



Do You Feel What I Feel? Difference, Disappointment and Joy: Patronize an Airline Lounge by Transit Passengers

Adarsh Batra*

Abstract *Although traveling can be enjoyable, many individuals do not enjoy spending time at airports. However, research has shown that airport lounges are becoming increasingly popular as a space for transit passengers, with many air travelers using them multiple times for various reasons, before their flight or during a layover. This research aimed to study the features of the airport lounge identified by the 15 transit passengers, their lounge experience and services deemed salient to air passengers during long-haul travel. The data were collected by utilizing a qualitative method, non-probability purposive sampling, and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Qualitatively, three themes manifest in transit passengers' airport lounge experience: added value services, amenities and human touch. Results suggest that a lounge should provide a more personalized and comfortable experience, allowing passengers to make the most of their time before departure and providing tourism marketers with practical insights into the creation of a strategy for airline lounges that focuses on meeting the needs and desires of transit passengers and emphasizing the unique experience offered by the lounges. This study offers valuable insights into the practical consequences for airport lounge vendors and stop-over destination service providers with a better understanding of transit preferences.*

Keywords: *Airport, Lounge Service, Lounge Experience, Stop-Over Destinations, Transit Passenger*

INTRODUCTION

Compared to other modes of transportation, international air travel is often seen as a luxurious and exciting experience. Airlines reserve space at airports to provide their passengers with special treatment, offering complimentary snacks and beverages in designated airline lounges as a way of making them feel like honored guests (Batra, 2014). Lohmann et al. (2009) maintained that the extent to which locations can establish themselves as something more than a hub or a gateway, i.e., destinations, depends on their ability to provide facilities and attractions that appeal to the connecting traffic to stop for a few hours or to spend nights there. Whether passengers are flying domestically or internationally as first-class customers, the airport they are flying out of may have a lounge available for their use, especially in transit.

Regional airlines compete for a larger share of air passengers. The Hub-and-spoke system to a certain extent is responsible for having an edge over competing airlines/airports/destinations by a national carrier. Transit Tourism on the other hand is explained by McKercher and Tang (2004) as a transit tourism phenomenon of short-stay visits by transit tourists or stopover visitors in the transit point en route to their final destination. A stopover was defined by the International Air Transport Association as lasting 24 hours or greater on an intermediary port (Beaver, 2005). A layover is a stopover that may last 24 hours or less. The liberalization of international air travel reduced the dominance of the ancient rivals Singapore and Hong Kong as transit/stopover destinations through the development of low-cost carriers (Page, 2005). These new destinations were cities in southeast Asia, including Beijing, Tokyo, Bangkok,

* Assistant Professor, MBA in Hospitality and Tourism Management Program, Graduate School of Business and Advanced Technology Management, Assumption University of Thailand, Bangkok, Thailand.
Email: abatra@au.edu; adarshbtr@yahoo.co.in

and Kuala Lumpur, as well as in the Arabic peninsula with Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha. Between Europe and Asia upon long-haul, Dubai has been successful in attracting a great portion of point-to-point, or transit stop, passengers. Dubai aims to become a Middle and Far East air transport hub (Henderson, 2006).

To travel between the United Kingdom/Europe and Australasia, passengers must either have a transit/layover, which is a stay of fewer than 24 hours without accommodations at an intermediary port, typically to change planes, or a stopover that involves a change of flights en route. The quickest route on this journey is through the eastern hemisphere, where the popular transit/stopover destinations have traditionally included Singapore and Hong Kong, while Dubai and Abu Dhabi are becoming increasingly popular as well (Pike et al., 2022).

Airports are transit places, and transit passengers have to drink, eat, sleep and work (because of the gadgets) they are there and their transfer requires a while to get a lounge. Lounges provide different services as well as meeting the basic needs of the passengers. There are several large screens displaying flight information and plenty of charging points for travelers' devices. Generally, the airport lounge is equipped with a bar that offers a wide range of drinks and snacks. Additionally, there is a collection of magazines and newspapers available for reading while people wait. Overall, the international airport lounge is a welcoming and inviting space for travelers to relax before their flight. Interestingly, they are willing to pay extra to avail themselves of available amenities, primarily leisure, personal care, spa, and food-related stuff (Baratti, 2023). People can reserve spaces by paying online in advance. If they are lucky, the glass windows of the lounges (depending on the location) can give a clear glimpse of landing and taking off air carriers.

The present study examines the preferences of a convenience sample of transit travelers at the Dubai International Airport after the pandemic. Dubai is a convenient stopover destination on the route between Europe and North America. Dubai International Airport operates in a highly competitive market not only regarding transfer traffic but also for local traffic with all UAE emirates having their own airports. Chua et al. (2017) argued, that when the frontline employee-centrist view is taken by airlines into account, as airlines are in the business of producing travelers' experiences, the high-quality products and services create an environmental experience and satisfied or very satisfied flying customers. Hence, they always try to gather user feedback in terms of what they love and what they hate. To date, little research has been carried out into the experiences of transit passengers in airport lounges. An exploratory research phase was, therefore, necessary to interview transit passengers, in order to identify the main characteristics or attributes considered important when experiencing an airport lounge

during a long-haul journey involving a change of plane. To fill this gap, the problem statement of this study is "Why do people need an airport lounge while transiting at the hub airport?" How do airport lounge executives improve their understanding of expectations and services required by transit passengers? This research aims to: 1. Assess and classify the features (i.e., facilities, services and activities) of the hub airport lounge; 2. Examine how transit passengers share their lounge experience and services. The study, thus, adds to the growing body of literature examining travelers' airport lounge experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Airport Lounge

A study conducted by Han et al. (2012) considered that while an airline lounge may not be the deciding factor for most people when choosing an airline, it is likely to have a significant influence on the selection of business travelers, as they heavily rely on the amenities provided by the lounges.

According to Fick (2014), Airport lounges offer a getaway spot for passenger relaxation and accessing multiple services and entertainment while they wait for their flights. Pearson et al. (2015) describe the growing significance of airport lounges as a competitive tool among full-service airlines that are facing increased competition from low-cost carriers (LCCs). Chatterjee, et al. (2023), observed that airport lounges provide a place for customers to relax before and after their flights. Some airlines operate airline-specific lounges in addition to the airport lounges.

Han et al. (2012) argued that airline lounges may range from being glorified waiting areas to exclusive retreats while Chua et al. (2017) contended that it is an experiential servicescape that provides passengers with relaxing and refreshing places to unwind before or after a trip abroad.

While travellers are unwillingly frank about what they expect of lounge facilities, they have become an assumed condition for buying air carrier products (Business Travel World, 2004).

Service Quality of the Airport Lounge

The paper by Lee et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of quality in airport lounges. A lounge of an airline is a highly service-oriented hospitality place where people look forward to good products and services. According to Han, et al. (2012), satisfaction and intention to revisit an airport lounge are influenced by dimensions of service quality such as atmosphere, food and beverages, employee service and facility dimensions. A study conducted by CAVU (2023)

affirmed when providers get this mix right and deliver against customer service expectations, lounges can provide a unique selling point to grow non-aeronautical revenue. Therefore, focus on providing a safe, clean, and comfortable environment for customers. Furthermore, provide high-quality amenities in the Airport lounges, namely comfortable seating, power outlets, complimentary Wi-Fi, and other amenities to make guests feel at home. Airport lounges should have staff that provide attentive customer service to ensure guests have a pleasant experience. Lounge and airport experience providers must therefore stand out through their customer service, investing in a mix of skilled staff and technological solutions to provide a memorable experience.

Airport Lounge Experience

There are a few studies that have addressed the customer experience of airport lounges from a service quality perspective. Popovic et al. (2009) primarily defined the airport experience as the activities and interactions that passengers encounter while in the airport. Han et al. (2012) noted that travelers assess the functionality of airline lounges, including amenities, services, food and beverages, and physical surroundings. Chua et al. (2017) suggested that the tangible factors that contribute to the lounge experience include the availability of waiting for lounges and in-flight offerings.

Han et al. (2012) suggested that customers are given lasting impressions by their experiences in airports, which can be achieved by using an attractive or useful airline lounge. Based on the findings, the key attributes involved in determining airline lounge usage were classified into image and accessibility, atmosphere, food and beverage (F&B) service, and facility dimensions. Atmosphere and F&B services prove to be the most important dimensions affecting passengers' use of the airline lounge.

While existing studies have explored various aspects of airport lounges—including their role as a competitive tool (Pearson et al., 2015), the importance of service quality (Lee et al., 2017), and the factors influencing customer satisfaction (Han et al., 2012) - there is a noticeable gap in understanding the personalized experiences of customers within these lounges. Most research primarily addresses the general features and service quality but does not delve deeply into how individual preferences, moods, and expectations shape these experiences. Furthermore, the impact of specific amenities and lounge designs on customer satisfaction has not been sufficiently investigated. Understanding these personalized experiences could provide valuable insights for lounge operators looking to enhance customer engagement

and satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative research approach to identify the passengers in the airport terminal. The sampling methods were initiated with purposive sampling, facilitating the selection of participants aligned with the research's core objectives—individuals in the Dubai airport lounge. Building on this foundation, convenience sampling was incorporated into the methodology, capitalizing on the accessibility of participants to the researcher.

Data Collection and Sample

For data collection, the researcher selected the Christmas holiday, which represents the peak time for tourist movement on an international level. The study targeted transit passengers who had either waited in the Dubai airport lounge or had used an airline lounge at different airports within the past six months. Data were collected in situ at Dubai International Airport by conducting informal interviews with departing foreign passengers waiting to board flights over two weeks from December 13, 2022, to January 14, 2023. According to Hagaman and Wuitch (2016), saturation of themes usually occurs within 15-20 interviews. As some of the questions required respondents to have experience with airport lounges, the researcher was able to interview 15 international tourists who had used the lounges previously. To ensure that the respondents were indeed transit tourists, the researcher used non-probability purposive sampling to select participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in an in-depth interview in English. The interviews focused on the entire lounge servicescape experience, including services and facilities, ambiance, comfort, and grievances. Additionally, some general questions were asked about the participants' travel experiences and prior experience with transit airports. No audio or video recordings were made due to the sensitive location of the interviews.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed immediately after each interview. Open-ended interview questions (see Table 1) were developed in order to allow the participants (see Table 2) to answer in an unconstrained way, to use as many words as they wish, and to avoid bias by the interviewer. Interestingly, the majority of responses ranged from a few words to a sentence.

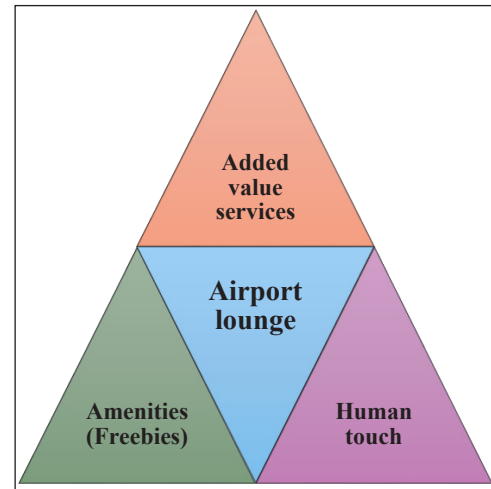
Table 1: Outline of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Question - Wording
Why do transit passengers need Airport Lounges?
How have you spent your time at the airport lounge?
What do you think of the general ambiance and feel at the airport lounge?
What best describes your airport lounge experience?
What do you appreciate or dislike about the airport lounge?
Comment on your recent Dubai airport lounge experience
How can airport lounges improve to serve you well?

Table 2: Sample Profile

Sr. No.	Participants	Nationality	Purpose	Gender	Age
1	Trans_1	UK	Bleisure	male	35-40
2	Trans_2	Australian	Leisure	female	40-45
3	Trans_3	Japanese	Business	male	40-45
4	Trans_4	Spanish	Holiday	female	35-40
5	Trans_5	French	Leisure	female	40-45
6	Trans_6	Indian	Leisure	Male	50-55
7	Trans_7	Chinese	Business	Male	45-50
8	Trans_8	Chinese	Leisure	Male	35-40
9	Trans_9	Indian	Business	Male	40-45
10	Trans_10	USA	Leisure	male	50-55
11	Trans_11	UK	Holiday	male	50-55

The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze (without the assistance of software) the research data. First, the original transcript was examined to identify broad categories, with statements limited to individual cases set aside. The data was read through, and passages were selected (sticky notes) and underlined, with each chunk assigned a code. The data sets obtained from transit passengers were analyzed separately and then combined to compare the results of the initial coding. Once all the data had been coded, the codes were combined by similarity, and themes were identified (emerged from some narratives as well as many occurrences) and documented based on each grouping and how they were connected. The thematic analysis revealed three key attributes that an airport lounge needs to enhance to be a successful business venue (see Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1: Key Attributes that an Airport Lounge Needs to Enhance**

RESULTS

Transit Passengers’ Expectations from the Airport Lounge

It can be seen from Table 3 that people are in transit looking for something to do to fill their time. International departing passengers tend to spend longer in the airport and consequently have a higher likelihood of engaging themselves (Refresh/ Relaxing/ Restroom/ reconnecting/ Reading or buying something available at the airport lounge).

Han and Hyun (2015) suggested that customers evaluate

their satisfaction with a product or service based on how it compares to their expectations. When using airport lounges, passengers may experience a sense of community and belonging with other travelers, regardless of whether they are in business class or facing travel disruptions. Lounges offer a respite from the chaos of the airport and provide a sanctuary for passengers, especially during long wait times and delays. Rowley and Slack (1999: 373) noted that passengers have varying levels of experience with airport lounges, with some being frequent users and others being new to the experience. To develop an effective marketing strategy, it is crucial to meet customers’ needs for both essential products and emotional fulfillment (Ekinci, 2003).

Table 3: Data Coding – Airport Lounge Expectations

Codes	Data Extracts	Purpose of Travel	Transit Passenger
Things to do	“Relax and unwind before, after, and during the flight”	Holiday	Trans_11
Amenities	“Food and beverages, comfortable chairs, private workspaces, and entertainment”	Holiday	Trans_8
Amenities	“Wi-Fi, showers, newspapers, magazines, and other services that can make my airport experience more enjoyable	Holiday	Trans_6
Ambience	“a quiet and comfortable space to work, rest, and relax in between flights”	Business	Trans_3
Amenities	“Grab complimentary snacks and drinks, and high-speed Wi-Fi” to make a long layover more pleasant {smile}	Business	Trans_7
Service staff	“Personalized experience with concierge services”	Business	Trans_9
Amenities	“Working at an airport lounge was much easier with business amenities such as printers, fax machines, and high-speed internet”	Business	
Service staff	“They have dedicated staff members who can help with any needs or questions”	both business and leisure purposes (informally known as “bleisure”)	Trans_1
Amenities	“I prefer [a particular lounge] due to its amenities, such as a better selection of food and drinks, more comfortable seating, or more spacious bathrooms”	Holiday	Trans_2
Added value	“Strategic location {Giggle}, its proximity to the departure gate without having to go through too much security”	holiday	Trans_5

How Do You Compare the Airport Lounges Services and Experience Elsewhere?

Findings shown in Table 4 reveal the airport lounge services ever experienced by the informants of the study. They can be listed below:

Ambiance – As more airlines offer lounge access, airport lounges are becoming increasingly crowded, making it difficult to find a quiet place to relax.

Lack of access to desired features and services – Airport lounges lack the amenities that passengers desire, such as showers, quiet spaces, charging stations, and more.

Spatial Dimension – Many airport lounges are cramped and lack the space needed to provide a comfortable experience.

Indifferent Staff – Airport lounge staff are not well-trained and often lack the knowledge needed to provide passengers with the assistance they need.

Being able to enjoy airport lounge perks can change the mood of transit passengers and improve their entire travel experience. Knowing that they’ll have a comfortable and relaxing place to go after the stress of airport security may change how they feel about their trip. For many travelers, an airport lounge experience helps to reduce anxiety and makes spending time at the airport more enjoyable — which helps to start their trip off right.

Table 4: Data Coding – Airport Lounge Elsewhere

Codes	Data Extracts	Transit Passenger
Ambience	“It was crowded, difficult to find a seat or access amenities”	Trans_9
	“Long wait times to enter”	Trans_3
	“It was full of people and a bit noisy”	Trans_7
Lack of access to desired features and services	“Limited food & beverage and entertainment options”	Trans_1
	“Few power outlets, those that were available, were occupied”	Trans_9
	“Wi-Fi connectivity and speed were not that great”	Trans_7
	“It was too dark at the entrance! Everything artificial”	Trans_2
	“We (my partner) left immediately when we noticed charges for food and drinks that were set too high beyond our reach”	Trans_4
	“The texture and quality of covers appear cheap”	Trans_5
Spatial dimension	“Insufficient space between seating areas”	Trans_10
Staff insensitive about the requirements of the customers	“The staff was hardly making eye contact when I inquired {pause}, I feel that was rude”	Trans_3
	“Attitude problem, staff who were too tired to smile” LOL!	Trans_9

Positive Aspects and Suggestions for Improving the Lounge at Dubai International Airport (DBX)

Table 5 reflects that Dubai International Airport lounges stand out for offering a diverse range of amenities that other

lounges may not have, including free Wi-Fi, private showers and sleeping areas, a full-service bar, complimentary refreshments, comfortable seating, business centers, workstations, and even private meeting rooms. Additionally, Dubai International Airport lounges offer exclusive access to VIP services, such as priority boarding and luggage handling.

Table 5: Data Coding – Likes About DBX Airport Lounge

Codes	Data Extracts	Transit Ppassenger
Complimentary	“The lounge offers a range of amenities including refreshments, snacks, Wi-Fi, and a selection of newspapers and magazines”	Trans_4
Service staff	“Concierge service that can help with any questions or queries”	Trans_3
Ambience	“The seating and lounge areas”	Trans_6
Complimentary	“The wide variety of food and drinks available”	Trans_11
Service staff	“The helpful and friendly staff”	Trans_9
Complimentary	“The variety of entertainment and activities available”	Trans_10
Convenience	“The location of the lounge”	Trans_1
Ambience	“The clean and modern facilities”	Trans_2
Convenience	“I enjoyed a variety of shopping and dining options inside the lounge, as well as taking advantage of exclusive spa services”	Trans_5

According to Rowley and Slack (1999), the aim of the service environment in airport departure lounges is to provide a relaxing atmosphere and convey a positive impression of the environment as an excellent place to wait. Despite the wide range of prices for food items, which cater to travelers with different travel motivations, purposes, and spending abilities, Wattanacharoensil et al. (2017) suggested that airports do not fully cater to the psychological needs of air travelers. Jeon and Kim (2012) found that passengers’ subsequent behavior is significantly influenced by positive emotions elicited by airport service environmental factors.

A study by Wen and Chi (2013) demonstrated that passengers’ positive as well as negative emotions had a direct influence on satisfaction with service recovery.

Five out of 15 informants required improvement for the DBX airport lounge:

.....“The cost of access to the lounge”.....(Trans_4)

.....“The lack of privacy in certain areas”..... (Trans_3)

.....“The limited seating in some areas”..... (Trans_7)

.....“The long wait times to access the lounge”....(Trans_8)

.....“Well! Sometimes I do not find myself trying to relax next to complete strangers. LOL”.....(Trans_2)

Transit Passengers’ Overall Experience at the Dubai International Airport Lounge

Frequent air travelers are well versed with airports in different parts of the World and are in a better position to compare airport lounges, it can be seen in Table 6 that informants of DBX airport lounge found it generally equipped with various facilities for transit passengers. To cater to passengers of diverse demographic characteristics, the Dubai International Airport Lounge provides a range of amenities to meet the needs of transit passengers. Furthermore, an airport lounge creates a welcoming environment for all visitors, including those of different nationalities, by offering various amenities that accommodate different cultures.

Rowley and Slack (1999) noted that the service environment in airport departure lounges is designed to attract and engage passengers who are waiting to board a flight and is an important aspect of their travel experience and perception of the airport’s location. In addition to seeking value, Kim et al. (2016) found that travelers also desire an experience that engages their senses. An airline lounge experience is composed of cognitive, affective, and sensory attributes, such as the quality of facilities, feeling relaxed and refreshed, and the atmosphere. While cognitive attributes are fundamental to the airline lounge experience, experiential marketing for airline lounges should also consider how these attributes, along with emotional and sensory factors, impact travelers’ subsequent responses, such as their sense of well-being, satisfaction, word-of-mouth recommendations, and intention to revisit.

Table 6: Data Coding – Overall DBX Airport Lounge Experience

Codes	Data Extracts	Transit Passenger
Comfort	“It is comfortable {smile}”	Trans_11
Complimentary	“The luxurious lounge and amenities, such as food, drinks, showers, massage chairs, and seating”	Trans_2
Complimentary	“Lounge’s business facilities, including Wi-Fi and power outlets, safety and privacy”	Trans_3
Complimentary	“I used shower facilities and spa treatments, while the on-site staff was on hand to assist”	Trans_9
Ambience plus complimentary	“I will give them full marks for their comfortable seating, free Wi-Fi, complimentary drinks and snacks, and extra space”	Trans_6
Service staff	“Friendly and helpful staff and the chance to relax and unwind before a flight”	Trans_10
Ambience	“I think the most crucial elements of a lounge are calm, solitude, and peace. Good food is wonderful to have, but not necessary; I don’t typically drink or take a shower right before a flight”	Trans_5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the informants’ interview script it can be concluded that airport lounges offer several amenities to transit passengers on long-haul flights, such as comfortable seating areas, complimentary snacks and beverages, Wi-Fi access, and entertainment options such as magazines and newspapers. Subjects mentioned that many lounges also offer showers, private work areas, and complimentary spa treatments. Additionally, many lounges feature concierge services that can help arrange transportation to the next destination or provide helpful advice on local attractions. For travelers on long layovers, an airport lounge can provide a comfortable place to relax and pass the time.

To operationalize a combination of added value services, amenities, and a human touch at an airport lounge (Fig. 1), the following strategies need to be adopted:

Added Value Services: Airport lounges are often limited to first-class passengers or members of certain rewards programs, as they are considered the most valuable customers. This was also observed in previous studies,

which found that airline lounges are particularly attractive to travelers seeking exclusive services (Han et al., 2012), and are willing to pay for lounge access or membership fees (Fourie & Lubbe, 2006). This not only provides airlines with an additional revenue stream but also helps them retain their high-value customers. While some lounges are open to any passenger flying a same-day international flight, others may offer pay-per-use options that are available to all travelers.

Offer additional services that go beyond what is expected. This can include concierge services, priority boarding, luggage handling, and private meeting rooms. These services can be advertised on the lounge’s website and social media pages, and by email to lounge members. According to Chua et al. (2017), airline lounge operators should not only maintain a cozy lounge environment but also provide practical facilities. Consequently, to ensure the sustainability of an airport lounge, it is important to continually invest in improving the services and amenities offered. This can include upgrading the furniture, providing better amenities, and offering more compelling features and services. It is also important to create a comfortable, inviting ambience that guests will find enjoyable.

Amenities (Freebies): Numerous international airport lounges provide diverse amenities to cater to individual preferences, and it is ultimately up to the transit passenger to determine which lounge best suits their needs and preferences. According to Chiappa et al. (2016, p. 107), transfer passengers have varying needs from those not connecting at the airport, particularly regarding the terminal layout, parking, and rental cars.

Transfer passengers' behaviour is significantly constrained by the nature and characteristics of the connection, such as shopping. Therefore, the design and implementation of airline lounges should address air travelers' needs who are sensitive to time and likely to engage in the airport environment (Lee et al., 2017). This is where the presence of an airport lounge can play a vital role for transit passengers.

Provide free amenities to make the passenger experience more enjoyable. This can include free Wi-Fi, charging stations, snacks, and beverages, reading materials, and entertainment options. These amenities can be promoted throughout the lounge via signage, digital displays, and social media.

Airport lounges are not always as grand as they might seem because they can be limited in space, amenities, and services depending on the size of the airport and the demand for the lounge. Sometimes it is not beyond individual control to find exactly what imagination transit passengers may have before patronizing a lounge on a specific day and time. Airports can be jam-packed with people, noisy, and often have limited seating. Additionally, the resources allocated to an airport lounge can vary depending on the airline that owns or operates the lounge. For example, some airlines may provide premium services and amenities in their lounges, while others may provide more basic services and amenities. In addition, the design and layout of the lounge can vary depending on the size and type of airport, as well as the needs of the passengers. In the meantime, the Dubai International Airport (DXB) opened a gaming lounge where guests can pay a fee to play more than 40 solo or multiplayer games while they wait for their flights. Future airport lounges are anticipated to take cues from these innovations as they reinvent themselves to stay relevant (Lamba & Mohan, 2022).

Human Touch: Train lounge staff to be welcoming, attentive, and accommodating. This can include greeting passengers by name, offering personalized recommendations for amenities and services, and addressing passenger concerns and complaints promptly. Therefore, Airline lounge operators should recruit and train employees to possess competency skills that will prepare them to manage and serve guests while providing services (Lee et al., 2017).

The human touch can be conveyed through staff uniforms, nametags, and other branded elements. Given the significant influence of transit travelers' perception and satisfaction,

lounge staff should be trained to deliver more personalized offerings (Chua et al., 2017). Therefore, airport lounges should strive for a high level of customer service and provide ample staff to ensure that guests' needs are attended to promptly and efficiently.

At an international airport lounge, transit passengers may feel a sense of anticipation and excitement as well as a bit of apprehension, especially if they are unfamiliar with the culture or language of the transit airport/destination. The worst airport lounge experience is likely a combination of unpleasant factors such as overcrowding, poor customer service, and inadequate amenities. There is a need to have helpful staff on hand to answer any questions, as well as a concierge service for assistance with luggage and boarding passes. Therefore, it makes sense to assume that if visiting an airline lounge and its amenities improves the quality of the travel experience, it will improve the perception of transit travelers. Thus, to operationalize these elements, the lounge operator can develop a comprehensive customer service program that outlines the standards for service, amenities, and human touch. The program can include training modules for staff and clear communication protocols for passengers. Additionally, the lounge operator can measure customer satisfaction through surveys, feedback forms, and online reviews to identify areas for improvement and implement changes accordingly.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Airport lounges provide a great way for travelers to relax and unwind before their flights. Airport lounges are becoming increasingly popular and are often offered as part of a more expensive ticket package.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that airport lounge operators should pay considerable attention. Airport lounges can help reduce stress and create a more pleasant travel experience, with travelers reporting feeling more relaxed and comfortable in a lounge than in the main terminal. They can provide a sense of exclusivity and luxury, which can be attractive to travelers who are willing to pay a premium for the experience. They help improve customer experience and loyalty by providing travelers with a private and relaxing environment away from the hustle and bustle of the main terminal. In a nutshell, Airport lounges can be an effective way for airlines and airports to differentiate their services and attract more customers.

Air travel has become associated with inconvenience and discomfort due to long lines, flight cancellations, and other small annoyances. This perception has led consumers to

view air travel as a commodity rather than a brand. Physical environments such as aesthetics, lighting, ambiance, layout and seating should be highly enhanced by airport lounge operators according to Chua et al. (2017). The facilities of the lounges including quiet room, Wi-Fi, TV, computers with internet access, reading materials, mini-bar bathroom restrooms food and beverages business/meeting facilities are essentials that should maximize air travel enjoyment. To cater to the diverse needs of transit passengers from different nationalities, airport lounges need to provide a range of amenities, such as food and beverage options, reading materials, and entertainment options in multiple languages, as well as free Wi-Fi and charging stations. Additional services like currency exchange, transportation assistance, and access to showers and other facilities can also be offered to enhance the passenger experience. Furthermore, airline lounge operators can tailor their image to their target market by promoting their modernized facilities through advertising campaigns (Lee et al., 2017).

Contribution to Tourism Research

This study introduces a fresh perspective to the theoretical landscape of airport lounges in general, as well as Dubai Airport lounges, in particular.

This study adds to the existing theoretical research within the field of tourism by conducting a novel investigation that focuses on passengers' expectations and experiences of airline lounges. It does so by evaluating the service required by transit passengers.

The analysis of transit passengers patronizing airline lounges carries significant scientific implications for the fields of aviation management, consumer behavior, and service quality. Firstly, this research provides empirical evidence on the match between the availability of premium services and the perceived value of transit passengers. This can enhance understanding of consumer decision-making processes in a high-stakes environment, such as air travel. Additionally, by examining the behavior and preferences of transit passengers, this study can contribute to theories of customer loyalty and satisfaction (Hwang & Han, 2015), specifically within the aviation sector. Furthermore, the findings could inform the development of new models that integrate service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, offering a nuanced perspective on how ancillary services like airline lounges influence overall passenger experience and loyalty.

This research contributes to tourism literature by extending the understanding of how ancillary services at airports, particularly airline lounges, impact transit passengers' travel experience. It provides insights into the role of such services in enhancing the overall travel experience, thereby influencing tourists' choice of airlines and their likelihood

of revisiting (Chen & Chang, 2008). Moreover, the study highlights the importance of service quality in non-core areas, such as lounges, in shaping tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Ostrowski, O'Brien & Gordon, 1993), which are critical factors for the competitiveness of airlines. By integrating concepts from tourism and aviation management, this research underscores the interconnectedness of these fields and proposes a comprehensive framework for assessing the premium airport services on the tourist experience.

Finally, most research in the field has concentrated on direct passengers, with limited attention to the distinct needs and behaviors of transit passengers. This study focuses specifically on transit passengers, offering novel insights that can guide targeted service improvements and marketing strategies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results are scarcely generalizable because the study employed a purposeful sample and data were gathered from a single airport lounge, which has unique features of its own (dimensions, insularity, and seasonality). More precisely, in order to generalize the results in various cultural contexts, future studies should make use of bigger random samples and think about contrasting airport locales such as Europe, Asia, or the Middle East. Conclusive findings must be drawn cautiously because the interview results may not always apply to a larger group.

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