

**THE FACTORS AFFECTING PASSENGER SATISFACTION
WITH SHORT-RANGE AIR TRANSPORT SERVICES:
APPROACH TO VALUE CHAIN IN THE CASE OF VIETNAM AIRLINES**

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Passenger satisfaction with flights is an essential factor that affects their loyalty and enables air-carriers to stabilize their market share, enhance sales efficiency in a highly competitive airline marketplace nowadays. This research aims to analyze the factors affecting passenger satisfaction towards short distance flights carried out by Vietnam Airlines. The research findings will lay the foundation for shaping up the business strategies for air carriers, especially for Vietnam Airlines to enhance passenger satisfaction level with their flights.

Keywords: Passenger Satisfaction, Air Transport Services, Value Chain

JEL Classification: A10, A11

1. INTRODUCTION

In Viet Nam, short-haul flights are normally taken less than five hours using aircrafts such as A320/A321 or B737. These flights are typically flown by traditional and low-cost air carriers. On the other hand, air transport also competes with other means of transport such as: roads, railways and so forth. That is the reason why competition levels are usually high and this, as a result, requires air carriers to constantly raise passenger satisfaction levels, to protect market share and to strengthen sales efficiency.

Vietnam Airlines is the Vietnamese National Aviation Corporation with operations

* This paper has been presented at the International Conference on Business and Finance 2019 held by the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. We would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments and efforts towards improving our manuscript. All authors contribute equally to this paper.

based on traditional airline models. Vietnam Airlines developments have had great effects on the Vietnamese airline industry growths. However, in recent years, market share of the short-range flights of Vietnam Airlines have been decreasing significantly year over year. Vietjet Airlines just operated the first commercial flights in late 2011. In 2012, the domestic market share of Vietjet Airlines was only at 8% whereas Vietnam Airlines market share was around 70%. Yet, by the end of 2017, Vietjet Airlines achieved 43% of domestic airline market share. On the other hand, Vietnam Airlines market share fell to under 42%. As a result, it took Vietjet Airlines just around 6 years to overtake Vietnam Airline and Jetstar Pacific Airlines to become the biggest domestic air carrier in Vietnam.

There are several studies which provide important context of Vietnam and Vietnam economy (Vo, 2009, Vo 2015a,b, Vo 2016a,b, Vo, 2017a,b, Vo, 2018a,b,c,d, Vo 2019a,b,c,d, Vo and Chu 2019). However, none of previous papers considers examine the context of airlines. By applying the method of approaching the value chain of airlines services for passengers, this research intends to build the factor model, conduct the surveys on passengers on the short-range flights of Vietnam Airlines and analyze the data with an aim to determine the importance of factors. The research findings will be used to set policies/strategies for Vietnam Airlines and air carriers in general.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

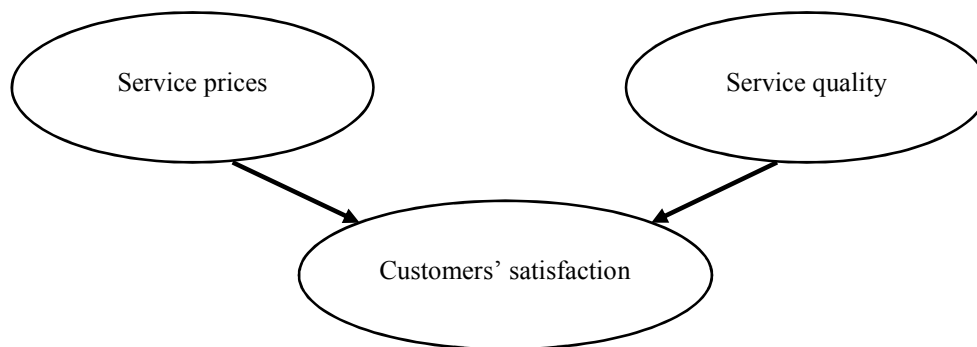
2.1. Theory Foundation

2.1.1. *Passenger Satisfaction toward Aviation*

Up to now, there have been numerous concepts of satisfaction. Halstead et al. (1994) considered satisfaction as a sentimental response of focusing on the comparisons between products and some standards set prior to the sales and the measurements during and after consumptions. In contrast, Mano and Oliver (1993) took the view that satisfaction is the attitude change during the continuous product realization and post-consumption assessments. In comparison, Zeithaml et al. (1988) supposed customer satisfaction is the response to realization differences between prior experiences and expectations. This means customers prior experiences in service consumptions and post-service outcomes. On the contrary, according to Kotler and Keller (2006), satisfaction is the level of the individual sentimental state stemming from the consciousness comparison on a product compared to the expectations. Therefore, satisfaction has three levels: (1) If customers' realization is more marginal than expected, they feel dissatisfied; (2) If customers' realization is equal to expectation, they feel satisfied; (3) If customers' realization is more than expected, customers feel satisfied or enjoyable. Sharing these views, Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2001) explained that customer satisfaction creation to a service is recognized by means of

comparisons between the supplied service and the expected one. According to this: (1) Received services greater than expected services; exceeding expectation, top quality; (2) Received services equal to expected services: expectation satisfaction (meeting expectation, accepted quality); (3) Received services smaller than expected services: expectation dissatisfaction (below expectation, unaccepted quality).

The service that customers receive is the quality of the products and services of suppliers/service providers. On the other hand, expected services are the ones that customers expect to receive in commensurate with the price of products and services they pay for. Therefore, the customer satisfaction depends on two main factor groups: service quality and service prices (Figure 1). Similarly, Zeithaml and Bitner (2001) indicated that satisfaction is determined by the realization of service quality, product quality and prices where service quality is focused on assessing customer realization based on five specific aspects of services: trust, feedback, guaranty, sympathy and tangibility.



Source: Developments from models by Zeithaml and Bitner (2001)

Figure 1. The Relationship between Prices, Quality and Satisfaction

2.1.2. Product quality and air transport services

Researchers at Newcastle University, Australia (2002) did research into an air transport service product and divided into two main levels: 1) Core product: transport time or flight schedules and flight schedule reliability; 2) Actual product: booking systems, airport services, flight service, safety levels and so on. Having assessing product quality, air carrier services, Skytrax, English air consultancy agency, constructed assessment scales for short distance carrier including three main factors: (1) services at departure/arrival airport, (2) product on flights, (3) flight attendant services. These factors were used by Gnanlet and Yayla-Kullu (2013) in the research

into “The Impacts of Globalization on the Supply Chain Quality”.

In addition, the research by Park et al. (2005) and Nwaogb et al. (2017) also pointed out that flight schedules and flight ability schedules are also crucial factors of air transport service quality. Besides, Park et al. (2005) added the factor “sales and booking system” to air transport service quality and this factor is also used by Vietnam Airlines with an aim to survey their flight passengers (Vietnam Airlines, 2017).

2.1.3. Value Chain of Air Passenger Transport Service

Value chain is a business administration concept approached under two main aspects. In the business perspective, Porter (1985) referred to it as an activity chain carried out within an enterprise range in order to produce a certain output with the final purpose of enhancing enterprise competitive advantages. In the context of globalization or an industry, Kaplinsky and Morris (2001) thought that the value chain is the activities essential for transforming a product or service from initial conceptual thoughts through various production stages to the final stage of distribution to end consumers. Though in different ranges, the common characteristics of these approaches are chains of activities that will create increasingly higher cumulative value for products than the total increase of values of all activities. Airline passenger observations show that the stages supplied by transport agencies include: ticket purchases, seat reservation, check in and boarding; air transport; landing and luggage claim. From the above activities, we can develop the value chain model of air passenger transport service through Figure 2 as below:

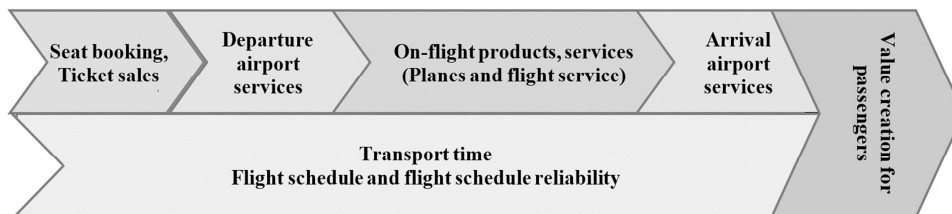


Figure 2. Service Value Chain of Air Passenger Transport

2.2. The Research Model and Hypothesis

2.2.1. Research Model

From the above figure as well as related prior studies, the model of factors affecting passenger satisfaction toward short distance transport services - the access to the value chain in the case of Vietnam Airline comprises: five factors of air transport service quality (flight schedule and flight schedule reliability; aircraft quality; airport services;

in-flight services; seat reservation and ticket sales) and one factor concerning air transport service price (prices and price policies) (Figure 3).

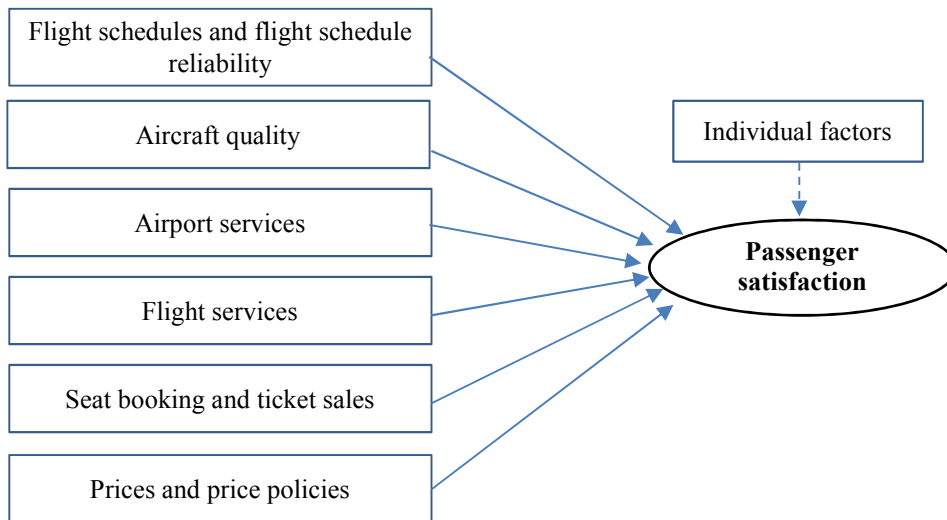


Figure 3. Suggested Research Model

2.2.2. Hypotheses

In order to verify the research model, the hypotheses are flight schedule factors and flight schedule reliability, aircraft quality, airport services, flight services, seat reservation and ticket sales, prices and proper pricing policies having positive correlation with passenger satisfaction on short distance flights of Vietnam airline. The importance of these factors is estimated through parameters in the linear regression model in the formula (1).

$$Y = b + a_1X_1 + a_2X_2 + a_3X_3 + a_4X_4 + a_5X_5 + a_6X_6, \quad (1)$$

where Y is the satisfaction on Vietnam Airline short flight; X_1 is the flight schedule and the flight schedule reliability; X_2 is the aircraft quality; X_3 is airport services; X_4 is the flight services; X_5 the seat reservation and ticket sales; and X_6 is prices and pricing policies.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Variables and Scales

Table 1. Explanations and Coding of Scales

Factors/Observation Variables	Transformation into Research Model							Code	References
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)	(vii)		
Airport services									
1 Check-in facilities			x					X _{3,1}	Gnanlet and Yay la Kullu (2013); Skytrax (2017)
2 Check-in staff services			x					X _{3,2}	
3 Boarding services			x					X _{3,3}	
4 Arrival services			x					X _{3,4}	
5 Connection services			x					X _{3,5}	
6 Luggage claim time			x					X _{3,6}	
Plane Products									
7 Seating comfort			x					X _{2,1}	Gnanlet and Yay la Kullu (2013); Skytrax (2017)
8 Cabin safety information			x					X _{2,2}	
9 Cabin and seat cleanliness			x					X _{2,3}	
10 Restroom cleanliness			x					X _{2,4}	
11 Flight entertainment				x				X _{4,1}	
12 Free meals/snacks				x				X _{4,2}	
13 Free drinks				x				X _{4,3}	
Flight attendant services									
14 Creating attention in safety guidance				x				X _{4,4}	Gnanlet and Yay la Kullu (2013); Skytrax (2017)
15 Customer service experience and qualifications				x				X _{4,5}	
16 Service speed and time				x				X _{4,6}	
17 Enthusiasm and friendliness				x				X _{4,7}	
18 Hospitality				x				X _{4,8}	
19 Customer interactions				x				X _{4,9}	
20 Language skill				x				X _{4,10}	
21 Responding to customer requirements				x				X _{4,11}	
22 Quality consistency				x				X _{4,12}	
Flight schedules and flight schedule reliability									
23 Availability of the flight routes	x							X _{1,1}	Park and Wu (2005); Nwaogbe et al. (2017)
24 Convenient flight schedules	x							X _{1,2}	
25 Connection ability	x							X _{1,3}	
26 Punctuality	x							X _{1,4}	
Convenient booking system									
27 Ticket sales and seat reservation on line					x			X _{5,1}	Park and Wu (2005), VN Airlines (2017)
28 Ticket sales and seat reservation by phone					x			X _{5,2}	
29 Ticket sales and seat reservation at office					x			X _{5,3}	
30 Ticket sales and seat reservation through agencies					x			X _{5,4}	
Pricing policies									
31 Flexible pricing policies						x		X _{6,1}	Zeithaml and Bitner (2001)
32 Competitive prices						x		X _{6,2}	
33 Meeting passenger expectations						x		X _{6,3}	
34 Passenger satisfaction with pricing policies						x		X _{6,4}	
Customer satisfaction									
35 Services in line with prices							x	Y ₁	Zeithaml and Bitner (2001); Fitzsimmons (2001), VN Airlines (2017)
36 Services provided as expected								Y ₂	
37 Selections of connecting flights								Y ₃	
38 Recommendations to family and friends								Y ₄	

Source: Combined from the research.

From the research model, and the reference to scales on service quality and passenger satisfaction (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2001; Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 2001; Park et al., 2005; Gnanlet and Yayla-Kullu, 2013; Skytrax, 2017; Nwaogbe et al., 2017; Vietnam Airlines, 2017), the six factors are developed into 34 observation variables (questions) including: 4 variables for “Flight schedule and flight schedule reliability (i)”; 4 variables for “Aircraft quality (ii)”; 6 variables for “Airport services (iii)”; 12 variables for “Flight services (iv)”; 4 variables for “Seat reservation and ticket sales system (v)” and 4 variables for “Prices and pricing policies (vi)”. Passenger satisfaction (vii) (dependent variable) is measured by 4 observation variables (Table 1). The scales of observation variables are measured by five-degree scales with 1 (highly disagree) and 5 (highly agree).

3.2. Survey and Data Collections

To achieve statistics significance, sample sizes must be larger or equal fivefold numbers of questions or observation variables or larger or equal $50 + 8P$ with P being the number of independent variables in the model (Green, 1991; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The number of observation variables in this research are 38, divided into 7 factor groups. Therefore, the minimum sample size is $n \geq 38 \times 5 = 190$ or $n \geq 50 + 7 \times 8 = 106$ samples. Therefore, this research selects the minimum sample size of 190 with an aim to meet the requirements of the above researchers. The samples are chosen according to the convenient approach. Samples collected in the research are 400, checked and cleaned by the software SPSS with 195 males, 48.8% and 205 females, 51.2% (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of the Survey Samples

		Unit of Measurement: Person					
		Male		Female		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Purposes	Business	111	56.9%	120	58.5%	231	57.8%
	Personal	84	43.1%	85	41.5%	169	42.2%
Frequency	Over 2 times per month	44	22.6%	19	9.3%	63	15.8%
	1-2 times per month	104	53.3%	146	71.2%	250	62.5%
	Under 1 time per month	47	24.1%	40	19.5%	87	21.8%
Total		195	100%	205	100%	400	100%

Source: Descriptive statistics analysis results.

3.3. Scale Assessment

The scale reliability is assessed through Cronbach Alpha coefficients and corrected item - total correlation coefficients in order to remove “rubbish” variables. The variables with corrected item - total correlation coefficients less than 0.3 will be removed and the

criteria to select the scale is to have Cronbach Alpha coefficient greater than 0.6. The findings of Cronbach Alpha coefficient analysis indicate that all the scales have Cronbach Alpha coefficients greater than 0.6 and the corrected item - total correlation coefficient of the observed variables are greater than 0.3. Therefore, all the observed variables will be accepted and put into the analysis (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of the Scale Test

Scales	Observed	Correlations with the smallest total variables	Cronbach's Alpha coefficients
Flight schedules and flight schedule reliability	4	0.553	0.775
Aircraft quality	4	0.585	0.764
Airport services	6	0.477	0.791
Flight services	12	0.494	0.777
Ticket sales and seat reservation system	4	0.575	0.811
Prices and pricing policies	4	0.517	0.780
Passenger satisfaction	4	0.632	0.817

Source: Result of analysing Cronbach's Alpha.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. The Model Test

Table 4. Matrix of Correlations between Factors

		X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆	Y
X ₁	Pearson Correlation	1	0.659**	0.126*	0.456**	0.505**	0.524**	0.679**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.012	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
X ₂	Pearson Correlation	0.659**	1	0.132**	0.477**	0.500**	0.522**	0.653**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.008	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
X ₃	Pearson Correlation	0.126*	0.132**	1	0.046	0.087	-0.009	0.167**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.012	0.008		0.361	0.081	0.865	0.001
X ₄	Pearson Correlation	0.456**	0.477**	0.046	1	0.521**	0.528**	0.522**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.361		0.000	0.000	0.000
X ₅	Pearson Correlation	0.505**	0.500**	0.087	0.521**	1	0.499**	0.527**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.081	0.000		0.000	0.000
X ₆	Pearson Correlation	0.524**	0.522**	-0.009	0.528**	0.499**	1	0.593**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.865	0.000	0.000		0.000
Y	Pearson Correlation	0.679**	0.653**	0.167**	0.522**	0.527**	0.593**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	

Note: **Correlation coefficient at 0.01 (2-tailed).

Source: Correlation coefficient analyze result.

The results of the Pearson correlation coefficients test show that there is a correlation between “Passenger satisfaction” with the affecting factors in the model “Flight schedules and flight schedule reliability”, “Aircraft quality”, “Airport services”, “In-flight services”, “Ticket sales and Seating reservation system”, “Prices and pricing policies”. All Sig. values are smaller than 0.01 so all correlations ensure the statistics significance (Table 4).

4.2. The Importance of Factors

The results of the linear regression analysis demonstrate that all affected variables have the positive correlations with dependent variables and ensure the statistics significance (Sig. < 0.05). The significance in the ANOVA less than 0.05 show that the sample model can be put into use. The values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) of all variables in two models are within the range from 1 to 10. This means there is no self-correlation between all independent variables in all the models (Table 5).

Table 5. Estimated Parameters in the Model

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-0.264	0.190		-1.385	0.167		
X ₁	0.325	0.047	0.314	6.962	0.000	0.496	2.018
X ₂	0.253	0.050	0.231	5.099	0.000	0.492	2.031
X ₃	0.090	0.034	0.087	2.679	0.008	0.966	1.035
X ₄	0.116	0.042	0.112	2.753	0.006	0.608	1.644
X ₅	0.085	0.042	0.083	2.021	0.044	0.598	1.672
X ₆	0.212	0.043	0.208	4.936	0.000	0.570	1.753

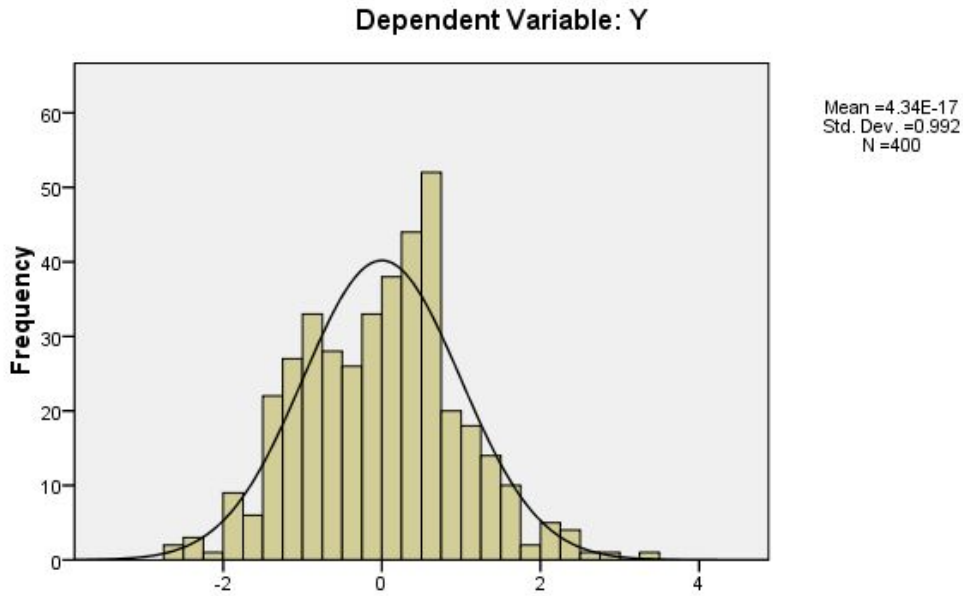
R² = 0.604
Adjusted R² = 0.598
Sig. in ANOVA = 0.000 (F = 99.727)

Note: a. Affected variables: (Free coefficients), X₁, X₂, X₃, X₄, X₅, X₆.

b. Dependent variables: Y.

Source: From the linear regression analyst.

The Histogram over standardized frequency of the model shows that the average value Mean is nearly 0, the standard deviation is 0.992, nearly 1. This means the extra distribution is nearly standard. We can conclude that the assumption of the standard distribution of the extra part is not broken (Figure 4).



Source: Histogram standardized linear regression extra.

Figure 4. The Histogram Standardized Linear Regression Extra

According to the linear regression analysis (Table 5 and Figure 2), the model after the estimation has the following form:

$$Y = 0.314X_1 + 0.231X_2 + 0.087X_3 + 0.112X_4 + 0.083X_5 + 0.208X_6.$$

4.3. Tests of Individual Affecting Factor

Table 6. The Variance Test of Groups of Passengers

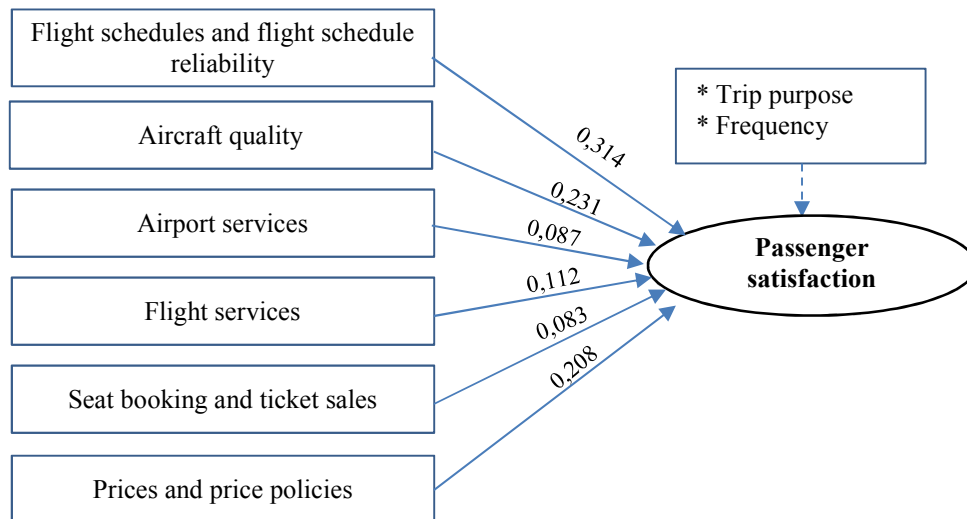
		Average	Standard deviation	Statistical Value	
				t or F	Sig. (2-tailed).
Gender	Male	3.5974	0.59648	1.014	0.311
	Female	3.5305	0.71485		
Trip purposes	Business	3.6982	0.62373	-3.553	0.000
	Personal	3.4643	0.66926		
Frequency	Over 2 times/a month	3.7143	0.54414	3.144	0.044
	1-2 times/a month	3.5670	0.65189		
	Under 1 time/a month	3.4425	0.73799		

Source: Difference statistics analysis results

The tests of differences indicate that there is a difference with Sig. ≤ 0.05 in the

customer satisfaction and the frequency of air transport. The difference assessments about male and female satisfaction are not big enough and do not ensure statistics significance. Specifically, non-residents give the highest favorable comments, followed by pupils and students and the lowest favourable comments belonged to the workers. Regarding the air transport use frequency, the more people use the air transport, the less satisfied they feel (Table 6).

From the results of regression analysis and the influence of individual factor assessment, the model of the factors affecting the performance of safety work on the flight is presented in Figure 3.



Source: From research results.

Figure 3. Model from Research Result

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the value chain model and analysis of passenger surveys on Vietnam Airlines short distance flights, passenger satisfaction depends most on the factor: "Flight schedules and flight schedule reliability", the next one is "Aircraft quality", "Prices and pricing policies", "In-flight services", the bottom two is "Airport services", "Ticket sales and seating reservation system".

As these factors increase by 1%, the satisfaction of passenger on Vietnam Airlines short haul flight increases by 0.314%, 0.231%, 0.208%, 0.112%, 0.077% and 0.083%. The results also show that there are differences in satisfaction depending on trip purpose and travel frequency of passengers. Passengers in business trip tends to have higher

satisfaction than passengers in personal trip. With regard to the passengers, the most satisfied guests are travelers, followed by students, the lowest is the workers. On a frequency basis, the more frequented passengers tend to have higher satisfaction.

As a result of this research findings, in order to improve passenger satisfaction on short haul flights, Vietnam Airlines should pay close attention to all of the factors, particularly flexible flight schedules and punctuality, reduction of delays or cancellation, aircraft quality and in-flight services. Competitive price structure and pricing policy should also be addressed accordingly.

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Received 28 November 2019, Accepted 20 March 2020.