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NIŠ AIRPORT SERVICE QUALITY AND PASSENGER SATISFACTION

Abstract: *The authors of this paper keen to investigate attributes of airport service quality and how they affect the satisfaction of passengers at Niš airport in Serbia in 2022 from the demographic approach, have provided empirical research of 294 passenger ratings of airport services quality significance to their level of satisfaction. Four groups of airport services were defined: tangible airport services, staff efficiency services, the image of the airport, and energy efficiency services. The methodology used was statistical analysis, Mann-Whitney U and the Kruskal-Wallis test for hypotheses testing, and IBM SPSS statistical software version 21. Results show that overall satisfaction levels differ concerning the demographic characteristics of passengers, gender, age, education, social status, and frequency of travel. The study can contribute to scholars, airports, and other stakeholders within the context of behavioral intention and the importance of demographic factors for the image of the airport, revenues, and its new initiatives concerning sustainability and energy efficiency.*

Keywords: *Airport service quality, passenger satisfaction, Serbia, impact*

1. Introduction

Airports have become businesses that compete for passengers at various levels, in today's turbulent and quickly changing times of new technologies and customer behavior (Graham et al., 2020; 2017). In their competition for the airport's airline customers (ACI, 2020; Miletić & Čurčić, 2021; Arsovski, 2023), for destination traffic, origin, transfer/transit), their spending on food and drink retail, and car parking has become an important source of income (Shin & Roh, 2021). Airport service quality monitoring programs become planned and provided by more and more airports and regulators, as the passengers can use a greater choice of airports or modes of transport Thelle & Sonne (2018), their experience and satisfaction become a factor

of the decision-making on willingness to switch to alternative ones if they are not satisfied.

According to Pandey (2016), service quality is viewed as an important source of competitive advantage for many airports and tourist destinations as Wattanacharoensil et al. (2016), consider them an important factor in forming the first and last impressions of quality in the destination (Graham, 2000).

As service quality compares the difference between perceived expectations of the passengers of a service and its perceived performance, the satisfaction of the passengers with the airport services quality influence the increase in revenues, even greater than even traffic or shopping at airports. Based on the literature of Prentice & Kadan (2019), this paper aims to research the possible relationship between service

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quality and passenger satisfaction at the airport Niš in Serbia (Graham, 2006). Niš is the kind of airport operating in less competitive markets than others (in Serbia there are Belgrade and Niš commercial airports), and consumers have limited alternative options to choose from when traveling (Halpern et al., 2017; 2016; Graham, 2014). There is always a risk that such airports might abuse their market power by paying little attention to service quality, but on contrary, Niš airport is well-known for a lot of low-cost airlines operating, relatively cheap tickets, and a great choice of destinations, which makes it attractive for younger and business travellers.

As this paper aims to present the importance of the demographic aspect of the service quality in Niš airport in Serbia for the passengers' overall satisfaction, key findings could contribute to further development of the managerial as well as theoretical approach to the issue.

2. Literature review

On airport service quality, many authors tried to develop a set of airport-specific attributes, mostly based on studies written by Parasuraman et al. (1988). So Rezaei et al. (2018), and Urdang & Howey (2001), defined services for airlines using hospitality cases to define service quality for airports, Mey et al. (2006), Frochot & Hughes (2000), with a more developed model HISTOQUAL, and model HOLSAT, being formulated by Tribe & Snaith (1998). Also are known study service attributes like prices by Bogicevic et al. (2016), and design of the services, studies by Correia et al. (2008).

The authors of this research, respecting the previous studies' classification, have combined approaches and defined 4 categories of services of the airport Niš in Serbia, where there are new categories concerning energy efficiency and the image of the airport.

Niš airport services definition:

1. Tangible airport services:
 - 1.1. Check-in/departure/arrival/transit services and times (contactless, fast track, professional assistance, baggage reception, and delivery, efficient customs, passport, security, and passenger health control) are effective,
 - 1.2. Convenience services/availability of facilities and contents at the airport (restaurants, toilets, game rooms, shops, exchange offices, VIP lounges, infirmaries, Internet and Wi-Fi technologies, transportation, and parking are adequate to the needs,
 - 1.3. Airport comfort and ambiance services (cleanliness, lighting, temperature, acoustics, aesthetics) are good,
 - 1.4. Airport appearance and function services (distance between the check-in desk and the terminal, availability, elevators, stairs, trolleys, toilets, and seating) are more,
 - 1.5. Signaling, information, and mobility services (clear procedures, instructions, and signaling signs for easy movement around the airport, up-to-date information displays, and flight data) are adequate for the needs.
2. Staff efficiency services:
 - 2.1. The friendly attitude and empathy of employees towards passengers are high,
 - 2.2. The application of adequate passenger security measures at the airport is effective,
 - 2.3. The existence of modern security facilities and equipment is adequate for the needs,
 - 2.4. Achieving a high sense of safety and security for passengers,
 - 2.5. The staff is helpful to passengers, responds quickly to their needs and questions, and especially helps

- unaccompanied children, people with special needs, in transit,
- 2.6. The attitude and behavior of the staff instill safety, and confidence and guarantee their self-confidence in passengers,
- 2.7. The staff has the knowledge, ability, and responsibility and skillfully performs the work
- 2.8 Staff are available, reliable, and of decent personal appearance.
- 3. Image of the airport (Halpern, 2021):
 - 3.1. The airport is known for the regularity of air transport lines and the possibility of quick flight transfers,
 - 3.2. Rewards and loyalty programs (free tickets, and cards for collecting miles are good,
 - 3.3. The airport implements compensation measures for non-delivered services and damages, as well as reward and loyalty programs for passengers,
 - 3.4. The airport provides the possibility of jet flights by operating with numerous low-cost companies,
 - 3.5. The prices for dining and shopping at the airport are favorable and correspond to the delivered quality of service,
- 4. Airport energy efficiency services (Graham, 2010):
 - 4.1. Energy management measures are applied at the airport,
 - 4.2. Section collection and recycling of waste is carried out at the airport with appropriate equipment installed,
 - 4.3. Rational use of light, water, and thermal systems at the airport is carried out with digital, sensor management technologies.

These services were supposed to be assessed by passengers of the airport on the level of quality that impacts their overall satisfaction level, concerning their demographic criteria: age, gender, social status, education level, and frequency of thrive.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling

The research deals with the examination of the differences in satisfaction with the airport service quality at Niš airport according to the demographic characteristics of passengers.

This includes the application of statistical techniques for conclusions. Therefore, this paper belongs to the group of quantitative research combined with descriptive and deductive methods.

The empirical research included 294 respondents as a sample of passengers from the Niš airport in Serbia (Table 1).

Table 1. Passengers sample (n=294)

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	177	60.2
	Female	117	39.8
Education level	Primary/secondary school	133	45.2
	Higher school/faculty	161	54.8
Age	18-30	62	21.1
	31-43	106	36.1
	44-56	83	28.2
	57-65	31	10.5
	> 65	12	4.1
Social status	Employed	235	79.9
	Unemployed	47	16.0
	Retiree	12	4.1
Travel experience	First time flying or 1	98	33.3
	Fly 2 to 3 times	64	21.8
	Fly more than 3 times	132	44.9

Source: Author's calculation

The research was conducted in the period from April to June 2022. The questionnaire used for the empirical research in its first part included the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents - passengers (gender, education, age, social

status, travel experience), and in the second part, their attitudes on the level of their satisfaction with the Niš airport service quality provided in 2022. The results of the research are presented as follows.

Based on the presented socio-demographic characteristics of the passengers, it is evident that women make up 60.2% of the sample, while men make up 39.8% of the sample. According to education, more than half of the passengers (54.8%) have completed high school or university. The majority of passengers are between the ages of 31 and 43 (36.1%). Young people from 18-30 are 21.1%, and those from 44-56 83 (28.2%). Passengers from 57-65 are 31 (10.5%), and the least are over 65 (4.1%). The sample includes the most respondents who are employed (79.9%) and those who have traveled more than 3 times (44.9%).

The second part of the questionnaire was evaluated, the passenger's satisfaction with the Niš airport services quality, using the Likert scale for the evaluation of the 5 statements offered:

1. My needs as a passenger are met by the quality of services provided at the Niš airport;
2. The Niš airport services provided are not to my expectations as a passenger*;
3. The value of services at the airport

Niš corresponds to the price;

4. The airport Niš service used makes me an emotionally satisfied passenger;
5. Using Niš airport services makes me happy as a passenger.

The Likert scale ranged from 1-5 (1 – I'm completely clueless; 2 - I am not satisfied; 3 - I am neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4 – satisfied; 5 - I am completely satisfied). Statements marked with an asterisk (*) are negatively worded and, during data processing, were recorded.

Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport was obtained as the sum of the findings of agreement with these five claims, and the number of statements (5) divided by the total result.

Niš airport services are defined in four categories: Tangible airport services, 4. Staff efficiency services, Image of the airport, and airport energy efficiency services are obtained as the sum of these categories of services with 20 statements in which quality was evaluated by passengers from the aspect of satisfaction.

To obtain descriptive statistical indicators of passenger satisfaction with the airport services quality, minimum, mean value, standard deviation, maximum, and variance were used (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptives statistics

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Shapiro-Wilk
Passengers' Satisfaction with the airport services quality	294	1.80	4.40	3.60	0.714	0.510	0.000	0.000

Source: Author's calculation

3.60 is the passenger satisfaction average value with the quality of services at the airport, in the range of obtained findings of the research ranging from 1.80 to 4.40. Based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests the results of the

examination of the normality of the distribution show, that the assumption of the normality of the distribution can not be confirmed, as the level of significance is less than 0.05. That implicates the non-parametric statistical techniques application.

For the empirical research five hypotheses are set based on the research objectives:

H₁ = Satisfaction with the quality of airport services concerning the passenger's gender makes a significant difference

H₂ = Passengers' satisfaction with the quality of airport services is significantly influenced by their education

H₃ = The age of passengers significantly affects their satisfaction with the quality of airport services

H₄ = The social status of passengers has a significant impact on their satisfaction with the quality of airport services

H₅ = The frequency of air travel significantly affects passenger satisfaction with the quality of airport services

The testing of the hypotheses was made possible using the: Mann-Whitney U test for

the first and second hypotheses, and the Kruskal-Wallis test for the third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses. For data processing and testing of proposed hypotheses was used IBM SPSS statistical software version 21.

3.2. Key findings and discussion

For the determination of a significant difference concerning the gender of passengers (male and female) in the satisfaction with the airport Niš services quality was used the Mann-Whitney U test, as a non-parametric alternative to the t-test of independent samples (Table 3). The probability value (p) should be less than the required threshold value of 0.05, for the Z approximation result to be considered statistically significant.

Table 3. Test statistics (*Grouping variable: Gender*)

	Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport	M/F	N	Mean	Median
Mann-Whitney U	2000.0	Male	177	100.30	3.40
Wilcoxon W	17753.0				
Z	-11.827				
Significance (p)	0.000	Female	177	218.91	4.20

Source: Author's calculation

In satisfaction with the quality of airport services among passengers, male (Md = 3.40, n=177), and female (Md = 4.20, n=117), U = 2000.0, Z = -11,827, p = 0.000<0.05, r = 0.69 large impacts a significant difference is found statistically by the Mann-Whitney U test. An examination of the values of mean ranks shows that satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport is higher among female passengers. This is also proven by the value of the median, i.e. female passengers have a higher median score than male passengers. That confirms the proposed hypothesis:

H₁ = Satisfaction with the airport services quality concerning the passenger's gender makes a significant difference

To determination of a significant difference in the level of satisfaction with the quality of airport services concerning the passenger's education level (primary/secondary school and higher school/faculty) was used the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 4).

In exploring the statistically significant difference in the level of satisfaction with the quality of airport services among passengers with primary/secondary school, (Md = 3.40, n=133) and passengers with higher school/faculty (Md = 4.00, n=161), U = 5196.0, Z = -7,672, p = 0.000<0.05, r = 0.45 (medium effect), was used the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 4. Statistical testing (*Grouping variable: Education*)

	Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport	Education	<i>n</i>	Mean Rank	Median
Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>	5196.0	Primary/secondary school	133	106.07	3.40
Wilcoxon <i>W</i>	14107.0				
<i>Z</i>	-7.672	Higher school/faculty	161	181.73	4.00
Significance (<i>p</i>)	0.000				

Source: Author's calculation

An examination of the values of mean ranks shows that satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport is higher among passengers with higher school/faculty. This is also proven by the value of the median, i.e. passengers with higher school/faculty have a higher median score than passengers with primary/secondary school, which confirms the H2 hypothesis valuable:

H₂ = *Passengers' satisfaction with the quality of airport services is significantly influenced by their education*

The possible differences in the level of satisfaction with airport service quality for groups of passengers according to their age were explored and compared by statistical test (Kruskal-Wallis). The variable - satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport was tested and compared for five age groups (18-30, 31-43, 44-56, 57-65, >65).

Table 6. Statistical test (*Grouping variable: Passenger's age*)

	Age	<i>n</i>	Mean	Median
Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport	18-30	62	152.47	3.80
	31-43	106	171.24	4.00
	44-56	83	140.32	3.80
	57-65	31	100.50	2.80
	> 65	12	83.25	3.30

Source: Author's calculation

That satisfaction with airport service quality for five different groups of passenger's age has significant differences can be confirmed by further results: (Gp1, *n* = 62: 18-30, Gp2, *n* = 106: 31-40, Gp3, *n* = 83: 44-56, Gp4, *n* = 31: 57-65, Gp5, *n* = 12: >65), $\chi^2(4, n=294) = 25,909, p = 0.000 < 0.05$. the highest level of Satisfaction is found with the airport services quality among passengers

According to Chap (2003), less than 0.05, significance level allows the conclusion, that the difference between the five age groups as obtained values of the continuous variable is important.

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis Test (*Grouping variable: Age*)

	Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport
Chi-Square	25.909
<i>df</i>	4
Weight (<i>p</i>)	0.000

Source: Author's calculation

The next step is converting the results into ranks (Green, 2014). Mean ranks and medians of different ages of passengers according to satisfaction with airport service quality are shown in Table 6.

from 31 to 43 years old (Md = 4.00), and the least among passengers aged 57 to 65 (Md = 2.80). Based on the presented test results, the hypothesis H3 can be confirmed:

H₃ = *The age of passengers significantly affects their satisfaction with the quality of airport services.*

The social status of passengers as the possible demographic factor of influences their satisfaction with the airport services quality was explored using the Kruskal-Wallis test (Table 7).

Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport for three groups of passengers' social status (employed, unemployed, retiree), is tested by The Kruskal-Wallis test. Mean ranks and medians of different passengers' social status according to satisfaction with

airport service quality are shown in Table 8.

Table 7. Kruskal-Wallis Test (*Grouping variable: Social status*)

	Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport
Chi-Square	8.806
df	2
Significance (p)	0.012

Source: Author's calculation

Table 8. Mean Rank and Median (*Grouping variable: Social status*)

	Age	n	Mean	Median
Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport	Employed	235	152.99	3.80
	Unemployed	47	136.44	3.80
	Retiree	12	83.25	3.30

Source: Author's calculation

That satisfaction with airport service quality for three different groups of passenger's social status has significant differences can be confirmed by further results: (Gp1, n = 235: employed, Gp2, n = 47: unemployed, Gp3, n = 12: retiree), $c^2(2, n=294) = 8,806$, $p = 0.012 < 0.05$. The findings show that the highest level of satisfaction is found among employed passengers (Md = 3.80), and the least among passengers who are retired (Md = 3.30). Based on the presented test results the hypothesis H4 can be confirmed:

H₄= *The social status of passengers has a significant impact on their satisfaction with the quality of airport services*

Table 9. Kruskal-Wallis Test (*Grouping variable: Travel experience*)

	Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport
Chi-Square	7.974
df	2
Significance (p)	0.019

Source: Author's calculation

Satisfaction with airport service quality (as a continuous variable), is compared for three groups of passengers' travel experience (first time flying or 1 time, flying 2 to 3 times, flying more than 3 times). Mean ranks and

medians of different passengers' travel experiences according to satisfaction with airport service quality are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Mean Rank and Median Grouping variable: Travel experience)

	Age	n	Mean Rank	Median
Satisfaction with the quality of services at the airport	First time flying or 1 time	98	128.36	3.60
	Fly 2 to 3 times	64	162.35	4.00
	Fly more than 3 times	132	154.51	4.00

Source: Author's calculation

In satisfaction with airport service quality for three different groups of passenger's travel experience (Gp1, n = 98: first time flying or 1 time, Gp2, n = 64: fly 2 to 3 times, Gp3, n = 132: fly more than 3 times), $c^2(2, n=294) = 7,974$, $p = 0.019 < 0.05$, has been found the difference. Satisfaction with airport service quality is at the highest level among passengers who fly 2 to 3 times (Md = 4.00), and least among passengers who first time

flying or 1 time (Md = 3.60). Based on the presented test results, the hypothesis H5 is accepted:

H₅ = *The frequency of air travel significantly affects passenger satisfaction with the quality of airport services*

According to the key findings of the research, all hypotheses are confirmed showing that demographic factors have an important impact on the assessment of the service quality and satisfaction of customers (Chen et al., 2017; Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

4. Conclusion

Satisfaction with airport service quality among passengers becomes a more regular issue to be explored by airport management, providers of all stakeholder services, as well as from the local community, concerning the importance of their experiences for the destination image. World airport associations make some research on these issues during the last few years (Anderson & Sullivan,

1993).

The results of the provided research in this paper on the satisfaction of passengers are valuable to support the literature as well as to the practitioners on the airport, and Niš airport management (Ćurčić, 2018). Demographic issues, according to the topic explored are shown as very important as they make an important difference in the passengers' assessment of the level of airport services quality (Baker & Crompton, 2000).

Among services, by the definition of services for airport Niš are involved in new groups: energy efficiency and image services. They make the results even more actual by treating the passenger attention for these issues with respectful attention, and further can improve the likelihood of the image of an airport. In terms of managerial implications, it means that the cooperation and joint approach of the airports and their partners to the quality of the service can improve the level of their quality and the satisfaction of the passengers, as well as employees (Graham, 2018).

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