the company should continue providing more attractive marketing campaigns to gain more revenue throughout the year.

In contrast, the most important factors of the respondents that chose to fly with Thai AirAsia X were attractive sales promotion or discount and reasonable price. These were the priority reasons the passengers used for making their decision, thus the airline should keep on using and always generating new sales promotions to attract the customers. Moreover, there is another advantage of Thai AirAsia X, the location of the airport - Don Mueang International Airport located in the downtown area had a significant effect as well. Meanwhile, the service was the least important because the passengers focused only on the price, not other fringe services, so the airline may just maintain the standard services and safety concern and also convey these messages to the target customers continuously.

This chapter showed the results of the customer satisfaction level towards the service of the airlines as well as the factors affecting customers' decision when choosing the airline. Under each table heading, were the results illustrated in seven tables with detailed explanations and discussion of the results in the final part. The finding of this study will be concluded in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents (1) summary of the study, (2) summary of the findings, (3) conclusions and (4) recommendations for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This part summarizes the objectives and methodology of the study as follows:

5.1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed firstly to analyze the demographic factors influencing customer behavior when choosing the airline, secondly, to explore the customer satisfaction level towards the service quality of the premium airline compared to the low-cost long-haul airline and, eventually, to examine the most important factor affecting customer decisions when choosing the airline.

5.1.2 Subjects, Materials and Procedures

The subjects used in this study were 90 people, both Thai and foreign passengers: 45 THAI Airways' passengers and the other 45 passengers were from Thai AirAsia X. The study was conducted by purposive sampling method both at airports and during flights. All subjects were passengers travelling to/from Tokyo (Narita), Japan.

As for the data collection process, the survey questionnaires were employed as an instrument comprising closed-ended questions, Likert Scale questions and opened-ended questions. The structured questionnaire was divided into four parts: the first part was designed using closed-ended questions based on the demographic record of each participant regarding general information, namely gender, age, occupation, income and purpose of travel. The second part provided the Likert scale questions asking about satisfaction towards the airline's services. The third part asked the respondents to rate the seven most important factors affecting customer decisions when choosing the airline. In the last part, an open-ended question was added for

more opinions or suggestions about the ways to improve services. All questionnaires were distributed for data collection process during March to April, 2016.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 The Demographic Information of the Respondents

The total participants were 90 respondents from both THAI Airways and Thai AirAsia X. The majority of THAI Airways' respondents was male (53.33%). Most of them were aged between 41 and 60 (53.33%) and had own business (55.56%) with monthly income from 40,001 to 60,000 baht (44.44%). The purpose of travel mostly was for holiday (60%).

On the other hand, the majority of Thai AirAsia X's respondents was also male (55.56%) with the age at 21 to 40 years (60%). Most of the respondents worked as business employees (48.89%) with income from 20,001 to 40,000 baht per month (48.89%) and travelled for holiday (73.33%).

5.2.2 The Customer Satisfaction Level towards the Airlines' Services

The survey questions measured these two main areas: in-flight services and cabin attendants. From the findings, the respondents were satisfied with THAI Airways' in-flight services with overall mean score at 3.84, especially in excellent quality and taste of food and beverages ($\bar{x} = 4.24$) and cabin and lavatory cleanliness ($\bar{x} = 4.22$). While, customers were satisfied with the in-flight services of Thai AirAsia X with overall mean score at 2.90. The respondents were most satisfied with cabin and lavatory cleanliness ($\bar{x} = 3.67$) and assistance from in-flight cabin attendants in general ($\bar{x} = 3.40$).

Moreover, in terms of cabin attendants, the respondents were satisfied with THAI Airways' cabin attendants with overall mean score at 4.08 in that the cabin attendants had excellent language and communication skills ($\bar{x} = 4.38$), professional appearance ($\bar{x} = 4.36$) and finally were friendly, polite and helpful ($\bar{x} = 4.36$). Whereas, the cabin attendants of Thai AirAsia X satisfied the customers with overall

mean score at 3.63. The respondents were most satisfied with the cabin attendants' safety awareness ($\bar{x} = 4.22$) and professional appearance ($\bar{x} = 3.73$).

5.2.3 The Most Important Factors Affecting Customer Decisions when Choosing the Airline

The respondents rated seven important factors adapted from Service Marketing Mix (7P's) that are product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence. From the findings, the most important reasons that the respondents chose to fly with THAI Airways were excellent service ($\bar{x} = 6.40$), great facilities and equipment, both in-flight and ground handling ($\bar{x} = 5.80$) and well-trained and professional staff ($\bar{x} = 5.40$), while the least important was attractive sales promotion or discount ($\bar{x} = 1.40$).

On the contrary, the respondents chose to fly with Thai AirAsia X due to attractive sales promotion or discount ($\bar{x} = 6.80$), reasonable price ($\bar{x} = 5.80$) and good location of the airport ($\bar{x} = 4.40$) which is Don Mueang International Airport. Meanwhile, the least important reason was excellent service ($\bar{x} = 2.20$).

5.2.4 Additional Comments and Suggestions

The findings revealed that THAI Airways should improve the in-flight entertainment system to be more effective with updated choices of movies and music. Moreover, some of the cabin attendants should offer more help and maintain good grooming during the service, especially on an overnight flight.

As for Thai AirAsia X, the respondents would like the airline to improve the taste and quality of meal service to be suitable with the selling price. Also, the respondents can notice improper facial expressions of some cabin attendants when dealing with some cases or problems with passengers. Besides, the cabin attendants should be more present in the cabin during a long or overnight flight to offer help or examine unsafe situations.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The majority of THAI Airways passengers were upper class people with higher monthly incomes and older ages. These target customers intended to pay more for full and premium services especially for long-haul flights (flight time is more than 4 hours). The quality of meal service, equipment and facilities and importantly professional airline personnel were key factors affecting the decision making rather than sales promotion or discount. The company should maintain these kind of loyal customers while at the same time keep on improving services to be above standard so that the airline can be sustainably competitive in this challenging situation in the airline business.

As for low-cost long-haul airlines like Thai AirAsia X, the majority of the passengers was company employees, of younger ages and had lower monthly incomes. These target customers focused only on lower ticket price and standard services, but not other fringe services such as in-flight entertainment or meal services that are sold on board. Furthermore, the cabin attendants perform a good standard of services, especially in safety awareness. This assures the passengers that the flight must be safe. The company management should maintain this standard and continue improving services in view of the lower price but provide high quality as well.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.4.1 Due to the limited time, the number of respondents was also limited only; 90 passengers in total. Moreover, this study was conducted on only one route (Bangkok –Tokyo (Narita) - Bangkok). In further research, the number of respondents should be increased and some other routes considered that might gain different data. Therefore, the results will be more reliable and raise the degree of generalizability.

5.4.2 A future study should compare the satisfaction level with other airlines in the regions of Southeast Asia or Asia Pacific so that the result will be more advantageous for the airline companies.

5.4.3 The survey questionnaire should be developed to cover more aspects. Besides, other efficient methods may be used to obtain more useful or detailed information such as in-depth interviews.



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APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Honorable Passengers:

My name is Wittawat Wongsuwan – a cabin attendant and master’s student of English for Careers (English Program), Thammasat University. This questionnaire is an exploration of passenger satisfaction with service quality of the airline. Data gained will be utilized for improving service operation. Please kindly complete the questionnaire. This data will be kept confidentially and used for the research study only. Your kind cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Part 1 Personal Data

Direction: Please put a check in front of the choice chosen as your answer in the provided space.

1. Gender

- 1) Male 2) Female

2. Age

- 1) Under 20 years 2) 21-40 years
 3) 41-60 years 4) Above 60 years

3. Occupation

- 1) Government official/
State enterprise employee 2) Business employee
 3) Business owner 4) Student
 5) Retiree 6) Others

4. Monthly income

- 1) Up to 20,000 Baht 2) 20,001 – 40,000 Baht
 3) 40,001 – 60,000 Baht 4) 60,001 Baht and above

5. Purpose of travel

- 1) Business trip 2) Holiday
 3) Visit 4) Others (Please specify.....)

Part 2 Your satisfaction towards the services of THAI Airways / Thai AirAsia X for this flight (Bangkok – Tokyo (Narita) – Bangkok)

Direction: Please identify how you feel towards the following aspects of services provided by THAI Airways / Thai AirAsia X on this flight.

⑤ = Excellent

④ = Good

③ = Average

② = Fair

① = Poor

◆ In-Flight Services ◆	Level of Satisfaction				
	5	4	3	2	1
1. Quality and taste of food and beverages					
2. Assistance with special needs (Elderly, wheelchair, children, etc.)					
3. Assistance from in-flight cabin attendants in general					
4. Seat comfort/ seat facilities					
5. Cabin and lavatory cleanliness					
6. Choice of in-flight magazines/ newspaper					
7. In-flight entertainment provided i.e. music and movies					
◆ Cabin Attendants ◆					
8. Available throughout the flight					
9. Friendly, polite, and helpful					
10. Responsiveness in serving your needs					
11. Ability to solve your problems					
12. Language and communication skills					
13. Professional appearance					
14. Safety awareness					

Part 3 Please rate the important reasons that you consider when choosing THAI Airways / Thai AirAsia X

Direction: Put rating number in the space provided in front of each item from **1** = the most important to **7** = the least important.

_____ **Excellent Service**

_____ **Reasonable Price**

_____ **Good Location of the Airport**

(Please specify the name of the airport.....)

_____ **Attractive Sales Promotion or Discount**

_____ **Well-Trained and Professional Airline Staff**

_____ **Convenient and Easy-to-Access Services**

_____ **Great Facilities and Equipment both In-Flight and Ground Handling**

Part 4 Your opinions/suggestions about the way to improve services (if any)

.....
.....
.....

✦ Thank you for your kind cooperation ✦

BIOGRAPHY

Name Mr. Wittawat Wongsuwan

Date of Birth July 14, 1987

Educational Attainment

2016 Master of Arts in English for Careers (English Program)

Thammasat University

2011 Bachelor of Business Administration (Honors)

Marketing – International Business

Chulalongkorn University

2007 High School

Triam Udom Suksa School

Work Experiences

2013 – Present Cabin Attendant

THAI Airways International Public Company Limited

2011 – 2012 Marketing Officer

The Siam Cement Public Company Limited (SCG)