Chapter 16
Service Quality and Innovation in Air Transport

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ABSTRACT

Passenger services at airports are coproduced by many organizations - airports, airlines, ground handlers, immigration, customs, aviation security, and commercial establishments. Service performance on subjective parameters is evaluated primarily through customer satisfaction surveys at frequent intervals through third parties with varying parameters and methodology. The objective parameters as defined by the airports are measured and reported by the airports. Thus, there is no standardized set of parameters and methodology for airport services performance. With the increased passenger's awareness about quality of services and reporting platforms like social media, airports have started to innovate the processes and introduce advanced technologies and exceed the service quality paradigm to passenger experience. Also, the importance attached to the services by the passengers differs based on the travel purpose. It is seen that airports compete with each other to add value to passenger services and experience on a continual basis. This book chapter describes these aspects of airport services.

1. INTRODUCTION

Airlines are responsible for transporting passengers and cargo between various locations, with the processing of both occurring at airports. It's essential to note that the following book chapter description focuses solely on passengers, excluding considerations for cargo. Airports furnish the infrastructure, facilities, and systems necessary for processing passengers at passenger terminals. Airlines utilize aircraft parking stands, the runway/taxiway system, and Air Navigation Services provided by airports. Evaluating service delivery and implementing corrective measures not only enhances passenger satisfaction but also enhances an airport's reputation, potentially attracting additional passenger traffic. This, in turn, may lead existing airlines to add more routes/flights, while other airlines may express interest in commencing operations from the airport. Passengers prefer airports offering choices between airlines,

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seeking positive performance attributes, while airlines aspire to expand their operations based on passenger demand driven by the airport's service quality and performance attributes. Therefore, airlines and airports complement each other.

Service is defined as "a time-perishable, intangible experience performed for a customer acting in the role of co-producer" (Fitzsimmons, 2001). Hill (1977) characterizes service as a change in the condition or state of an economic entity caused by another. Combining Fitzsimmons and Hill's definitions, service emerges as a time-sensitive, intangible experience carried out for a client who also plays the role of a co-producer, transforming the client's state or possession. This amalgamation reveals that clients actively contribute to the co-production of value, often resulting in a transformed state or possession. The concept of responsibility in a co-production activity is exemplified by the check-in process for passengers. The performance of staff at check-in counters or self-service kiosks is integral to service quality, but equally important is how well passengers present documents to facilitate timely process completion.

Airport services, encompassing passenger, baggage, and aircraft processes on apron stands, involve multiple stakeholders such as airports, airlines, ground handlers, fuel suppliers, in-flight caterers, immigration, customs, and aviation security personnel. This intricate network contributes to the challenge of delivering high-quality services while striving to maintain a balance between productivity and performance. It is imperative not to compromise performance quality for increased productivity, and vice versa. The aviation industry, driven by the need to accommodate growing traffic and minimize operational costs, emphasizes service productivity enhancement, transcending mere service delivery to ensure an optimal passenger experience.

This chapter delves into the parameters and methodologies for assessing airport service quality performance, incorporating technologies and innovative approaches to enhance service satisfaction. Noteworthy is the dedication of airport service providers to continually enhance services and distinguish themselves from competitors. Although the term "airport" is used, it encompasses various stakeholders, primarily airports, airlines, and government authorities such as immigration, customs, and aviation security.

The discussion on service performance and productivity includes apron services, with a particular focus about 'On Time Performance' (OTP) of flights as a crucial metric.

Recognizing the diversity in passenger profiles, it becomes essential to understand the specific airport services that passengers deem important.

The subsequent sections of this chapter cover an overview of previous literature (Section 2), methodologies for service assessment (Section 3), results detailing the importance of services based on traveller opinions for domestic passenger processes in Indian airports (Section 4), exploration of service innovations and advanced technologies adopted by airports (Section 5), and the concluding remarks (Section 6).

It's crucial to note that this chapter centers on passenger services while the aircraft is at the airport, excluding in-flight services and their corresponding performance.

Figure 1 illustrates the flow of domestic departure passengers through various processes, and for domestic arrivals, the sole process involves collecting baggage at the arrival baggage carousel. International departures entail an additional immigration process after check-in, while arriving international passengers undergo immigration after deboarding and subsequent baggage reclaim.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literatures reviewed have been grouped together based on the objective of the study as below.