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Service quality improvement of ground staff at Don Mueang International Airport

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this research were to: 1) evaluate the service quality of the ground staff at Don Mueang International Airport (DMK), 2) compare the ground staff quality service perception of Thai passengers at DMK, and 3) provide guidelines for service quality improvement of the DMK airlines ground staff. A sample size of 400 Thai domestic passengers was accidentally selected at DMK. A questionnaire was used as a research tool for data collection. Five dimensions of service quality were evaluated: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. It was found that the service quality of ground staff was moderate. The highest dimension of service quality realization was tangibles, followed successively by reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. The passengers' perception of the ground staff's service quality varied by gender and age group. Guidelines were proposed for the improvement of ground staff service quality at DMK based on the findings.

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Introduction

The World Wide Web has changed the global dynamic of air transport by rapidly developing advanced technology to facilitate traveling and increasing the expectation for service quality and the demand for passenger air-travel. In addition to providing a public utility service, air transport has played a significant role in national economic development. It provides more business-to-businesses in the supply chain industries such as restaurants, tourism, hospitality, and travel agents. [The International Civil Aviation Organization \(2013\)](#) forecasts that air transport of worldwide passengers will continually increase by 4.8, 5.9, and 6.3 percent in 2013, 2014, and 2015, respectively, as depicted in [Figure 1](#).

Data from the International Air Transportation Association (IATA) show that the demand for international air transport of world passengers between 2013 and 2017, expressed as revenue passenger kilometers, will expand at an average growth rate of 5.4 percent per annum. This is in line with the World Tourism Organization's 2014 forecast, which predicted that the number of passengers traveling internationally in Asia and the Pacific will increase by 5–6 percent ([The United Nations World Tourism Organization Asia-Pacific \[UNWTO Asia Pacific\], 2013](#), p. 11), whereas Airport Council International (ACT) expected that the growth rate of world passengers in the next 20 years (2008–2027) will increase on average by 4.2 percent per annum, and the growth rate in Asia-Pacific passengers at 6.3 percent is the highest compared to other regions of the world ([Thai Airways International Public Company Limited, 2012](#), p. 61).

In Thailand, according to [Table 1](#), DMK, which serves low-cost airlines (LCAs) and/or domestic and international point-to-point routes ([Bureau of Policy and Strategy, Office](#)

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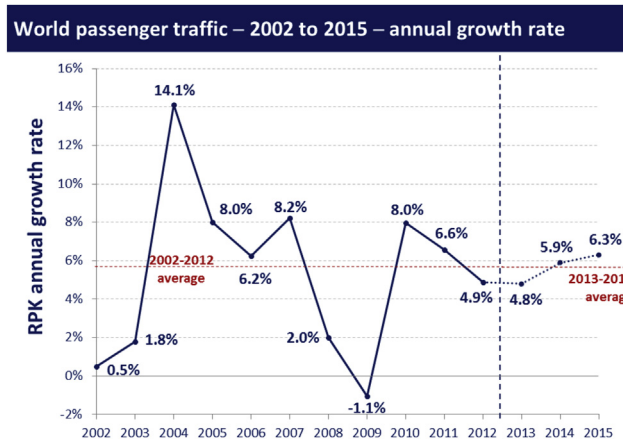


Figure 1 Forecast air transport passenger traffic between 2013 and 2015
Source: [International Civil Aviation Organization \(2013\)](#).

Table 1
Increased volume of flights and passengers at six airports in Thailand

Airport	Aircraft movement (Flights)		Number of passengers	
	2012	2013	2012	2013
Suvarnabhumi	326,970	288,004	52,368,712	50,900,697
Don Mueang	37,141	135,988	2,717,413	15,562,753
Chiang Mai	35,571	41,295	4,334,608	5,172,742
Hat Yai	14,573	17,056	2,013,243	2,465,370
Phuket	59,406	70,198	9,161,005	10,979,537
Mae Fah Luang	6,674	6,882	926,323	1,053,863
Total	480,335	559,423	71,521,304	86,134,962

Source: [Airports of Thailand PLC. \(2013, p. 89\)](#)

of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Transport, 2013, p. 26), experienced substantial increases in the volume of aircraft movements and passengers. This demonstrated a change in demand and modes of air transport, revealing that more passengers chose LCA services.

Currently, LCAs play an important role as competitors to full-service airlines as well as among themselves. The pricing strategy is a key factor in competition. However, service strategy was extremely important and numerous studies and research have shown that price competition is negative in the long term for LCAs (Chang & Yeh, 2002, pp. 166–177). Passengers still expect impressive service quality. According to the Travel Consumer Report issued in February 2014 (Table 2), the U.S. Department of Transportation, statistics showed that both full-service airlines and low-cost airlines received customer service complaints. Thus, passengers traveling with LCAs were not only impressed with the cheaper air fare, but they also wanted good service quality from the airline staff.

Service quality is an important achievement indicator. Airline business organizations set strategies and develop service quality to win the kudos for its organization of being at the top level and globally recognized. They use service excellence as a main organizational strategy to inspire and assure the passengers that their service quality is excellent. In addition, it establishes satisfaction, reliability, distinction, organization image, and loyalty of

Table 2
Top three passenger complaints about U.S. airlines between January and December 2013

U.S. airline	Flight problems	Customer service	Baggage
Air Wisconsin	30	10	0
Airtran Airways	47	22	18
Alaska Airlines	22	17	13
Allegiant Air	139	57	21
American Airlines	485	275	358
American Eagle Airlines	180	34	34
Chautauqua Airlines	30	3	4
Commut Air	36	0	4
Compass Airlines	11	3	3
Delta Air Lines	178	137	79
Endeavor Airlines	75	9	20
Express jet Airlines	251	22	36
Frontier Airlines	75	42	33
Go!	45	3	3
Gojet Airlines	36	7	7
Great Lakes Aviation	24	1	1
Hawaiian Airlines	15	20	11
Horizon Airlines	9	2	3
Island Airlines	7	1	0
Jetblue Airways	47	28	48
Mesa Airlines	52	9	1
Piedmont Airlines	44	6	2
PSA Airlines	24	3	2
Republic Airlines	116	11	9
Shuttle America	44	6	6
Silver Airways	17	3	14
Skywest Airlines	142	18	30
Southwest Airlines	104	76	70
Spirit Airlines	318	109	148
Sun Country Airlines	3	2	4
Trans States Airlines	19	1	5
United Airlines	521	337	287
US Airways	277	99	75
Virgin America	19	15	17
Other U.S. airlines	21	8	6
Total Jan–Dec 2013	3,473	1,396	1,372

Source: [U.S. Department of Transportation \(2014\)](#)

passengers or new customers who are interested in using their service (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997, p. 75).

Under the new global dynamic, airline businesses have changed and now focus on gaining a competitive advantage

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