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Behavioural patterns of airline passenger and their travel choice: The case of Sri Lanka

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To study the behavioural patterns of passengers travelling from Sri Lanka, a cross section of 358 passengers flying to eight different destinations on all the serving airlines were interviewed at the Bandaranaike International airport departure lounge with a structured questionnaire. The study focused on four dimensions of variables: socio economic and demographic characteristics of passengers [*gender, age, income, occupation*]; passengers perceived importance of airline service attributes [*price, frequency, reliability, safety, in-flight services, reservation, baggage, image, loyalty programmes*]; trip related characteristics [*destination, trip purpose, travel companions*] and other situational variables [*travel agents influence, travellers past experience and availability of the airline at the time of booking*]. Collected information was analyzed using statistical methods.

Male travellers travelling for employment accounts for the majority of the passengers on Middle Eastern countries' flag carriers. South Asians except Sri Lankan citizens choose Sri Lankan airline as their preferred carrier while Sri Lankans choose Kuwait and Emirates over Sri Lankan airlines. Singapore airlines and Emirates carry higher number of student percentages within the airlines. Budget carriers and Kuwait airways carries a higher percentage of low income earners. Emirates carry the highest percentage of high income earners while carrying the third highest percentage of lowest income category as well. Sri Lankan airline is more popular among middle and higher income category passengers.

All the passengers perceive price as the most important factor in selecting an airline. Flight frequency and convenient availability is perceived to be other important factors. Loyalty programmes and their attractiveness, baggage handling and allowances, reservation related services are not perceived very important by the passengers. Reliability, safety, in-flight services are perceived averagely important. Significant relationship exist between passengers demographic factors and perceived importance of airline attributes.

It is also found that the Sri Lankan airlines carries the highest number of leisure travellers, while Qatar, Kuwait and Emirates carry the highest number of employment travellers. Singapore and Emirates are the preferred airline of Business Travellers. Passengers travelling with family/spouse/children prefer to select Sri Lankan Airlines and Qatar Airways. More than 50 % of the passengers make their reservations through travel agents. Evidence is present for the increasing popularity of online reservation, coming the second highest purchase method of travellers.

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