



THE ROLE OF AIRLINE PASSENGER SATISFACTION IN MODERN ERA OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

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Abstract:

In the context of the constant growth of tourist movements, the quality of the tourist product and the experience of travellers represent a category that clearly faces a great challenge. The question arises as to how to increase the volume of tourist movements and not lead to a decline in the quality of the tourist product as a huge. The development of mass tourism is to a significant extent conditioned by the development of air traffic as the main carrier of mass movements of tourists. Traveller experience and satisfaction are one of the key indicators of business success in tourism. Analyses that deal with the research of this travel experience can be used as a good basis for better planning and recognition of market potential. The growth of international tourist movements is in direct correlation with the growth of commercial aviation and the development of airport infrastructure. The passenger experience in commercial aviation can be observed through the analysis of satisfaction in three basic segments of the trip, i.e. before the flight, during the flight and post flight experience. This document deals with the analysis of the results of the survey on satisfaction and passenger experience, conducted by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) as part of the Global Passenger Survey (IATA Global Passengers Survey 2024). Based on this analysis of passenger satisfaction and experience, we will give certain recommendations and conclusions in which business segments the company's operations should be improved.

Keywords:

commercial aviation, passengers' satisfaction, passenger experience, traditional airline, low-cost carriers.

INTRODUCTION

Air Transport plays a key role in modern tourism (Papatheodorou, A., 2021). and economic development (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), enabling people to reach different points of the world in the quickest way, making their trips much easier and more comfortable. (Putrik, Y. *et al.*, 2022). By the latest forecast made by IATA (Dr. Marie Owens Thomsen, *Global Outlook for Air Transportation, Jun 2025*), the number of passengers on global level for 2025 was forecasted up to 5 billion passengers which represents 4.4% growth compared to 2024. During 2024., 86.5 million jobs worldwide- and 3.9% of global GDP were supported by the aviation industry (*Aviation benefits beyond borders, Global Summary, december 2024*). In 2024, 58% of the international tourists travelled by plane which clearly shows the importance of air transportation in global economy and international tourism.

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Modern era of travelling is putting passenger satisfaction on the top of the list of criteria (Li, Q., Jing, R., & Zhu, X., 2024) which has an impact on the passengers' decision on how to organize their trips. (Law, C. C., Zhang, Y., & Gow, J., 2022). This doesn't automatically means that all the passengers are requiring high level of all the services (Gowda *et al.*, 2023) but the most important thing is that airlines have to meet passengers' expectations. (Masorgo, N., Mir, S., & Hofer, A. R., 2022) (Dike *et al.*, 2024). During the last two decades Low Cost Carriers - proved that some passengers are ready to accept lower level of air transportation services in order to get a better price. (Wensveen, J., 2023). Nevertheless, the majority of passengers worldwide - still prefer to use traditional airlines as their main choice or so called full-service or legacy carriers. (Gualini, A., Martini, G., & Porta, F., 2024). These carriers are typically characterized by their extensive route networks, which connect major global hubs with numerous destinations (David Mc, 2013). Some of the previous researches and analyses - of passenger satisfaction - showed different approach to passenger satisfaction (Lin, H. F., 2022), between low cost and legacy carriers (Bagwell, T. J., & Kellerman, P., 2023). The analysis of passenger satisfaction in this document shows that they don't make a difference between LCC and Legacy carrier passenger (K. Kováčiková, *et al.*, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

IATAs research on passenger satisfaction and passenger experience is conducted once a year. The analysis of the research covers the period between 2017 and 2024, and the sample of respondents consists of more than 77,000 passengers in all parts of the world across multiple travel segments.

The time frame when the survey was conducted represents a period of high volume of traffic without irregularities, which gives a more objective picture of the research. We can assume that the annexation of passengers during the period of traffic irregularity, which as a rule represents an ad hoc situation, would give a wrong image considering that passengers who are affected by flight delays or cancellations would, by definition, be dissatisfied.

The research provides a quantitative analysis aimed at qualitative improvement of various processes within aircraft pilotage. The analysis of this research aims to identify and make recommendations about the direction in which - it is necessary to go so that the passenger experience can be maintained at a high level and improved in the years ahead.

In addition to the mentioned research, in practice, passenger satisfaction and the importance of passenger satisfaction in the development of a modern form of tourism are analyzed through various forms of research. Researches are carried out by airlines, airports, numerous consulting agencies specialized in the field of passenger satisfaction research, but these types of researches are also the subject of scientific and professional works. Some analyses make a difference in passenger satisfaction, between low-cost companies and traditional airlines, considering the difference in the expectations of passengers who use two different types of carriers. In some analyses, it is emphasized that passenger satisfaction does not have to be a prerequisite that will contribute to the improvement and growth of tourist movements, on the contrary. The presence of LCCs, which differ from traditional airlines in terms of their lower level of service, generally bring incremental tourist traffic and additionally stimulate tourist demand (Kuljanin *et al.*, 2015).

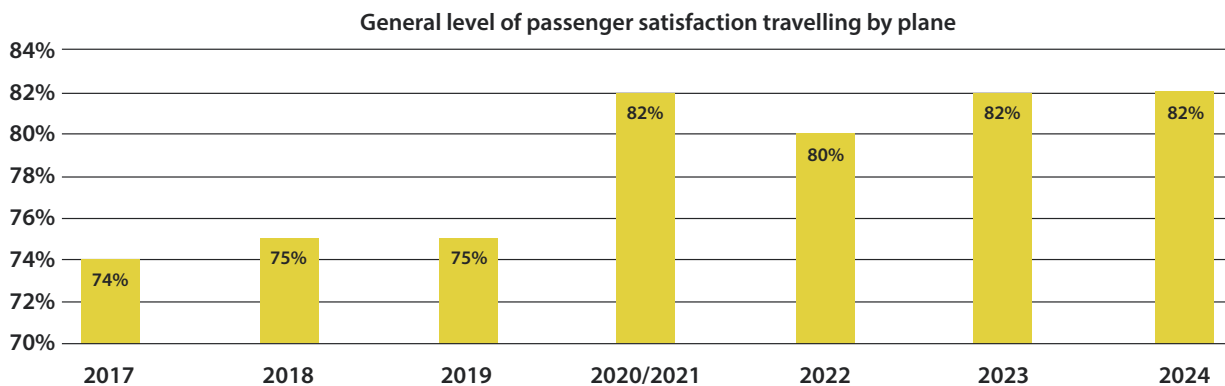


RESULTS

Based on a detailed analysis, - graph 1 below shows -general impression and – experience of passengers who were travelling by -plane from 2017 to 2024.

The percentage of satisfied passengers represents the sum of passengers whose answers were realistically between „very satisfied,, and „partially satisfied,,. In the analysis, no distinction was made between travellers who travel for tourist reasons (leisure travellers, friends and family visits) and travellers who travel for other reasons (business travellers).

Figure 1. General level of passenger satisfaction travelling by plane

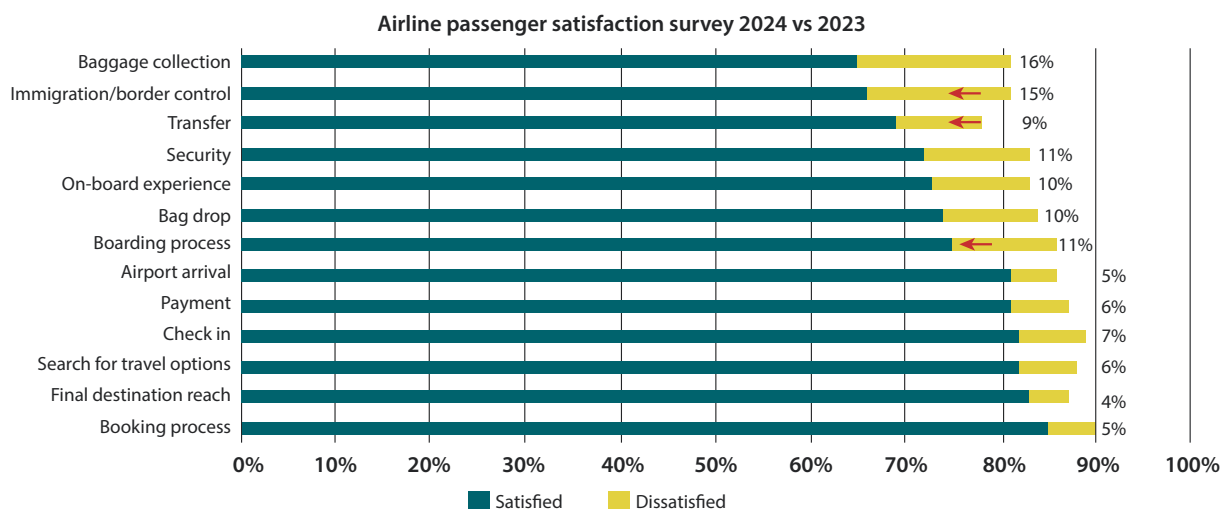


Source: 2024 IATA Global Passenger Survey (2)

From the above research results, we can conclude that the experience of the passengers who were travelling by plane, significantly improved in the past 7 years. If we compare constant improvement of passenger satisfaction through the years with the constant increase in the number of passengers and tourists, which contributes to a greater operational challenge, we can conclude that mass tourism and its growth did not lead to a decline in the quality of service in the passenger experience.

If we go deeper in the details of IATA Global Passenger Survey 2024, which compares the satisfaction of passengers travelling by plane in 13 areas, between 2023 and 2024 on a sample of slightly more than 22,000 respondents., we will see that 10 out of 13 areas show positive trend year on year.

Figure 2. Airline passenger satisfaction survey 2024 vs 2023



Source: 2024 IATA Global Passenger Survey (3)



The results of the research showed that out of 13 segments of air travel, 10 recorded the same or higher level of satisfaction, while 3 segments of the trip recorded a decrease in satisfaction. The negative trend compared to the previous year is reflected in the area of border control, baggage claim and experience during the flight.

If we take a deeper look at this result, we can conclude that the three segments of travel in which there is a decrease in satisfaction are located on three different sides.

The negative trend in the experience during the flight lies on the side of the airlines, while the negative trend in the experience of passengers with border control lies on the side of the state institutions that manage border crossings.

When it comes to the negative experience related to baggage claim, where passengers express greater dissatisfaction compared to the previous year, this segment belongs to the airport operator.

The conclusion that can be drawn is in favour of the fact that airlines, airports and state institutions must work on improving the passenger experience. At the same time, it is clear to conclude that a greater synergy between all three mentioned parties is necessary in order to improve the passenger experience.

Practice shows that the issue of border crossings is a so-called bottleneck at a large number of airports, whether it is about arrivals or departures. To the greatest extent, we are talking about an insufficient number of certified persons, who can perform the tasks of passport control and crossing the state border.

In recent years, through the development of technological solutions that in parallel must be synchronized with legal regulations, there has been noticeable progress in this field. Various types of independent systems for automatic passport reading (e-Gate) are in use. Some countries, depending on their legislation, in addition to automatic passport control, apply more advanced types of control such as biometric data (scanning of the face, scanning of the pupil of the eye or scanning of hand fingerprints). The presence of such types of control greatly speeds up the process of crossing the border crossing and contributes to a better passenger experience.

As an additional recommendation, both by IATA and by numerous airports and airlines, as well as travel agencies, there is the constant reminder of passengers to familiarize themselves with the conditions of travel to a certain country in advance, so that they arrive at the airport prepared.

Recommendations for travellers include the fact that it is always a good idea to apply online for a flight, hand over your luggage independently (self drop off) and apply electronically for a visa, in order to use the time spent at the airport before and after the flight as efficiently as possible.

Those airports that do not have additional security checks for both passengers and luggage in their transfer zones have the advantage, the so-called OSS model (One Stop Shop model).

Waiting in lines at the airport is the main source of passenger dissatisfaction. As many as 37% of respondents pointed out that the security check process must be improved and accelerated.

On the other hand, waiting in lines also happens during the boarding process. Out of the total number of respondents, as many as 52% of them marked this process as something that would significantly improve the flying experience if it was performed more efficiently. In recent years, airlines have started to introduce the so-called boarding by priorities and boarding by zones, which reduces congestion and speeds up the boarding process by 15-20%.

The issue of baggage collection, as a segment of travel, which records a decrease in passenger satisfaction, is related exclusively to the airport operator. We have witnessed that in the post-covid period, the passenger baggage management process has been brought to the lowest level at a large number of airports, predominantly in Europe and North America. The main reason is the inadequate number of employees who could not respond adequately to the rapid growth of tourist demand.

The question of the passenger experience, during the realization of the flight, can be observed through several segments that influence passenger satisfaction. From the moment of boarding the flight, during the flight and upon landing at the destination.



The mentioned segments can be analyzed through several factors, from the efficiency of the boarding process, in-flight content (in-flight entertainment, wifi, etc.), catering, hygiene, friendliness of employees, to external factors that can affect the satisfaction of passengers during the flight and which cannot be influenced (meteorological conditions that can affect delays, increasingly present problems with slots, turbulence during the flight, etc.).

IMPACT OF MODERN RETAILING AND TECHNOLOGY ON PASSENGER EXPERIENCE

As we have mentioned before, pre flight passenger experience starts with the first step, how to make reservation and buy the ticket. When it comes to the way of making reservations, 72% of respondents indicated online purchase as the preferred method of purchasing airline tickets, while 16% pointed out that they prefer purchasing tickets through alternative forms of purchase that involve interaction with people (dominantly through travel agencies).

Within online shopping, the largest share belongs to airline websites (37%) and airline mobile applications (16%). The alternative is OTA (online travel agencies) with 9%, i.e. different types of aggregators through which it is possible to buy tickets (8%).

The fact that more than 50% of respondents use the direct channels of airline companies, such as web sites and mobapp's, shows that online sales and user friendly interface are playing very important role.

Credit and debit cards are the most common method of payment with 79% of respondents. Among respondents under 25 years of age, the alternative method of payment through various forms of digital wallets is increasingly present. Payment methods are becoming main point of stress during booking process since 16% of respondents pointed out that they were not satisfied with their experience when paying for airline tickets, and even 19% of respondents did not continue to purchase additional services due to a bad experience in the payment process, which is a direct financial blow to the revenue of the airline company.

As a recommended measure, the payment process must be maximally simplified. System should give different payment options including installments and alternative forms of payment. The analysis shows that 77% of respondents, expressed an interest in using digital wallets that are linked with payment cards, loyalty cards and personal documents. The greatest interest for this purchase model in a geographical sense belongs to Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Advanced technological solutions that comply with the highest safety standards represent a tool that contributes to a more efficient use of time during a tourist trip and a more complete passenger experience. In direct connection with the use of modern technological solutions, there are security standards that guarantee the safety and protection of data. In a word, progress must be based on passenger trust.

Modern tourism emphasizes the efficient use of time during a tourist trip as one of the important points.

Nowadays, online flight check-in is becoming the dominant channel of passenger registration, but it is not available at all airports and for all passengers. The research showed that 36% of respondents want to complete the check-in process before arriving at the airport and thus reduce the time spent at the airport.

The research that is the subject of this analysis shows that 89% of respondents are interested in the so-called Trusted Travel Program, which could lead them through the security check process faster, while 86% of travellers would like the visa issue to be completed before starting the trip.

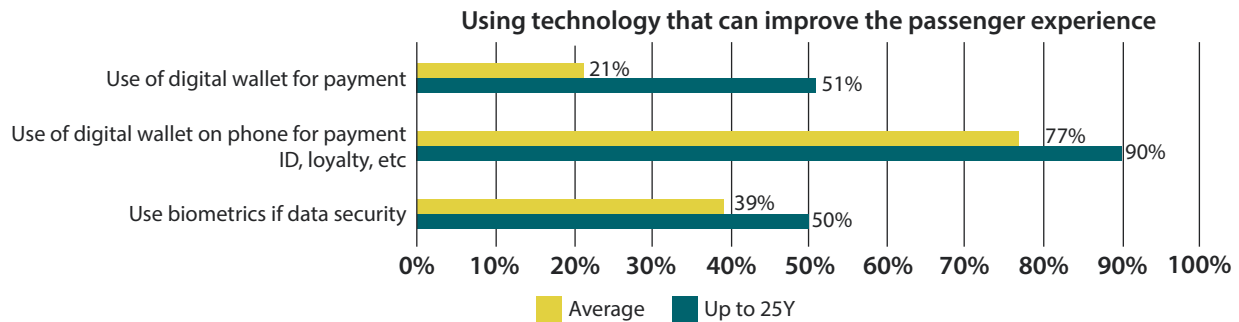
Biometric data, which is increasingly present and used more and more during travel, has significantly accelerated the process of registration and security control. During 2023 and 2024, 46% of passengers used biometric data at airports. Of the stated percentage, 84% of the respondents highlighted a positive experience in using biometric data during travel. The survey shows that 73% of the respondents declared that they would rather use biometric data instead of passports and boarding passes.

Among the respondents, there are mainly issues related to transparency in the domain of use, sharing and storage of personal biometric data, as well as the potential risk of data misuse, which stand out as barriers to the greater application and the use of biometric data. In this regard, 39% of the respondents expressed their willingness to use biometric data if they had absolute certainty regarding the privacy and security of the given data.



When it comes to the use of modern technological solutions, there is an evident difference in the attitudes of respondents of different ages compared to the attitudes of travellers under 25 years of age. In this sense, we can see that the research shows that among younger generations, alternative forms of payment play a significant role in part of the travel experience. Below is a presentation of the results of research on the use of technology through three parameters, whose role can improve the passenger experience.

Figure 3. Using technology that can improve the passenger experience



Source: 2024 IATA Global Passenger Survey (14,15)

At the end, the point of new gen technology is to ensure better passenger experience and faster passenger flow since time consumption is something that all passengers are aiming for.

CONCLUSION

Despite the growth of tourist movements and the growth in number of passengers travelling by plane, passenger satisfaction has to be something that has to be on the priority list of all stakeholders in one touristic trip. Better passenger experience has also better financial impact on all stakeholders that participate in one touristic trip. In order to at least keep the current level of passenger satisfaction and to improve the current one, all travel segments have to be faced with certain improvements no matter if we are talking about pre flight, during the flight or post flight activities.

Relying on the results of the research for the year 2024, we have come to the conclusion that the improvement of the process should be carried out on several sides, from airlines, airports to state institutions that must provide a legal framework for the implementation of technological solutions that have as their ultimate goal more efficient business and a better passenger experience.

The Implementation of various technological solutions that bring better passenger flow, clearly have positive impact on passenger experience. At the same time, in order to get positive impact on passenger experience, the implementation of technological solutions have to guarantee the security of all the data that the passengers use on their trip.



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