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**SHOOTING FOR THE SKIES: LEVERAGING PUBLIC RELATIONS TO  
IMPROVE THE IMAGE OF COMMERCIAL AIRLINES**

by  
Elisa Ruzbeh Durand

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Public Relations and Advertising  
College of Communications  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Public Relations  
at  
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Thesis Chair:        Joseph Basso, Ph.D.

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Special thanks to Dr. Basso...without his patience, this project would never have come to fruition.

And last but certainly not least, my parents, who always instilled a healthy appreciation for the pursuit of higher education.

## **Abstract**

Elisa Ruzbeh Durand

### **SHOOTING FOR THE SKIES: LEVERAGING PUBLIC RELATIONS TO IMPROVE THE IMAGE OF COMMERCIAL AIRLINES**

2012

Joseph Basso, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Public Relations

The goal of this study was to determine if commercial airlines can improve their image by soliciting feedback from their customer base and responding accordingly. The results of both qualitative and quantitative research methods show that travelers lack confidence in the level of concern commercial airlines hold for their satisfaction.

Multiple national customer service surveys administered to travelers paint a recurring pattern of unhappy fliers who believe airlines are unaware of their concerns and needs. The results of two primary questionnaires demonstrate that airlines are not in concert with customer expectations.

The data results indicate that by leveraging customer feedback to implement effective public relations techniques via channels such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and blogs to digitally communicate with passengers, commercial airlines can regain the confidence and approval of their customers.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Background**

The airline industry has changed significantly in recent years. The events of September 11, 2001 accelerated the industry's already dire budgetary situation. Four airlines, Delta, United, US Airways and Northwest Airlines, declared bankruptcy following the tragedy.

### **Problem Statement**

Customer satisfaction has taken a backseat to maintaining business operations. Overcrowded airplanes, flight cancellations, scores of fare hikes and added fees, multitudes of cost and service-cutting measures, and inattentive air and ground services all are equating to increased passenger frustration with the airlines' service quality and reliability (Brimmer, 2011).

In the 2009 budget year, 10 U.S. airlines collected \$7.8 billion in baggage fees and reservation change penalties; the leader was Delta with \$1.65 billion revenue from such fees (Bonkamp, 2010). Other added fees by the airlines are now common practice: American, Continental, Delta, US Airways, and United all charge \$25 for the first checked bag, and \$35 for the second. JetBlue charges \$10 and up for additional legroom. AirTran charges \$6 for passengers to get seat assignments in advance, and sells exit row seats for \$20 extra. Snacks on most airlines cost \$4 to \$5, meals cost even more. Delta charges \$150 to change a

domestic flight and United adds \$9-\$109 for seat selection. A complete listing of fees is provided in Appendix A.

The latest Department of Commerce figures indicate that the cost of air travel continues its upward trend. Compared to the last quarter of 2010, passengers faced a 21.4% increase in air-travel prices during the first quarter of 2011 (Department of Commerce, 2011).

The 2010 survey of airline quality conducted by Wichita State University (WSU) underscored increased customer complaints about the airlines' quality and services. Compared to 2008, the 2009 WSU survey overall Air Quality Rating (AQR) showed a slight improvement, which was largely due to fewer passengers in 2009 rather than airlines imposing effective quality improvement. Details about WSU's AQR study are contained in Appendix B.

In fact, according to the 2008 U.S. Travel Association figures, the commercial airline "hassle factor" drove passengers to avoid 41 million trips annually, costing the U.S. economy \$26.5 billion (Consumer Reports, 2010). A recent analysis conducted by the Consumer Travel Alliance indicated that the amount of hidden fees charged to a typical traveler with two bags ranged from 21 percent to 153 percent of the price of the base fare (Consumer Travel Alliance, 2010).

Unfair airline practices involving extra fees and mishandled baggage

prompted Senator Jim Webb of Virginia to introduce the Airline Passenger Protection Bill to increase transparency of hidden fees for airline ticket sales (Webb, 2010). Furthermore, in response to growing passenger frustrations with the airlines practices, the US Department of Transportation proposed new rules that will protect consumers from unfair practices by airlines. Included are increased compensation to passengers for making them wait more than three hours on a tarmac, compensation to passengers for late arrivals, abatement of customer penalties for making or canceling reservations within 24 hours, full disclosure of baggage fees, and alerting customers of flight status changes in a timely manner (Ngo, 2010).

The publics' frustration, if not remedied by correct public relations solutions, may create persistent and severe trust and credibility problems and may ultimately cause significant financial damage to the airline industry as a whole.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to conduct surveys of airline passengers, both occasional and frequent/business travelers, to establish the prime causes of passenger dissatisfaction with the airlines and propose feasible solutions to mitigate the current airline-passenger issues.

The following three hypotheses were tested during the course of the

study:

**Hypothesis 1:** It is expected that the majority of travelers are dissatisfied with airlines' level of service.

**Hypothesis 2:** It is expected that the majority of customers are dissatisfied with airlines' response to negative traveler feedback.

**Hypothesis 3:** It is expected that if airlines take action to improve problem areas identified through traveler feedback, their reputation among customers will improve.

Conclusions for these three hypotheses will be provided in Chapter 5.

## **Procedure**

Two primary surveys were conducted using a convenient, non-random sample of known airline travelers. The first survey was a quantitative, questionnaire-based, structured technique. The second survey was a less formal, discussion-based qualitative survey method.

A secondary literature review was performed on nationally conducted airline customer service surveys as well as the public relations models that can be employed to connect with customers.

These methods will be used to understand travelers' opinions as they pertain to the airlines. Oskamp and Schulz (2005, p. 9) define attitude as behavioral preparation, or a predisposition for an individual to respond in a

certain manner.

While opinions are similar to attitudes, Oskamp and Schulz (2005, p. 15) define opinions as “evaluative beliefs....that are usually narrower in content or scope than attitudes, and they are often primarily cognitive.”

### **Terminology**

The terms *airlines* and *airline industry* are used to address the top carriers (Delta, United, US Airways, and Northwest Airlines) in the United States market. The terms *passengers*, *travelers*, and *customers* are used to refer to individuals who are actively flying for personal or business reasons.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Historically, the relationship movement of the corporate world with society started in the late nineteenth century and intensified during the early twentieth century when the large corporations started engulfing the business of small merchants.

Corporate monopolies and business practices became the target of scrutiny by the public, academia, and investigative journalists. This was the right time and favorable conditions for the birth of a modern relational practice, later to be termed public relations, that could bridge gaps of communication and mutual understanding between publics and corporations.

The practice of public relations is not a recent phenomenon. Public relations has its roots in various ancient times and cultures (Bates, 2002). The pioneered concept of modern public relations as a new practice started as arbitrary and persuasive propaganda. By the early decades of the twentieth century the public, already disenchanted with questionable propaganda, was convinced that the private enterprise should be more responsive to public concern (Cutlip, 1995).

This shaped the thinking of the first generation of public relations professionals, such as Ivy L. Lee, who dispensed facts instead of manipulation

and established a demeanor of factuality and openness to offset traditional corporate secrecy (Miller, 2000). Lee considered public relations as an open and honest publicity policy of “the public be informed.” This was in contrast to others who like the financier Vanderbilt defined it in terms of “public be damned,” and later, Edward L. Bernays summarized it as “an art applied to a science...the art of communications applied to social science,” ( Bernays, 1952).

### **Public Relations Communications Models**

Analyzing the historical evolvement of modern public relations, Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified four models that describe distinct approaches to the practice of public relations. Within the span of more than a century, these models demonstrate how public relations has evolved over time.

The first model, known as the “press agency”, “publicity”, or “one-way asymmetrical” model has its roots in late nineteenth century public relations practices. Press agents such as PT Barnum with his deceptive publicity worked primarily to make news and influence public opinion. The press agency model does not involve any investment in time or research, nor does it seek credibility, accuracy, and the practice of ethics. The aim is mainly making news, advertisement, and behavior manipulation (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The second model, known as the “public information” or “one-way” model dates back in the early twentieth century when public relations

practitioners moved away from manipulations and questionable methods of advertisement toward more ethical practices. The public information model focuses on a one-way communication from the source to the public through press releases, brochures, and one-way communication as the main tools used for the dispensation of information (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The public relations practitioner does not know much about the audience and is often referred to as the “journalist in residence.”

The third model, known as the “two-way asymmetrical” model is mainly a post-World War II relational development and is associated with the rapid rise in consumer products, expansion of mass media, and gradual consumer awareness. The new consumerism created a need for targeted and scientific marketing. Under the two-way asymmetrical model, public relations practitioners used research to help create targeted messages to effectively reach the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It uses persuasion and manipulation to influence the audience to behave as the organization requires. It does not attempt to change an organization’s practices nor does it attempt to find out how its public feels about the organization. Grunig and Hunt (1984) called it “scientific persuasion,” and it remains the main objective of advertisers and marketers everywhere. While asymmetrical communication is two-way, the main purpose of communication is not balanced. It is primarily intended to be a

targeted means of persuasion to trigger a transaction.

The fourth model, known as the “two way-symmetrical” or the “public information” model, applies two-way communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its public. It casts public relations in the role of mediator versus persuader. In this model, public relations practitioners are to listen to the concerns of both the client organization and key publics and help them adapt to one another. Later, Grunig conceived of the “excellent” public relations model based on the two-way symmetrical model. Specifically, Grunig and White argued that for public relations to be excellent, it must be two-way symmetrical, idealistic, critical, and managerial (Grunig & White, 2002).

### **Focus on Two-Way Symmetrical Model**

Grunig and Grunig (1992) elaborate on the processes that are required for public relations to be effective. They indicate that the two-way symmetrical communications model “epitomizes professional public relations and reflects the growing body of knowledge in the field” (Grunig, 1992, p. 320). They suggest that this model also adds to the organizational effectiveness more than the other three public relations models (Grunig, 1992, p. 320). According to Grunig (2006) the most successful organizations use this two-way symmetrical communications model. They are based on mutual trust and are apt to establish long-term

management relationships with stakeholders (Grunig, 2006, p. 159).

Despite the widely stated advantages of the two-way symmetrical model, results of Grunig's research shows that the two-way symmetrical model is the least practiced method by public relations professionals. In her case studies, Grunig found too few instances of actual two-way symmetrical application to prove that it was the most effective public relations model (Anderson, 1992). Grunig (1986) argues that because organizations fail to effectively deal with activist publics there is a need for effectively adopting the two-way symmetrical model.

Another implication of this research, as noted by Murphy and Dee (1992), is that corporations and activist groups seldom succeed at resolving disputes between them. The authors argue that this lack of closure is simply an inevitable outcome of each side's incompatible strategy for dealing with conflict. Grunig found that "activists groups help to create constraints on organizational autonomy that are the major reason for public relations problems and programs to solve them" (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

A review of public relations literature dealing with the two-way symmetrical communications model reveals that public relations theorists and practitioners endeavor to determine if public relations is realistically capable of establishing honest two-way communication to build mutual relationship and

credibility. For the purposes of the present work, the question focuses on if the airline industry's public relations professionals can properly represent the interests of the passengers while the industry demands layoffs, reduced customer care, new fees, and fare increases in favor of low-cost operation and higher profits and dividends for its shareholders (Maruggi, 2010).

Many public relations practitioners and academic theoreticians consider the two-way symmetrical as an idealized model. According to Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, and Mitrook (1997), "The practice of public relations is too complex, too fluid, and impinged by far too many variables" to be forced into the frameworks of Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations. As the proponents of the contingency theory, the authors argue that the strategies and tactics used by public relations practitioners are functions of a variety of variables that depend on such factors as the internal and external conditions, pressures, and opportunities a public relations practitioner faces (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 32).

### **Discussion of Contingency Theory**

As a relatively new development in public relations, the contingency theory arose from the constraints associated with Grunig's excellence theory of public relations. Given the difficulties that constrain the application of excellence theory, particularly the internal and external factors that limit relations with publics, contingency theory suggests public relations practitioners should

consider all these factors to determine the optimal and most appropriate public relations practice for the specific case (Cancel et al, 1997, p. 37).

The contingency theory, seen as an extension to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) fourth model of public relations, provides a more practical and flexible framework of action for public relations professionals. It allows the public relations practitioner to envision the multiplicity of contrasting parameters that often affect strategies and tactics used in the field (Cancel et al., 1997). The contingency theory approach allows the application of a wider spectrum of different public relations strategies ranging from pure advocacy to pure accommodative. It is characterized by a "wide range of discrete operational stances and public relations strategies that entail different degrees of advocacy and accommodation" (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 37).

Cameron, Pang, and Jin (2001) suggest that two-way symmetrical communications, however, must be elaborated to become more comprehensive and normative in purpose. The authors suggest that within the two-way symmetrical communications there are many ambiguities that constitute the unaccounted factors (Cameron et al, 2001, p. 243). These factors stem from regulatory or legal issues with which public relations professionals must deal (Reber, Cropp, & Cameron, 2003).

The principal arguments for the adoption and use of the contingency

model can be summarized as follows. Despite stakeholders' pressure, organizations should be communicating with their publics on a consistent basis, from advocacy to accommodation. Public relations practitioners should use a "matrix of dependent factors" to establish where on the consistency scale the organization's communication strategies and tactics stand. The organization should use a separation of strategies and tactics (Cameron et al., 2001).

Cancel et al. (1997) and Grunig (2006) define accommodation and advocacy in terms of the public relations practitioners attempt to create understanding, acceptance, and support for the organization. Accommodation and advocacy, however, exclude strategies of public persuasion and manipulation (Cancel et al., 1997). There is a general consensus among most public relations practitioners that "professional advocacy is a socially acceptable and socially necessary role of public relations" (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 36). It is further emphasized that the accommodation's function is to build "trust with external publics" and create mutually beneficial relationships with it (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 36).

Cameron et al. (2001, p. 245) suggest that excellent public relations activity should not be typified as a single model. In fact, there are more than 80 different variables derived from extensive literature review and professionals' experiences showing conflict situations that could affect any given public at any time



(Cameron et al., 2001, p. 245). On the one hand, limitations imposed by legal constraints and internal pressure from management are the main factors on the advocacy side of the continuum. On the other hand, the organization's social responsibility and a public relations practitioner's personal ethics fall on the total accommodation side of the continuum (Reber et al., 2003). The contingency theory proposes the use of the actual public relations practitioner's experience as the basis for the model, stating that the existence and the nature of so many variables can change according to the dynamics of the situation that the organization faces.

More recently, Grunig (2006) proposed that his four models of public relations and Cancel et al.'s (1997) contingency theory are all interrelated. Grunig's purpose was to foster better relationships among practitioners and their publics. While Cancel et al. (1997, p. 168) consider the two-way symmetrical communications as a utopian model, Grunig proposes to emphasize on, "how symmetrical communication can be combined with coercive behaviors and the misuses of symmetrical communication." According to Grunig, "the contingency theory proposed by Cameron and his colleagues does not really challenge the symmetrical model. Symmetry in public relations really is about balancing the interests of organizations and publics, of balancing advocacy and accommodation," (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 171).

Research shows that the management of an organization is not always willing to accommodate a public. In some situations, it is willing to accommodate, in other situations, it is not. In addition, case studies clearly illustrate the interactions among public relations professionals, top management, and publics that characterize the real-life application of symmetrical mode (Grunig, 2001, p. 16). Cameron et al. (2007) believe the contingency theory is not yet a fully developed theory and they suggest further analysis of the contingent factors is needed. The authors argue that better analysis of the theory helps practitioners understand the factors that affect their use of accommodation or advocacy strategies and tactics.

Cameron et al (2001) attempted to define the theory as they tested several parameters to accommodation. The authors reduced their list to 80 distinct factors originally created by Cameron and colleagues in order for theorists to manage this theory effectively. Interviews of eight top public relations managers were used in order to “learn whether these top executives had ever encountered situations that precluded taking an accommodative stance towards a public” (Cameron et al., 2001).

The results indicated that, while the constraints of contending publics, jurisdictional issues, and litigation and regulation did sometimes limit accommodation, it did not enforce advocacy practices. The authors state,

“Overall, the findings suggest that the inclination, often expressed in platitudes, is to practice two-way symmetrical communication” (Cameron et al., 2001, p. 260). The authors conclude that contingency theory is a supplement to excellence theory and public relations practitioners ought to become aware of the challenges and obstacles that they may encounter in a time of crisis.

Reber et al (2003, p. 444) conducted the first survey to study and quantify concepts related to contingency theory of accommodation in public relations. They surveyed 91 corporate public relations practitioners. The survey results were arranged to establish a scale of five theoretical constructs and analyzed. It was concluded that most public relations practitioners strongly agree that, “bridge building is always the best public relations practice” (Cameron et al., 2001, p. 443). Participants, however, cited many instances where communication with an external public is prohibited and noted other specific contingencies that limited bridge building or accommodation,” (Cameron et al., 2001, p. 431). The contingencies cited for diminished accommodation were fear of legitimizing activist claims, credibility and commitment of an external public, and the place of public relations in the dominant coalition.

In contingency theory, accommodation is not always practical or even desirable. Public relations practitioners are to consider all relevant factors, the pertinent ones must be selected, carefully weighed, and systematically applied in

specific circumstances. The decision-making process based on contingency theory expands on the Potter Box where public relations professionals prioritize values and publics by defining the situation, identifying values, selecting principles, and choosing loyalties (Seitel, 2011).

The contingency approach also treats public relations not as a strict singular function or even as a set of discrete functions but rather as an inter-related multifaceted process. The empirical research, including interviews, surveys, and experiments, indicates that when there is no set of ethical principles to be consistently applied by public relations practitioners, ethical relativism predominates the profession (Cameron et al, 2007).

### **Summary of Public Relations Practice Review**

Results of the literature review indicate that there is no single universal ethical approach dominating the public relations practice. Pratt (1994) attributes this to the absence of a functional and accepted definition of public relations. This is because public relations is now operating in a new and increasingly complex environment. As in the case of any robust profession, new environmental complexities generate new problems, renew debate, and create new ideas, controversies, and innovations.

This is not dissimilar to the issues encountered by the scientific community attempting to utilize stem cells, conduct genetic research, or create

life in the laboratory. In a similar manner, new environmental factors such as advanced technology, information overload, greater emphasis on public opinion for policy making, increasing government regulations, the rise of consumerism and consumer protection, along with environmental awareness all have contributed to new developments in public relations (Heath, 1997).

From these developments and the consequent PR evolvement, a trend in ethical directive has emerged. Organizations can no longer function as isolated enclaves and independent entities from society. Obsolete ethical theories focused primarily on the organization's intrinsic needs, such as advocacy, professionalism, or corporate social responsibilities, are no longer sufficient and adequate to inform modern practice (Vasquez, 1996). Thus, as publics become more aware and more empowered, public relations practice must adopt new methods and techniques and expand its ethical approaches to manage conflicting stakeholder claims while updating and redefining organizational relations on an ongoing basis (Vasquez, 1996).

To meet the changing needs of the organization and its publics, public relations must become more dynamic and proactive in engaging issues management. To be responsive to the modern publics, public relations practitioners must adopt or develop new technological means to empower publics through two-way information and communication flow. Under this

perspective, public relations, as a proactive management function, requires a more complex ethical framework. This framework expands the focus from an organizational to a societal approach, such as those suggested by the relational dynamics of contingency theory (Seitel, 2011).

The argument about the exact practices and functions of public relations becomes more contentious as the field gets more extensive, digital, and global. To become more efficient and successful, public relations tends to more intensively adopt new communication technologies to consolidate the two-way symmetrical dialogue with the public (Neghina, 2009, pp. 12-15).

### **Use of Social Media in Public Relations**

Prevailing thought holds that the ideal model of public relations is two-way symmetrical. In this model, communication flows both ways between an organization and a public and it assumes that both parties are willing and prepared to change their own stance. The result is therefore expected to be the most professional, ethical, and effective practice (Neghina, 2009, pp. 12-15).

Public relations practitioners are now increasingly confronted with a significant array of Internet-based social media technologies that include online video and social networks, blogs, podcasts, and similar tools. These technologies act as influencers to empower the voice and opinion of millions of nameless digital consumers around the globe. Public relations professionals' apprehension

of controlling the positive or negative impact of their messages to a community of millions of unknown individuals is offset by the prospect of leveraging the same technology to reach their global audience directly and instantly (Warren, 2010).

In reaching the audience, public relations practitioners have not changed their basic aim, which is to symmetrically connect client organization with publics. But their reach-out methods and technology of communication have evolved over the years. With the advent of digital technology and the Internet, communication channels with the audience have greatly expanded and publics' response times are now nearly instantaneous. The interactivity of communication, combined with the ease of information sharing, makes the communication two-way between the organization and millions of audience globally. Public relations practitioners are now able to connect globally with publics and determine their expectations or the root cause of their discontent with the client organization (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006). They are at the same time able to act as fast and efficient outlets for an organization's news release and instantly communicate with a multitude of publics around the world. If required, public relations practitioners are now capable of conveying an organization's messages to the global public and receiving prompt feedbacks. They can conduct extensive opinion surveys, obtain

prompt responses via online questionnaires from customers, and analyze preliminary survey results on the spot using specialized application software. Utilization of email, Facebook, Google+, blogs, Twitter, search engines, and other Internet-based services are examples of how technology is enhancing public relations communications methods and shrinking the required waiting times in public relations (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006).

### **Airline Public Relations Blunders**

Often, an industry's drive for profitability in terms of relentless cost-cutting measures and diminished customer care comes at a considerable cost as an airline experiences resounding customer disputes and reactions that damage its image and compromises its reputation.

Episodes like the "United Breaks Guitars" video posted on YouTube is an example in a series of incidents demonstrating how customers can effectively react to disservice and voice their complaints. Posted by Canadian musician, Dave Carroll, "United Breaks Guitars" demonstrates how customer complaints about unresponsive businesses can be extensive and far reaching. Carroll's \$3,500 guitar was broken by United Airlines baggage handlers (Carroll, 2010). After several months of futile dealings with United's customer service staff, Carroll wrote and performed a derogatory song about United's baggage handling and its indifferent customer care. Carroll posted this video on



YouTube, which received more than four million views within the first three weeks of its posting.

Sound airlines' public relations practices can avert or minimize the impact of similar publicity disasters. A case example is Delta's prompt response to the \$2,800 baggage charges for returning U.S. soldiers. In this incident, members of an army unit returning home from Afghanistan were forced to pay \$2,800 out of their own pockets for extra bags on a Delta flight from Baltimore to Atlanta (Cherette, 2011). In a YouTube video making the rounds on the Internet and the national news, the soldiers explained their baggage fee problems with Delta while checking in at the Baltimore Washington Airport. Some of their extra bags, the video explains, were cases holding military tools and weapons (Cherette, 2011).

The response by Delta's social media manager, a blog post on Delta's website, was conciliatory and reassuring. It publicly apologizes, "to those service men and women for any miscommunication regarding our current policies as well as any inconvenience we may have caused. We are currently looking further into the situation, and will be reaching out to each of them personally to address their concerns and work to correct any issues they have faced" (Cherette, 2011).

Delta promptly changed its baggage policy to allow active-duty military

traveling in economy class to check four bags for free. The next day the soldiers removed the video from YouTube and ended the wave of negative publicity against Delta (Cherette, 2011).

### **Review of Airline Customer Surveys**

The following section is a literature review of several surveys that are used to measure passengers' attitudes and satisfaction or discontent with U.S. airlines. Results of this review have been helpful in formulating the questions incorporated in the survey questionnaires used in this study.

The Airline Quality Rating (AQR) was developed in 1991 by Wichita State University (WSU) for assessing airline quality on a combination of multiple performance criteria (Bowden & Healey, 2010). The AQR uses publicly available monthly airline performance data in the four areas of on-time arrivals, involuntary denied boarding, mishandled baggage, and a combination of 12 passenger complaint categories. The formula for calculating the AQR score is provided in Appendix B.

Bowden and Headley (2010) determined that of the 17 carriers rated both in 2008 and 2009 the combined AQR improved from -1.63 in 2008 to -1.27 in 2009. This was due to improved arrival percentage (79.4% in 2009 vs. 76.0% in 2008) and a decline in mishandled baggage rates (3.88 cases per 1,000 passengers in 2009 vs. 5.19 cases per 1,000 passengers in 2008). The consumer complaints (1.15

per 100,000 passengers) in 2008 decreased (0.97 complaints per 100,000 passengers) in 2009 (Bowden & Headley, 2010). Appendix B shows the AQR scores for 18 airlines during the period of 2003 to 2009.

The AQR is not normalized to the total number of passengers, thus a decline in the total number of passengers in a given period may result in a mathematical improvement of the AQR.

Another key survey is performed by Consumer Reports on an annual basis. Fifteen thousand Consumer Reports respondents were asked to rate their experiences on 29,720 domestic round-trip flights in the previous 12 months. Eight of the 10 airlines respondents rated received low scores for seating comfort. Other quality-of-flight measures, including cabin-crew service, cleanliness, and in-flight entertainment, received low marks from the respondents (Consumer Reports, 2010).

In a national survey conducted in January 2010 and published in June 2010, 2,000 Consumer Reports respondents were asked to rate on a 10-point scale their degree of annoyance (0 = no annoyance, 10 = most annoyed) with airline services (Consumer Reports, 2010).

Consumer Reports (2010) determined that the top traveler annoyances and their corresponding scores were luggage charges (8.4), added fees (8.1), unhelpful staff (7.7), inability to reach a live service rep (7.6), poor

communication regarding delays (7.1), flight delays (6.8), long wait at baggage claims (5.9), long lines for security or check-in (5.2), and lack of snacks (5.1).

Zagat also performs an annual airline-focused survey. Zagat's 2009 airline survey covers 16 U.S. and 75 international airlines, incorporating opinions of 5,895 frequent air travelers and travel professionals (Zagat, 2010). Airlines are divided into large and mid-size domestic and international categories and rated for their economy and premium seating qualities. The latter includes an airline's on-time estimates, value, luggage policy, in-flight entertainment, and frequent flier program.

The Zagat survey results indicated that major US domestic airlines performed poorly, with American, Delta, United, and US Airways receiving overall ratings between 9 and 11 on the 30-point Zagat scale. Meanwhile, smaller airlines like JetBlue and Virgin America performed better scores of 19 and 21, respectively. For international economy travel, Singapore (24) and Emirates (22) scored the best.

J.D. Power and Associates, a global marketing information services company, performs an annual airline satisfaction study. This study ranks overall customer satisfaction based on performance in seven categories: Reservation, Check-in, Boarding, Aircraft, Staff, Service, Cost and Fees (J.D. Power and Associates, 2010). Each category receives two to five stars (5-stars: "among the

best," 4-stars: "better than most," 3-stars: "about average," and 2-stars: "the rest."

The individual ratings factors are also combined to yield the "Overall Satisfaction." The 2010 North America Airline Satisfaction Study is based on responses from 12,300 passengers who flew on major US airlines between April 2009 and April 2010.

In this study, Alaska Airlines ranks highest for a third consecutive year in the traditional network carrier segment and JetBlue Airlines ranks highest for a fifth consecutive year in the low-cost carrier segment. The key findings of the study indicate that overall, among customers who are assigned to a center seat, satisfaction averages 16 points lower than among customers in a window or aisle seat. Approximately 65% of passengers of traditional network carriers and 56 percent of passengers of low-cost carriers indicate that complimentary meals is the in-flight amenity they would most like to have. About 50% of passengers say that prices charged for in-flight beverages and food; checked baggage; and preferred seating are unreasonably high (J.D. Power and Associates, 2010).

On average, nearly 60% of airline passengers check baggage. Satisfaction with boarding, deplaning and baggage averages nearly 60 points higher among passengers who are not charged for the first checked bag, compared with those who are charged for the first bag (J.D. Power and Associates, 2010).

An airline passenger survey was conducted in 2005 by Amadeus, a travel

technology provider. The survey respondents, comprising 485 men and 516 women, were among a nationally representative sample of 1,001 adult travelers 18 years or older who booked their ticket online.

The survey results indicated that 9 out of 10 travelers find value in the ability to find flight and fare information online at an airline's website. About 87% of respondents also expect to see a wide selection of dates, schedules and fares. Survey respondents indicated that, given the choice, they would be willing to pay for optional amenities when booking a ticket online: 52% would be willing to pay more for the ability to use points to upgrade their ticket class on discounted fares that normally do not allow upgrades, 49% would be willing to pay more for the ability to get more frequent flyer miles than their ticket class allows. Also, 40% would be willing to pay more for the use of an airline's exclusive club, 40% would be willing to pay more for the choice of in-flight entertainment, and nearly one-third of the respondents would be willing to pay more for guaranteed overhead storage above their seat (Amadeus, 2006).

The survey found that two-thirds of leisure travelers, and nearly half of business travelers, book personal travel through an airline's branded website, and 83% indicated that they would switch to an airline website if it offered flexible fares and add-on options. The study tends to show that airlines that provide consumers flexibility, choice, control, and convenience can more

effectively respond to consumers' needs (Amadeus, 2006).

U.S. airlines score lowest among 47 industries evaluated by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), according to a report released by the ACSI in June 2011. In fact, the airlines tie newspapers for the lowest-satisfaction ratings (Hunter, 2011).

According to ACSI, "bag fees play a big role in airline passenger disgruntlement. Those who pay for bags are much less satisfied than those who avoid the fees (a score of 58 compared to 68). Poor service, other fees, and higher fuel prices are also contributors," (Hunter, 2011).

With an industry average score of 65 out of 100, airline passenger satisfaction is down 1.5% from last year. Among the major carriers evaluated, Southwest Airlines with a score of 81 leads in passenger satisfaction. Its score is up 3% from last year. Delta passenger satisfaction with a score of 65 shows a drop of 10% with respect to last year.

ACSI notes that the merger between United and Continental deteriorated Continental's satisfaction score, which with a score of 64 plunged 10% from last year. United, with a score of 61, appears unaffected by the merger (Hunter, 2011).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

In the present study, the airline industry's new practice and the passengers' response must be examined through the lens of two-way symmetric communications, enhanced with flexibilities defined within the contingency theory.

Many factors surrounding the continuing airline-passenger conflicts, such as rising airfares and the addition of a multitude of new fees, negative media coverage, and widespread public frustrations, reinforces the need for the application of the two-way symmetrical model. This model allows the author to analyze the airline-passenger conflict, design surveys to quantify the extent of the passengers' discontent, and propose viable solutions.

#### **Data Collection Approach**

The methodological framework for collection and analysis of survey information highlights the complementary characteristics of two approaches: a quantitative, questionnaire-based, structured technique and a less formal, discussion-based qualitative survey method that can provide more in-depth understanding of the issue (Babin & Zikmund, 2005). Babin and Zikmund (2005, p. 64) define a survey as "a research technique in which a sample is interviewed in some form or the behavior of the respondents is observed and described in



some way.”

The quantitative research process begins with a set of hypotheses for which a data set is gathered for examination. These methods are used to “measure information about a population or database under study such as attitudes and opinions, newspaper clips, etc. and quantify the things mathematically” (Bagin & Fulginiti, 2005, p. 34).

According to Bagin and Fulginiti (2005, p. 33), “qualitative research describes a situation without necessarily measuring it,” and generates a concept of opinions, attitudes, and behavior.

### **Sampling Methodology**

Recipients for both surveys were selected using a convenient, non-random sample. The design, planning, and conducting of both types of surveys adhered to the general survey guidelines given by Bagin and Fulginiti (2005, p. 33),

Babin and Zikmund (2005, p. 64) define a survey as “a research technique in which a sample is interviewed in some form or the behavior of the respondents is observed and described in some way.”

Convenience samples are defined as a “sampling of people...that are conveniently available” (Babin & Zikmund, 2005, p. 411). The primary benefit of this method is that it allows easy access to individuals and does not involve significant financial investment (Babin & Zikmund, 2005, p. 412). Daymon and

Holloway (2011) describe a convenience sample as making the most of opportunities to “ask potentially useful subjects to take part in your study.” The benefit of utilizing a convenience sample was getting input from individuals that fly frequently.

However, convenience sampling does not ensure a representative sample beyond the immediate study. Its very non-probability methodology limits how well the research represents the intended population (Babin & Zikmund, 2005, p. 412).

### **Quantitative Survey**

The quantitative questionnaire-based survey was conducted by the author and consisted of distributing the questionnaires electronically to the respondents and asking them to answer the questions using Survey Monkey software.

The scope of the survey was to determine opinions toward the airline safety and security and perception of how the airlines address passengers’ safety and security concerns.

The convenience sample consisted of 251 respondents at an organization in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, with known air travel experiences within the business realm.

## **Qualitative Survey**

The qualitative survey involved the author's informal discussions with air travelers and consisted of open-ended interview-based questions focusing on personal flight experiences, major airline annoyances, and what should be done.

The author conducted the qualitative informal interview sessions within a two-week time period. At the start of each interview, the author described the scope of the survey, explained the voluntary nature of the interview, and informed individual respondents of their options to skip any question they did not wish to answer or not to participate in the interview. No individuals chose either of those options.

The sample population consisted of passengers waiting to board their domestic or international flights at the two Washington Metropolitan Area international airports: Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) and Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD). The number of participants in these informal interviews was 114.

## **Data Analysis**

The individual questionnaire responses were reviewed and entered as spreadsheets into Microsoft Excel, versions 2003 and 2007. These files were processed to create frequency distributions, histograms, and pie charts for the statistical analysis of the figures.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Quantitative Questionnaire Findings**

The main objectives of the quantitative questionnaire (Questionnaire 1) were to determine passengers' attitudes toward the airlines safety and how they perceive the customer service provided by the airlines. A copy of Questionnaire 1 is presented in Appendix C.

The 15 main survey questions addressed passengers concerns with the airline safety and customer service. Respondents were asked a variety of questions regarding their attitudes toward flight safety, and their level of confidence about the airlines efforts to ensure flight safety and customer care. Five questions in Questionnaire 1 are used to characterize the airline travelers by gender, ethnicity, annual household income bracket, annual travel frequency, and their level of education.

The first eight questions focused on respondents' perception of airlines' safety. Forty-eight percent of surveyed airline passengers agree or strongly agree that the airlines are doing a good job in making air travel safe (Figure 1), and 54% agree or strongly agree that flying is safer than other modes of travel (Figure 2). Only 8% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that airlines are doing a good job with safety (Figure 1), and 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed

that flying is safer than other modes of transportation (Figure 2).

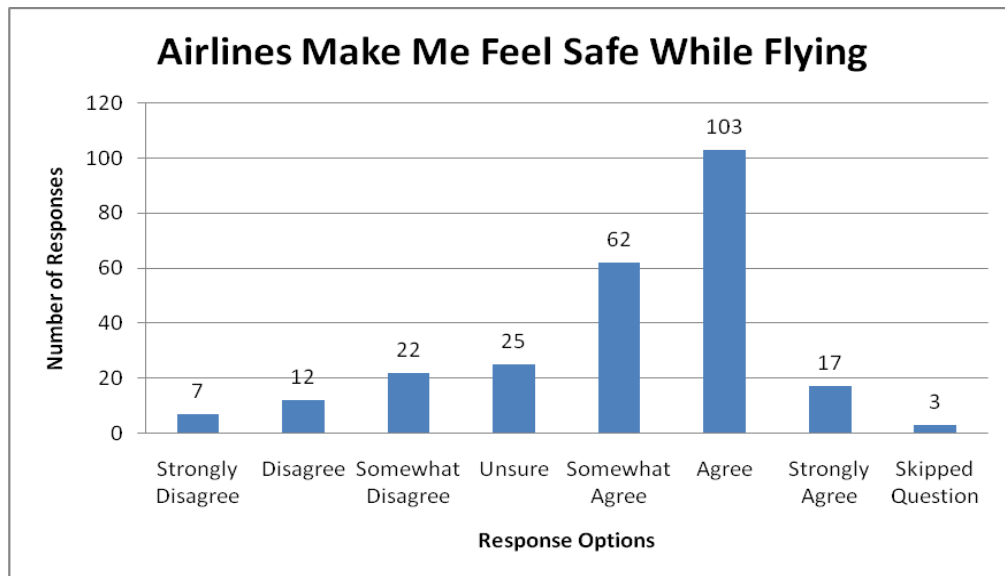


Figure 1: Perception of Airline Safety

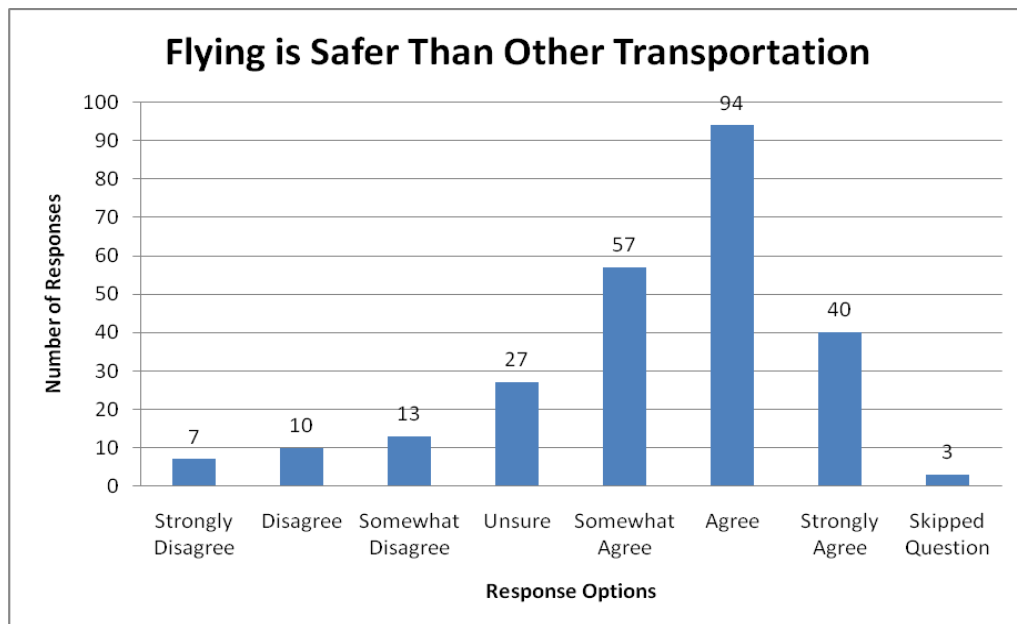


Figure 2: Perception of Airline Safety Compared to Other Transportation

Twenty-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the aircrafts are properly maintained, and 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 3).

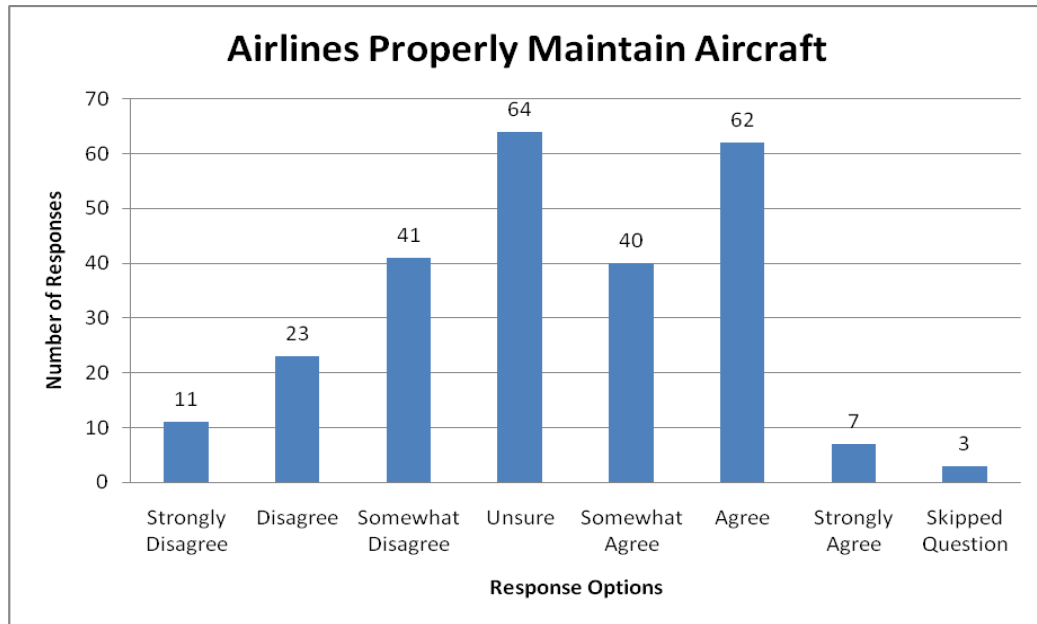


Figure 3: Perception of Proper Aircraft Maintenance

Twenty-three percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they worry about mechanical failure of the plane when they fly, and 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 4).

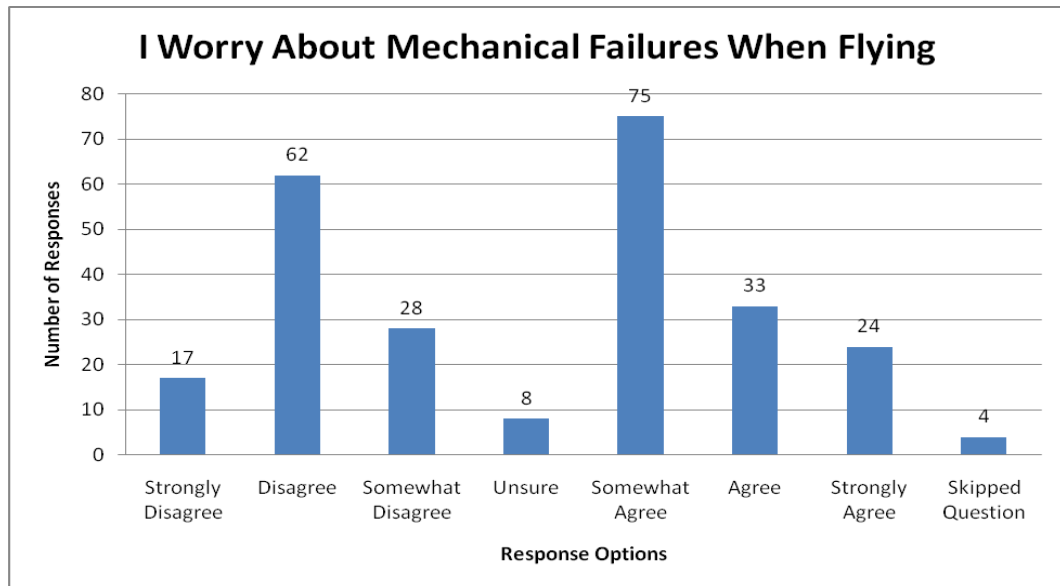


Figure 4: Concern Regarding Mechanical Plane Failure

Seventeen percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they worry about plane crashes when flying, and 42% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 5).

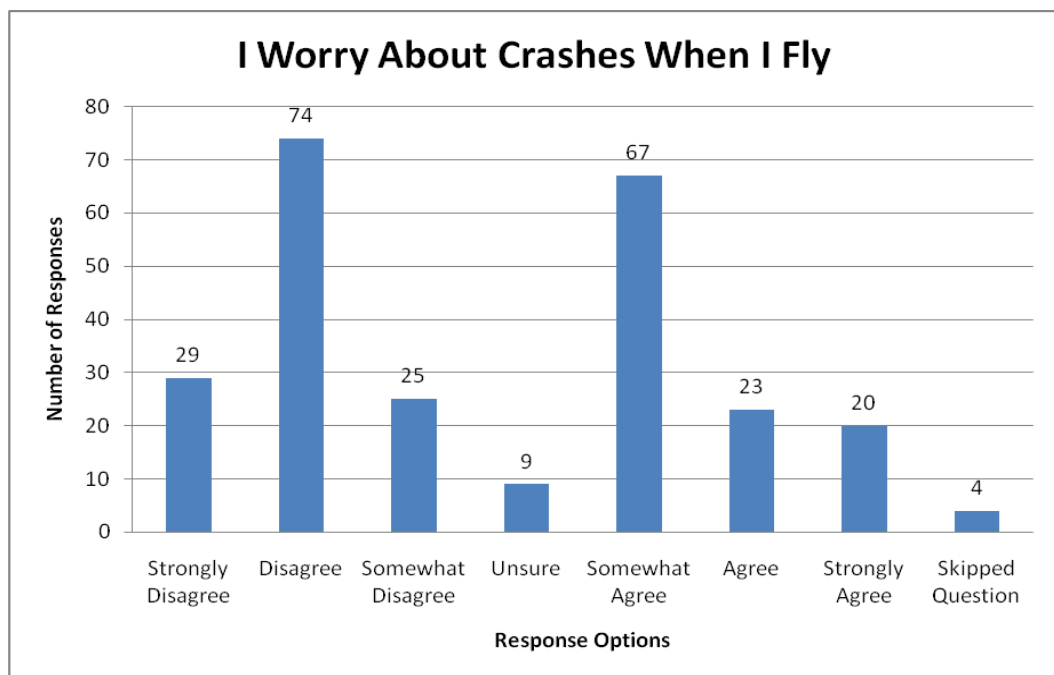


Figure 5: Concern Regarding Plane Crashes

Respondents also showed weak confidence about the airlines' full-disclosure of possible risks associated with flying. Only 18% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the airlines provide full-disclosure of the risks (Figure 6). Of the respondents, 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the airline fully discloses flying risks.

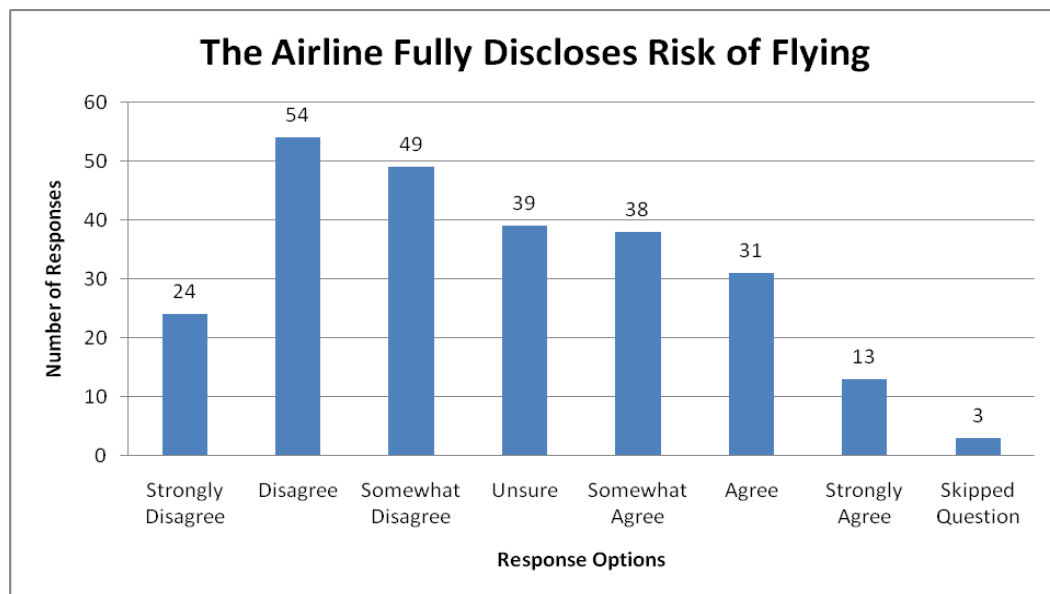


Figure 6: Confidence in Airlines' Risk Disclosure

The level of confidence in security measures at the airports was split: 27% agreed or strongly agreed that they had confidence in security measure at the airport, and 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 7). As a result, the feeling of protection against possible terrorist act was also split among the respondents. 21% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt protected against acts of terrorism, and 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 8).



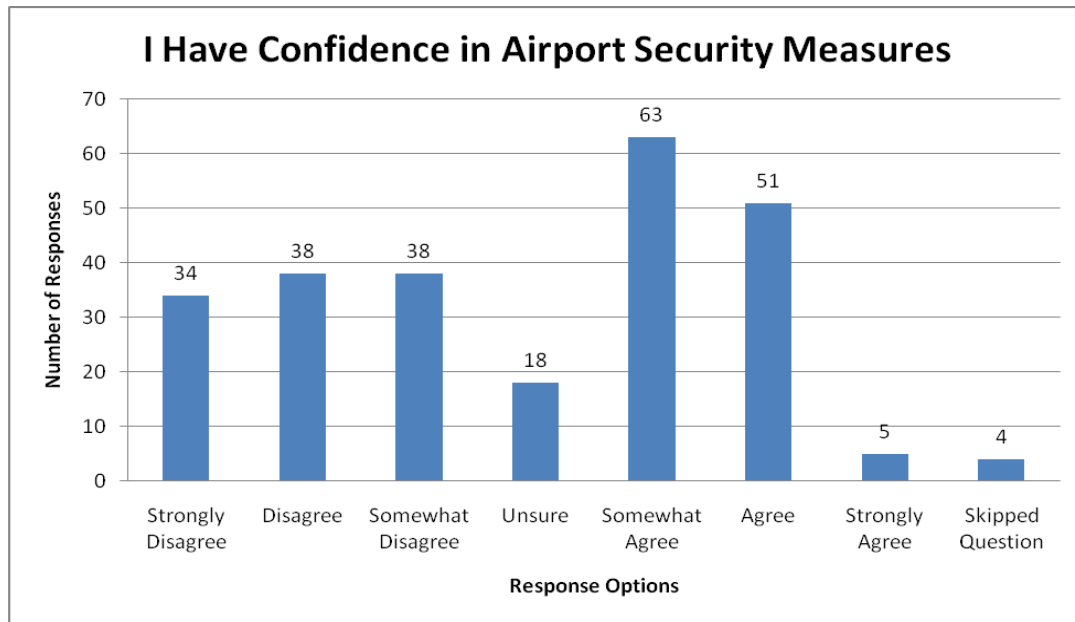


Figure 7: Confidence in Airport Security Measures

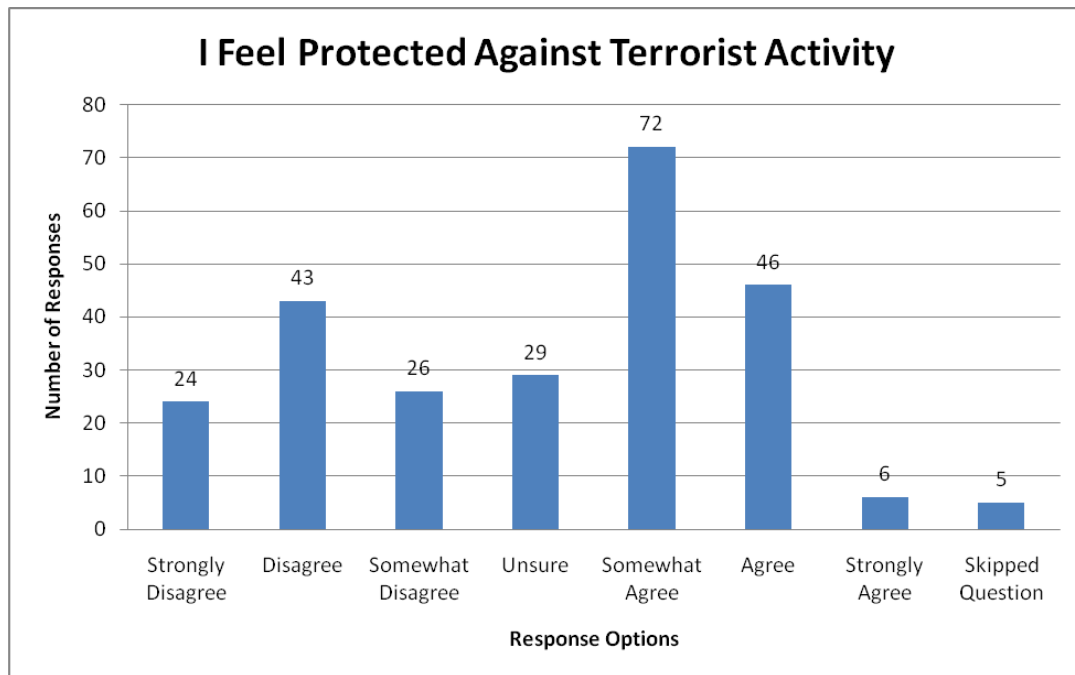


Figure 8: Confidence in Protection Against Terrorist Attack

The remaining questions were to assess respondents' satisfaction with the customer service levels provided by airlines.

Only 14% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that airlines are responsive to traveler needs (Figure 9). Twenty-nine percent of the respondents disagreed, or strongly disagreed that airlines respond to traveler needs.

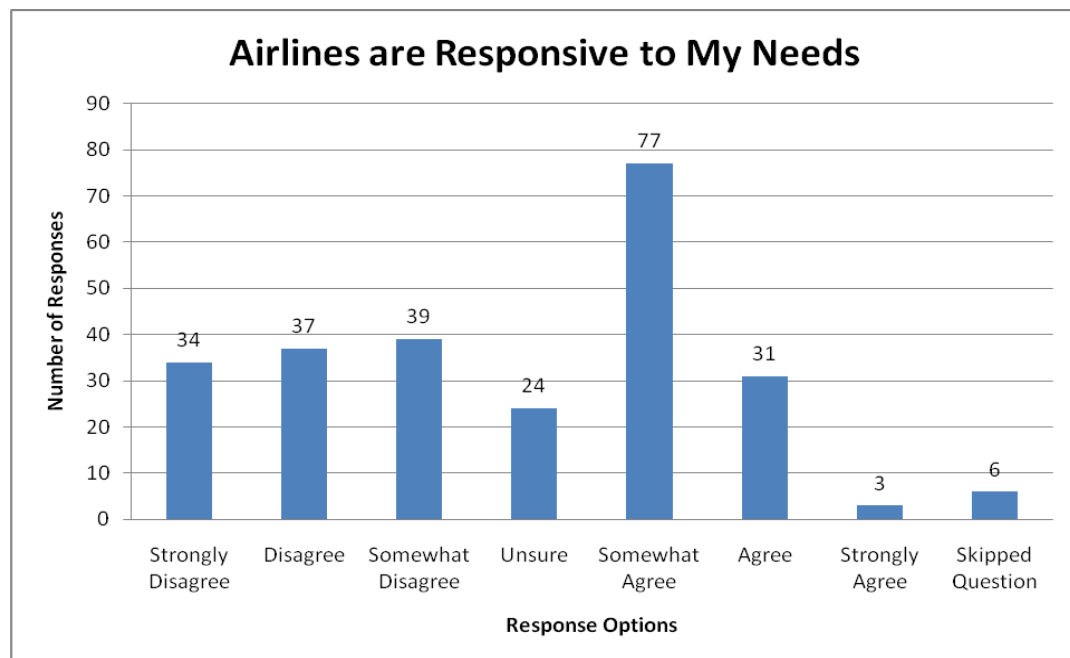


Figure 9: Perceived Airline Responsiveness

Airlines' staff performance received a better rating: only 11% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that airline staff is courteous (Figure 10). Thirty-nine percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that airline employees are courteous toward travelers.

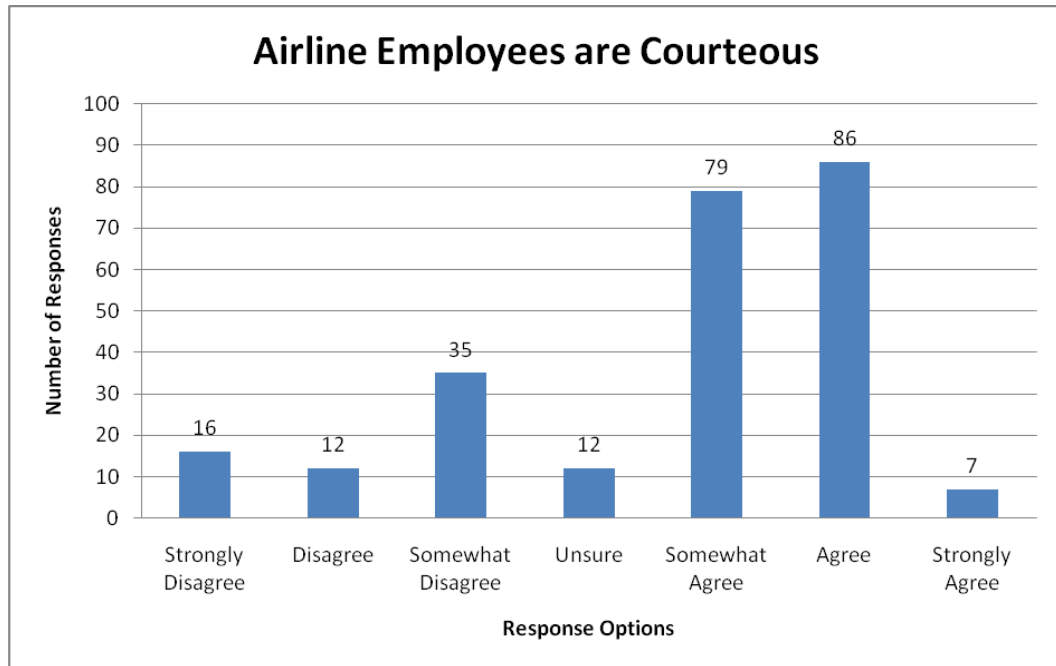


Figure 10: Perceived Courtesy of Airline Employees

Surveyed travelers demonstrated a lack of confidence in airlines' efforts to gain their confidence. Only 11% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that airlines make a genuine effort to earn passengers' confidence by providing good service. Of the respondents, 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed that airlines are making such efforts (Figure 11).

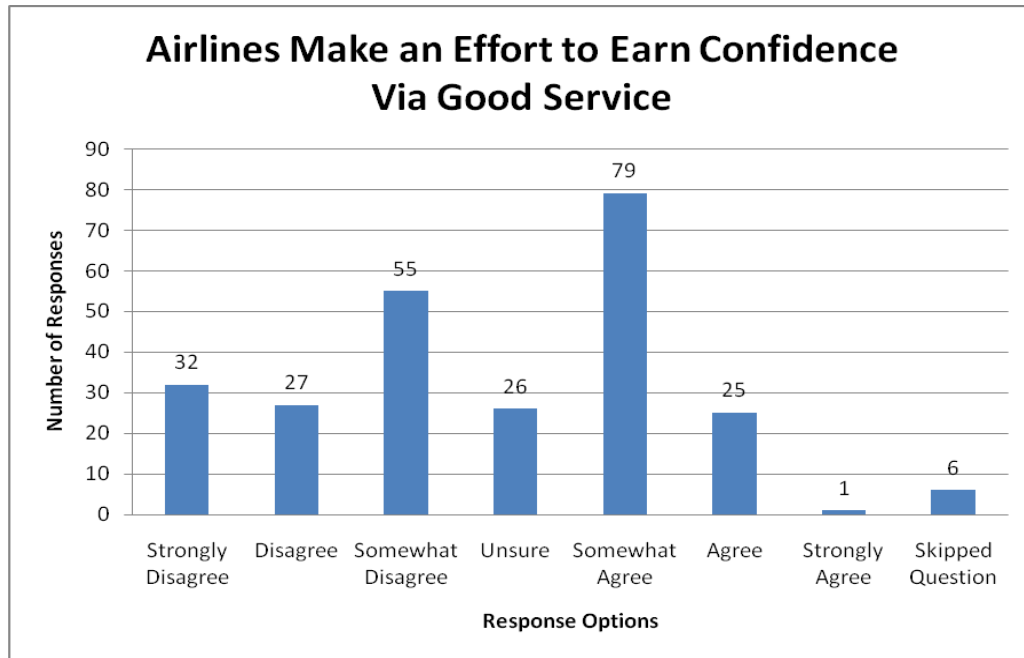


Figure 11: Perceived Airline Efforts to Provide Good Service

Similarly, only 14% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the airlines are concerned about passengers flying experience (Figure 12).

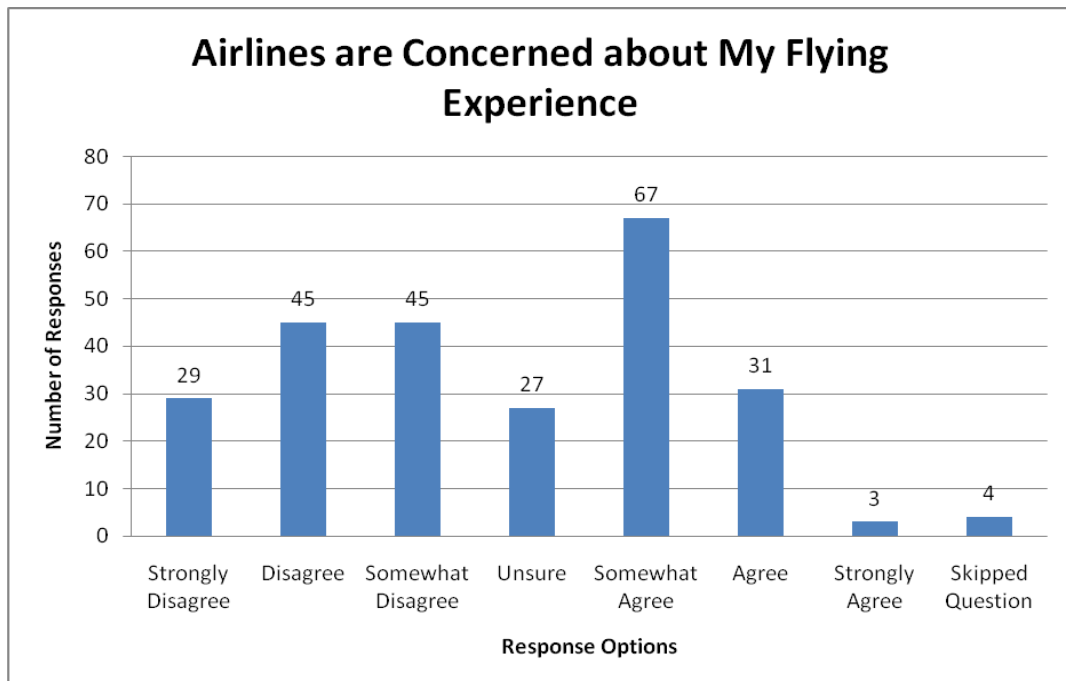


Figure 12: Airlines' Perceived Concern Regarding Traveler Flying Experience

Only 14% agreed or strongly agreed that the airlines place a high priority on customer satisfaction (Figure 13).

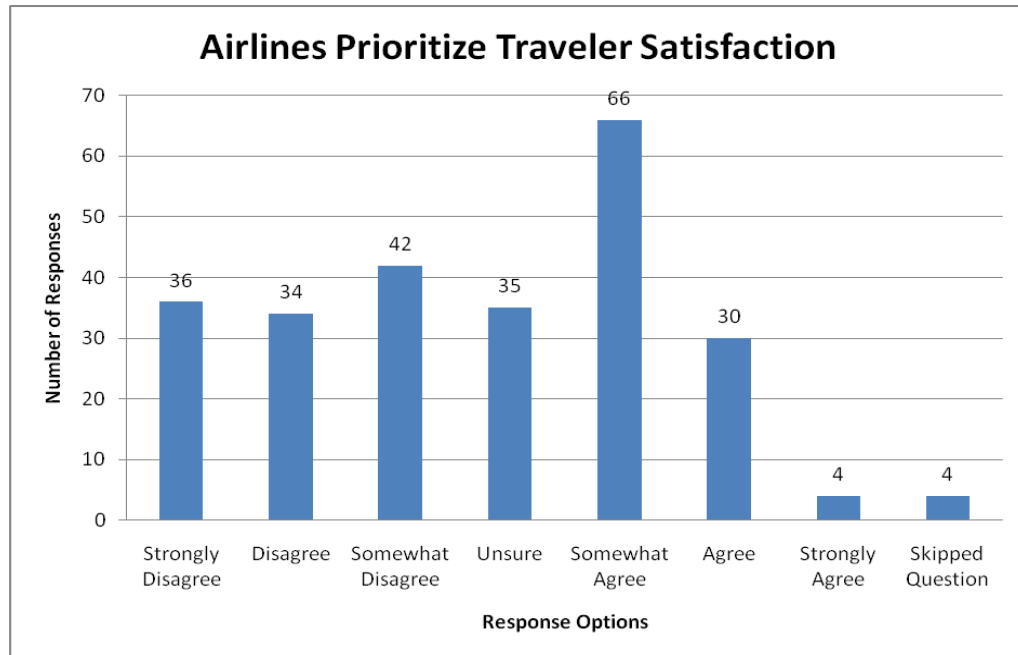


Figure 13: Perceived Priority Placed on Traveler Satisfaction

Eleven percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that airlines promptly respond to passengers' expressed dissatisfaction (Figure 14). Twenty-four percent indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that airlines respond promptly to traveler displeasure.

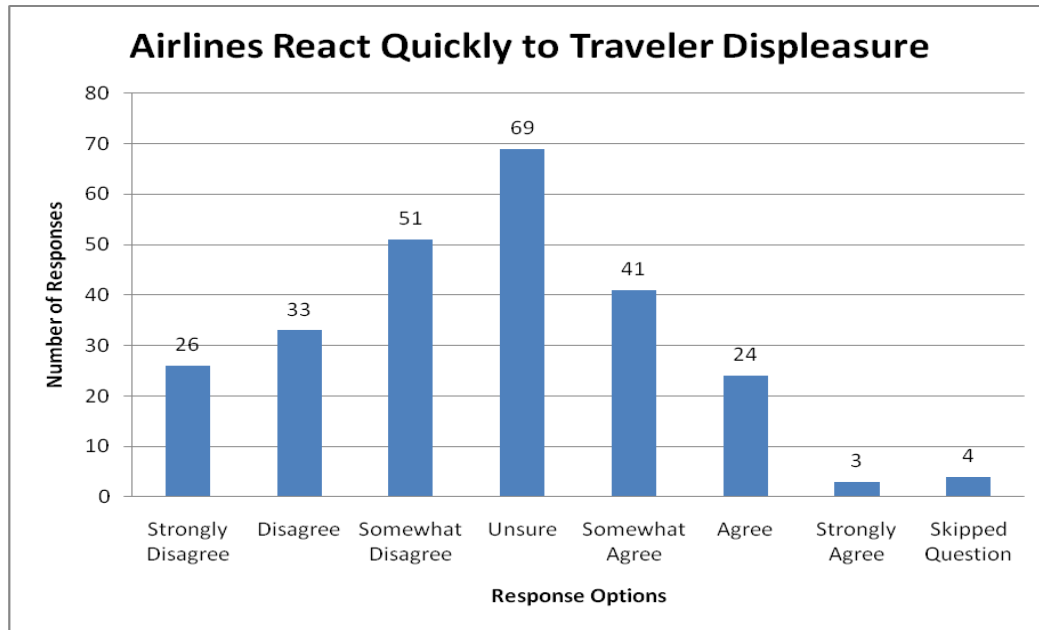


Figure 14: Perceived Speed of Response to Traveler Displeasure

Eighty-five percent of respondents answered “yes” to whether their opinion of airlines would improve if the airlines showed concern toward consumer satisfaction. Only 5% of the respondents answered “no” (Figure 15).

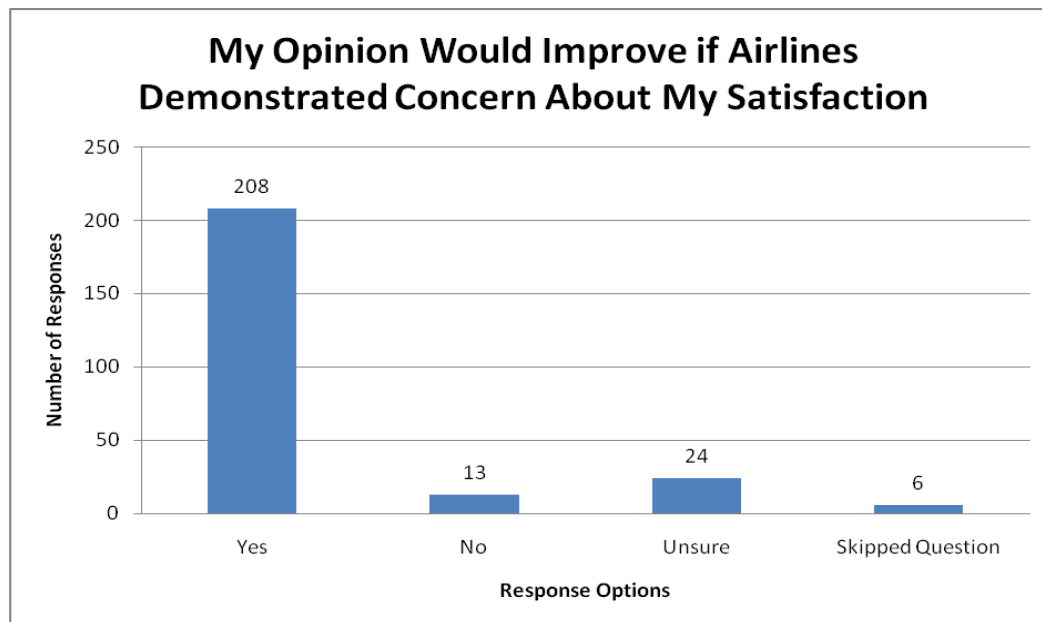


Figure 15: Effect of Demonstrated Airline Concern on Traveler Opinions

Respondents were asked to answer five demographics-related questions.

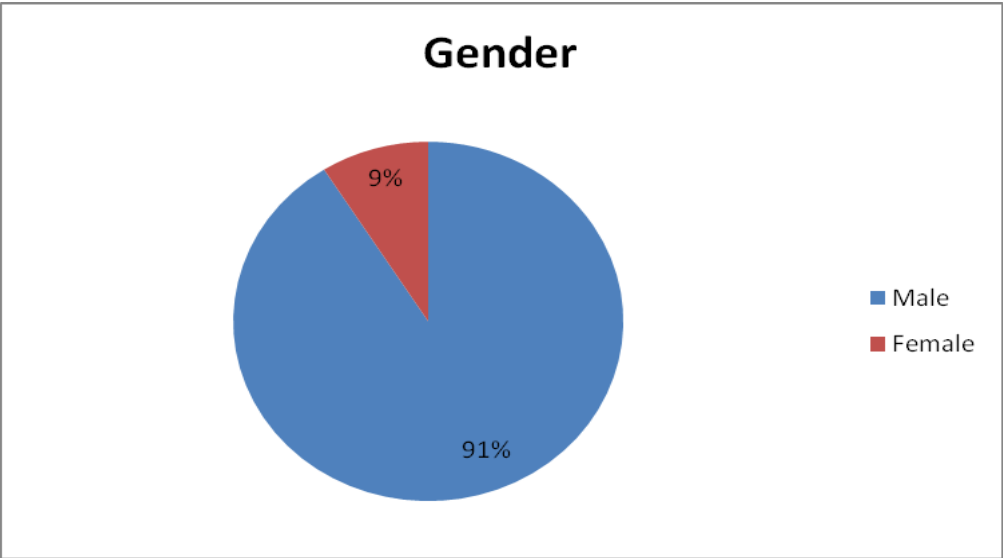


Figure 16: Respondent Gender

Ninety-one percent of respondents were male. Six respondents skipped the question.

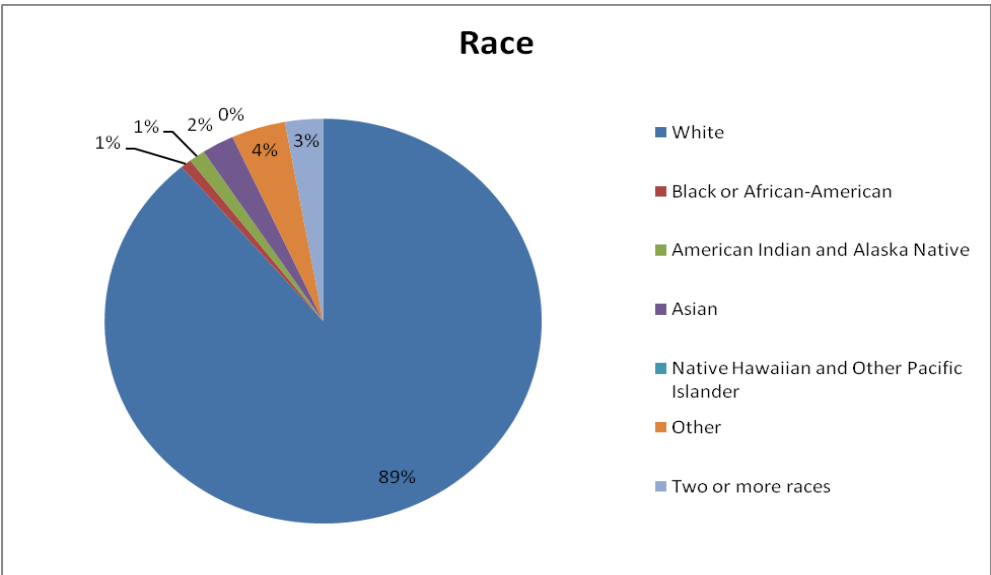


Figure 17: Respondent Race

Eighty-nine percent of respondents were white. Four respondents skipped the question.

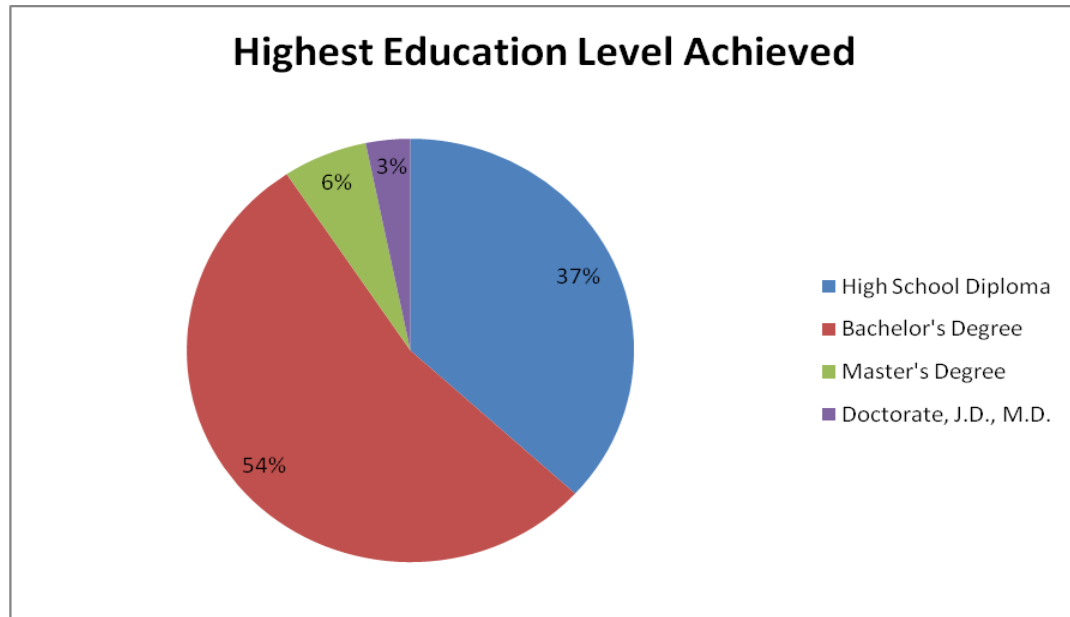


Figure 18: Respondent Education Level

Fifty-four percent of respondents have a bachelor's degree. Four respondents skipped the question.

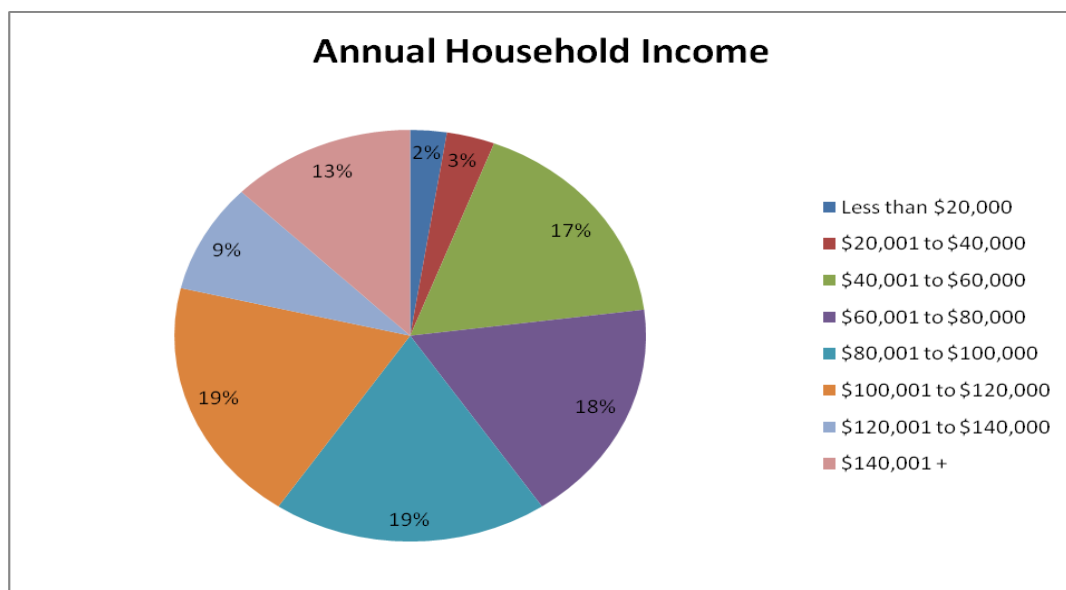


Figure 19: Respondent Household Income



Thirty-eight percent of respondents have an annual household income of between \$80,001 and \$120,000. Four respondents skipped the question.

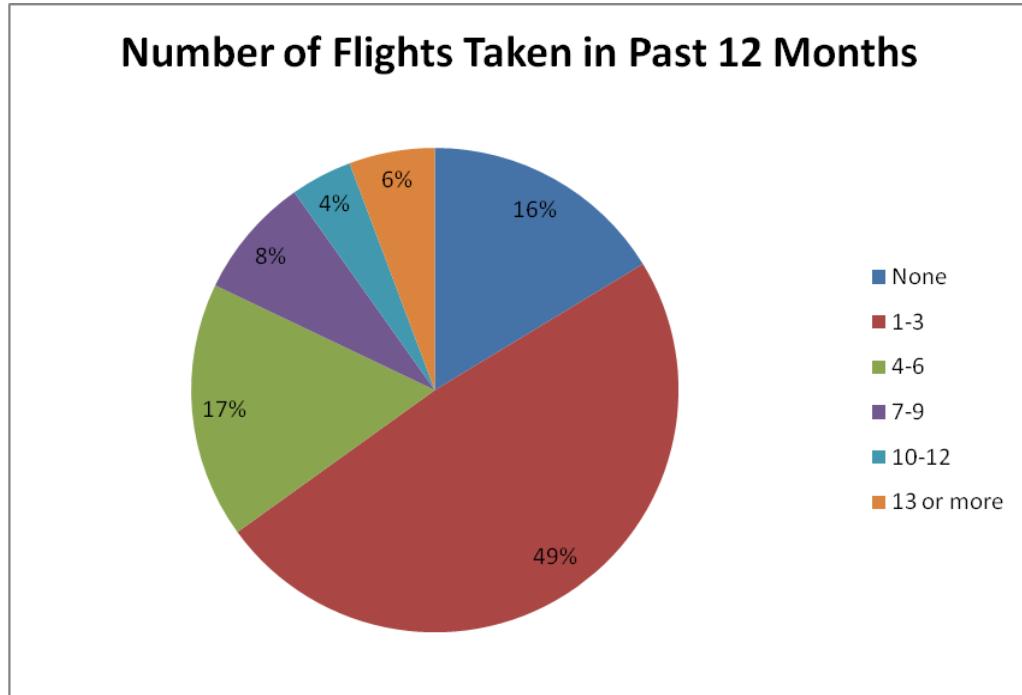


Figure 20: Respondent Number of Flights in Past 12 Months

The majority of respondents, 49%, have flown 13 or more flights in the past 12 months. Five respondents skipped the question.

Generally, questionnaire responses were not strong functions of the respondents' personal characteristics. Respondents' answers did not show dependence on the gender, age group, education level, income bracket, ethnicity, or purpose and frequency of respondents' air travel.

## **Qualitative Questionnaire Findings**

The scope of the qualitative questionnaire (Questionnaire 2) was to explore the major areas of passenger satisfaction or discontent with the airlines where the fundamentals of public relations practice could be applied to ameliorate the areas of passenger-airline conflict. A copy of Questionnaire 2 is presented in Appendix D.

Six questions in Questionnaire 2 are used to characterize the airline travelers by gender, age group, purpose of the air travel, annual frequency of air travels, type of their air travel, and use of social media. The remaining 12 questions addressed passengers' perceptions of airline services, perceived safety, punctuality, and fees.

Respondents were asked to select the single most important aspect of the airline services among the following choices: safety, being on time, reasonable fares, and clearly defined fees. Forty-eight percent of the respondents indicated safety as the single most important aspect of the airlines (Figure 21). The next choices in descending order of importance were clearly defined fees (24%), reasonable fares (20%), and being on-time (8%).

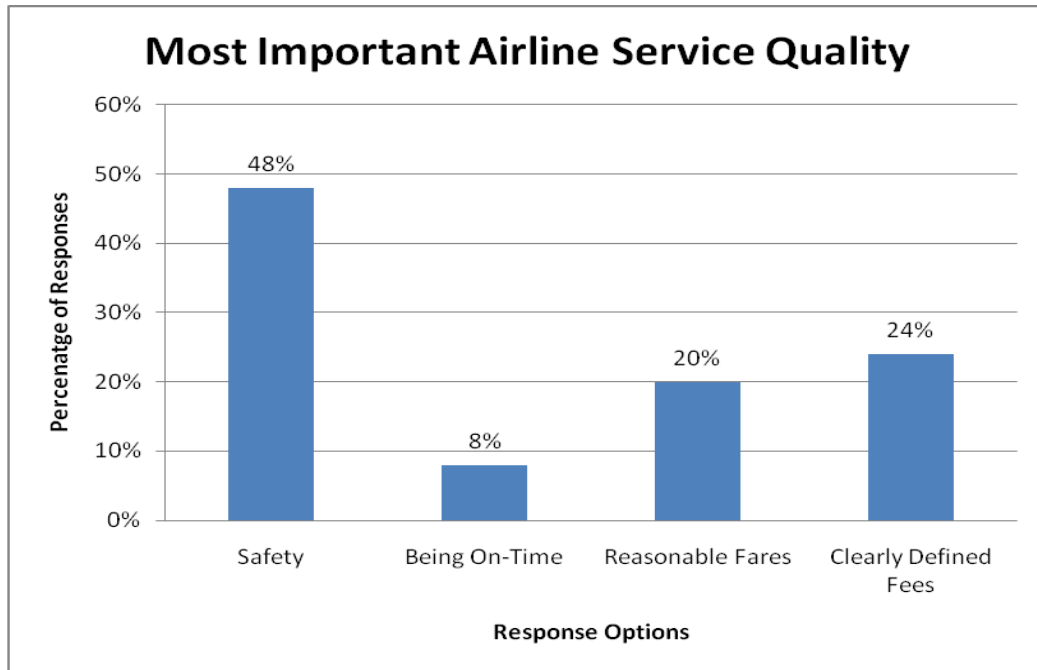


Figure 21: Most Important Airline Service Quality

Respondents were also asked about the most beneficial service that airlines provide. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents chose online booking as the single most beneficial aspect of airline services (Figure 22). The second choice, customer care, was selected by only 16% of the respondents. More hubs/destinations with 8%, loyalty rewards with 7%, and airport lounge availability with 2% were other choices of lesser importance.

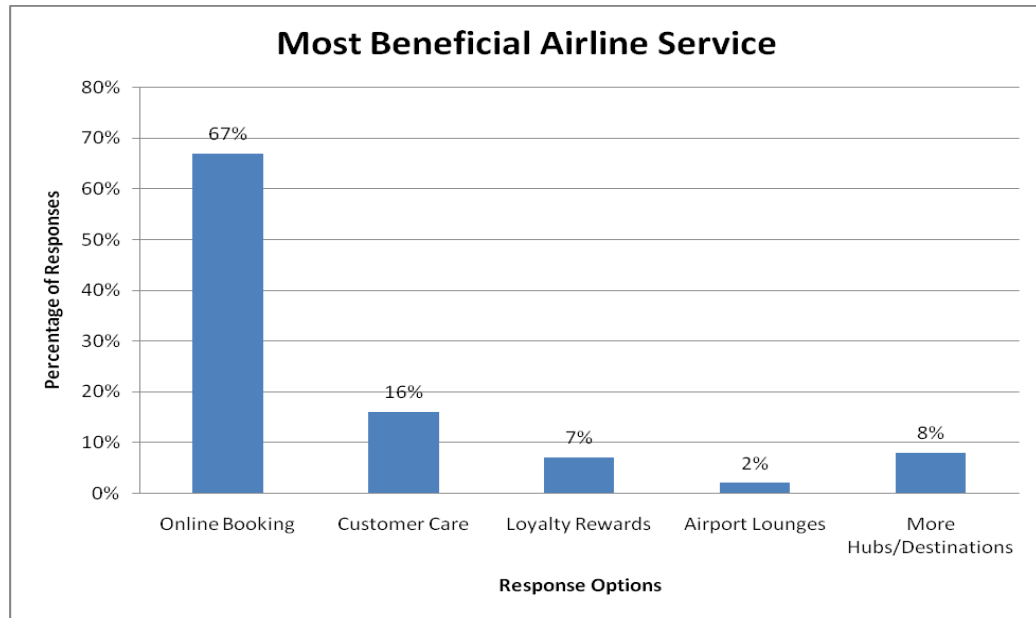


Figure 22: Most Beneficial Airline Service

The majority of the respondents (88%) rated the airline safety as excellent (34%) or good (54%). Only 2% of the respondents felt that their airline rated poor in terms of safety (Figure 23).

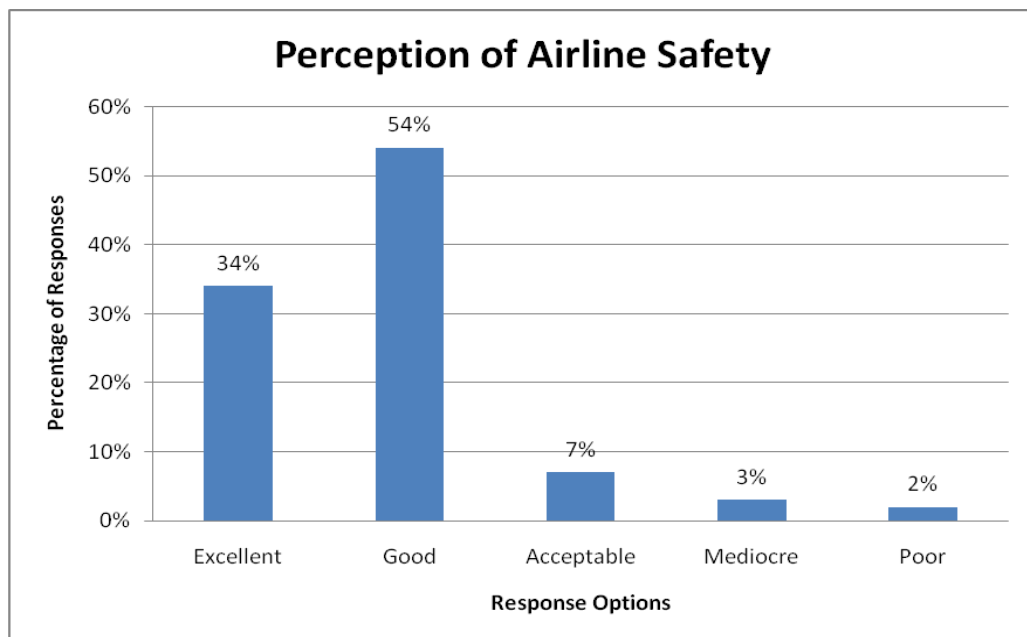


Figure 23: Perceived Airline Safety Rating

Also, the majority of the respondents (89%) rated airline on-time arrival and departures as excellent (12%), good (47%), or acceptable (30%). Only 11% of the respondents chose the mediocre (6%) or the poor options (5%) (Figure 24).

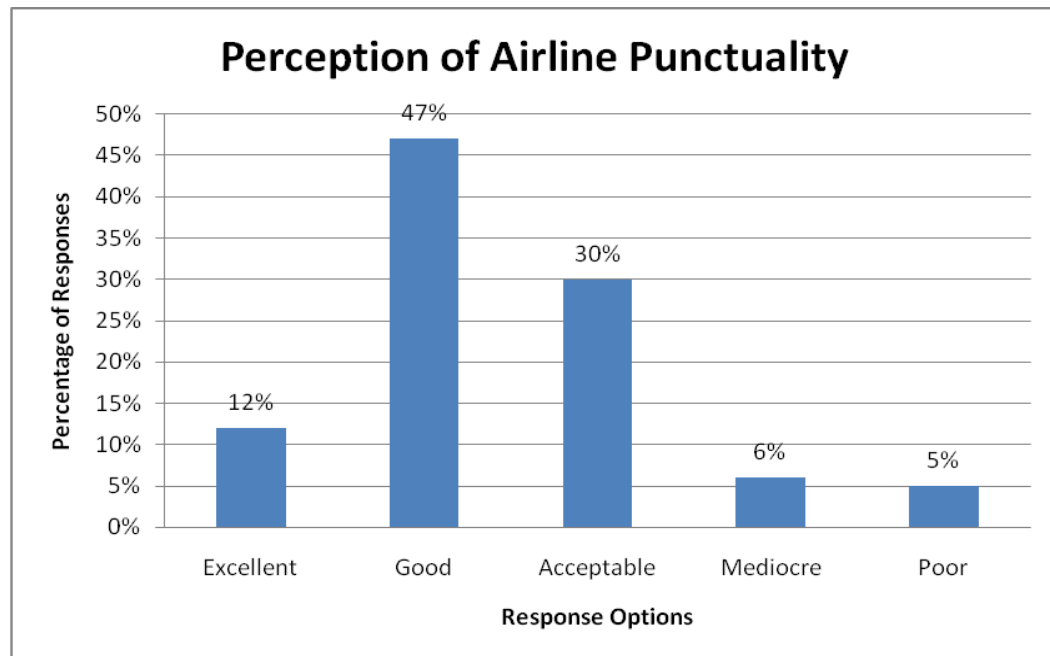


Figure 24: Perception of Airline Punctuality

In comparison with positive airline safety and punctuality assessments, the overall passenger ratings of the airlines fares and fees were less satisfactory. Only 16% of the respondents rated airline fares either as excellent (4%) or good (12%); and only a total of 23% of the respondents rated the airline fees either as excellent (5%) or good (18%). As shown in Figure 24, 25% of respondents considered the airline fares mediocre and 26% considered fares too high.

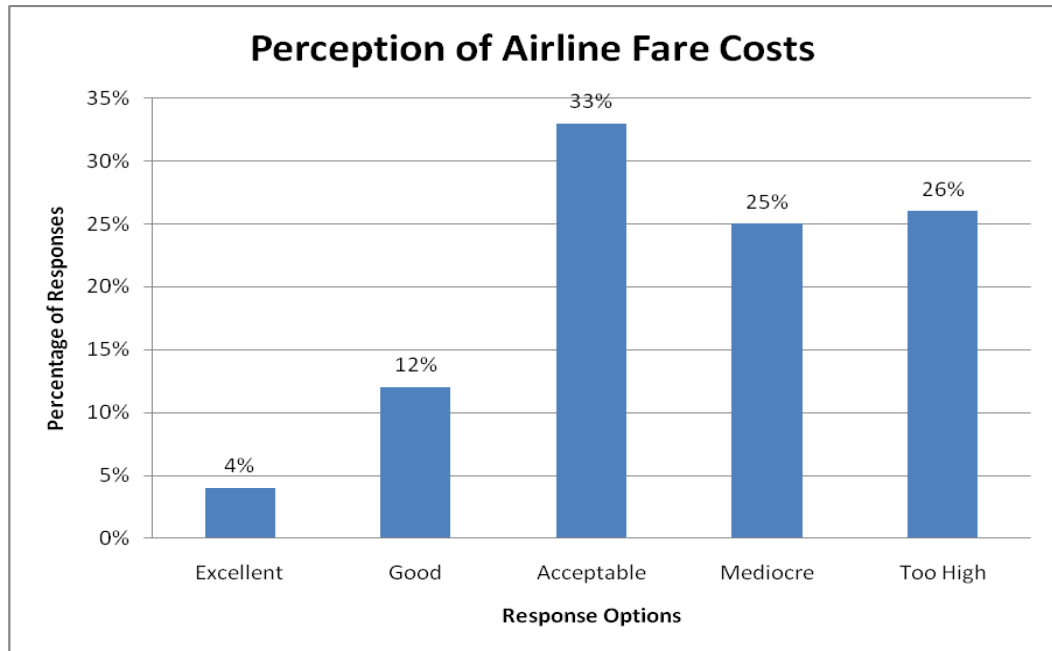


Figure 25: Perception of Airline Fare Costs

Ratings were lower for airline fees. As shown in Figure 26, 65% of the respondents considered the airline fees either mediocre (27%) or too high (38%).

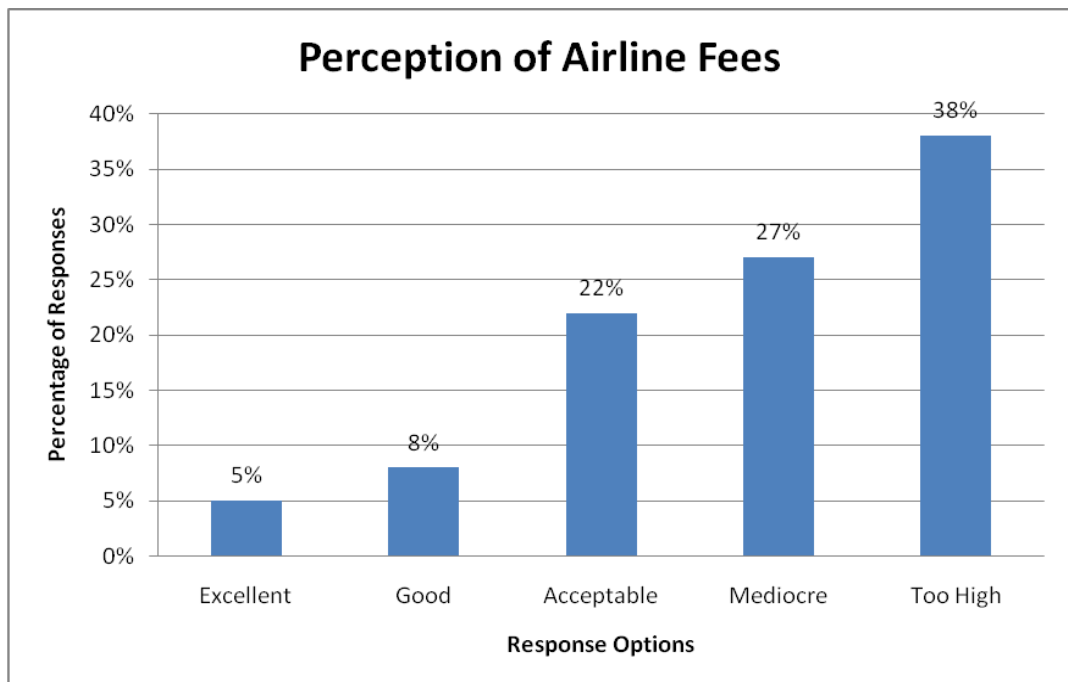


Figure 26: Perception of Airline Fees

The least popular airline fees were the fees applied to passenger baggage and food provided onboard. Fifty-two percent of the respondents chose luggage fee and 37% chose in-flight food as the least acceptable airline fees (Figure 27).

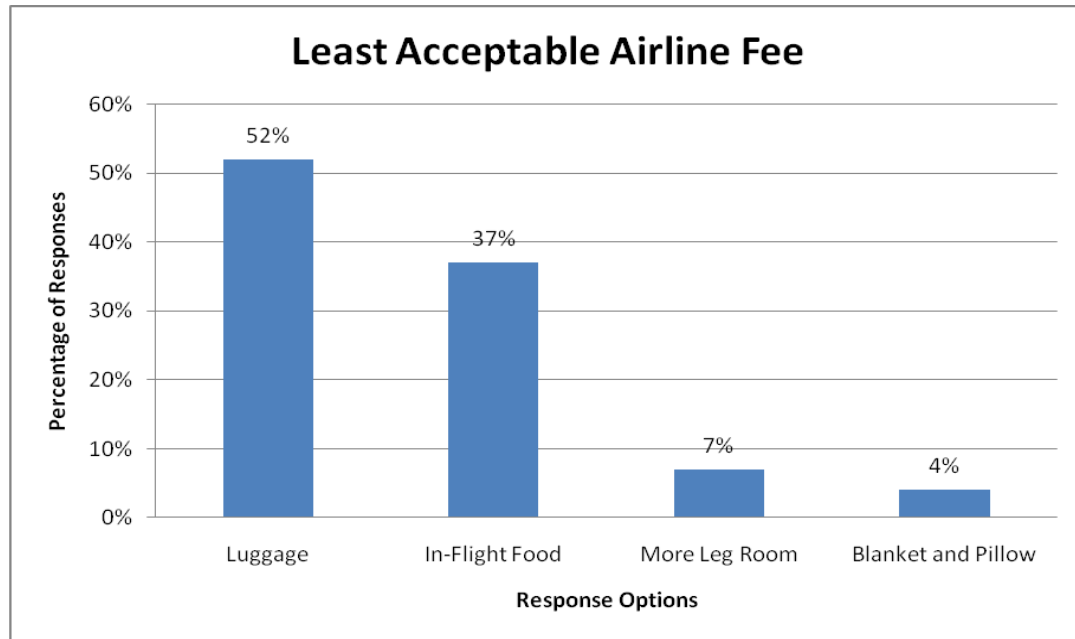


Figure 27: Least Acceptable Airline Fee

Respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with ground services, which include baggage handling, ticket counter service, and the boarding process. Thirty-three percent of the respondents rated the overall satisfaction with the in-ground services as acceptable, 25% as good, and 8% as excellent (Figure 28). Only 5% of the respondents rated ground services as poor.

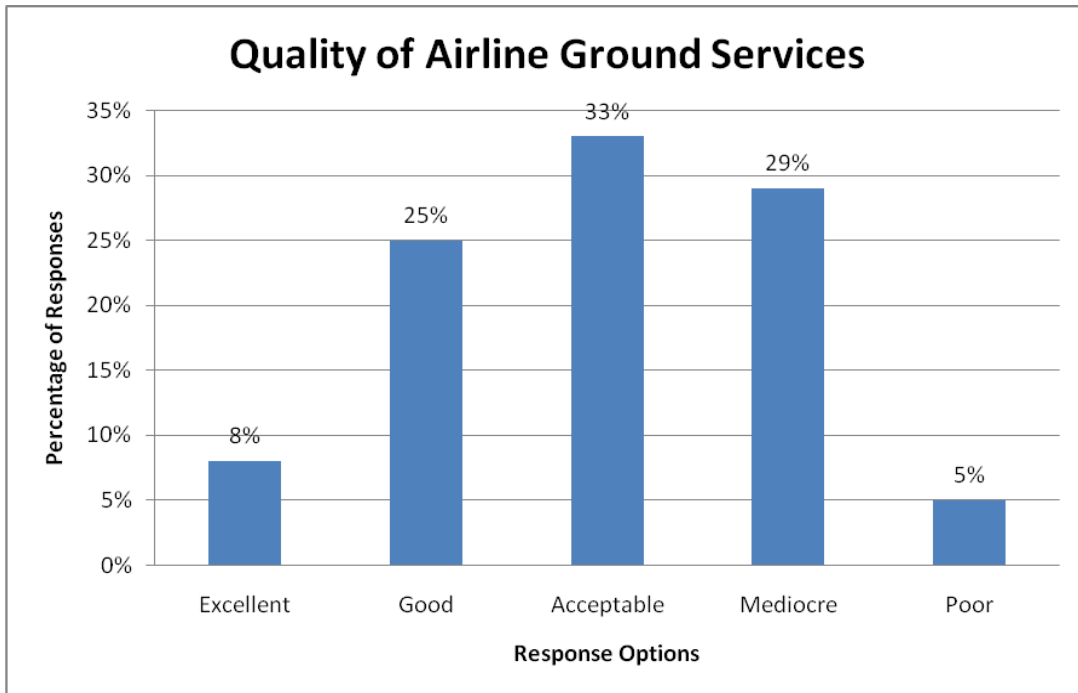


Figure 28: Quality of Airline Ground Services

As noted in Figure 29, most of the dissatisfaction with the airlines in ground services can be attributed to luggage handling (55%) and ticket counter service (31%).

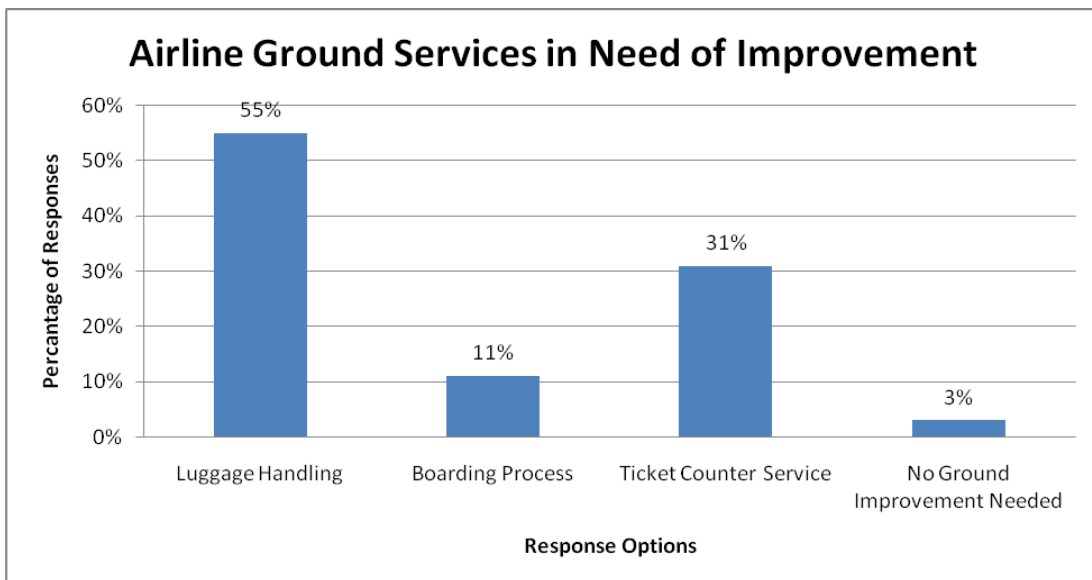


Figure 29: Ground Services Needing Improvement



Similarly, 48% of the respondents rated the overall satisfaction with the airborne services as acceptable, 19% as good, and 3% as excellent. About one-third of the respondents were less satisfied with the airborne services. Nineteen percent rated the services as mediocre, and 11% as unacceptable (Figure 30).

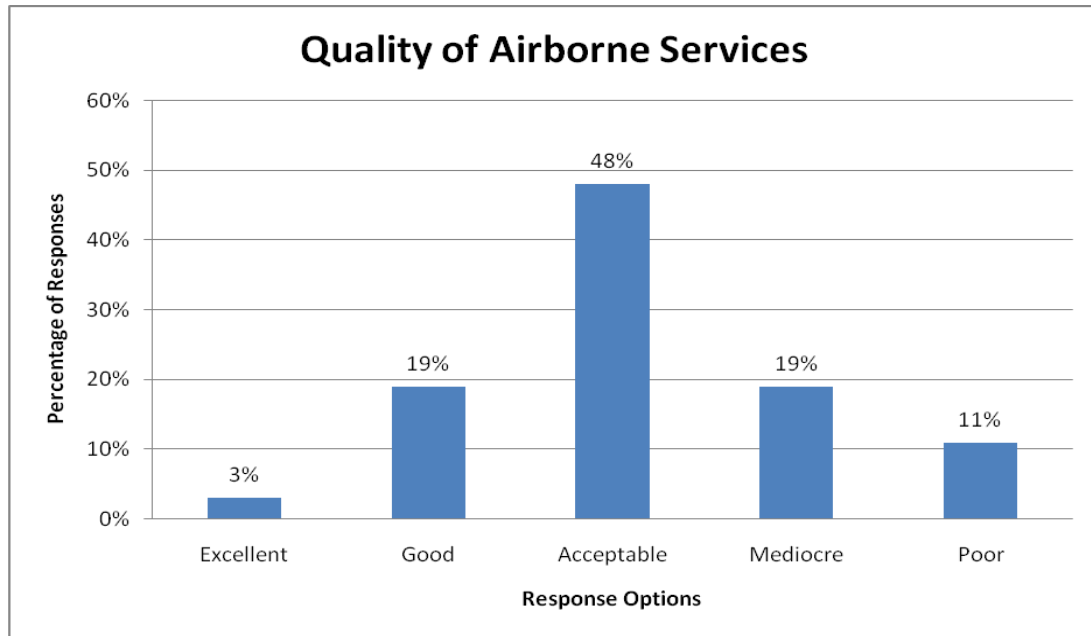


Figure 30: Perceived Quality of Airborne Services

As shown in Figure 31, most of the dissatisfaction with the airborne services can be attributed to seating and inadequate legroom (38%), and customer service (31%).

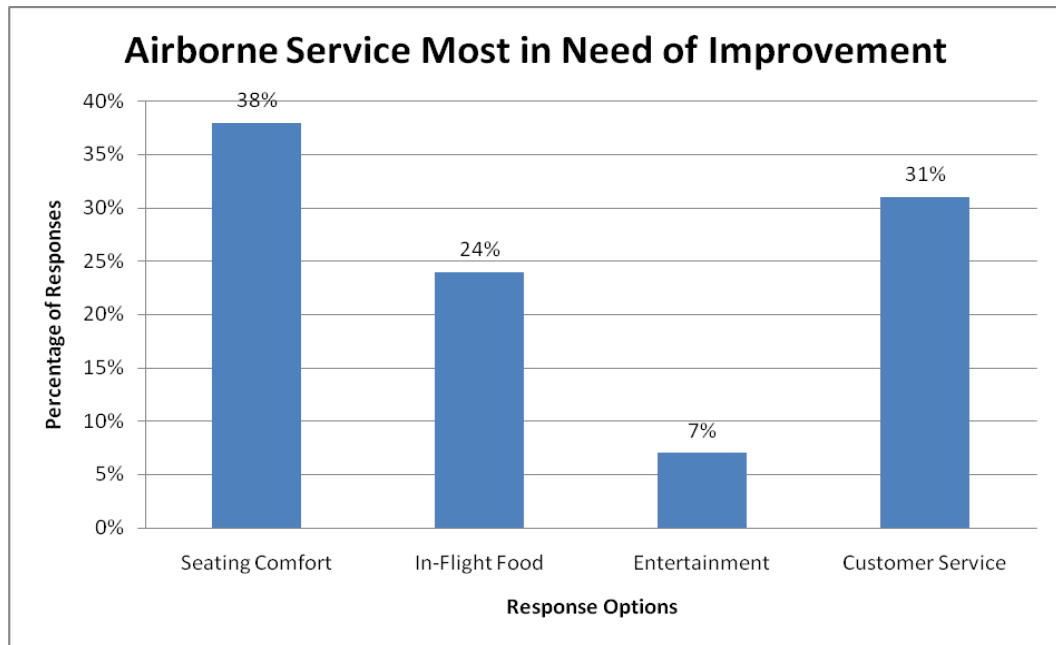


Figure 31: Airborne Service Needing Most Improvement

Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated that the most urgent airline improvement needed is better fares and fees. In comparison, only 25% of the respondents rated better safety measures as the most urgent improvement needed (Figure 32).

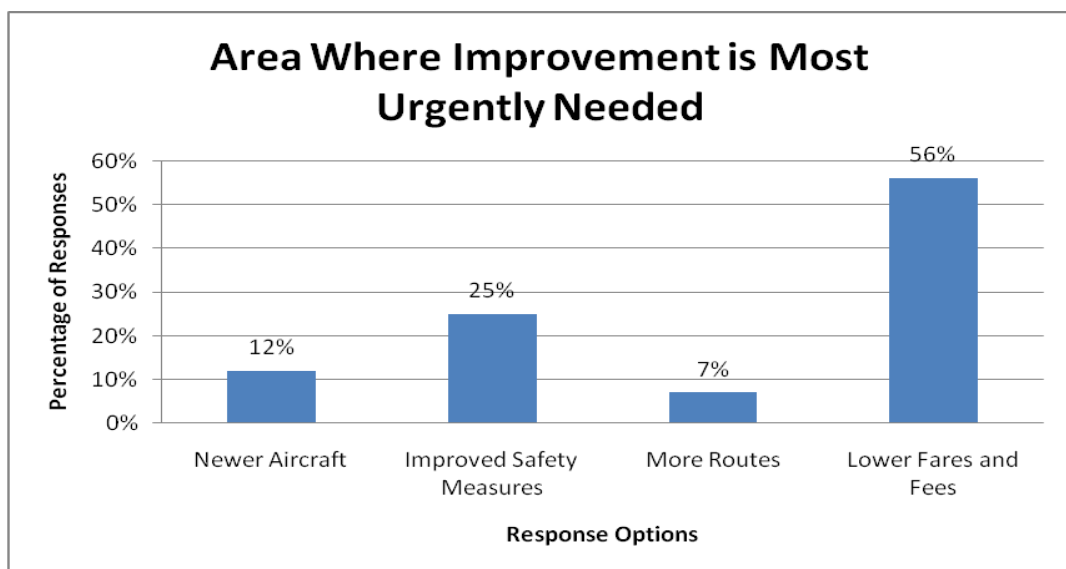


Figure 32: Airline Quality Most in Need of Improvement

Respondents were asked to answer five demographics-related questions.

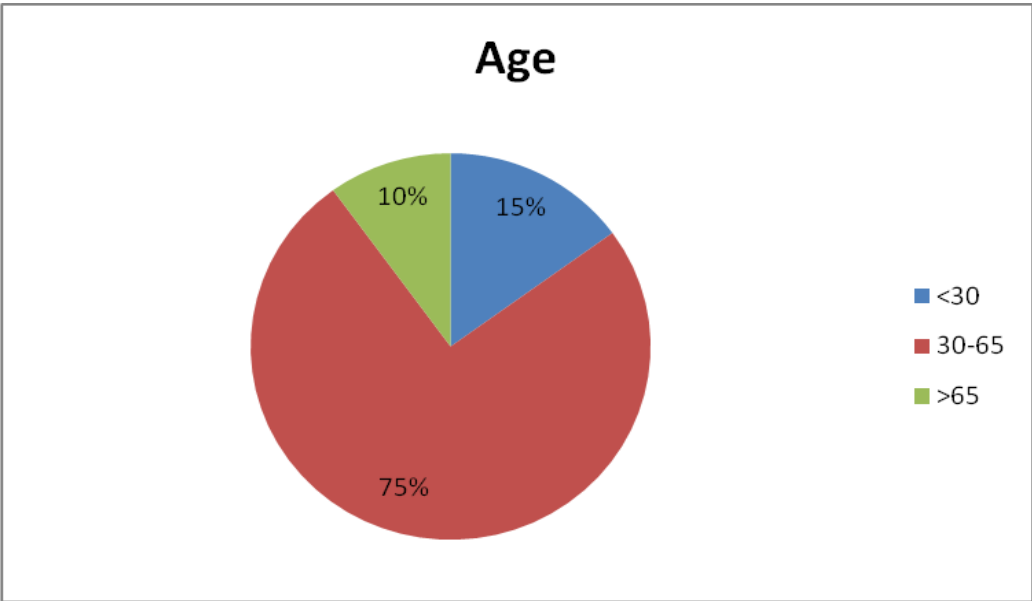


Figure 33: Age of Respondents

Seventy-five percent of the respondents were between the ages of 30-65.

Forty-one percent of respondents were traveling for pleasure.

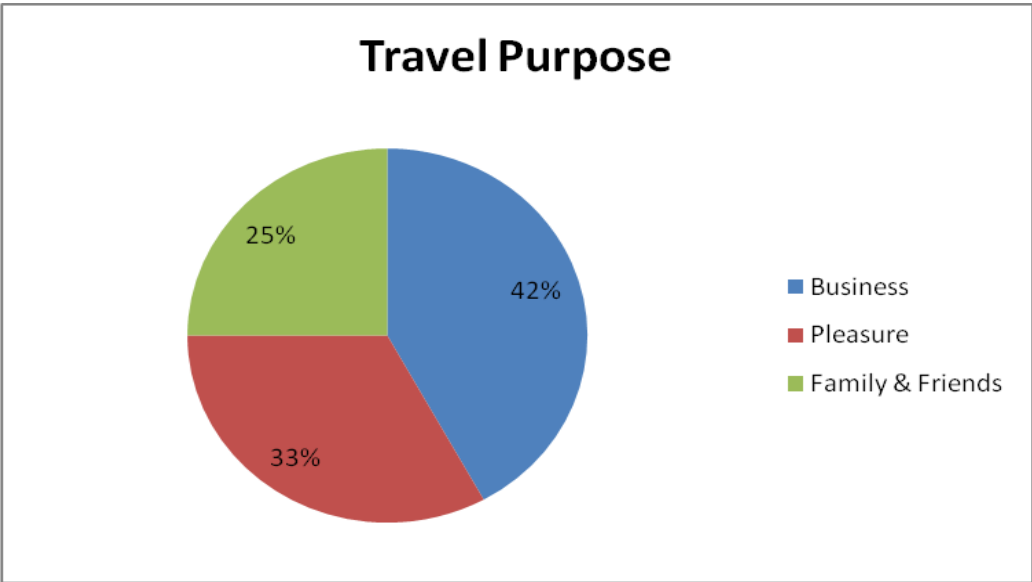


Figure 34: Respondent Travel Purpose

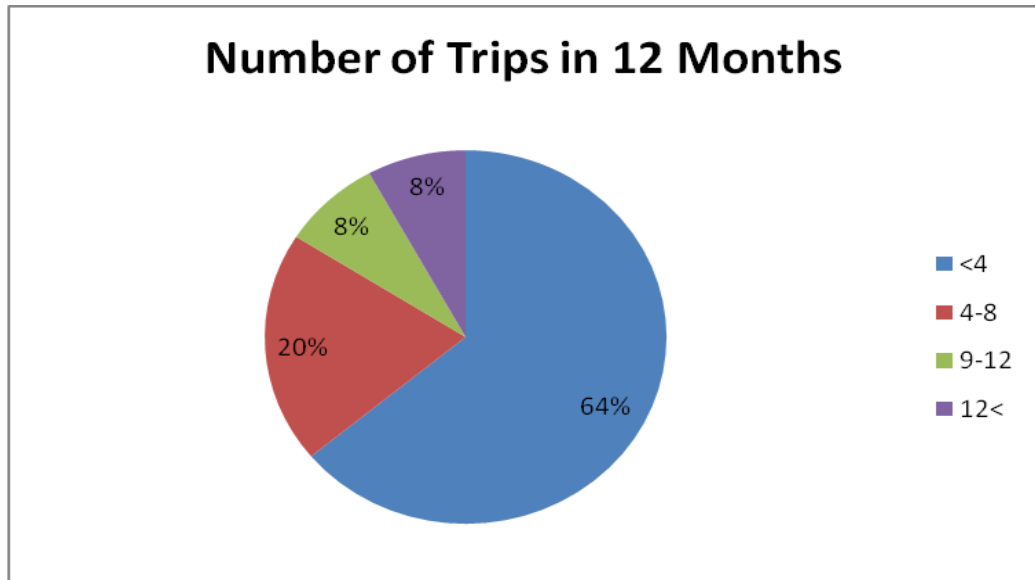


Figure 35: Respondent Number of Trips in 12 Months

Sixty-four percent of respondents had taken four or less flights.

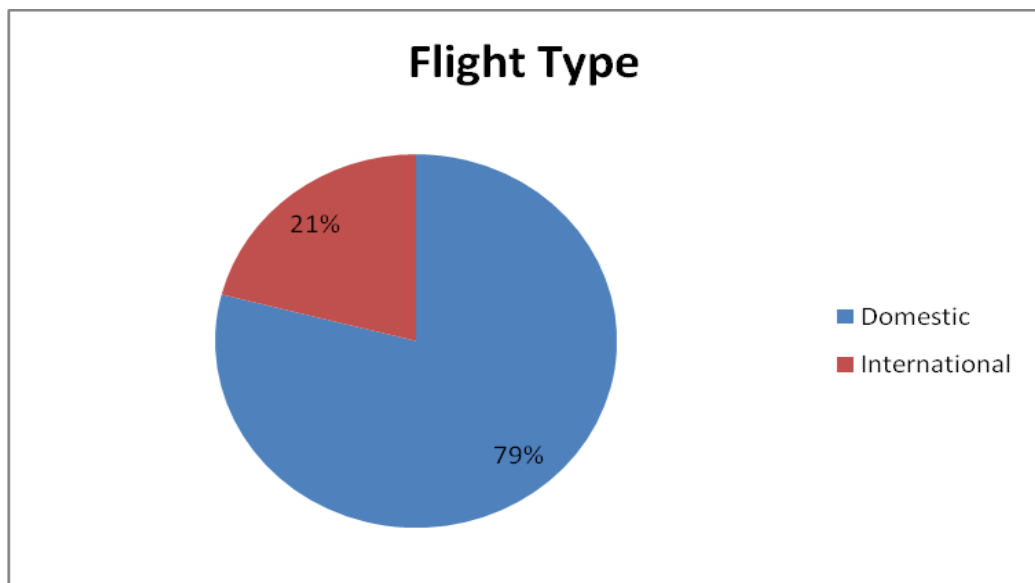


Figure 36: Respondent Flight Type

Seventy-nine percent of respondents were flying domestically.

A majority of the respondents (88%) indicated they use Internet for matters related to air travel, 51% of the air travelers use Facebook, 33% use Twitter, and 44% use other social media for airline related matters (Figure 31). Note that in this question respondents could select more than one answer, thus, the percent total exceeds 100%.

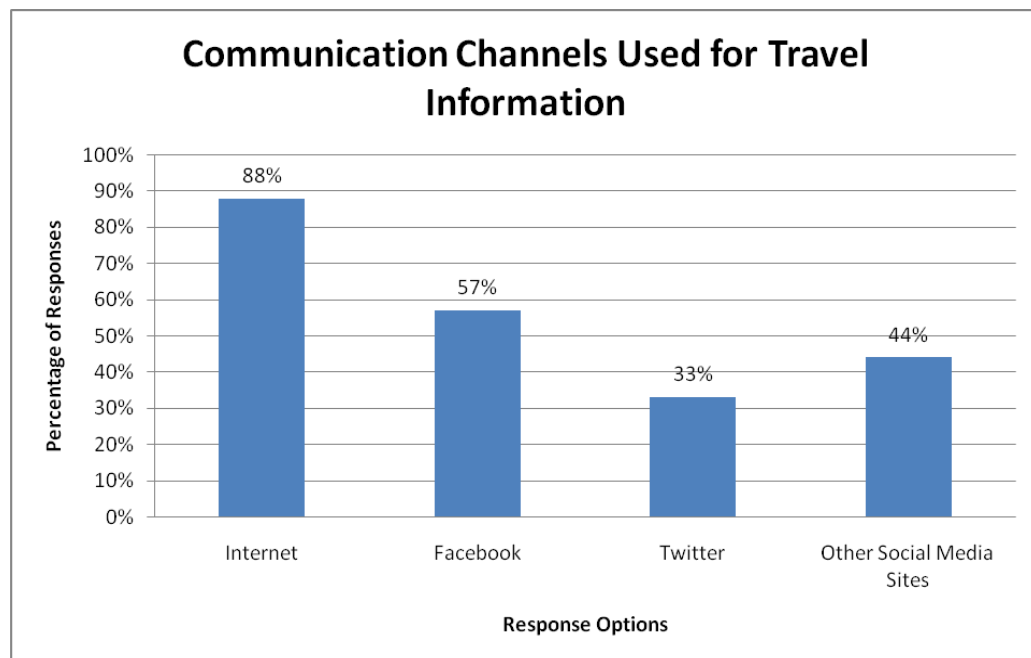


Figure 37: Channels Used by Respondents for Travel Information

Generally, questionnaire responses were not strong functions of the respondents' personal characteristics. Respondents' answers did not show dependence on the age group, social media preferences, or the purpose and frequency of respondents' air travel.

## Questionnaire Results Analysis

The majority of the airline passengers believed that flying is the safest mode of transportation and the airlines, overall, are doing a good job in making air travel safe.

Other aspects of the airlines safety, such as the proper aircraft maintenance, which could be compromised by the airlines' cost-cutting measures, did not inspire passenger confidence. As a result, many respondents expressed worry about possible mechanical failure of the plane and doubted airlines full disclosure of possible risks associated with their flights.

Although airline staff members were considered courteous, customer service, and airline responsiveness to passenger needs were generally considered deficient and substandard. Only a few respondents agreed that the airlines are concerned about passengers' flying experience and yet fewer respondents felt that the airlines place a high priority on customer satisfaction.

Airline safety was chosen by the respondents as the most important aspect of airline travel. The second ranking response to the same question was "clearly defined fees." Compared to an 8% response for "being on time", which was respondents' last place choice, the "clearly defined fees" preference highlights the impact of such fees on customer satisfaction. It shows significant air traveler resentment toward the airline fees that are considered unclear or unjustified.

Among various fees, the airlines' luggage fees and fees charged for in-flight food were chosen by the majority of the respondents as "the least acceptable" fees.

The overwhelming positive assessment of the airlines' on-time arrival and departures by the respondents indicates a highly satisfactory on-time performance by the airlines. But this response can also be interpreted from a different perspective. In the past, given the absence of current passenger issues with the airlines, the main concerns were flight safety and the airlines' punctuality. Now, the long wait for the airport security check and the existence of many other passenger concerns about a multitude of issues tend to marginalize the relevance of flight punctuality. Punctuality is no longer a passenger's primary issue with the airlines, but only one of the many competing concerns. Passengers seem to accept reasonable delays in flight arrival or departure without much annoyance.

Conversely, airline fares and extra fees did not fare well with the respondents. About half of the respondents considered airline fares either mediocre or too high. The responses were even more negative with the airline fees, where the majority of the respondents rated the airline fees either mediocre or too high. The great majority of customer issues over the extra fees were for the airline charges that are being applied for the luggage and in-flight food. These extra fees seem to be important causes of the passenger dissatisfaction

with the airlines. This was noted particularly in the responses dealing with the airlines' ground services. Here, luggage handling was identified as most in need of improvement. With added baggage fees, passengers tend to have a higher expectation for improved baggage handling by the airlines.

Airborne services received a similar rating from the respondents. In-flight services in need of improvement were seating and adequate legroom, food and snacks, and customer service. The first two deficiency areas are issues that are related to the airlines' extra fees. Passengers with economy tickets in need of more legroom are required to pay an additional fee for seats with more legroom. Passengers on domestic flights can also obtain food by paying additional fees.

It seems that these types of added charges are the underlying reasons for the respondents' answer regarding which improvement is most urgently needed. More than half of the respondents indicated that the most urgent airline improvement needed was better fares and fees. The number of respondents who selected this option was more than twice the number of respondents who chose safety improvements.

The results of the present survey indicate that the most pressing passenger issues with the airlines are the added fees and fare hikes, particularly the fees applied for onboard food and luggage. On the other hand, survey results indicate that there is also notable positive feedback by the respondents. There



seems to be significant passenger satisfaction with the newer online services that airlines provide. The single most beneficial aspect of the airline services according to the survey results is the respondents' ability to choose and book their flights online. Respondents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the online functions that have become increasingly automated and are being executed by passengers themselves.

The present survey results are in agreement with the recent results of the 2011 North America Airline Satisfaction Study released by J.D. Power and Associates (J.D. Power and Associates, 2011). J.D. Power surveyed more than 13,500 passengers who flew on North American carriers between July 2010 and April 2011 to rate the airlines on several factors, including costs, fees, in-flight services, and check-in procedures. Generally the high fares and fees were responsible for a drop in passengers' satisfaction on traditional network carriers. The score decreased from 582 out of a possible score of 1,000 in 2010 to an all-time low of 555 in 2011 (J.D. Power and Associates, 2011).

Satisfaction with non-fare-related costs, such as baggage fees, priority boarding, and onboard food and entertainment purchases, was down in 2011 for every airline except four in the survey. These four airlines (Southwest, JetBlue, WestJet, and Air Canada) have relatively lower fares and do not charge for the first piece of checked baggage. When it came to fares that airlines charge the

customers, none of the carriers scored well in the survey.

J.D. Power and Associates (2011) also reported some areas of substantial customer happiness. According to the survey results, respondents showed the highest levels of passenger satisfaction with the online check-in and online reservation process since 2006. Passengers appear more satisfied with the convenience and speed that technology enables them with booking and boarding the flights, while airlines benefit from reduced costs and greater efficiencies in these areas.

Results of the present work are further supported by a separate May 2010 airline passenger survey, when more than 3,200 people were surveyed about their air travel preferences. The survey covered a range of topics from airline fees to in-flight entertainment. The results, as reported by Global Travel Industry News, revealed that 25% of travelers indicated that limited legroom was one of their biggest gripes about air travel (Global Travel Industry News, 2010). When asked what airlines should offer to make the in-flight experience better, 30% lobbied for more legroom and 38% requested wider seats. Twenty-five percent of respondents considered airline fees to be their biggest complaint about air travel. Fifty-six percent of travelers said that checked baggage fees were the most annoying current airline fees.

The data demonstrates that airline passengers have gradually readjusted

their expectations during the past several years and now they appear more receptive to many airline changes. Air travelers are now less apprehensive about airline safety and punctuality and are inherently more satisfied with the convenience and efficiency that Internet technology and social media provides. Conversely, they are more frustrated with the airlines fare hikes, added fees, and deteriorated customer care and responsiveness.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Hypotheses Resolution

The following hypotheses were evaluated during the course of this study:

**Hypothesis 1: It is expected that the majority of travelers are dissatisfied with the airlines' level of service.**

The data demonstrates that airline passengers are frustrated with the airlines fare hikes, added fees, and deteriorated customer care and responsiveness. Therefore, the hypothesis can be considered true for this study.

**Hypothesis 2: It is expected that the majority of customers are dissatisfied with the airlines' response to negative traveler feedback.**

In the primary quantitative survey performed as part of this study, only one-fourth of more than 200 respondents agreed that airlines are responsive to travelers' needs, and 29% of the respondents disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the airlines responsiveness. Therefore, the hypothesis can be considered true for this study.

**Hypothesis 3: It is expected that if airlines take action to improve problem areas identified through traveler feedback, their reputation among customers will improve.**

Eighty-five percent respondents answered "yes" to whether their opinion

of airlines would improve if the airlines showed concern toward consumer satisfaction. Only 5% of the respondents answered “no.” Therefore, the hypothesis can be considered true for this study.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The airline industry continues to be in a state of change and transformation, as the importance of fares and fees and customer service continue to dominate passenger choice and considerations. Passengers are increasingly adopting new online technologies to search for the best fares and use social media to show their feedback and reactions to the airlines. The industry is now realizing that the traditional methods of advertising are on the way out, and innovative technological channels emphasizing convenience, speed, and efficiency are new choices of today's digital consumers.

The U.S. legacy carriers (Delta, United, US Airways and Northwest Airlines) operate in most domestic markets regardless of their profitability in all routes. In contrast, the low-cost airlines are more price-competitive as they operate in limited but mostly profitable markets. The evidence suggests that air travelers place a higher value on lower cost and better service than the size of the airlines. Results of the present work show customers are increasingly price sensitive and a competitive cost structure both in the areas of base fares and added fees are essential in attracting their business.

This survey further indicates that there is no delineation between leisure and business travel as it relates to price elasticity. Analysis of the responses indicates that passengers' satisfaction or frustration with the airlines has no dependence on the scope of travel, business vs. leisure. In fact, responses are fairly independent of passenger gender, age group, income, or other personal characteristics. Thus, a determined focus on the features and benefits that are valuable to the majority of passengers are key success factors in the industry.

Increased usage and reliance by passengers on the Internet for online booking and customer feedback is prompting the industry to be proactive and establish a proper presence on the Internet. Airlines should launch and improve their own websites and further adopt social media networking capabilities such as YouTube and Facebook. U.S. airlines should further focus on technological innovations that create better service and higher efficiencies in their responsiveness to the customer voice. The end result will be improved customer care and a better understanding of how to be more competitive in regard to fares and fees.

One area clearly in need of revision and focus is the air industry's public relations activities. Public relations inefficiencies of many airlines, particularly legacy carriers, are pervasive and the airlines must overhaul their public relations operations to focus more on responsiveness and activities that add

value in the customer's views. Recent airline public relations fiascos require no emphasis. An episode like the "United Breaks Guitars" video is one example in a series of incidents demonstrating how customers can effectively react to disservice and voice their complaints. It also shows how customers' reactions against unresponsive businesses could be extensive and far-reaching. Sound airline public relations practices can avert similar publicity disasters. Delta's prompt and positive response to the \$2,800 baggage charges for returning soldiers case is an elucidating example.

Many businesses fail to pay attention to or learn from the public relations blunders emanating from indifferent customer service and unresolved customer complaints. Consumers are increasingly using social media to voice their frustration and discontent about unacceptable customer service practices. Internet technology and social media are helping air travelers to voice their frustrations with a high speed and extensive reach. Airlines should better understand the power of social media and use it to interact with customers and respond quickly and positively to their expressed concerns.

Monitoring social media sites is already an important tool for customer outreach and an effective means of public relations practice. Social media specialists are being tasked to monitor and resolve customer-airline issues for improving customer satisfaction and ultimately to enhance airlines marketing

activities. Several competitive airlines have been already employing dedicated public relations staff to exclusively monitor social media and use it as a two-way means of communication.

An increasing number of airlines are using social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Some are blogging and using other Internet channels to communicate with passengers. These are all effective two-way channels to reach the digital community and motivate them to give both positive and negative feedback about what they like or dislike about the airlines. The Internet, and social media websites in particular, are offering once faceless travelers a global and instantaneous platform from which to air their grievances.

Airlines in the United States have been the quickest to embrace social media as a low-cost public relations tool to establish contact with the customers, and, at the same time, use it as a marketing tool. In particular to spread the word about fare sales or to make announcements about special fares or packages, new routes, or services. Carriers like Southwest Airlines, JetBlue, and Alaska Airlines are among the most active users, each with online “followings” approaching hundreds of thousands.

With social media, the communication goes both ways, if there is any kind of problem with the airlines, someone can send feedback, pictures, a video on YouTube, or tweet it and the word gets out instantly and globally. At the same



time, airlines can equally use social media to effectively come up with a public relations response just as quickly and extensively, and use it to resolve dissatisfactions, dispel rumors or accusations, and provide accurate information.

Today, capabilities such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and online blogs offer largely unexplored new public relations and promotion platforms. In principle, these sites enable airlines to listen to customer voices and use them to instantaneously and cheaply promote their product and services. Furthermore, they can get the online community motivated to travel, and specifically target key market segments and develop brand loyalty to the carrier. Social media is also a low-cost way to promote word-of-mouth advertising, which is the single largest influencer when it comes to making air travel decisions.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

To further develop on this study, a random sample would be useful in addition to the convenience sample. This additional research would allow the researcher to compare responses from participants who are more representative of the overall population.

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## Appendix A

### Airline Fee Matrices

**Table 3: Domestic Checked Baggage Fees of 17 U.S. Airlines as of July 1, 2010**

Airline	First bag (airport/online)	Second bag (airport/online)	Additional bags (each)	Overweight bags	Oversized bags
Air Tran	\$15	\$25	3+: \$50	51-70 lbs: \$49 71-100 lbs: \$79	\$49-\$79
Alaska <sup>a</sup>	\$20	\$20	3: \$20 4+: \$50	51-100 lbs: \$50	\$50-\$75
Allegiant	\$35/\$15-\$30	\$35/\$25-\$35	\$35/\$50	51-74 lbs: \$50 75+ lbs: \$100	\$35
American	\$25	\$35	3-5: \$100 6+: \$200	51-70 lbs: \$50 71-100 lbs: \$100	\$150
Continental	\$25/\$23	\$35/\$32	3+: \$100	51-70 lbs: \$50	\$100
Delta	\$25/\$23	\$35/\$32	3: \$125 4-10 \$200	51-70 lbs: \$90 71-100 lbs: \$175	\$175-\$300
Frontier	\$20	\$30	3+: \$50	51+ lbs: \$75	\$75
Hawaiian	\$25/\$23 inter-island: \$10	\$35/\$32 \$17 inter-island: \$17	3-6: \$125 7+: \$200 inter-island: \$25	51-70 lbs: \$50 inter-island: \$25	\$100 inter-island: \$25
Jet Blue	\$0	\$30	3: \$75	51-70 lbs: \$50 71-100 lbs: \$100	\$75
Midwest	\$20	\$30	3+: \$50	51-100 lbs: \$75	\$75
Southwest	\$0	\$0	3-9: \$50 10+: \$110	51-100 lbs: \$50	\$50
Spirit <sup>b</sup>	\$25/\$19	\$25	3-5: \$100	51-70 lbs: \$50 71-99 lbs: \$100	\$100-\$150
Sun Country	\$25/\$20	\$35/\$30	\$75	51-100 lbs: \$75	\$75
United <sup>c</sup>	\$25	\$35	3+: \$100	51-100 lbs: \$100	\$100
USA3000	\$25/\$15	\$25	\$25	51-70 lbs: \$25	\$25-\$50
US Airways	\$25/\$23	\$35/\$32	3-9: \$100	51-70 lbs: \$50 71-100 lbs: \$100	\$100
Virgin America	\$25	\$25	3-10: \$25	1st <70 lbs: free 51-70 lbs: \$50 71-100 lbs: \$100	\$50

Morran, 2010



## Other fees charged by the same airlines:

Airline	Ticket change or cancellation (domestic ticket)	Booking phone/ in person	Unaccompanied minor	Pet in cabin	Seat selection	Inflight food and beverage	Blanket and pillow
Air Tran	\$75	\$15/\$0	\$39 direct/non-stop \$59 connecting	\$69	\$6 advance \$20 exit row	F: NA B: \$6	NA
Alaska	\$100 (\$75 online)	\$15/\$15	\$25 direct/non-stop \$50 connecting	\$100	NA	F: \$3.50-\$7 B: \$6	NA
Allegiant	\$50 per segment	\$15+\$14.99 per segment /\$0	NA	NA	\$4.99-\$24.99 varies by flight length and seat.	F: \$2-\$5 B: \$2-\$7*	NA
American	\$150	\$20/\$20-\$30	\$100	\$100	NA	F: \$3-\$10 B: \$6-\$7	\$8
Continental	\$150	\$20/\$20	\$100	\$125	NA	F: \$0 B: \$6	NA
Delta	\$150	\$20/\$35	\$100	\$125	NA	F: \$2-\$8 B: \$5-\$7	NA
Frontier	\$50 - \$100	\$0/\$0	\$50 direct/non-stop \$100 connecting	\$75	\$15-\$25	F: \$3-\$7 B: \$2-\$5*	NA
Hawaiian	\$100-150 inter-island: \$25-\$30	\$25/\$35 inter-island: \$15/\$35	\$100 inter-island: \$35	\$175	NA	F: \$5.50-\$10 B: \$6.50-\$14	NA
Jet Blue	\$100	\$15	\$75	\$100	\$10 extra legroom	F: \$0 B: \$6	\$7
Midwest	\$100	\$0/\$0	\$50 direct/non-stop \$100 connecting	\$75	NA	F: \$3-\$7 B: \$2-\$5*	NA
Southwest	\$0	\$0/\$0	\$50	\$75	\$10 priority boarding	F: \$0 B: \$3-\$5	NA
Spirit	\$110 (\$100 online)	\$5/\$0 (\$5 each way online)	\$100	\$100	Varies based on location.	F: \$2-\$5 B: \$2-\$6*	NA
Sun Country	\$75	\$15/\$0	\$75/segment	\$100	\$8	F: \$3-\$6 B: \$5	\$5
United	\$150	\$25/\$30	\$99	\$125	\$9/\$109	F: \$3-\$9 B: \$6	NA
USA3000	\$75	\$0/\$0	\$50	\$75	\$9-\$25	n/a	NA
US Airways	\$150	\$25-\$35	\$100 (non-stop flights only)	\$100	\$5+ Varies by location.	F: \$3-\$7 B: \$7-\$8	\$7
Virgin America	\$100 (\$75 online)	\$15/\$10	\$75	\$100	NA	F, B: \$2-\$10	\$12

Source: GAO analysis

Morran, 2010

## Appendix B

### WSU AQR Methodology and Scoring

$$\text{AQR} = \frac{(+8.63 * \text{OT}) + (-8.03 * \text{DB}) + (-7.92 * \text{MB}) + (-7.17 * \text{CC})}{(8.63 + 8.03 + 7.92 + 7.17)}$$

Where (from Bowen & Headley, Table 1):

OT	On-Time Arrival (with a positive impact weighting factor of 8.63)
DB	Denied Boarding (with a negative impact weighting factor of 8.03)
MB	Mishandled Baggage (with a positive impact weighting factor of 7.92)
CC	Customer Complaints (with a positive impact weighting factor of 7.17)

Customer complaints consist of the following categories:

- Flight Problems
- Oversales
- Reservations, Ticketing, and Boarding
- Fares
- Refunds
- Baggage
- Customer Service
- Disability
- Advertising
- Discrimination
- Animals
- Other

The AQR uses a mathematical formula to combine four parameters, each

with its own positive weighting factor (On-Time Arrival) and the negative factors (Denied Boarding, Mishandled Baggage, and Customer Complaints). Thus, AQR allows a time-based inter-comparison of individual domestic airlines' performance and the trend of the airline industry's AQR as a whole. On the other hand, all 12 categories of Customer Complaints contribute to the AQR formula as a single factor, with the lowest multiplier. In this respect, small improvements in Denied Boarding and Mishandled Baggage can outweigh substantial increases in Customer Complaints.

Furthermore, the AQR is not normalized to the total number of passengers, thus a decline in the total number of passengers in a given period may result in a mathematical improvement of the AQR.

### Airline Quality Rating Scores

	2009 AQR		2008 AQR		2007 AQR		2006 AQR		2005 AQR		2004 AQR		2003 AQR	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Air Tran	-0.49	2	-0.84	2	-1.03	1	-1.13	3	-0.99	2	-0.76	2	-1.05	8
Alaska	-1.39	11	-1.16	5	-1.75	7	-1.66	9	-1.64	9	-1.11	5	-0.74	2
American	-1.25	9	-1.71	9	-2.19	9	-1.83	10	-1.66	10	-1.30	8	-1.24	11
American Eagle	-2.83	18	-3.12	16	-3.80	15	-3.97	17	-2.66	14	-2.26	13	-2.10	13
Atlantic Southeast	-2.49	17	-3.43	17	-4.04	16	-5.45	18	-4.68	17	-4.10	16	-5.76	14
Comair	-2.22	16	-3.03	15	-3.78	14	-3.55	16	-2.96	16	-3.27	15	N/A	-
Continental	-1.09	6	-1.39	8	-1.74	6	-1.63	7	-1.51	8	-1.31	9	-1.04	7
Delta	-1.73	15	-2.09	12	-2.72	10	-2.17	12	-2.14	12	-1.54	11	-1.24	12
ExpressJet	-1.32	10	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-
Frontier	-1.09	7	-1.31	7	-1.71	5	-1.30	4	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-
Hawaiian	-0.40	1	-0.69	1	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-
JetBlue	-0.62	3	-0.90	3	-1.30	2	-0.93	2	-0.88	1	-0.59	1	-0.64	1
Mesa	-1.42	12	-2.29	14	-2.99	12	-3.12	15	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-
Northwest	-0.88	4	-1.04	4	-1.59	4	-1.35	5	-1.46	7	-1.24	7	-1.02	6
SkyWest	-1.57	14	-2.13	13	-3.09	13	-2.76	14	-2.48	13	-2.46	14	N/A	-
Southwest	-1.00	5	-1.23	6	-1.59	3	-1.38	6	-1.06	4	-0.90	3	-0.89	3
United	-1.43	13	-1.83	11	-1.93	8	-1.65	8	-1.21	5	-1.09	4	-1.11	9
US Airways	-1.19	8	-1.77	10	-2.94	11	-2.32	13	-2.77	15	-1.55	12	-0.96	5
<b>Industry</b>	<b>-1.27</b>		<b>-1.63</b>		<b>-2.16</b>		<b>-1.87</b>		<b>-1.73</b>		<b>-1.38</b>		<b>-1.14</b>	

#### NOTES:

- Scores and rankings for 2009 reflect the addition of ExpressJet to the airlines tracked.
- Scores and rankings for 2008 reflect the addition of Hawaiian to the airlines tracked.
- Scores and rankings for 2006 reflect the addition of Frontier and Mesa to the airlines tracked.
- As of January 2006, data of the merged operations of US Airways and America West Airlines are combined, and appear only as US Air data.
- Rankings for 2005 reflect the removal of Independence Air from the airlines tracked.
- Scores and Rankings for 2004 reflect the addition of Comair and SkyWest to the group tracked.
- Scores and Rankings for 2003 reflect the addition of Air Tran, Atlantic Southeast, and Jet Blue to the group tracked.

## Appendix C

### Quantitative Questionnaire

#### Consumer Perception of Airline Safety and Service Levels

##### 1. Safety and Service

The following survey is intended to gauge consumer attitudes toward safety measures and customer service levels provided by the airline industry. We will also ask you some questions about yourself and your travel habits. This survey is CONFIDENTIAL and ANONYMOUS.

Please respond to all of the statements below.

**1. Airlines are doing a good job of making me feel safe while flying.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**2. Flying is safer than other modes of transportation, such as automobile or train travel.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**3. The airline provides full-disclosure of any risks associated with flying.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**4. I worry about a plane crash when I fly.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**5. I worry about mechanical failures of the plane when I fly.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**6. Airlines properly maintain their aircrafts.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**7. I have confidence in security measures at the airport.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**8. I believe I am protected against terrorist activity while flying.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Consumer Perception of Airline Safety and Service Levels

**9. Airlines are responsive to my needs as a traveler.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**10. Airlines make a genuine effort to earn my confidence by providing good service.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**11. Airlines are concerned about my flying experience.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**12. Airline employees are courteous.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**13. Airlines react promptly when I express my displeasure about any aspect of my travel.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**14. Airlines place a high priority on consumer satisfaction.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**15. My opinion of airlines would improve if they showed concern toward consumer satisfaction.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

## Consumer Perception of Airline Safety and Service Levels

### 2. Personal Information

Please answer the following questions.

**1. How many flights have you taken in the past 12 months?**

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10-12
- ☐ 13 or more

**2. What is your gender?**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

**3. Please choose the description that best suits your race.**

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ American Indian and Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Two or more races

**4. Please choose the option that best reflects your level of education:**

- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctorate, J.D., M.D.

## Consumer Perception of Airline Safety and Service Levels

### 5. What is your annual household income?

- ☐ Less than \$20,000
- ☐ \$20,001 to \$40,000
- ☐ \$40,001 to \$60,000
- ☐ \$60,001 to \$80,000
- ☐ \$80,001 to \$100,000
- ☐ \$100,001 to \$120,000
- ☐ \$120,001 to \$140,000
- ☐ \$140,001 +

## Appendix D

### Qualitative Questionnaire

**Please note: This questionnaire is being distributed for purely academic research purpose.**

*Except for the last question, please use one single check mark to answer each question.*

1. Gender:  
☐ female ☐ male
2. Age group:  
☐ less than 30 ☐ 30-65 ☐ more than 65
3. Air travel for:  
☐ business ☐ pleasure ☐ visit family/friends
4. Your air travel frequency/year:  
☐ more than 12 ☐ between 8 and 12 ☐ between 4 and 8 ☐ less than 4
5. Travel mostly:  
☐ domestic ☐ international ☐ about the same
6. What is the most important aspect of the airline industry?  
☐ safety ☐ being on time ☐ reasonable fares ☐ clearly defined fees
7. Your overall rating of the airline safety:  
☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ acceptable ☐ mediocre ☐ unsafe
8. Your overall rating of the airline on time arrival/departure:  
☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ acceptable ☐ mediocre ☐ poor
9. Your overall rating of the airline fares:  
☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ acceptable ☐ mediocre ☐ too high
10. Your overall rating of the airline fees:  
☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ acceptable ☐ mediocre ☐ too high
11. What are the least acceptable airline extra fees:  
☐ luggage ☐ food ☐ more leg room ☐ blankets/pillows/entertainment
12. Your overall rating of the airline in ground service:  
☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ acceptable ☐ mediocre ☐ unacceptable
13. In ground services that are in need of improvement:  
☐ luggage handling ☐ boarding ☐ customer service ☐ none needed
14. Your overall rating of the airline airborne service:  
☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ acceptable ☐ mediocre ☐ unacceptable
15. In the air service areas that are in need of improvement:  
☐ seating/leg room ☐ snacks/food ☐ entertainment ☐ customer care
16. What is the most urgent airline improvement needed?  
☐ newer aircrafts ☐ better safety ☐ more routes ☐ better fares /fees
17. What do you use for matters related to airlines (for example: booking, information, updates, feedback)?  
*You may use more than one check mark*  
☐ internet ☐ facebook ☐ twitter ☐ other social media