

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) discussion of the results, (4) conclusions, and (5) recommendations for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This study set out to ascertain the overall satisfaction of Thai members in Bangkok with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP), to locate the factors related to the degree of satisfaction, and to examine some of the problems and obstacles that the members may face when using the service of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP).

To measure the degree of satisfaction of Thai members in Bangkok with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP), 400 questionnaires were distributed to Thai members. All of the questionnaires were returned by 400 respondents from December 2007 to early January 2008.

The questionnaire consisted of three main parts. The first part was to find out general information from the respondents i.e. gender, age, educational background, occupation, income per month, membership status, year of attaining membership, and types of redemption. The second part was designed to measure the degree of satisfaction of Thai members with the benefits and awards and the service provided for the use of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). The third part involved open-ended questions to find out the opinions and suggestions from Thai members.

The 400-sample size was used for analysis by SPSS program Version 15. To analyze the results, the findings were presented in frequency distribution, percentage, and other relevant descriptive statistics.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

The results obtained show that the majority of the members were male. Most of them were in the age group of 41-50 years old. Furthermore, the majority of interviewees had a bachelor's degree and was engaged in government service. Regarding average monthly income, the findings revealed that most of them earned 20,001-40,000 Baht per month. In addition, about 78.5% of the members earned silver status with more than 4 years membership and most of them had never redeemed any rewards.

5.2.2 Satisfaction of Members with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP)

The results of the survey show that the members had a degree of overall satisfaction with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). Members were more satisfied with benefits and awards than service of the use of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP).

In terms of the benefits and awards, the results reveal that the members were rather satisfied with the eligibility to redeem awards tickets for up to five family members and friends award (on an award nominee list), followed by earning 2,500 miles when flying on their first flight with Thai after enrollment. However, they were dissatisfied with expired miles that must be redeemed by a stipulated date each year or miles that were deleted from member accounts.

Additionally, regarding the service provided for the use of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP), the members' overall satisfaction with the service was 'neutral'. The ROP service members were rather satisfied were the eligibility of earning miles with all partner airlines and Star Alliance Airlines, followed by the priority for seat reservations, checking in and boarding at the airport including the priority through online i check in. However, the members were rather dissatisfied with the requirement of mileage claims that the original boarding pass and the copy of ticket or e-ticket must be submitted to local Thai office or the Members service center in Bangkok.

5.2.3 Opinion and Suggestion

Most of the ROP members (88 persons) who answered the questionnaire in the third part stated they have faced the problem that ROP telephone line was frequently engaged, followed by the inconvenience caused when reclaiming mileage that the original boarding pass and copy of ticket are required.

Regarding the members (36 persons) who gave the advice for service improvement, most of them suggested that it should require only an air ticket or a copy of a ticket or boarding pass for reclaiming mileage because other information can be verified through the TG system. Other suggestions are that accumulated mileage should not be expired or should be expired after 5 years and special check-in counters for silver membership should be provided.

5.3 DISCUSSION

The study was carried out to examine the overall satisfaction of Thai members in Bangkok with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). There are several concepts, findings, and limitation to discuss.

The first area to examine is how the concept of customer satisfaction is related to the study. The concept of customer satisfaction is used to illustrate why customer satisfaction is an important indicator to the performance of the organization. According to Lui (2000), Kotler (1994), and Bitner and Hubbert (1994), customer satisfaction is the overall feeling that results from a customer experiencing and comparing the outcome of the performance of the product or service to their first expectation. It is also defined as the scale to capture the customers' overall feeling towards the organization. To measure customer satisfaction is the means to obtain the customer evaluation towards the organization's performance as observed by Marr and Crosby (1993). Thus, in this study, members' degree of satisfaction was measured to define the outcome of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) in terms of the benefits and awards as well as the service provided to members. The results obtained from the study indicate that the members were satisfied with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) in overall aspects. However, there were some minor aspects that Thai Airways could improve to deliver more advantages to customer satisfaction as it is a key to build and maintain the long-term relationship between customers and the company, as well as customer loyalty.

Concerning the overall satisfaction of the members with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP), the results of the study reveal that the respondents were satisfied with the program (mean = 3.45). This finding is consistent with the previous study conducted by Prapatpong Thitisurawat (ประภักทรพงศ์ ฐิติสุรวัดน์, 2542). The findings of his study showed that most respondents chose Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) as the first choice among 4 types of the service of sales promotion campaign.

In terms of benefits and awards, most of the members were satisfied with the eligibility to redeem awards for family members and friends with up to 5 names on their award nominee list. This result is consistent with the finding of the research conducted by Phornsany Thipburee (พรเสนทร์ ทิพย์บุรี, 2545). Additionally, the result corresponds with the concept of consumer's buying behavior stated by Kotler (1994) that one major factor influencing consumer's buying behavior was family. As the family members form the most influential reference group, the opportunity to grant the family members those benefits and awards may encourage the members to be satisfied with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) and continue flying with Thai Airways.

The other two elements that correspond to the previous research conducted by Phornsany Thipburee (พรเสนทร์ ทิพย์บุรี, 2545) are as follows. Firstly, satisfaction with benefit and awards, the members were dissatisfied with the expired miles that must be redeemed by stipulated date each year or deleted from accounts. Secondly, in terms of the service provided for the use of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP), most of the members were satisfied that they were able to earn accumulated miles with all partner airlines and Star Alliance Airlines.

However, there are some slightly differences from the previous studies. Firstly, the result reveals that in term of overall satisfaction with the service provided for the use of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP), the members felt indifferent. This is in contrast with the results of the study conducted by Phornsany Thipburee (พรเสนทร์ ทิพย์บุรี, 2545) which showed that members felt satisfied with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). One reason for the lesser degree of satisfaction may be the higher competitiveness in the airline industry since Phornsany Thipburee's 2002 study. As each airline has its own Frequent Flyer Program to engender customer loyalty, it is important to

maximize customer satisfaction to be ahead of its rivals in a competitive market. This is particularly the case in the airline industry where service is a critical factor for customers when choosing an airline. From the customer's perspective, it is common to compare Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) with Frequent Flyer Programs launched by other airlines. Some of the members may find that other airlines provided a more attractive service than ROP.

Secondly, the aspect that most of the members were dissatisfied revealed in the study is the requirement for the processing of mileage claims. This includes the requirement that the original boarding pass and ticket or e-ticket copy be submitted to local Thai office or the Member Service Center in Bangkok to collect points. These findings differ from research conducted by Phornsany Thipburee (พรสนันท์ ทิพย์บุรี, 2545) that the degree of satisfaction of this element was in the third rank from the lowest degree of least satisfaction. The members' dissatisfaction in this factor was also raised in the part of the opinion from the members in problems and obstacles occurring when using the service of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). Some members suggested that the information of passengers boarding should be checked through the Thai Airways system. One reason that may support the members' dissatisfaction with this factor is the use of e-tickets which are based on the concept of paperless ticketing. E-ticket passengers can check-in by presenting only ROP member card or identification card or passport. Paper tickets are now not required as all information about the passengers and their flight schedule are in the online system. So it would offer more convenience to members when reclaiming mile that the information needed is all stored in the online system.

The differences in results could be explained by the concept of customer satisfaction stated by Liu (2000), Kotler (1994), Bitner and Hubbert (1994), Anderson and Fornell (1994), Leu (2000), and Dovdon (2000). All of them agreed on the same concept that satisfaction is the feeling a person perceiving from using product or service comparing with his or her expectation or previous experience. Thus, it is possible that members from different group, with different prior experience and expectation have different degrees of satisfaction.

As a final part, some important limitations need to be considered.

Firstly, the sample size of the study involved 400 respondents. As a numbers of Royal Orchid Plus Members in Bangkok is approximately 400,000, only 400 respondents may not be enough to indicate the exact consumer preference outcomes.

Secondly, answers from the respondents may contain some bias. As the study was conducted among only Thai members in Bangkok, it is possible that Thai people may have high expectations of Thai Airways as Thai is considered as the national carrier. The expectations could be both positive and negative. The members may want to maintain the good image of national carrier, so they didn't want to say anything negative about the airline. On the other hand, the members who were strongly demanding from their national carrier may file many complaints even though those factors could be generally accepted.

Lastly, the degree of satisfaction can significantly depend upon the emotional condition of the respondents when participating the survey. When people were in a good mood, they were more likely to view everything in the positive way. On the other hand, every aspect was taken negatively, if they were upset or exhausted. Therefore, the mood of the respondents may affect the outcome of the survey.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study are discussed in the following sessions:

5.4.1 The Degree of Satisfaction of Thai Members

Overall, Thai members were found to be satisfied with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). There were two main factors used to measure the degree of satisfaction.

Benefit and awards factors	Satisfied
The service for the use of ROP factors	Neutral

Regarding benefits and awards, the members were most satisfied with the eligibility to redeem awards for up to five family members and friends. They were also satisfied with the eligibility of earning miles with all partner airlines and

Star Alliance Airlines in the part of the service provided for the use of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). However, the result showed that the members felt neutral with 11 elements of the service provided by Royal Orchid Plus (ROP). Moreover, they were dissatisfied with the requirement for mileage claims that the original boarding pass and ticket or e-ticket copy are required to submit to Thai Airways local office or the Member Service Center in Bangkok.

5.4.2 Some of the Problems and Obstacles Occurring When Using the Service of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) and Suggestions

The problem stated in the first rank was that ROP telephone line was always engaged. The inconvenience with mileage claim process that the original boarding pass and the copy of ticket are required was also raised in the second rank in the part of the opinion from the members. It is consistent with the suggestion by the members interviewed that other information required in the mileage claim process should be able to be obtained and checked through Thai Airways online system.

The following are recommendations for further research.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for future research.

5.5.1 This study focused only on Thai members. As Thai Airways has customers worldwide, it is worth studying if customers overseas have a different levels of satisfaction with Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) in different locations.

5.5.2 Commercial airlines now operate in a highly competitive market. Each airline tries to differentiate itself in order to attract the customer. Frequent Flyer Programs are used as one of the marketing strategies to maintain customer loyalty. Therefore, studying the different degrees of members' satisfaction with different Frequent Flyer Program among airlines would be helpful in identifying some of the significant points to improve Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) in terms of the program itself and also the service.

5.5.3 One of the objectives of Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) is to engender customer loyalty. However, there are other factors that draw the customer to keep flying frequently with a particular airline such as customer service or value for money. Thus, it should be studied if the Royal Orchid Plus (ROP) alone can be the reason for customer to choose flying with Thai.