The influence of service quality and satisfaction in consumer behavior intention: The case of charter industry

From the theoretical and empirical points of view, quality of service and satisfaction have been identified as strong predictors of consumer behavioural intentions. Investigations about these dynamics on the airline industry have already been done, mainly in regular and low costs. However, in the context of charter companies this theme was not found. Thus, this study aims to explore the impact of service quality and satisfaction in behavioural intentions, considering passengers of a charter company.

Service quality assumes an extreme importance to customers who evaluate airline service according with their perceptions of service attributes in a multi-dimensional context, the airline industry. To measure service quality, Servperf was chosen due to its fewer limitations. On the other hand, Satisfaction is directly dependent upon perceptions of performance and it is considered to be a stronger predictor of behavioural intentions than service quality.

The main objectives of the dissertation are: 1) To identify key items and dimensions considered in airline service quality evaluation; 2) To evaluate the impact of service quality in satisfaction; 3) To determine the relation between service quality and passenger behavioural intentions; 4) To determine the impact of satisfaction on passenger behavioural intentions. Based on the problem statement and the subsequent research objectives, it is proposed a conceptual model based on the frameworks of airline service quality, satisfaction and customer behaviour intentions.

Factor Analysis was used in order to reduce service quality dimensions and behavioural intentions and we did not distinguish between long and medium haul as we intended to find the important factors in a group of variables. After analysing Principal Components, we drawn up three components that generate the following factors: Index of Intangibles, Index of Tangibles and Index of Entertainment, all referred to in-flight service quality. At customer behaviour level, a single index was created, Customer Behavioural Intentions, which showed a variance of 96.65%, explained by the intention to recommend and the intention to repurchase.

A survey was conducted during the period between 24 July and August 20, 2010. Consequently, we have collected 1283 questionnaires of long haul passengers and 4507 questionnaires of medium haul passengers.
From Objective 1 we stated two hypotheses, the first of which stated that airline charter passengers consider in-flight service more important than on-ground service, which was accepted in long haul and rejected in medium haul flights. However, it is imperative to highlight two aspects: the number of items of each type of service (in-flight has more items, so a good global evaluation is harder to achieve) and the role of entertainment, in both levels, performance and importance, lowering the values of in-flight service evaluation.

In terms of passengers’ importance perceptions, the tangibles are the most important dimension, regardless of the route, even though tangibles and intangibles do not show a significant difference in our study. However, faced with the surprise of the rejection of this hypothesis and the inconclusive results, we decide to expand our conclusions based on the items, and we found explainable reasons.

Answering the second objective, 48.5% of Satisfaction variance can be predicted from the independent variables, in the short haul, and 50.4% in the long haul. There are no differences between medium and long distance courses as far as the order of satisfaction determinants is concerned: tangibles, intangibles and on-ground service. Entertainment is the dimension which less predicts satisfaction. However, tangibles have a higher impact on satisfaction in long haul than in medium haul and the inverse happens with intangibles, with a bigger influence in medium haul.

Focusing on the relation between service quality and behavioural intentions, it is confirmed in both length courses. The tangible dimension has a higher impact on behavioural intentions, followed by the intangible dimension. In medium haul, entertainment does not predict behavioural intentions due to the same reason that less predicts satisfaction.

In global terms, service quality explains 45,1% of the variation of behavioural intentions on medium course and 48% on long course; and overall satisfaction explains 66,9% of the behavioural intentions variation on both routes. This proves a higher power prediction than the one founded in literature review.

The findings of this study have important implications for managers of charter airlines especially as far as the dimensions to which passengers give more importance to are concerned; the dimensions which show lower performance means; and the significant influence that satisfaction has on behavioural intentions. It is vital to point out that behavioural intention is the dependent variable that shows the most similarities with effective behaviours, so it has a higher potential of validity.