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Customer Purchase Intention Towards the US Airline

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CUSTOMER PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARDS THE US AIRLINE

INDUSTRY

By

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Abstract

The airline industry has become the main economic resource to the United States. The airline companies have had a very mature operating base towards their marketing standing point and their target customers. Yet, customer purchase behavior has changed consistently, especially after the whole year of lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic. Customers no longer only look for the service quality when they select an airline to fly. This paper aims to explore the possible aspects that may affect customer purchase intention to a US-based airline. Many studies have indicated that service quality is no longer the only reason to attract the purchase intention. This paper is focusing on the aspects of perceived value, price, customer satisfaction, value employees, brand image, brand trust, in-flight facilities, and service failures that may affect customer purchase intention towards US-based airlines by using the secondary data to step into customer's perspective to know about their purchase intention.

Keywords: Customer purchase intention, US-based airlines, airline industry, SERVQUAL Model, AIRQUAL Model

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Chapter One

Introduction

The airline industry is the main economic resource that brings to a country, especially for the United States. According to the statistics, there are more than 656 million travelers that have traveled by air transportation from June 2019 to May 2020 in the United States (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, n.d.). It represents the American people's dependence on air transportation is very high, and air transportation has become an irreplaceable means of transportation. However, every airline's mission is to guarantee safety while bringing their customers to their destinations, whether it is a traditional airline or a budget airline. In the United States, there are 18 US-based commercial airlines that are offering the service to the public (Mazareanu, 2021) and serving the routes around the United States, as well as the international routes.

The airline industry is not only to deliver the transportation service, but it is also considered as a service industry to offer the service in the air. In terms of the customers, they tend to believe that the main reason that triggers their purchase intention is based on an airline that can deliver the best customer service or offer the best deal of the time (Chen, 2008). Therefore, there is a high correlation between customer service and the value that is provided, which leads to preferred airlines of

choice for customers (Chen, 2008). However, a preferred airline company is not only because of its customer service quality but there are also other reasons why the customers would prefer to choose them. Such as in-flight facilities (An & Noh, 2009), the quality of the employee (Paek & Won, 2018), especially when it comes to tricky situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic that may affect their rights and convenience, and the service failure that may be happened during the experience (Xu et al., 2018). Therefore, the way that all airlines attract their customers is not always the same reason. On the other hand, if an airline wants to keep their existing customers and attract a protentional customer group, understanding what customers' visions are important. Hence, exploring the customer purchase intention is always a lesson to every airline company.

The strategy of being competitive is to know the customer's behavior of purchasing and the elements that trigger their purchase intention. However, there are lots of factors that are involved in the customer purchase intention that have not been well discussed in the previous studies (An & Noh, 2009). Therefore, to align with the research intention, the research question of this paper is: What will affect the purchase intention of customers who are selecting a US-based airline?

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to prove that the customer purchase intention is not only triggered by the service quality. This paper is going to focus on different factors that may affect customer purchase intention, such as perceived value, price, customer satisfaction, valuable employees, brand image, brand trust, in-flight facilities, and service failure. The airline company is a very important link to make a customer's trip begin. However, it can also be the reason to suspend the trip or experience the unfavored process (Perez, 2019). In addition to these common factors, there may be hidden satisfiers and dissatisfiers regarding customer satisfaction and loyalty for airline customers.

Conceptual Framework

The key to allowing an airline company to become competitive is to frequently review the services that they provide to the customers. Moreover, it is even harder to become one of the well-known best airlines among the high-demand market in the United States, especially when the airline industry is hit by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kemmis, 2021). Among my working experience in the US budget airlines, I have received different voices from our customers with their comments on the service we provide inside and outside of the aircraft. On the other hand, different customers have different intentions of purchasing after receiving the services, and the service quality is not always their reason. To modify the customer purchase intention, I utilize the

methodology of SERVQUAL in this paper, a model that is frequently used to weigh the service quality in the overall service industry (Koklic et al., 2017) to observe the aspects that may drive the service quality.

Researchers indicate that SERVQUAL methodology is the best model to evaluate the customer purchase intention (Min & Min, 2015). Five divisions of SERVQUAL including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy can measure the customer's satisfaction (Rady, 2018). In addition, I use the AIRQUAL methodology to find the service quality connection exclusively in the airline industry to explore the aspect other than service itself that SERVQUAL is focusing on (Koklic et al., 2017). Research implies that customer satisfaction in the airline industry is more towards the employee and brand image (Rady, 2018), which can bring confidence in the flying experience and the ease of travel to the customer (Min & Min, 2015). Therefore, I apply the AIRQUAL model with the divisions of a valued employee, brand image, brand trust (Akamavi et al., 2015), in-flight facilities (Chen & Chang, 2005), and service failure (Xu et al., 2018) to find the significant connection of the customer purchase intention in the airline industry.

Research Design

With the increased demand for air transportation, customers' expectations and purchase intentions are worth discussing between traditional airlines and budget

airlines by using US-based airlines' existing examples. As the tourism industry becomes more prosperous and the demand increases, every airline is trying its best to solidify its customer group and attract new customers. Thus, what could be a reason to let the customer choose an airline to fly on among the variety of options? The answer could be varied, and it all leads to customer purchase intention.

Numerous studies indicate that the customer purchase intention is not only being driven by the customer service quality but also the perceived value that the customer received during their experience (Mayr & Zins, 2012). The research indicates that although the expectation of customer service is slightly lower for budget airlines, it is offering a cheaper price than a traditional airline (Koklic et al., 2017). Everyone has a different standard of service quality, and the perceived value can also be varied to drive the different customer satisfaction. Therefore, I propose that (H1) the service quality has a direct impact on the perceived value, (H2) the perceived value will affect customer satisfaction, and (H3) customer satisfaction will affect customer purchase intention.

Every airline company hopes to bring a positive image to the public and have enough trust to win everyone's goodwill towards the company, especially to the existing and the potential customers (Hung, 2015). In the other words, employees are the ones that are represent the whole company and direct the customer's impression

during the whole experience (Paek & Won, 2018). A customer's mood is likely to be affected because of an employee's action. Therefore, I propose that (H4) employee's image has a positive effect on customer purchase intention. In addition, the brand image is the intangible foundation, as well as the starting point to allow the business to win customers' goodwill and to trigger their purchase intention of a positive image. Hence, I propose that (H5) a positive brand image will raise the customer's purchase intention, and (H6) a positive brand trust will raise the customer's purchase intention.

Customers may also decide their next flight purchase options based on the in-flight tangible service (An & Noh, 2009), such as in-flight entertainment (Inmarsat, 2018), quality of the seat (An & Noh, 2009), and the probability of the airline facing service failures and its solutions (Xu et al., 2018). Therefore, I propose that (H7) the airline's tangible service will possibly affect customer purchase intention and recommendation intention, and (H8) service failure may result in a negative impact on customer repurchase intention.

Limitations

COVID-19 pandemic

The limitation of this paper is that every US airline may have some changes based on the current situation. This paper is conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the travel restrictions and health concerns. The table resources I

conducted are based on the current update by the airline companies, which may differ from before and after the pandemic. Therefore, some of the results and research that are included in this paper may only be applicable for a short period of time, but it is valuable and worth being referenced for future study.

Delimitations

Market Setting

This paper only uses the US-based airlines' examples, which means that all the resources that are included in this paper are all based on US-based airlines' performance and customer behavior. Hence, the result may not be applicable for non-US-based airlines.

Survey

This paper did not conduct any survey due to the travel restriction is still happening, which decreases the possibility of travel, as well as the willingness to travel. Hence, the resources that have been collected are all based on online and published academic papers which may cause bias due to the positive results and publications are most likely to be exposed on the Internet (Xu et al., 2018).

Definition

Customer Purchase Intention: Customer's preference that would trigger them to purchase a product, service, or an experience from a business (Younus et al., 2015) that have been detailly evaluated before and after the experiences that lead to the future purchase intention (Koklic et al., 2017).

Service Quality: The level of the service that has been given out from the business to the consumer and it is evaluable by the customer (Konstantoulaki et al., 2019).

Perceived Value: The assessment of the return that the customers pay to the business, and the expectation of the equal return (Chen, 2008).

Customer Satisfaction: The satisfaction is based on the interaction with the airline employee, such as the check-in procedure, boarding procedure, and in-flight services (Koklic et al., 2017).

Flight Attendant Training: A 3–6-week training that includes flight safety, emergency procedure, flight procedure, learning aircraft, customer service, and first aid (Best Accredited Colleges, 2021).

Brand Image: The performance and the perception that a brand wants to deliver to the public and it is usually positive, motivated, and persuasive enough to catch customers' attention (Wilson, 2018).

Brand Trust: The credibility that the customers give to a brand because a company can perform the function and the service (Kabadayi & Alan, 2012).

In-flight facilities: The tangible service that customers can access in the aircraft

(Koklic et al., 2017).

Service Failure: A critical situation that causes a negative impact on customers' trips.

It could be a flight delay, cancelation, and aircraft crash (Xu et al., 2018).

Airline Industry in the United States

Innovation

The US Congress gave all the airline companies more flexibility and more freedoms in their operations after the Airline Deregulation Act was terminated in 1978 (Min & Min, 2015). It marked an important milestone for the US airline industry, as well as increased the options to the customers. All airline companies are allowed to design their own fares, routes, and operations without any limitations and restrictions (Jager, 1998). After the deregulation, Congress also lifted the restrictions of the destinations that the airlines were allowed to fly, which means that every airline company can utilize their aircraft and schedule more commercial flights (Schiller, 2019).

Besides the traditional airline, the budget airline has been slowly engaging within the competition. The first budget airline of the United States was Pacific Southwest Airlines in 1949 that only operated its routes in California before the deregulation

(Bailey, 2019). It built up a very solid foundation for the budget airline. Along with its low-cost feature, Pacific Southwest Airlines strived with the rising profit within its first few years of the operation, even though they did not operate any flight outside of California (Bailey, 2019). Herb Kelleher, one of the co-founders of Southwest, saw the potential of the budget airlines' market. He merged Pacific Southwest Airlines to "Air Southwest Co." in 1967 and expanded with the possibility of the budget airline with Pacific Southwest Airlines' success (Bailey, 2019). In 1971, Kelleher launched Southwest Airlines and took off its very first commercial flight from Houston on June 18 in the same year (Southwest Media, n.d.), and the Pacific Southwest Airlines stopped its operation in 1988 (Bailey, 2019). Kelleher saw the potential of Southwest Airlines, as well as the market of budget airlines in the United States (Budget Airline Guide, n.d.). After years of operation, Southwest has now become the biggest budget airline that flies domestically in the United States (Brown, 2021), along with 23 percent of the market share (Southwest Media, n.d.). It indicates that the budget airlines' future has become favored since then, and it marks the successful start of budget airlines to invade the United State airline market.

Statistics

Operating an airline is not an easy job. In fact, the airline industry has been facing a financial crisis ever since the deregulation act was lifted in 1978 (Garrow et

al., 2012). According to statistics, the ticket price of domestic flights in the United States has dropped 41.2% within 30 years after the deregulation (Garrow et al., 2012). The entire airline industry was suffering from the safety issue after the 911 attack, contagious virus outbreak, and the global financial crisis, which is all involved with their biggest financial source, customers.

The US airline industry has a significant impact on the US economy, as well as the citizens' top transportation choice (FAA, 2016). According to the statistics, there are nearly 2 million travelers who travel by air transportation in the US every day (TSA, 2019), with nearly 800,000 commercial flights that were being operated for each month in 2019 (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, n.d.). In addition, more and more Americans are willing to travel by air transportation compared with 50 years ago. Study shows that nearly 87% of Americans have taken air transportation within 50 years (Airlines for America, 2021). It indicates the high demand of the airline industry and reflects the importance of the entire US economy.

However, the airline industry is also vulnerable to external impact. The COVID-19 pandemic is the airline industry's hardest since the beginning of 2020. Compared with 2019, the domestic departure flights of 2020 have decreased nearly 72% (Hotle & Mumbower, 2021). In addition, the total revenue of 2020 has the same amount as 2000 (Garrow et al., 2021), which implies that the airline industry is suffering huge

damage from this impact. In terms of the airline industry, 2020 is the most depressing year ever.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The airline industry has a high demand for the main transportation method for all Americans to travel from state to state, or to the international destination. Customer purchase intention is always a lesson to all airline companies to be more special, and more competitive within a high-demand market. By being said, the perceived experience that customers will receive during their experience that may allow customers to evaluate their feeling and their overall perceived value. Therefore, the aspects that may affect any of the customer's feelings and overall experience are worth discussing. The aspects that may affect the purchase intention will be discussed below.

Customer Service

Studies indicate that a good customer quality could not only lead to a higher perceived value but also boost up customer satisfaction and loyalty (Sumaedi et al., 2012). A business that can provide a good customer service that is exceeding customers' expectations will likely receive higher customer satisfaction, as well as affect the customer's purchase intention (Chou et al., 2011).

The customer service of the airline industry is involved in the overall flying experience, including the check-in procedure, gate service, in-flight service, and baggage handling (Chen & Chang, 2005). In addition, customers also care about the airline's ability to solve the problem, including baggage handling, on-time departures, and the ability to handle tricky situations (Min & Min, 2015). Researchers have indicated that the service quality has the direct impact to the customer's perceived value and the overall satisfaction toward the entire experience (Sumaedi et al., 2012)

Perceived Value

Researchers indicate that perceived value is the primary factor that influences purchase intention (An & Noh, 2009). Previous studies indicate that the perceived value has a higher possibility to affect the purchase intention other than the customer satisfaction and the service quality (Gurler & Erturgut, 2018). Perceived value is not only involved with the customer's expectation that is attached with the price, but also the service quality, advantages, and efficiency they will receive during their experience (Mayr & Zins, 2012). These factors can be thoroughly demonstrated during the experiences. Along with the price that customers have paid to the business, customers can examine their perceived value based on the price and experience from their expectation and evaluate their future purchase with that business (Konstantoulaki et al., 2019).

In addition, the perceived value can also be affected by the seat classes the customer purchases. According to the research, the perceived value may be different between the economy class customers and the business class customers, such as the food quality, alcoholic beverage options, and the comfort of seats (An & Noh, 2009). The seat class may be affected by the general experiences, as well as the customer satisfaction. For example, the business class customers tend to purchase the class for the better perceived value they can receive other than the economic class, such as service, priority access, food and beverage, and comfort seat (Xu et al., 2018). It will cause the perceived value that the business class customer receives will be different and leave the more sensitive feedback toward the overall perceived value. Hence, I propose that

H1: *The service quality has a direct impact on the perceived value.*

Price

Customers tend to expect that they will receive the same amount of product and service as the amount they pay to the business (Arif, 2019). By comparison, budget airlines tend to take away the fares that are not necessarily required for every customer, such as luggage fees and the seat selection fee (Jou et al., 2021). Studies indicate that the reason for the trip, seats, allowance along with ticket price, the flight duration, and the frequency of travel are the factors that affect the willingness to

spend the money on travel. According to the research, business travelers are likely to choose the traditional airline and spend the money for the experience, as well as the customers who do not frequently travel by air transportation (Jou et al., 2020).

In general, traditional airlines tend to set their ticket price higher, but customers will receive multiple advantages that reflect its perceived value, including complimentary carry-on bags and complimentary snacks on board. However, unlike the traditional airline, the budget airlines have the lowest ticket price and the pricy surcharge services that would fulfill their profit on one passenger, such as the additional fee if a customer wants to select their seats, or an additional carry-on fee that may be more expensive than the ticket (Jou et al., 2021). Hence, budget airlines are promoting themselves with lower fares to attract customers who are not seeking an upper-level experience (Koklic et al., 2017). However, existing researchers indicate that the perceived value is floated by the price, which is because if the price is higher, the expectation will become higher, and the perceived value will become more sensitive (Koklic et al., 2017). It implies that the price can raise the higher perceived value, and it will affect the overall customer satisfaction. Therefore, we find the connection that perceived value will be impacted by the price.

Customer Satisfaction

In terms of a company, the higher customer satisfaction they receive, the higher possibility the customers will repurchase their products, and the more loyal customers they will receive (Koklic et al., 2017). Researchers find that more than half of the customers tend to scale their satisfaction based on the service quality, as well as the personal care during the experience (Anitsai et al., 2019).

However, compared with the traditional airline and the budget airline, there is no significant relationship between its customer satisfaction because the perceived values are different with two different types of airline operation (Koklic et al., 2017). As being said, the different perceived values can form the difference in customer satisfaction. Therefore, a significant relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction exists.

In addition, customers also examine their intention on airlines' attitude towards the contagious virus. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, airlines' staff are being limited to delivering their services to the customers. The FAA has regulated the policy to respond to COVID-19 pandemic for every airline, such as the flexibility of booking a ticket. For example, by now, American Airlines is the only airline that only accepts the flight change once, while most of the airlines are accepting multiple changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kemmis, 2021). The response of COVID-19 from each

airline becomes one of the reasons that trigger customer purchase intention (Ozuem et al., 2021). Therefore, I propose that

H2: *The perceived value will affect customer satisfaction.*

H3: *The customer satisfaction will affect customer purchase intention*

Valuable Employees

Good employees can make a business successful. In terms of the airline industry, customer service takes a huge part of the operation (Paek & Won, 2018) by providing complete customer service and assistance with any inquiries about the flights (Shahzad, 2018). Airline employees are in contact with their customers at every step of every customer's trip. Therefore, airline employees play a significant role in representing the company, as well as influencing how pleased customers are with their experience (Shahzad, 2018). To enable each employee to provide the same quality of service to every customer, a complete employee training is necessary to make sure their employees can fully represent the company.

Different from other service industries, the airline industry also takes care of safety and services to customers during the flight. Therefore, flight attendants' service in the air can impact customer repurchase intention (An & Noh, 2009), which indicates that flight attendants' pre-employment training is relevant. Every flight attendant must pass every individual exam before they are qualified to fly. In addition,

the overall employees' performance must be fluent and confident to let their customers feel safe in the air. Thus, the performance of flight attendants is based on their knowledge and skills acquired through training that translates into passenger satisfaction (Gibbs et al., 2017). It indicates that the firm's employee training is important to allow the flight attendant to enhance the customer service, and to affect the customer purchase intention, as well as that a good and valuable employee, along with a complete employee training can bring the customers in the business and affect the customer purchase intention.

Customer's intention of purchase can be driven by the employee's general performance within their role, whether it is on the ground or in the air (Shahzad, 2018). Happy employees and a happy workforce can also encourage the employees to enhance and create better customer service (Peek, 2021). Therefore, we find a significant relationship in that the valuable employee can affect the overall customer satisfaction, and drive the customer's repurchase intention for the next trip. Research indicates that employees' ability and efficiency are the keys that allow customers to evaluate their satisfaction and repurchase intention, especially while responding to customers' inquiries and performing the customer-orientated service (Akamavi et al., 2015). Therefore, I propose

H4: *Employee's image has a positive effect on customer purchase intention.*

Brand Image

Unlike other industries, the airline company upholds the duty to guarantee customers' safety and look after all the responsibilities in the air. To let customers feel safe while getting to their destination, a positive brand image of an airline company may be able to let the customers feel at ease throughout the whole experience, which may influence customers' future purchase intention (Hung, 2015). It is important and necessary for every brand to maintain its image and convey positive news and energy. Hence, I find the possibility that the brand image will affect the customer purchase intention. It could be based on the marketing, companies' core values (Zeren & Kara, 2021), and the top-notch quality of the operation (Hung, 2015). A positive brand image could shape customers' first impression of the company well, even before they access any service from the company (Wilson, 2018).

However, building a positive brand image is not easy and it is not a job that a single person could do. It is all based on the connection between the company and employees, the image, or any actions that the company has done for the public (Wilson, 2018), and the customer-oriented service that is provided by the employees (Shahzad, 2018). A positive brand image is indeed important to any business to leave a vigorous impression on their customers and become the customer's top choice of the purchase to drive its purchase intention. Therefore, I propose that

H5: *A positive brand image will raise the customer's purchase intention.*

Brand Trust

Credibility is a gem for a brand to be successful and persuasive. When a company wants to acquire customers' trust, showing its efficiency and credibility are important, especially it could build up a strong and positive relationship with its customers (Akamavi et al., 2015). Numerous studies have indicated that customers will feel good, loyal, and more willing to invest their purchases in the company they trust (Jeng, 2016). Moreover, adequate brand trust can also decrease the discomfort while purchasing any of the services because the customer has already had advanced customer satisfaction, which can also set the pace of loyalty (Zeren & Kara, 2020). Everyone does not want to waste their money and time on a brand that does not give them trust. Hence, if there is a brand that can gain the trust of customers, their customers will be more willing to purchase their service and product repeatedly (Dam, 2020).

Establishing brand trust is not only to win the customers' entrust, but also it is a reason that allows the brand to stay competitive within the industry. Brand trust is a factor to encourage customers to continue purchasing a product and a service in the same brand, as well as to build up confidence in their future purchases (Dam, 2020).

An incident that happened on United Airlines' flight could be the best example. In 2017, securities were asked to drag an involuntary passenger to deplane from his seat just because United Airlines needed their flight attendants to be on this full flight to complete the flight from the destination, even though that passenger was not a volunteer (Anitsal et al., 2019). This flight has thoroughly changed customers' trust in United Airlines for its service, which may cause the customer's fear to purchase their service.

Building brand trust can enhance customers' confidence in the brand. Customers tend to rely more on a brand that is trustworthy and could decrease their fear while purchasing a service (Zeren & Kara, 2020). In addition, brand trust is also related to the commitment that a brand gives to its customers. Customers tend to trust a brand that can offer the service to them based on the commitment they made (Chaudhrt & Holbrook, 2001). It implies that if a brand can fulfill the commitment they give to their customers, its brand trust will be growing, the customer loyalty will increase, and the customer will be more likely to return to purchase their service again in the future.

Everyone has a different experience with different airlines in a different situation, which means that their trust in traditional airlines may not always be the highest. In addition, any negative experience and service quality could affect the

brand trust. The quality of the service can not only impact the overall experience during the flight, but it can also affect the trust of a brand based on the perceived performance of a customer (Han et al., 2018). Therefore, I propose that

H6: *A positive brand trust will raise the customer's purchase intention.*

Inflight Facilities

Each aircraft is designed differently based on every airline's trait and the image that they want to show to their customers (An & Noh, 2009), such as the delicated seat classes, seat sizes, in-flight meals, types of aircrafts, and the inflight entertainment (Bryan 2018). Every customer has different point of views of the experience and preferences, especially every customer may receive different service based on the ticket price or the seating class in the same flight (Jeng, 2016).

Therefore, tangible traits in the aircraft may mark a deep impression to the customers and customers may return to purchase for that specific trait they like (Koklic et al., 2017) Hence, I find a significant connection that the overall in-flight facilities can decide customer purchase intention.

Every customer has their seating preferences depending on their backgrounds, needs (An & Noh, 2009), or purpose of travel (Kim & Lee, 2019). The comfort of the cabin seats has a certain influence on purchase intention while customers are choosing

an airline to fly, especially for a long-haul trip (Segan, n.d.). The seating chart arrangement and size of seats may differ based on the aircraft that the airline adapts for the specific trip (Aldrich, 2021). The detailed features are listed in Table 1. Study indicates that business travelers tend to choose an airline that provides larger seats or extra legroom; a family traveler tends to choose an airline regardless of the seat size (Kim & Lee, 2019), and a wide passenger will avoid the airline that provides narrow seats (Segan, n.d.). Hence, I find the direct connection that the seat size may affect the customer's purchase intention.

With the improvement of the aircraft, more and more airlines have installed their in-flight entertainment services in their aircraft, especially for long-haul trips and newer models (French, 2021). The detailed features are listed in Table 2. Every customer has different habits during their flights. Study shows that customers tend to utilize the in-flight entertainment service on board rather than stay on their own devices (Gillaspia, 2021) unless the airline provides free Wi-Fi or free texting access (French, 2021). Whether there is in-flight entertainment on the plane will likely affect people's overall experiences and increase overall customer satisfaction.

In addition, the in-flight meals can also trigger customer intention of purchase. Within numerous flight options of a day, the in-flight food option may affect customer purchase intention. For example, customers may choose Hawaiian airlines just

because they serve Hawaiian macadamia nuts instead of normal pretzels during the flights to go to Hawaii (Hope, 2017); and people may prefer to choose an airline that does not charge for water or soft drinks (Bryan, 2018), especially for a long-haul trip. The detailed food and beverage features for domestic routes are listed in Table 3, and Table 4 is listed for international routes. However, most of the US-based budget airlines do not offer any complimentary food and beverage, while the traditional airlines offer free bottled water and free snacks for the domestic routes (Heasman, 2017). Every tangible detail on the flights may affect customers' future intentions after their experience. I find the significant conclusion that the in-flight facilities will positively affect customer purchase intention.

H7: *The airline's tangible service will possibly affect customers repurchase and recommendation intention*

Table 1

The main US-based airlines seat dimension chart of economy class.

Airline (Code)	Pitch	Width
Alaska Airlines (AS)	31-32 inches	17-18 inches
Allegiant Air (G4)	31 inches	16-17 inches
American Airlines (AA)	30 inches	17-17.8 inches
Delta Airlines (DL)	30-32 inches	18 inches

Frontier Airlines (F9)	28-31 inches	18 inches
Hawaiian Airlines (HA)	31-32 inches	18 inches
JetBlue (B6)	32-33 inches	18 inches
Southwest Airlines (WN)	31-32 inches	17.8 inches
Sun Country Airlines (SY)	29-30 inches	16.1-17.3 inches
Spirit Airlines (NK)	28 inches	17.75 inches
United Airlines (UA)	31 inches	17-18 inches

Note: This table is created by using the data from airlines' official websites and airfarewatchdog.com. The size may be varied based on the type of aircraft.

Table 2

The main US-based airlines in-flight entertainment service of economy class.

Airline (Code)	Wi-Fi	Free?	Personal Screen
Allegiant Airline (G4)	No	No	No
Alaska Airlines (AS)	Yes	No	Yes
American Airlines (AA)	Yes	No	Yes
Delta Airlines (DL)	Yes	No	Yes
Frontier Airlines (F9)	No	No	No
Hawaiian Airlines (HA)	No	No	Yes
JetBlue (B6)	Yes	Yes	Yes

Southwest Airlines (WN)	Yes	No	No
Sun Country Airlines (SY)	No	No	No
Spirit Airlines (NK)	No	No	No
United Airlines (UA)	Yes	No	Yes

Note: This table is created by using the data from airlines' official websites. The in-flight entertainment may be varied based on the type of aircraft and any renovation.

Table 3

The main US-based airlines in-flight food and beverage service of economy class

(Domestic routes)

Airline (Code)	Food	Beverage
Alaska Airlines (AS)	<350 miles: complimentary snacks >350 miles: Complimentary fresh meal box excludes LAS-PDX	Complimentary soft drinks, alcohol drinks are for purchase
Allegiant Airlines (G4)	Not Complimentary	Not Complimentary
American Airlines (AA)	Complimentary snacks	Complimentary soft drinks and coffee. Alcohol drinks are for purchase.

Delta Airlines (DL)	Complimentary snacks with savory and sweet options	Complimentary soft drinks and coffee. Alcohol drinks are for purchase.
Frontier Airlines (F9)	Not Complimentary	Not Complimentary
Hawaiian Airlines (HA)	Complimentary Hawaiian snacks and meal boxes	Complimentary soft drinks, beers, and wines.
JetBlue (B6)	Complimentary chips and crackers	Complimentary soft drinks and coffee. Alcohol drinks are for purchase.
Southwest Airlines (WN)	Complimentary snacks	Complimentary soft drinks
Sun Country Airlines (SY)	Not Complimentary	Complimentary soft drinks and coffee. Alcohol drinks are for purchase.
Spirit Airlines (NK)	Not Complimentary	Not Complimentary
United Airlines (UA)	Complimentary snacks and sanitizer packages	Complimentary soft drinks and coffee

Note: This table is created by using the data from the airline's official websites. The subject may change by the current updates.

Table 4

The main US-based airlines in-flight food and beverage service of economy class

(International routes)

Airline (Code)	Food	Beverage
Alaska Airlines (AS)	Complimentary snacks and meal boxes	Complimentary soft drinks, beers, and wines
Allegiant Airlines (G4)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
American Airlines (AA)	Complimentary snacks and meal boxes	Complimentary soft drinks, beers, and wines
Delta Airlines (DL)	Complimentary snacks with savory and sweet options	Complimentary soft drinks
Frontier Airlines (F9)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Hawaiian Airlines (HA)	Complimentary Hawaiian snacks and meal boxes	Complimentary soft drinks, beers, and wines.
JetBlue (B6)	Complimentary chips and crackers	Complimentary soft drinks and coffee. Alcohol drinks are for purchase.
Southwest Airlines (WN)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Sun Country Airlines (SY)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Spirit Airlines (NK)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
United Airlines (UA)	Complimentary snacks and meal boxes	Complimentary soft drinks, coffee, wines, and beers.

Note: This table is created by using the data from the airline's official websites. The subject may change by the current updates.

Service Failure

Although all airlines are doing their best to complete the customer service and to avoid any complaints and negative feedback. Yet, service failure is one of the incidents that no one wants to happen. Since human laborers have an inseparable connection with the production and providing service, service failure is hard to be avoided (Mostert et al., 2009). When the service failure has occurred, its customer satisfaction and loyalty may have a significant impact (Keiningham et al., 2014). As a result, the overall return customer rate will drop, and the customer may not want to purchase any service from that airline anymore. Therefore, I find the connection between service failure and customer purchase intention.

However, most of the service failure is mainly caused by external factors, such as bad weather, aircraft malfunction, and airline staffing issue (Xu et al., 2018), which may affect the guests' entire experiences and the changes of their plan. Therefore, the perceived value and the overall experience may be ruined, and customer satisfaction will be affected.

Relying on the effectiveness of the vaccine and the post lockdown after a year of pandemic, Americans began to retaliate to travel even before the pandemic was completely under control during the summer. The US airline industry is currently experiencing a lack of employee crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Spirit Airlines has canceled more than 2000 flights a week due to staffing issues and weather issues during the summer of 2021 (Towey, 2021). It caused massive complaints from the unhappy customers who were stuck in the airport that was desperate to travel. After this service failure, Spirit airlines need to face a huge amount of service recovery fees and lose many existing and potential customers (The Associated Press, 2021). It implies that the impact of service failure is closely related to the customer purchase intention and the minimum chance for the recommendation. Every airline must have an effective response and solution for the service recovery (Mostert et al., 2009) to resolve the consequences of service failure.

In-flight facilities and service failure are closely related to the tangible services that take part in customers' overall flying experiences. In other words, these tangible services will drive customer satisfaction and purchase intention in different directions, and they will be deeply affected when they are negatively affected during the trip. It will result in the cause that customers will not be willing to purchase the service again. Hence, I notice the relationship that the tangible services will affect customers' repurchase and recommendation intentions.

H8: *Service failure may result in negative impact of customer repurchase intention.*

Summary of Finding from the Literature Review

The aspects that may affect customer purchase intention in the US airline industry while emphasizing service quality is not the only reason. The research result indicates that there are multiple reasons that can trigger customer purchase intention while selecting an airline service, such as the price of services, perceived value, customer satisfaction, employee's image, brand image, brand trust, in-flight facilities, and service failure

Chapter Three.

Findings

Customer purchase intention is subjective, and it can be affected in different aspects. The customer service quality that every customer receives may be varied based on different experiences they have received (Chen & Chang, 2008), which causes the different situations that every customer may have for each flight. Study reveals that more than 50% of the customers will not return to purchase the same airline if an airline fails to provide customer service for once (Min & Min, 2015). The example of United Airlines has a direct connection toward the customer service quality. Among 1900 responders, nearly 80% of responders stated that they will not purchase any United Airlines flights again after this incident (Nichols, 2017). On the other hand, a financial crisis can also be impacted by poor service quality. Researchers indicate that poor service quality may result in the regression of financial distress due to the lack of perceived value that reflects on the service that the customer has received (Min & Min, 2015). It implies that customers will not purchase a service if they cannot receive the same amount of the perceived value. I conclude that service quality has a direct connection to perceived value. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Customers tend to believe that they will receive the service with the equal value they paid for the flights and evaluate the experience to value its perceived value of the overall experience (Konstantoulaki et al, 2019). However, the study reveals that the

price is not the aspect that may drive the first-time flyer's purchase intention. Instead, the price has more effect on a customer who purchases the same airline's service frequently (Akamavi et al., 2015), which indicates that the price has a direct link with more toward the customer loyalty. Moreover, perceived values that customers consider are not thoroughly relevant to deny boarding, on-time departure and arrival, and false luggage handling (Min & Min, 2015). It is more towards flight delays and in-flight service that has direct contact with the customers during its experience (An & Noh, 2009). Hence, customers take their perceived value to evaluate the overall rate of the experience. It implies that the more positive perceived value they have received, the higher customer satisfaction the business will receive, and the higher chance to encourage the customers to purchase it again (Gurler & Erturgut, 2018). As a result, perceived value can affect customer satisfaction based on their experience. Therefore, H2 is supported.

Customers take their perceived value to evaluate the overall rate of the experience. Customer satisfaction is based on the perceived value and the overall customer service that customers have experienced with the airline (Koklic et al., 2017), such as the ease of online check-in via mobile app (Buckman, 2017), interaction with employees, overall flying experiences (Anitsai et al., 2019). Researchers indicate that customer satisfaction will encourage customer purchase

intention by word of mouth, and its repurchase intention will be based on the previous experience with an airline (Koklic et al., 2017).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed customers' concerns and definitions of travel by air transportation. Except for the overall experience, every airline's response to COVID-19 has been considered an aspect that affects customer satisfaction, such as waiving the cancellation fee, blocking the middle seat, and the flight attendant's action of enhancing COVID-19 infection (Effler, 2021). Also, because every airline has implemented COVID-19 regulation and the proper response, every airline's customer satisfaction has risen in 2021 (Clarke, 2021). Among all the US commercial airlines, Delta Airlines is ranked first with a score of 860 out of 1000 among all the US airlines. Not only is it an airline that has many praises in the eyes of customers' experience, but also it has been the Number 1 airline for several years in the US (Kemmis, 2021). An airline that has great customer satisfaction will naturally encourage the customers to purchase their service. The H3 is supported.

Employees are the ones representing the whole company, as well as the frontline representations that are representing the company to reach out to the customers. The study indicates that customer satisfaction can be built by frontline employees' service and performance to the customers (Gibb et al., 2017), especially when the customers are facing an event of service failure. The value of employees can be caused by the

value that the company gives to them. Southwest Airlines is known for being the best customer service provider, which is all based on its employees (Peek, 2021). Workers from Southwest illustrate how Southwest values their hard work, such as providing great benefit, flexible schedule, and care from the company (Ward, 2016) This company culture can really encourage and inspire their employees to provide better customer service and raise customer satisfaction and receive the minimum complaint from the customers (Robertson, 2018).

Every airline has its own way to train its employees. The researcher indicates that the more that employee is trained, employee's overall performance towards customers, customer satisfaction, and productivity of employee will have a significant raise (Gibb et al., 2017), which will make customers feel safe and confident along with the well-trained employees throughout the entire trip. It illustrates the importance of employee training and on-the-job training to evaluate employees' ability to represent the company before they start to reach out to the customers. Therefore, H4 is supported.

Credibility and image are important for a brand, especially in the airline industry. A positive and healthy brand image can likely attract new customers, especially first-time travelers for the long-term strategy (Min & Min, 2015). Study indicates that an airline can gain customer loyalty based on a greater brand image (Kijpanjasub &

Jitkuekul, 2019). An airline company that can acquire customers' trust in branding, operation, and the overall image can raise confidence in the flying experience, and customers will likely purchase the service because of the brand trust (Zeren & Kara, 2020). In accordance with the statistics, nearly 70% of people think that the credibility of a brand is more important than any aspect of marketing, (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2020). The study indicates that there are five factors that may affect brand trusts, such as professional knowledge, confidence, efficiency, euphemism, and service recovery (Akamavi et al., 2015). The professionalism of a brand could raise confidence to allow customers to trust a brand and attempt to purchase its service. Hence, I conclude that a positive brand image will raise the customer purchase intention. Therefore, H5 and H6 are supported.

The in-flight facilities are also a part of everyone's flight. Research indicates that the size of seats and in-flight entertainment are the two main reasons that affect customers' overall flying experience in the air (Koklic et al., 2017). Researcher indicates that the customers tend to choose an airline with wider seats to pursue comfort, especially the wide customers (Segan, n.d.). In addition, according to the statistics, 55% of the customers will choose an airline that offers Wi-Fi onboard and 67% of the customers, especially business travelers and family travelers, are more likely to repurchase an airline just for its Wi-Fi service (Inmarsat, 2018). JetBlue's

customer satisfaction is the highest because of its in-flight entertainment, free Wi-Fi, and it has the largest seat among all the US budget airlines (JetBlue, 2019). Hence, these features will affect customer purchase intention. However, in-flight food options do not have a significant impact on customer purchase intention. Customers cannot receive free water from budget airlines, but a budget airline's rate is usually cheaper than the traditional airline, in which the perceived value is different. Moreover, there is no research supporting that food quality may affect the purchase intention due to the catering may be changed from time to time. Therefore, even though in-flight food may not be a reason that customer purchase an airline, but the seats and in-flight entertainment have a direct connection towards customer purchase intention. Therefore, we still conclude that H7 is supported.

The event of service failure is hard to avoid, even with the top 1 airline carrier (Xu et al., 2018). In fact, research indicates that the US commercial airline has done a great job of aircraft inspection, which the last fatal incident happened a decade ago (Weise, 2018). It allows Americans to be willing to travel by air transportation with the minimum safety concern. In addition, a great service failure recovery can enhance customer loyalty and it can also comfort the angry customer to a loyal customer who is suffering in an event of service failure (Akamavi et al., 2015).

Another reason that causes the service failure is the chance of a flight being canceled. For example, Spirit Airlines has canceled more than 2000 flights in of a week due to staffing issues and weather issues during the summer of 2021 (Towey, 2021). It caused massive complaints from the unhappy customers who were stuck in the airport that was desperate to travel. After this service failure, Spirit airlines need to face a huge amount of service recovery fees and lose many existing and potential customers (The Associated Press, 2021). In addition, American Airlines also canceled more than 1000 flights due to the staffing issue in late October (Koenig, 2021). These customers may not want to purchase its airline's service again due to the previous service failure, even if an airline has provided the compensation and voucher for future trips with the proper apology (Xu et al., 2018). It will cost a negative impact on customer loyalty, as well as the customer repurchase intention. These factors will directly impact customers' flights. As a result, any of the service failures will positively affect customer repurchase intention for their next flights. Hence, I conclude that H8 is supported.

Solve/Address the Research Problem

Customer Service Intention Towards Airline Industry in the United States

With the development of the Internet and more and more choices within the market, it enables customers to be able to choose what they want accurately among

the airline companies. Hence, service quality is no longer the only reason that affects customer purchase intention.

Unlike Asian airlines, US-based airline companies neither have a service evaluation towards their employees nor encourage their employees to provide greater customer service unless it's related to flight safety (Leff, 2013). This aspect of the reasons prompted me to study what factors can change or affect the customer purchase intention towards US-based airlines. This paper points out some aspects that customers will encounter when flying and affect their purchase intention, and what aspects should an airline implement to their operation to retain their existing customers, attract potential customers, and receive a good evaluation.

Application

Every country has its own airlines. The airline industry is a mature industry that offers air transportation to customers. Although everyone may think that airline companies are always earning money and will never be left behind, the airline industry can be easily struck again by natural disasters and the next epidemic. COVID-19 pandemic teaches an unforgettable lesson to every industry, especially the airline industry. Every airline is hoping to earn their loss back to accomplish the recovery as soon as they see the brightness. Yet, the main resource is customers. Therefore, effectively making plans and understanding the markets is the key to

growing the company consistently. This study will help an airline to analyze the needs and concerns of customers while they are flying. Researchers and airline companies can utilize this study to apply for the future study of the post-pandemic environment to develop a more effective strategy to grow and dominate the airline market in the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the travel habits of all Americans, especially after the American has experienced a year-long lockdown without any foreign country travel opportunities. According to the survey that has done by Laurie Baratti, a journalist who focuses on the hot topics of the tourism industry, 20% of the respondents have developed the habit of driving to travel, instead of taking flights for domestic travel within the United States; 35% of the respondents starts to decrease their travel budget; 53% of the respondents have indicated that they are no longer enjoy travel after staying home for a year during the pandemic (Travel Pulse, 2021). These numbers imply that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a certain degree of harm to the aviation industry. Due to this paper being conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, I suggest that the future researcher can propose a study that focuses on the economy, customer travel preference, or purchase intention based on the post-

pandemic environment, as well as the major differences of purchase intention before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The airline industry has a huge impact on every country's economy. In terms of the tourism and transportation industry, the airline company operation is unreplaceable. Yet, the competition between each commercial airline is still fierce towards their customer base, especially after the huge loss from COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic changes people's travel habits a lot and refreshes people's definition of travel. Every airline has its target customers and wants to be at the top of the airline industry, no matter if it is a traditional airline or a budget airline. At this point, understanding their customers and society's needs is always a lesson to an airline. This paper has pointed out the aspects that could trigger customer purchase intention when they are selecting an airline, with referencing US-based active commercial airlines. It may be beneficial and applicable to any kind of airline structure, and it may be a good start to learn the customers by the evidence and statistics. Although the business cannot manipulate the customer's purchase intention, knowing the demand and to fulfill the needs can be the turning point to bring the business up. Airlines can develop strategies that are beneficial to both parties by knowing their customers and understanding their customers, as well as building

confidence so that customers can have confidence and consistently purchase their service to travel around the world.

Limitations

Limited Data

Due to this paper not conducting any survey, it causes the difficulty to collect real-life examples, or accurate numbers to support the findings. In the other words, any existing experience, or unrevealed experiences cannot be recorded in this paper because most of the companies tend to avoid any negative news that has been reported if it is possible, even though there may be lots of existing cases that have happened. It causes the lack of real-life data that could be collected in this paper. Therefore, some of the results are based on previous researchers and the information that has been reported in the news.

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