The Relationship Between Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality of the Kuwait Airways (KU)

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Abstract

This research sought to determine the SERVQUAL dimensions that have been commonly referenced in earlier studies, namely tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness, and to evaluate their impact on KU customer satisfaction. To fulfill the objectives of the study, two hundred structured questionnaires were distributed among KU customers, yielding 155 completed responses, which corresponds to a usable response rate of 77.5%. The analysis of the collected data indicates that passengers prioritize the dimensions of assurance, tangibility, and responsiveness, with assurance being recognized as the most significant factor influencing the service quality of KU. Furthermore, the findings suggest that customer satisfaction is influenced by the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The analysis underscores the importance for decision-makers to focus on aspects within the assurance, tangibility, and responsiveness dimensions of SERVQUAL to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: *Air passenger, Service quality, Questionnaire survey, Kuwait.*
JEL classification: D14, M19, M39, Z13.

Introduction

The significance of quality service and customer satisfaction has become a focal point in marketing research. This body of literature primarily aims to uncover the factors that enhance service quality through empirical investigation. Essential components identified encompass empathy, tangible elements, and assurance, all of which play a vital role in influencing customers' views on service quality. Additionally, factors such as the ease of booking, cabin service, the effectiveness of cabin crew, and the punctuality of flights are acknowledged as critical to customer perceptions. Additionally, the comparison of ticket prices with those of competitors is seen as a major factor influencing customer satisfaction. However, these insights may not be universally relevant to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which are distinguished by their oil wealth, state-controlled economies, and the provision of free healthcare and education to their citizens, along with government involvement in publicly traded companies. Therefore, this research sought to determine the SERVQUAL dimensions that have been commonly referenced in earlier studies, namely tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness, and to evaluate their impact on KU customer satisfaction. The outcomes of this research may be applicable to other GCC nations due to their shared economic, social, and cultural characteristics. It is expected that the findings will offer a fresh perspective to the existing discourse on service quality and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the results will aid Kuwait Airways in predicting service demand and refining its offerings, thus enhancing its competitive edge in a fiercely competitive market, which is vital for the company's growth and sustainability.

The organization of this study is as follows: the next section offers a brief overview of pertinent literature and delineates the research hypotheses. The third section elaborates on the research methodology utilized. The results and their analysis are discussed in the fourth and fifth sections, respectively. Lastly, the final section presents the concluding remarks.

Air transportation is widely recognized as a fundamental component of travel, enabling the swift transit of people and cargo between various destinations (Rose, Awang, and Yazid, 2017). The main aim is to improve services that draw in passengers and guarantee their contentment (Jahmani, 2017). The success of an airline is significantly dependent on its capacity to cultivate enduring relationships with its clientele (Jafari and Bazaee, 2016). As noted by Jamkatel (2018), the growing airline sector offers both prospects and obstacles

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for enterprises within this field. A multitude of studies has been conducted to assess the service quality provided by airlines in different nations. The following section will summarize these investigations. Jamal and Naser (2002) identified a connection between customer satisfaction and several dimensions of service quality; however, they noted a negative correlation between customer satisfaction and the level of expertise. In a subsequent study, Jamal and Naser (2003) confirmed a notable connection between customer satisfaction and service quality, while no link was identified between the tangible aspects of service and customer satisfaction. Hong and Jun (2006) examined service quality in Korean Airways, revealing that customers prioritized the convenience of the land transportation system and the flexibility of contract terms as critical factors influencing service quality. Ban and Kim (2019) conducted an analysis of customer experiences and satisfaction by examining online reviews from airline passengers. Their findings indicate that factors such as seat comfort, staff performance, ground services, perceived value for money, and airline branding significantly influence customer satisfaction. Abdullah *et al.* (2007) utilized the SERVQUAL framework to evaluate the perceptions of Malaysian consumers regarding airline service quality, pinpointing empathy, tangibles, and assurance as the most vital elements.

Rose *et al.* (2017) examined the inflight service quality (IFSQUAL) of Malaysia Airlines through the perspective of passenger satisfaction, revealing that personal characteristics and flight safety are significant factors influencing passenger contentment. In another study, Mahphoth *et al.* (2018) investigated the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction among air travelers in Malaysia. Their findings indicated that factors such as responsiveness, reliability, and assurance significantly enhance customer satisfaction, while empathy and tangible aspects showed a negligible relationship. Furthermore, Farooqa *et al.* (2018) employed the AIRQUAL scale to assess the service quality of Malaysia Airlines, demonstrating that all five dimensions of the AIRQUAL scale—airline tangibles, terminal tangibles, personnel services, empathy, and image—have a positive and substantial impact on customer satisfaction. Ahmed et al. (2010) investigated the impact of service quality on customers' intentions to repurchase, finding that customers expressed a moderate degree of satisfaction with the services, which correlated with their propensity to make repeat purchases. Their findings indicated that all dimensions of service quality are significantly associated with customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Qasim (2015) aimed to identify the service and value factors most important to passengers on domestic flights in Pakistan, revealing that flight timeliness is paramount, along with four broader service dimensions: booking convenience, cabin service, cabin crew, and flight timeliness, which were assessed for the first time in the context of Pakistan.

Ali *et al.* (2015) undertook a study to investigate the way passengers assess the service quality offered by Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and its effect on customer satisfaction. The findings of their research indicated that customer satisfaction at PIA is affected by all five dimensions of service quality (AIRQUAL), which encompass airline tangibles, terminal tangibles, personnel, empathy, and the overall image. In a separate study, Shanka (2012) analyzed the relationship between airline service quality, passenger satisfaction, and loyalty towards Ethiopian Airlines. The results indicated that three specific dimensions—tangibles, assurance, and reliability—had a positive effect on passenger satisfaction, with assurance being the most influential. However, the study also highlighted reliability as the dimension with the highest service gap score, suggesting a degree of dissatisfaction.

Archana and Subha (2012) aimed to identify the dimensions that improve service quality. The research revealed that the significance of various elements of in-flight service quality varies according to the passenger's class of seating. The authors identified three essential dimensions that have a positive relationship with perceived service quality in international air travel: food quality, seat comfort, and safety. Their conclusion emphasized that passenger satisfaction across different airlines is contingent upon the quality of services rendered. Furthermore, Rose et al. (2017) examined the primary factors influencing service quality and passenger satisfaction in air travel. Their results indicated that in-flight services, digital offerings during flights, and back-office functions are positively associated with perceived service quality in international air travel, with food quality, seat comfort, and safety being the most critical aspects of in-flight service quality. Gures *et al.* (2014) established that both reliability and facilities play a crucial role in enhancing customer satisfaction. They advised airline management to consider the income levels of passengers in order to assess their purchasing power and to modify pricing strategies accordingly.

In a different study, Yrd and Kurtulmuş (2017) examined the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction specifically within Turkish Airlines. Their results demonstrated a significant relationship

between onboard services and customer satisfaction, indicating that a considerable number of passengers place a high value on the quality of these services. They underscored the significance of onboard services, as well as customer expectations and experiences, for the clientele of Turkish Airlines. Khraim *et al.* (2014) investigated the relationship between perceived value, customer satisfaction, and the perceived fairness of airline pricing. Their findings indicated that customers view price fairness more favorably when they receive satisfactory value and service that meets their expectations. They highlighted that satisfaction is affected by the quality of service provided by agents and the experiences encountered at the airport and on the aircraft, including meal quality and staff responsiveness. Furthermore, Al-Refaie *et al.* (2014) examined the impact of service quality, satisfaction with service recovery, value, image, and pricing on overall passenger satisfaction and loyalty. The findings of their research indicated that various factors, including in-flight services, the processes of reservation and ticketing, flight availability, reliability, interactions with employees, airport services, and satisfaction with online services, play a significant role in determining overall passenger satisfaction. They also identified that service recovery, pricing, perceived value, and brand image are essential factors in shaping passenger satisfaction and loyalty behaviors.

Jahamani (2017) examined the impact of service quality offered by Royal Jordanian on passenger satisfaction. The study revealed that every dimension of service quality is positively associated with passenger satisfaction, highlighting the significance of service quality as a crucial element in influencing this satisfaction. In a different study, Jafari and Bazaee (2016) explored the connection between service quality and customer satisfaction in international airlines. Their results showed that certain tangible elements of the aircraft have a significant effect on customer satisfaction; however, the effects of visible airport characteristics, empathy, and the airline's reputation on customer satisfaction were not substantiated. They advised airline management to focus on acquiring modern and safe aircraft. Furthermore, Ahang *et al.* (2016) utilized a fuzzy TOPSIS multi-method approach to evaluate the airline sector in Iran, concluding that private airlines possess a competitive advantage over public airlines due to superior management, strategic marketing, improved service quality, and reduced variable costs.

Adeniran and Fadare (2016) employed the SERVQUAL model to assess passenger satisfaction and service quality within Nigeria's airport sector. Their findings indicated that the reliability dimension of service quality was the most esteemed among the various airport services. Although participants conveyed satisfaction with the reliability aspect, they expressed discontent regarding other service attributes. The authors emphasized the urgent need to improve facilities for individuals with physical disabilities at Murtala Muhammed Airport. In the same year, Gambo (2016) explored the relationship between airline service quality and customer satisfaction among domestic air travelers in Nigeria. His findings demonstrated a significant connection between four service quality attributes—specifically in-flight services, reliability, responsiveness, and baggage handling—and customer satisfaction. However, he did not find a significant relationship between the check-in process and customer satisfaction for domestic airlines in Nigeria. Jamkatel (2018) examined customer satisfaction concerning the service quality of Himalaya Airlines. The study indicated a generally high level of customer satisfaction; however, it highlighted that satisfaction regarding ticket prices was comparatively low, suggesting that management should focus on enhancing fare competitiveness relative to other airlines. In the same year, Rijal (2018) assessed the extent of customer-perceived gaps within the Nepalese domestic aviation sector. His research concentrated on overall customer expectations and perceptions across four specific areas of airline passenger services: ticketing and reservation services, airport services, in-flight services, and additional value-added services.

Additionally, Phuyal and Joshi (2018) conducted a study to evaluate the impact of airport service quality on the satisfaction of travelers visiting Nepal. Their research revealed that travelers place a high value on fundamental amenities, including the safety of luggage, reduced waiting times at the airport, the politeness of airport staff, efficient resolution of luggage-related issues, and transparent visa information. In a separate study, Fahim (2019) explored the elements that affect service quality from the perspective of customers and their subsequent effect on customer satisfaction. She found that Egypt Air has encountered various challenges, such as the need for cost reduction, managing fluctuating demand, and maintaining rigorous quality standards, all while attempting to cater to the varied requirements of its customer base.

A limited number of studies have been conducted in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) region focusing on passenger satisfaction and service quality in this area (see, for example, Saudi Arabia: Ansari and Qadri, 2014; Ansar, 2015; Ansar, 2015; UAE: Hussain, AlNasser, and Hussain, 2015; Kuwait: Naser *et al.*, 2013; AlShammeri *et al.*, 2023). The subsequent section will present a brief summary of these investigations. Naser *et al.* (2013) identified a relationship between customer awareness and satisfaction regarding the services and products available. Ansari and Qadri (2014) utilized a structured questionnaire to evaluate customer satisfaction with the overall service quality of Saudi Airlines, revealing that passengers expressed dissatisfaction with the services provided. Additionally, Ansar (2015) aimed to assess the satisfaction levels of Saudi passengers concerning onboard services, uncovering a low satisfaction rate that indicates a pressing need for the management of Saudi Airlines to develop a strategic improvement plan to boost passenger satisfaction and mitigate the risk of customer loss to competitors.

Furthermore, Ansar (2015) employed a structured questionnaire to evaluate customer satisfaction with the airline's online services, finding that while customers were somewhat satisfied with the overall online services, they expressed dissatisfaction specifically with the refund process for online ticket cancellations. Moreover, Hussain *et al.* (2015) utilized the SERVQUAL model to evaluate service quality and customer satisfaction within a UAE-based airline. Their findings indicated that elevated service quality, a positive corporate image, and perceived value play a crucial role in significantly improving passenger satisfaction. lShammeri *et al.* (2021) examined the association between passenger satisfaction and the service quality provided by airline companies in Kuwait. Their research identified several key factors that significantly affect satisfaction, including the responsiveness of staff at the airport, the attentiveness of in-flight personnel, the quality of online services, effective time management, and the tangible elements of service.

Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of facilities for passengers utilizing Full-Service Network Carriers (FSNC), recommending that these airlines prioritize the modernization of their facilities to improve the overall passenger experience. In a different study, VS and Fazil (2023) evaluated the perceptions of Qatar Airways passengers regarding the airline's services and their influence on customer satisfaction. The findings indicated that passengers were generally satisfied with various elements of the airline's offerings, such as seating comfort, catering quality, menu diversity, and the professionalism exhibited by the cabin crew. This study aims to assess the impact of each dimension of AIRQUAL on customer satisfaction, with each hypothesis aligned to a specific AIRQUAL dimension.

H_1:   The tangibility aspect of SERVQUAL is related to customer satisfaction in the context of KU.

H_2:   The empathy aspect of SERVQUAL is correlated with customer satisfaction in the KU context.

H_3:   The assurance dimension of SERVQUAL is correlated with customer satisfaction at KU..

H_4:   The responsiveness dimension of SERVQUAL is linked to customer satisfaction at KU..

H_5:   The reliability dimension of SERVQUAL is associated with customer satisfaction at KU.

Data Collection and Study Methodology

To test the hypotheses of the study and achieve its objectives, a structured questionnaire was randomly distributed to 200 frequent customers of Kuwait Airways between January and March 2024, yielding a total of 155 completed responses. This yields a usable response rate of 77.5%. The questionnaire was organized into seven distinct sections. The initial section gathered personal background information from the participants. Sections two through six focused on five categories of service quality (SERVQUAL), where participants indicated their level of agreement using a 1-5 Likert scale, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. The final section solicited feedback regarding the participants' satisfaction with the services provided by Kuwait Airways. A summary of the satisfaction and SERVQUAL factors utilized in this study is presented below.

Satisfaction	• I am satisfied with KU as a service provider

	• I have improved my impression of KU
	• I have a more positive attitude towards KU
	• I say positive things about KU to other people
	• I recommend KU to someone who seeks my advice
	• I encourage my friends and relatives to fly with KU.
SERVQUAL Factors	
Tangible	• New and modern aircraft and equipment
	• Aircraft cleanliness
	• Comfortable seats
	• Seats and aisles roominess
	• High quality catering service
	• Ttoilets cleanliness
	• Interesting on-board entertainment
	• Attractive crew appearance
Empathy	• Passengers receive individual attention
	• Convenient ticketing process
	• Passengers complaints handling
	• Extended travel services
	• Punctuality of the departures and arrivals
Assurance	• Employees instill confidence in passengers
	• Customers feel safe in their transactions
	• Employees are consistently courteous
	• Employees know how to answer customer questions
Responsiveness	• Keeping passengers informed about when services are performed
	• Prompt service to passengers
	• Willingness to help passengers
	• Readiness to respond to passengers 'inquiries.
Reliability	• Providing services as promised
	• Dependability in handling customers' service problems
	• Performing services right the first time
	• Providing services on time
	• Maintaining error-free records.

Descriptive statistics will be utilized to discern and rank the factors that affect customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis test will be performed to assess the internal consistency of the participants' responses. Furthermore, a stepwise regression approach will be employed to evaluate the significance of the relationship between customer satisfaction and the SEREQUAL factors, which will be incorporated into the subsequent regression model.

$$CUSA = \alpha + \beta_1 TANG + \beta_2 EMPT\ \beta_3 ASSR + \beta_4 RESP + \beta_5 RELB + \varepsilon$$

Where:

CUSA : Customer Satisfaction

A : Constant

TANG	:	Tangible
EMPTY	:	Empathy
ASSR	:	Assurance
RESP	:	Responsiveness
RELB	:	Reliability
$\beta_1 - \beta_5$	:	Parameters of the model
E	:	Standard Error

Findings

Cronbach's Alpha

To evaluate the consistency and reliability of the gathered data, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed for each SERVQUAL factor, along with the satisfaction factor utilized in the analyses. The results of this calculation are displayed in Table 1. The table reveals that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ranges from 0.720 to 0.955. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.70 or above indicates that the responses from the survey participants are sufficiently consistent and reliable.

Table (1). Cronbach's Alpha of All Factors Employed in the Regression Model

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha
Satisfaction	0.955
SERVQUAL	
Tangible	0.874
Empathy	0.720
Assurance	0.861
Responsiveness	0.873
Reliability	0.917
All SERVQUAL Factors	0.949

Participants' Personal Background The introductory segment of the questionnaire aimed to collect personal data concerning the individuals participating in the survey. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table (2). The data reveals a nearly balanced representation of Kuwaitis (52.3%) and non-Kuwaitis (47.3%), with a significant majority being female (57.4%) and married (57.4%). Moreover, the table indicates that participants traveled using KU to various international destinations, with the largest share (29.7%) reporting travel to Western countries. Additionally, the table showcases the diversity in age demographics and average monthly income among participants, along with their different reasons for utilizing KU. It is also apparent that participants frequently engage with KU and acquire a variety of ticket types. The differences in participant characteristics within the survey contribute to the robustness of the analytical findings.

Table (2). The Participants in the Survey Personal Background

	Freq.	%		Freq.	%
Nationality			**Gender**		
Kuwaiti	81	52.3	Male	66	42.6
Non-Kuwaiti	74	47.7	Female	89	57.4
Total	155	100.0	Total	155	100.0
Destination of Travel			**Age**		
GCC countries	35	22.6	Less than 25	30	19.4
Arab countries	39	25.2	26 – 35	70	45.2
Western countries	46	29.7	36 – 50	44	28.4
Others	35	22.6	More than 50 years	11	7.1
Total	155	100.0	Total	155	100.0
Last Academic Qualifications			**Purpose of travel**		
Less than High school	5	3.2	Business	6	3.9
High school	25	16.1	Tourism	118	76.1
Diploma	25	16.1	Study	14	9.0
Bachelor's degree	64	41.3	Visit	12	7.7
Masters	20	12.9	Work	5	3.2
Ph.D.	16	10.3	Total	155	100.0
Total	155	100.0			
Monthly Earnings			**Frequency of travel during a year**		
Less than 1,000 KD	77	49.7	1 time	45	29.0
From 1,000 to 2,000 KD	60	38.7	2- 4 times	87	56.1
From 2,000 to 3,000 KD	12	7.7	5- 7 times	14	9.0
More than 3,000 KD	6	3.9	More than 7 times	9	5.8
Total	155	100.0	Total	155	100.0
Ticket Type			**Marital Status**		
Economy	130	83.9	Married	89	57.4
Business Class	17	11.0	Single	66	42.6
First class	8	5.2	Total	155	100.0
Total	155	100.0			

Participants' Evaluation of Various SERVQUAL Dimensions

The individuals who participated in the questionnaire survey were asked to express their level of agreement with several SERVQUAL dimensions identified in previous research. The analysis of their feedback is encapsulated in Table (3). This table demonstrates that the participants recognized the importance of all SERVQUAL elements included in the survey, as indicated by the median scores. However, it also highlighted some variations in the levels of agreement for each dimension. The highest score was given to the cleanliness of the aircraft within the tangible dimension of SERVQUAL, closely followed by the appeal of the crew's appearance. In contrast, the lowest score among tangible aspects was related to on-board entertainment. Within the empathy dimension, the ticketing process's convenience received the most favorable rating, succeeded by the provision of personalized attention. The least favorable ratings were associated with the management of passenger complaints and the punctuality of departures and arrivals. Concerning the assurance dimension of SERVQUAL, the highest rating was attributed to the consistently courteous nature of employees, while the lowest was related to instilling confidence in passengers. In the responsiveness dimension, participants rated the willingness to assist passengers and the readiness to address inquiries the highest. Conversely, the lowest rating was given to keeping passengers informed about service performance. Finally, within the reliability dimension, the highest rating was awarded for performing services correctly on the first attempt, followed by delivering services as promised. However, the lowest rating was assigned to the punctuality of service delivery. The means of the SERVQUAL dimensions were calculated and displayed in Table (3), which illustrated that the assurance dimension received the highest ranking, followed by the tangible dimension, while the empathy and reliability dimensions were ranked the lowest.

Table (3). Participants Level of Agreement with SERQUAL Factors

SURVQUAL Factors		Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Factor rank based on the mean	All factors rank based on the mean
Tangible	New and modern aircraft and equipment	4.08	4	1.045	1	5	3	7
	Aircraft cleanliness	4.25	4	0.878	2	5	1	1
	Comfortable seats	3.88	4	0.987	1	5	5	14
	Seats and aisles roominess	3.77	4	1.068	1	5	7	20
	High-quality catering service	3.99	4	0.964	1	5	4	9
	Toilets cleanliness	3.88	4	1.047	1	5	5	14
	Interesting on-board entertainment	3.72	4	1.12	1	5	8	23
	Attractive crew appearance	4.15	4	0.959	1	5	2	3
Empathy	Passengers receive individual attention	3.73	4	1.002	1	5	2	22
	Convenient ticketing process	3.99	4	1.099	1	5	1	10
	Passengers complain handling	2.99	3	1.398	1	5	5	26
	Extended travel services	3.58	4	1.092	1	5	3	24
	Punctuality of the departures and arrivals	3.52	4	1.316	1	5	4	25
Assurance	Employees instill confidence in passengers	3.77	4.00	1.010	1	5	4	20
	Customers feel safe in their transactions	4.12	4.00	0.942	1	5	2	4
	Employees are consistently courteous	4.17	4.00	0.891	2	5	1	2
	Employees have the knowledge to answer customer questions.	4.12	4.00	0.890	2	5	2	4
Responsiveness	Keeping passengers informed about when services are performed		4.00	0.997	1	5	4	18

		3.82						
	Prompt service to passengers	3.86	4.00	0.981	1	5	3	16
	Willingness to help passengers	4.10	4.00	0.828	1	5	1	6
	Readiness to respond to passengers' inquiries.	4.04	4.00	0.925	1	5	2	8
Reliability	Providing services as promised	3.94	4.00	0.938	1	5	2	12
	Dependability in handling customers' service problems	3.91	4.00	0.996	1	5	3	13
	Performing services right the first time	3.97	4.00	1.000	1	5	1	11
	Providing services on time	3.82	4.00	1.041	1	5	5	18
	Maintaining error-free records.	3.84	4.00	1.060	1	5	4	17
All SERQUL Factors	Tangible	3.97	4.00	0.74	2	5	2	
	Empathy	3.56	4.0	0.82	1	5	5	
	Assurance	4.05	4.0	0.79	2	5	1	
	Responsiveness	3.95	4.00	0.80	2	5	3	
	Reliability	3.90	4.00	0.87	1	5	4	

Kruskal Wallis Test

The Kruskal-Wallis Test, which is also known as a one-way ANOVA for rank-based nonparametric analysis, is utilized to evaluate the differences among two or more groups of independent variables concerning a continuous or ordinal dependent variable. The findings of the test are presented in Table (4). This table indicates several significant differences attributed to the participants' nationality, monthly income, and travel purpose. Notably, the nationality groups exhibited significant variations in the reliability of the SURVQUAL factor. Additionally, the monthly income categories revealed considerable differences among participants regarding the responsiveness of the SURVQUAL factor. Furthermore, the table highlights significant differences related to the participants' travel purpose and the empathy aspect of the SURVQUAL factor. In contrast, participants' gender, age, travel destination, frequency of travel, and ticket type demonstrated consistency in their level of agreement with the SURVQUAL factor.

Table (4). Kruskal Wallis Test

	Nationality		Gender		Age		Monthly Income		Purpose of travel		Destination		Frequency of Travel		Type of ticket	
Factor	χ^2	Sig.	χ^2	Sig.	χ^2	Sig.	χ^2	Sig.	χ^2	Sig.	χ^2	Sig.	χ^2	Sig.	χ^2	Sig.

Tangible	0.332	0.564	0.088	0.767	2.781	0.427	2.722	0.437	9.049	0.060	1.015	0.798	2.200	0.532	2.712	0.258
Empathy	2.975	0.085	0.576	0.448	0.382	0.944	4.127	0.248	10.540	0.032	3.506	0.32	2.430	0.488	3.522	0.172
Assurance	0.877	0.349	2.873	0.09	8.278	0.041	4.991	0.172	7.396	0.116	3.792	0.285	7.247	0.064	3.807	0.149
Responsiveness	3.398	0.065	1.326	0.249	3.289	0.349	9.617	0.022	8.256	0.083	5.952	0.114	4.195	0.241	3.984	0.136
Reliability	5.503	0.019	0	0.993	3.011	0.390	4.255	0.235	7.503	0.112	5.401	0.145	3.246	0.355	4.102	0.129
Satisfaction	2.511	0.113	1.057	0.304	2.109	0.550	4.895	0.18	4.485	0.344	4.905	0.179	3.052	0.384	0.814	0.666

Stepwise Regression

A stepwise regression analysis was performed to identify the independent factors of SERVQUAL that significantly correlate with the dependent variable of customer satisfaction. The findings are detailed in Table (5), which reveals that the Assurance factor is the most influential contributor to customer satisfaction, followed by the Tangibles and Responsiveness factors of SERVQUAL. The three regression models presented in Table (5) exhibit strong robustness, as indicated by the F-value and its statistical significance. Furthermore, the modified R^2 value presented in Table (5) demonstrates that 63.4% of the variation in participants' satisfaction levels can be attributed to the factors of Reliability, Tangibles, and Empathy.

Table (5). Stepwise Regression

Model		Beta	t	Sig	VIF
1	(Constant)		4.474	0.000	
	Assurance	0.751	14.005	0.000	1.000
Adjusted R^2 = 0.561			*F = 196.150*		*Sig. = 0.001*
2	(Constant)		1.135	0.258	
	Assurance	0.570	8.909	0.000	1.612
	Tangible	0.293	4.586	0.000	1.612
Adjusted R^2 = 0.612			*F = 121.521*		*Sig. = 0.001*
3	(Constant)		0.172	0.863	
	Assurance	0.283	4.507	0.000	1.618
	Tangible	0.373	3.868	0.000	3.812
	Responsiveness	0.243	2.691	0.008	3.349
Adjusted R^2 = 0.634			*F = 86.775*		*Sig. = 0.001*

Discussion

The examination of the questionnaire results revealed that participants acknowledged the importance of all SEVOCAL factors included in the survey. This observation is consistent with previous studies conducted by Jamal and Naser (2002), Naser and Jamal (2003), Ahmed *et al.* (2010), Ali *et al.* (2015), Jahamani (2017), and Mahphoth *et al.* (2018). Participants demonstrated the strongest agreement concerning the assurance, tangible, and responsiveness dimensions of the SERVQUAL factors. This result partially corroborates the findings of Abdullah *et al.* (2007), Shanka (2012), Gambo (2016), and Mahphoth *et al.* (2018). While most of these studies recognized the assurance and tangible dimensions of the SERVQUAL factors as significantly affecting consumer satisfaction, some highlighted reliability and empathy as the most vital dimensions influencing customer satisfaction. A significant difference between the findings of this study and those of earlier research is the recognition of responsiveness as a key dimension affecting KU customer satisfaction, a factor that was not prominently featured in many prior studies. Additionally, the results of this study specifically underscored that KU customers place a high value on the cleanliness of the aircraft and show a preference for newer and modern aircraft and equipment, which aligns with the findings of Jafari and Bazaee (2016). The results also indicated that the attractiveness of crew appearance, the consistent politeness of employees, their capability to respond to inquiries, willingness to assist, and readiness to address questions significantly influence customer satisfaction levels at KA. Additionally, the security of transactions and the simplicity of the ticketing process are vital elements that significantly impact the satisfaction levels of KU customers. In contrast, KU customers showed the least agreement on aspects such as the resolution of complaints, the punctuality of departures and arrivals, the availability of additional travel services, engaging onboard entertainment, personalized service, and the spaciousness of seating and aisles.

These observations align with the findings of Archana and Subha (2012), Besides *et al.* (2017), and Rose *et al.* (2017), who recognized safety as a fundamental factor in customer satisfaction. Moreover, the responsiveness of staff and cabin crew, which was identified as a significant factor in this study, has been supported by earlier research conducted by Qasim (2015), Gambo (2016), Yrd and Kurtulmuş (2017), and VS and Fazil (2023). Nevertheless, the results of this study differ from those presented by Hong and Jun (2006), Archana and Subha (2012), Al-Refaie *et al.* (2014), Qasim (2015), Gambo (2016), Besides *et al.* (2017), Yrd and Kurtulmuş (2017), Phuyal and Joshi (2018), Rijal (2018), Ban and Kim (2019), AlShammeri *et al.* (2021), and VS and Fazil (2023), which emphasized factors such as in-flight entertainment, time management, seat comfort, food quality, baggage handling services, flight punctuality, and ease of booking as key contributors to customer satisfaction.

The attributes of Kuwait Airways (KU) customers, along with the changes implemented by KU, explain the differences noted in this study when compared to similar investigations. Unlike many international airlines that cater to a varied customer base, a predominant number of KU's passengers are Kuwaiti nationals. As a result, KU is expected to have an in-depth understanding of its customers' dining preferences. Furthermore, the high per capita income of Kuwaiti travelers enables them to carry devices such as smartphones, iPads, or laptops during their flights. These travelers are also inclined to pay for the internet services provided by KU on the majority of flights. Consequently, the range of entertainment options has a limited effect on customer satisfaction for KU. In addition, KU has upgraded its fleet in recent years and improved its services by offering online booking, along with the ability to extend and modify reservations. The airline also provides complimentary transportation for business and first-class passengers to and from their homes. Moreover, since a considerable number of Kuwaiti travelers are on leisure trips, flight punctuality does not significantly affect their satisfaction levels. Therefore, the results of this study differ from those of previous research.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the SERVQUAL dimensions frequently cited in previous research, specifically tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness, and to assess their influence on customer satisfaction with Kuwait Airways (KU). To achieve this goal, a structured questionnaire was randomly distributed to a diverse sample of Kuwait Airways customers, including both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti individuals, representing a variety of average monthly incomes and age groups. The respondents regularly utilize KU for different purposes and purchase tickets across economy, business, and first-class categories. Additionally, the sample included both married and single individuals with varied educational backgrounds. This diversity in participant characteristics enhances the credibility of the study's results.

Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that all SERVQUAL dimensions significantly influence their satisfaction levels, with the highest levels of agreement noted for assurance, tangibility, and responsiveness. This conclusion was further corroborated by stepwise regression analysis. The results indicated that the assurance dimension was of utmost importance to the respondents, particularly concerning the procedures required before boarding the aircraft. Passengers expressed a need for confidence in KU staff, highlighting the safety of their transactions, the consistent courtesy of employees, and their capability to effectively address inquiries. Emphasizing the assurance dimension is crucial for ensuring a smooth boarding experience for passengers. The second most important SERVQUAL dimension identified by respondents was tangibility, which emphasizes the quality of the aircraft and the amenities and services available onboard. Furthermore, participants highlighted the significance of the responsiveness dimension, which relates to the attentiveness of Kuwait Airways staff in addressing passenger requests both before and during the flight.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Customer satisfaction and service quality in Kuwait Airways

Dear Participant

It is my pleasure to present this questionnaire aimed at investigating "Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality in Kuwait Airways." I would like to assure you that all information you provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and only aggregated data will be utilized in any dissemination of research results.

Nationality

☐ Kuwaiti   ☐ Non- Kuwaiti

Gender

☐ Male   ☐ Female

Destination of travel

☐ GCC countries   ☐ Arab without GCC countries

☐ Western countries   ☐ Others

Age

☐ less than 25   ☐ 26 – 40   ☐ 41-55   ☐ More than 55 years old

Marital Status

☐ Single   ☐ Married

Last Academic Qualifications

☐ Less than High school☐ High school   ☐ Diploma

☐ Bachelor's degree   ☐ Masters   ☐ PhD

Purpose of travel

☐ business   ☐ holiday

☐ study   ☐ visit   ☐ others

Monthly Earnings

☐ less than 1,000 KD   ☐ from 1,000 to 2,000 KD

☐ from 2,001 to 3,000 KD   ☐ more than 3,000 KD

Frequent flyer with Kuwait Airways in the last year

☐ 1 time   ☐ 2 and 3 times

☐ from 4 to 7 times   ☐ More than 7 times

Type of ticket

☐ Economy   ☐ Business class☐ First class

			Please review the statements related to customer satisfaction and service quality provided below. Indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the corresponding box:: **1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Undecided, 4- agree, 5- Strongly Agree**					
				1		←——————→			**5**
		-	**SERVQUAL ITEMS**	**S. Disagree**			**S. Agree**		
Ta. ngi.		1-	New and modern aircraft and equipment	1	2	3	4	5	
		2-	Aircraft cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5	

	3-	Comfortable seats	1	2	3	4	5
	4-	Seats and aisles roominess	1	2	3	4	5
	5-	High quality catering service	1	2	3	4	5
	6-	Toilets cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
	7-	Interesting on-board entertainment	1	2	3	4	5
	8-	Attractive crew appearance	1	2	3	4	5
Empathy	1-	Passengers receive individual attention	1	2	3	4	5
	2-	Convenient ticketing process	1	2	3	4	5
	3-	Passengers complains handling	1	2	3	4	5
	4-	Extended travel services	1	2	3	4	5
	5-	Punctuality of the departures and arrivals	1	2	3	4	5
Assurance	1-	Employees instill confidence in passengers	1	2	3	4	5
	2-	customers feel safe in their transactions	1	2	3	4	5
	3-	Employees are consistently courteous	1	2	3	4	5
	4-	Employees have the knowledge to answer customer questions.	1	2	3	4	5
Responsiveness	1-	Keeping passengers informed about when services are performed	1	2	3	4	5
	2-	Prompt service to passengers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	3-	Willingness to help passengers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	4-	Readiness to respond to passengers' enquiries.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Reliability	1-	Providing services as promised	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	2-	Dependability in handling customers' services problems	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	3-	Performing services right the first time	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	4-	Providing services on time	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	5-	Maintaining error-free records.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Satisfaction	1-	I am satisfied with KU as a service provider	**1**	2-	**3**	**4**	**5**
	2-	I have improved my impression of KU	1	2	3	4	5
	3-	I have a more positive attitude towards KU	1	2	3	4	5
	4-	I say positive things about KU to other people	1	2	3	4	5
	5-	I recommend KU to someone who seeks my advice	1	2	3	4	5
	6-	I encourage my friends and relatives to fly with KU	1	2	3	4	5