Decoding the Airport Experience: A Multi-Dimensional Assessment of Airport Service Quality Through Passenger Reviews

Havalimanı Deneyiminin Çözümlenmesi: Yolcu Geri Bildirimlerine Dayalı Olarak Havalimanı Hizmet Kalitesinin Çok Boyutlu Olarak Değerlendirilmesi

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to identify the main factors behind passenger dissatisfaction at Türkiye's five busiest airports, despite their modern infrastructure. By analyzing traveler complaints, it explores which service quality dimensions most affect perceptions of airports and destinations. **Material and Method:** This study employed a qualitative approach using content analysis. Consumer reviews posted between January 2023 and July 2025 were collected from airlinequality.com. A total of 436 complaints were analyzed and categorized based on airport service quality dimensions. **Findings:** Service-related issues, especially high prices for food and amenities, were the most frequent complaints. Many passengers also criticized the airport staff. Common issues included lack of courtesy and unhelpfulness. Finally, layout problems, particularly the vast size of Istanbul Airport, contributed to negative experiences. **Conclusion:** The findings demonstrate that both tangible factors (e.g., terminal layout, amenities) and intangible factors (e.g., staff attitudes, communication) significantly impact perceived airport service quality. To enhance competitiveness and strengthen destination branding, airport managers should prioritize improvements in wayfinding clarity, staff training, and the availability of affordable, comfortable facilities. Addressing these areas proactively can foster greater passenger satisfaction.

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışma, modern altyapılarına rağmen Türkiye'nin en yoğun beş havalimanında yolcu memnuniyetsizliğine yol açan başlıca faktörleri belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yolcu şikayetlerini analiz ederek, hizmet kalitesi boyutlarının havalimanı ve destinasyon algısını nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. **Gereç ve Yöntem:** Bu çalışmada, içerik analizi kullanılan nitel bir araştırma yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Ocak 2023 ile Temmuz 2025 tarihleri arasında airlinequality.com platformunda yayımlanan yolcu yorumları toplanmıştır. Toplam 436 şikâyet, havalimanı hizmet kalitesi boyutlarına göre analiz edilmiş ve kategorilere ayrılmıştır. **Bulgular:** Hizmetle ilgili sorunlar, özellikle yiyecek ve diğer imkanların yüksek fiyatları en sık dile getirilen şikayetler olmuştur. Birçok yolcu havalimanı personelini de eleştirmiştir. Yaygın şikayetler arasında nezaket eksikliği ve yardımcı olmama yer almaktadır. Son olarak, özellikle İstanbul Havalimanı'nın geniş alanı ve uzun yürüme mesafeleri düzenle ilgili olumsuz deneyimlere neden olmuştur. **Sonuç:** Bulgular, hem somut faktörlerin (ör. terminal düzeni, imkanlar) hem de soyut faktörlerin (ör. personel tutumları, iletişim) algılanan hizmet kalitesini önemli ölçüde etkilediğini göstermektedir. Rekabet gücünü artırmak ve destinasyon imajını güçlendirmek için yöneticilerin yönlendirme işaretlerini, personel eğitimini ve uygun fiyatlı, konforlu imkanların sunulmasını önceliklendirmesi önerilmektedir. Bu alanlarda proaktif iyileştirmeler yapılması yolcu memnuniyetini artıracaktır.

Ethics committee statement: Since this study is not a study that requires scientific research and publication ethics permission, ethics committee approval was not obtained.

1. Introduction

Airports are the first and last experience travelers have with a destination. Beyond their primary function as hubs for air travel, airports also act as significant economic engines, producing revenue streams from passenger activity and airline operations that benefit the local or national economy. Airports, irrespective of whether they are publicly or privately owned, have widely implemented a business-oriented operational model (Graham, 2018). This model demonstrates the critical role of both airlines and travelers as key contributors to non-aeronautical income and profitability. Since airlines can strategically select hubs that align with their network plans and are perceived as welcoming to passengers, travelers' experiences and perceptions—whether favorable or unfavorable—play a pivotal role in maintaining the airport's financial viability (Bunchongchit & Wattanacharoensil, 2021).

Given this context, the accelerating growth of the civil aviation industry and the rising number of passengers have further amplified these dynamics. As a result, airports have evolved into businesses generating significant revenue through their diverse services (Gökdalay & Evren, 2009). Competition among airports has intensified alongside competition among airlines. To remain profitable and gain a competitive edge, airports must increasingly differentiate themselves by better meeting passenger needs.

While perceptions of service quality are only one factor influencing an airport's attractiveness—alongside routes, schedules, location, and pricing—they have become vital for competitiveness as customer satisfaction gains importance (Fodness & Murray, 2007). Therefore, understanding passengers' perceptions of service quality and developing appropriate performance measures is essential.

Türkiye has emerged as a significant actor in global civil aviation over the past two decades. Its strategic geographical location at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa has enabled the country to develop into a major transit hub for both passenger and cargo traffic. This study focuses on Türkiye's five busiest airports in terms of passenger volume: Istanbul Airport, Sabiha Gökçen Airport, Antalya Airport, Ankara Esenboğa Airport, and İzmir Adnan Menderes Airport. These airports were selected because they handle the majority of the country's domestic and international passenger movements and serve as critical hubs connecting Türkiye to global and regional destinations.

In parallel with the growth of global air travel, the digitalization of consumer feedback has also accelerated. Travelers now routinely share their airport experiences through online platforms such as TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Skytrax, making these publicly accessible comments an increasingly valuable source of data. These reviews not only influence other travelers' choices but also provide airport managers with real-time insights into service gaps and operational shortcomings. From an academic perspective, analyzing user-generated content enables researchers to assess perceived service quality across large samples without the limitations of traditional surveys or interviews (Rita et al., 2022, Ali et al., 2021; Perezgonzales and Gilbey, 2011) In this study, consumer reviews posted on Skytrax, which is an independent and widely used platform for evaluating airport and airline services, serve as the primary data source, allowing for a rich, unsolicited, and naturally occurring expression of passenger experiences.

Despite their modern infrastructure, consumers frequently leave online complaints for various reasons. These recurring complaints suggest a potential gap between the airports' intended image as global benchmarks and the actual experiences of travelers. Therefore, this study aims to systematically analyze consumer reviews to better understand which airport service quality dimensions are most frequently associated with dissatisfaction. By identifying and categorizing these issues, the research seeks to generate actionable insights that can inform airport management strategies, improve passenger satisfaction, and strengthen the

competitive positioning of Türkiye's main airports in the international aviation market.

2. Literature

2.1. Airport Service Quality

Traditionally, the ownership and management of airport terminals have predominantly been under government control. However, growing demands for infrastructure expansion and investment have prompted a transition toward commercialization and privatization models. This shift has heightened the focus on operational excellence and meeting the expectations of various stakeholder groups (Oum et al., 2006).

Airports initially adopted marketing practices to expand or secure their relationships with airline clients. As passengers grew more discerning and their expectations increased, airports recognized that targeting end users through a pull strategy—emphasizing superior services and the promise of exceptional customer satisfaction—could also influence airlines' decisions about where to route their flights (Fodness & Murray, 2007). As a result, understanding the factors that shape passenger satisfaction has become increasingly important, leading to the emergence of the concept of the airport experience as a central focus and key business strategy for airports worldwide (Usman et al., 2022).

Service quality has been a widely researched topic since Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) introduced the SERVQUAL model. This framework is designed to help organizations identify and close the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions of delivered service, which ultimately defines perceived quality. Customer perceptions reflect their individual evaluations of the services they actually receive, while customer expectations represent their beliefs about how services should ideally be provided and serve as reference points for assessing performance. In evaluating services, customers compare their perceptions against these expectations. Through this process, they form judgments about both the quality of

the service and their overall satisfaction with the experience (Tsai et al., 2011).

The SERVQUAL framework has been widely adopted across various sectors, including restaurants, education, healthcare services, banking, and logistics, and has also been applied in airports (Kayapinar & Erginel, 2019). In the literature, various approaches have been proposed to assess how travelers perceive the quality of services provided at airports. Researchers have approached airport studies from different angles: some investigate passengers' expectations and experiences, others assess operational efficiency and productivity using various performance measurement methods, and still others focus on evaluating the overall quality of airport services.

Since airports operate in an intensely competitive environment where maximizing aircraft movements is a core objective, airport management has traditionally prioritized the assessment of operational efficiency. To this end, various methods—such as Total Factor Productivity and Data Envelopment Analysis—have been employed to evaluate performance by analyzing factors including delay statistics, runway capacity, local labor costs, and airlines' perceptions of reliability (Adler & Berechman, 2001). In addition, technical characteristics like the number of runways and gates, overall airport size, workforce size, flight frequency, cargo volumes, and passenger throughput have been utilized to gauge operational effectiveness (Pabedinskaite & Akstinaite, 2014). While these approaches are valuable in identifying areas for operational improvement, they offer limited insight into the quality of services provided to passengers, which can ultimately undermine long-term sustainability.

Similar to airlines, passengers are also regarded as primary customers of airports. The increasing importance of non-aeronautical revenues has further encouraged airports to embrace a service-oriented approach to better meet the expectations of these diverse customer groups. Consequently, understanding how customers perceive and evaluate service quality has become a critical aspect of effective airport

2025, 6(1)
ISSN: 2757-7279

Güncel Pazarlama Yaklaşımları ve Araştırmaları Dergisi
Journal of Current Marketing Approaches and Research
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management (Fernandes & Pacheco, 2010). This focus is especially significant because airports, airlines, and passengers are closely connected, and the satisfaction of one group often affects the strategies and outcomes for the others.

While airports aim to attract airlines by offering competitive infrastructure and pricing, they also rely on delivering high-quality services that influence passengers' choices of both airlines and airports. In turn, airlines assess not only operational costs and facilities but also the potential demand shaped by passengers' experiences and perceptions of airport services. Therefore, maintaining high levels of passenger satisfaction is essential, as it contributes to sustaining demand, strengthening airline partnerships, and enhancing the overall competitiveness of the airport (Pabedinskaite & Akstinaite, 2014).

Another reason airport management should seek insights into airport service quality from the passengers' perspective is that negative experiences can potentially influence travelers' willingness to visit the destination again in the future (Kirk et al., 2014), particularly since air travelers often associate airports with the destination itself. Airports not only represent the place but also reflect its positive attributes and are perceived as an integral component of the overall tourism experience (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2017). In this regard, Nghiêm-Phú and Suter (2018) note that travelers' cognitive impressions of airport service quality are mentally linked to the destination city, so a positive airport experience may motivate passengers to reuse the same airport when revisiting the destination. Similarly, Prentice and Kadan (2019) highlight that overall airport service quality is closely connected with both airport reuse intentions and destination revisit behaviors.

2.2. Airport Service Quality Dimensions

The approach that examines airport service quality from the passenger experience perspective views it as a multidimensional concept encompassing a broad range of traveler interactions and perceptions. The service quality

that passengers experience at airports can be assessed based on several factors, including the ease of accessing airport facilities and terminals (Omer & Khan, 1988), the overall physical setting, and the nature of interactions that take place within the airport environment. Since airport services consist of a complex chain of processes spanning from entry at the departure airport to exiting the arrival airport, scholars have adopted diverse approaches to identify and evaluate the factors influencing airport service quality.

A range of studies has sought to conceptualize and evaluate airport service quality from the passenger perspective, highlighting the multidimensional nature of this construct. Early efforts, such as the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) annual Airport Monitor reported by Childs and Adam–Smith (1997), compared long-haul passenger satisfaction across international airports by assessing 23 attributes, including staff courtesy, restrooms, and dining options, although the results were not publicly disclosed and no overall quality indices were produced. Building on this, Rhoades et al. (2000) developed a quality index incorporating twelve factors such as parking facilities, ground transportation, retail services, and baggage handling to provide a more structured assessment of passenger perceptions.

Subsequent research further refined the categorization of service attributes. Yeh and Kuo (2003) proposed six primary dimensions—comfort, processing time, convenience, staff courtesy, information clarity, and security—but noted that their reliance on varied performance measures often made the results challenging for managers to interpret and operationalize. Fodness and Murray (2007) extended this understanding by demonstrating that passengers' expectations are inherently multidimensional, encompassing servicescape (function), service personnel (interaction), and services (diversion), with detailed subscales such as layout, ambient conditions, signage, staff behaviors and expertise, productivity, maintenance, and leisure amenities.

In a similar effort to integrate multiple perspectives, Tsai et al. (2011) introduced a multi-criteria evaluation model that combined passenger assessments of the physical environment and the quality of interactions and outcomes, informed by inputs from airline executives, frequent flyers, and reviews of both industry practice and academic literature. Liou et al. (2011) identified key dimensions of airport service quality, including convenience, environmental comfort, immigration, customs and quarantine procedures, transportation connections, staff courtesy, clarity of information, security, and check-in processes, as well as pricing in shops and restaurants. Complementing these approaches, Pantouvakis and Renzi (2016) offered a general classification, highlighting servicescape and image, signage, and services as some of the most salient descriptors of airport service quality. Another study conducted by Bezerra and Gomes (2016) proposed a six-factor framework capturing essential operational processes like check-in and security screening, the quality of passenger interactions within the terminal, the provision of leisure and convenience facilities, and the overall airport servicescape. In their attempt to determine the airline service quality dimension, Jiang and Zhang (2016) applied importance-performance analysis to clustering services into three main categories: core airport operations; comfort, convenience, and leisure-related services; and provisions supporting business travelers and families with children.

3. Method

In this research, consumer feedback was sourced from www.airlinequality.com, a platform maintained by Skytrax. Established in 1989, Skytrax is an internationally recognized organization that specializes in evaluating airlines and airports. The site has frequently served as a data source in prior studies (Perezgonzales & Gilbey, 2011; Morcote Santos & Tutkun, 2025). Importantly, Skytrax operates independently and does not maintain financial affiliations with any airlines or airports, which supports the objectivity of its reviews. To avoid the impact of extraordinary circumstances

beyond the control of service providers during the pandemic, this study exclusively includes customer reviews posted from 2023 onward. This timeframe was selected because the pandemic was officially declared over in 2023 (World Health Organization, 2023), reducing the likelihood that pandemic-related disruptions would distort the analysis.

Data covering January 2023 to July 2025 was retrieved using web scraping techniques implemented in Python 3.13.5. A total of 195 consumer reviews were initially collected. However, reviews that were positive, lacked specific problem description, or referred to airlines rather than the airport were excluded from the analysis, resulting in a final dataset of 187 reviews. Once the data was retrieved, the initial phase focused on categorizing and coding each feedback entry according to the relevant airport service quality dimension. This classification process was systematically applied to all consumer reviews recorded between January 2023 and July 2025 for Istanbul Airport (IST), Sabiha Gökçen Airport (SAW), Antalya Airport (AYT), Ankara Esenboğa Airport (ESB), and Izmir Adnan Menderes Airport (ADB). These airports were selected because they ranked among the top five in Türkiye in terms of passenger traffic in 2025 (DHMİ, 2025). Once coding was finalized, to enhance the reliability of the coding process, the final coding framework was reviewed by two independent academic experts in the field to confirm the clarity and relevance of the categories.

These dimensions have also been widely applied in various studies examining airport service quality in different contexts (e.g., Hong et al., 2020; Seetanah et al., 2020) supporting their validity and relevance as a robust framework for analyzing passenger perceptions (*see* Table 1). Unlike many earlier models that focus narrowly on either operational performance or passenger comfort, this framework encompasses a much broader spectrum of quality perceptions. Specifically, the model includes the servicescape—covering the airport's physical layout, ambient conditions, and signage—the role of service personnel, such as

employees' attitudes, behaviors, and expertise, and the quality of services, reflected in factors like productivity, maintenance, and leisure amenities. This holistic perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of the elements shaping perceived service quality within the airport environment, making it particularly well-suited for analyzing user-generated reviews. Moreover, the framework's clear categorization of dimensions facilitates consistent coding and interpretation, thereby enhancing both the reliability and the practical applicability of the research findings.

service quality dimensions. During the selected period, 195 consumer reviews were gathered in total, with the distribution as follows: 124 pertaining to *IST*, 34 to *AYT*, 33 to *SAW*, 3 to *ESB*, and 1 to *ADB*. The relatively low number of complaints for *ESB* and *ADB* may be attributed to several factors. First, these airports handle significantly fewer passengers compared to *IST*, which may naturally lead to fewer reported issues. Second, differences in digital engagement or review posting tendencies among their passengers may also contribute to the limited number of online complaints.

4. Findings

The five airports were analyzed according to the frequency of complaints within the airport Table 1.

Airport Service Quality Dimensions and Consumer Complaints

Airport Service Quality Dimension	Sub Dimension	Reasons of Complaint
Servicescape	Layout	• Walking distance inside terminal • Layout of the airport
	Ambient conditions	• Temperature, noise level, lighting, air quality • General comfort of the environment
	Sign and Symbols	• Visibility and clarity of directional signage • Information displays • Symbols guiding passenger flows
Service Personnel	Attitude and Behaviors	• Courtesy • Helpfulness
	Expertise	• Competency of the staff • Ability to solve problems
Service	Productivity	• Efficiency of processes like check-in, security, and baggage handling • Speed of service delivery
	Maintenance	• Cleanliness and upkeep of facilities • Operational reliability
	Leisure	• Availability of restaurants, shops, relaxation areas • Entertainment or ways to pass time comfortably

Following the screening process, the resulting dataset included:

- 118 consumer feedback entries for *IST* were included after excluding 6 reviews.
- 34 consumer feedback entries for *AYT* were included
- 32 consumer feedback entries for *SAW* were included
- 3 consumer feedback entries for *ESB* were included

Altogether, 187 passenger reviews were evaluated to explore the dimensions of service

quality among all airlines. Importantly, the volume of reported complaints was more than double this number because many dissatisfied travelers described several issues in a single review and provided extensive details about their experiences. The majority of the reviews focused on *IST*, as it is the country's largest and most prominent aviation hub. Additionally, serving as Türkiye's main international gateway, it handles a higher volume of flights and connects to a wider range of destinations compared to other airports in the country.

Table 2.

Consumer reviews and complaints

	IST	AYT	SAW	ESB	Total
Number of feedback	118	34	32	3	187
Number of complaints	284	72	76	4	436

A key part of the analysis centered on categorizing consumer complaints using the airline service quality dimensions to identify which areas were most affected by negative feedback. For this purpose, the model from Fodness and Murray (2007) served as the primary reference framework.

Table 3 presents the distribution of passenger complaints across the service quality dimensions categorized by airport. The analysis encompasses a total of 436 complaints collected from consumer reviews of Istanbul Airport (*IST*), Sabiha Gökçen Airport (*SAW*), Antalya Airport (*AYT*), and Ankara Esenboğa Airport (*ESB*).

In the case of Istanbul Airport, the layout subdimension emerged as a significant source of dissatisfaction among travelers. A substantial number of complaints focused on the sheer scale of the terminal, with passengers emphasizing that the airport's vast size made it difficult to navigate efficiently, particularly when transferring between distant gates for connecting flights. This recurrent concern highlights how spatial configuration and excessive walking distances can undermine perceived convenience and increase stress during transit. Beyond issues of scale, a smaller segment of travelers criticized specific elements of the internal layout, such as the impractical

juxtaposition of the children's play area adjacent to the designated nap zone—an arrangement perceived as disruptive for those seeking rest.

With regard to ambient conditions, several respondents reported that air conditioning systems were either not functioning adequately or were poorly regulated in relation to external weather conditions, leading to discomfort within the terminal. Additionally, isolated complaints cited insufficient lighting in the passport control area, suggesting potential gaps in environmental design that could compromise both functionality and security perception. Noise also emerged as a localized concern; one passenger recommended increased use of carpeting to mitigate the disruptive sounds generated by rolling luggage.

Finally, in relation to wayfinding, travelers frequently noted challenges in interpreting airport signage, which contributed to confusion and further exacerbated the difficulties of navigating the expansive facility. Collectively, these findings underscore that while Istanbul Airport's modern infrastructure is often positioned as a point of national pride, the servicescape dimension—particularly the interaction between scale, spatial organization, and environmental conditions—plays a pivotal role in shaping negative passenger experiences.

Table 3.

Passenger complaints categorized by airports

		IST	SAW	AYT	ESB	Total
Servicescape						**67**
	Layout	40	3		1	44
	Ambient	4	2	4		10
	Wayfinding	12	1			13
Service Personnel						**113**
	Behaviors & Attitudes	48	15	15	1	79
	Expertise	20	8	5	1	34
Services						**256**
	Productivity	21	10	7	1	39
	Maintenance	32	15	17		64
	Leisure	107	22	24		153
Total		284	76	72	4	**436**

2025, 6(1)
ISSN: 2757-7279

Güncel Pazarlama Yaklaşımları ve Araştırmaları Dergisi
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In Sabiha Gökçen Airport and Antalya Airport, layout-related complaints were fewer but still centered on the challenge of navigating crowded spaces. Signage and wayfinding were also perceived as inadequate, though less frequently than at IST.

At Ankara Esenboğa Airport the volume of complaints concerning servicescape was limited, reflecting the relatively smaller terminal sizes and simpler layouts. However, isolated mentions of unclear signage and occasional maintenance issues were noted. Below are several examples that illustrate the subcategories discussed above:

"Distances between gates may be really long and tiring…"

"The climate inside the terminal is like a sauna…"

"The transit was not easy where the signs were confusing and too complicated…"

Across all five airports examined, the service personnel dimension emerged as a prominent source of dissatisfaction among travelers, though the nature and intensity of complaints varied by location. In particular, behavior and attitudes were frequently cited, with passengers describing staff interactions as lacking courtesy, empathy, and a helpful approach. This theme appeared consistently in reviews of Istanbul Airport, Sabiha Gökçen Airport, and Antalya Airport, where travelers reported feeling unwelcome or confronted with an uncooperative demeanor, especially at security checkpoints, passport control areas, and customer service counters.

The expertise subdimension also generated criticism, most commonly related to the limited English-language proficiency of staff, which many international passengers perceived as a barrier to clear communication and effective assistance. This issue was most frequently reported at Istanbul Airport but was noted to a lesser extent in feedback about Antalya and Sabiha Gökçen Airports. Additionally, in several cases across airports, passengers observed that personnel appeared inadequately trained or lacked up-to-date procedural information.

Collectively, these challenges in staff professionalism and communication skills were seen as significant impediments to a consistent and supportive passenger experience. Below are several examples that illustrate the subcategories discussed above:

"There was no coordination from ground crew for transit passengers and once you reached the gate, the ground staff are not trained about good customer service, non empathetic to customers and rude…"

"The staff are rude and arrogant, they only speak Turkish and when we ask to speak to them in English, they tell us you're in Turkey, they only speak Turkish…"

"Check-in staff wanted to know if Australians needed a visa to enter the UK. You think they would know…"

Across all airports studied, the services dimension emerged as a central driver of traveler dissatisfaction, with consistent themes appearing across the productivity, maintenance, and leisure subdimensions. In terms of productivity, passengers most frequently complained about excessively long queues at security screening and passport control, often attributing delays to insufficient staffing levels during peak travel periods. This combination of inadequate staffing and inefficient processing contributed to a perception of operational disorganization and heightened travel stress, particularly at Istanbul Airport and Antalya Airport, which serve large volumes of international passengers.

The maintenance subdimension generated widespread criticism related to both hygiene standards and basic amenities. Passengers commonly reported unclean terminal areas and restrooms, as well as a lack of available seating in departure halls, forcing travelers to stand or sit on the floor. Additionally, the limited number of accessible toilets and the absence of free drinking water fountains were highlighted as factors that undermined comfort and convenience.

Finally, within the leisure subdimension, travelers frequently expressed frustration over the high prices charged by restaurants and cafes, describing them as prohibitive and inconsistent with a positive travel experience. This perception was particularly prominent in reviews of Istanbul Airport and Sabiha Gökçen Airport, where dining and retail costs were seen as discouraging passengers from spending leisure time comfortably. The restricted free Wi-Fi—typically limited to one hour—was also a recurrent theme across airports, as many travelers regarded it as an unnecessary inconvenience in facilities otherwise promoted as modern and passenger-focused. Taken together, these shortcomings in service productivity, maintenance, and leisure amenities highlight a clear gap between passenger expectations and the actual airport experience. Below are several examples that illustrate the subcategories discussed above:

"While I was waiting on the queue of the security check they closed 50% - with hundreds of passengers in the queue."

"Queuing all the time, arrival to gate took more than 80 minutes."

"The only airport that I have ever seen you have to pay for internet, ridiculous, and disappointing."

"The number of toilets for such a busy airport is ridiculously low and more importantly very very dirty!"

"The food and beverages are incredibly expensive not just have Turkish standards but anywhere internationally."

"There is literally no seating to be found, the only seats being in Cafes and Restaurants which charge eye watering prices for basic items."

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The analysis of passenger reviews across Türkiye's five busiest airports revealed that service quality concerns were widely shared, though their prominence varied in scope and intensity across facilities. Servicescape-related issues emerged as the most recurrent theme, particularly in Istanbul Airport, where passengers frequently criticized the airport's vast layout, difficulty navigating long distances, and insufficient wayfinding signage. Complaints about uncomfortable ambient conditions, including inadequate air conditioning and occasional noise disturbances, were also highlighted. While these issues were especially pronounced in Istanbul due to its size and complexity, similar albeit less frequent concerns were reported in other airports, particularly regarding signage.

Service personnel interactions were another critical area of dissatisfaction. Passengers across all airports often described staff as lacking courtesy or a helpful attitude, with complaints frequently pointing to an unwelcoming demeanor, indifference, or dismissive treatment. Additionally, limited English proficiency and lack of knowledge among employees undermined perceptions of professionalism, particularly in airports with significant volumes of international passengers, such as Istanbul and Antalya.

Regarding services, travelers consistently voiced frustration with long queues at security screening and passport control, citing both understaffing and inefficient procedures. Maintenance-related concerns—including insufficient seating capacity, lack of toilets and drinking water stations, and untidy common areas—further detracted from passengers' comfort during transit. The leisure sub-dimension similarly drew negative feedback, as passengers highlighted that the high cost of food and beverage options and restrictive Wi-Fi policies contributed to a sense of limited convenience.

Although the frequency and severity of complaints were higher in Istanbul Airport, reflecting the complexity and scale of operations, recurrent patterns of dissatisfaction were evident across all facilities. The findings collectively highlight the importance of addressing both tangible factors such as infrastructure and amenities and intangible factors such as staff engagement and clarity of communication to align airport service delivery with evolving traveler expectations and

reinforce positive perceptions of Türkiye's major air transport hubs.

The findings of this study emphasize that airport service quality is not only a determinant of immediate passenger satisfaction but also a strategic factor with longer-term repercussions for airport competitiveness and destination branding. Prior research consistently demonstrates that specific service dimensions such as clear signage, accessible facilities, and a comfortable ambienc play a decisive role in shaping travelers' perceptions and behavioral intentions (Brida et al., 2016). In particular, perceptions of the airport environment are closely intertwined with impressions of the destination itself, leading travelers to mentally associate the quality of the terminal experience with the attractiveness and professionalism of the host city (Prentice & Kadan, 2019)

In line with this, the passenger reviews examined in this study clearly show that travelers often project their dissatisfaction with airport services onto their broader perception of the destination itself. Many respondents explicitly stated that due to problems they have experienced they no longer intended to use Istanbul as a transit hub in the future, even if avoiding it meant incurring higher travel costs. Therefore, the patterns of dissatisfaction identified here such as layout, service attitudes and behaviors of the service personnel and restaurant prices warrant urgent attention from airport managers. Proactively addressing these shortcomings is likely to generate not only higher levels of passenger loyalty and positive word-of-mouth but also to enhance the airport's capacity to support tourism growth and regional economic development.

In an increasingly competitive aviation landscape, where travelers enjoy greater choice than before, cultivating an environment that aligns with evolving expectations is no longer optional but essential. By leveraging detailed insights from user-generated feedback and aligning improvements with the multidimensional drivers of perceived service quality, airport management can move beyond the operational efficiency to create experiences that are emotionally resonant and memorable. Investing in both the physical and human elements of the airport journey can yield long term dividends, not only in terms of improved traveler satisfaction and loyalty, but also in shaping a stronger destination brand and stimulating economic growth. By actively listening the voices of their travelers, airport managers have the opportunity to go beyond functionality and design experiences that leave lasting and positive impressions.

6. Limitations and Future Studies

While this study offers important insights into how travelers evaluate airport service quality, several limitations suggest avenues for future research. First, because the data were collected exclusively from consumer reviews on airlinequality.com, there is a risk of self-selection bias, as online platforms often attract individuals with particularly strong opinions. Future studies could address this by integrating large-scale passenger surveys or interviews to validate whether the same patterns of dissatisfaction emerge in more representative samples.

Additionally, this investigation focused only on Türkiye's five busiest airports over a specific period (2023–2025), potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other countries or time frames. To enhance external validity, future studies could conduct comparative analyses across different regions or track changes longitudinally to see how perceptions evolve in response to improvements or shifting traveler expectations.

While this study utilized traditional content analysis to examine passenger complaints, future research could benefit from integrating artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools, particularly in the domains of sentiment and emotion detection. These technologies offer enhanced capabilities for analyzing large volumes of unstructured textual data by identifying nuanced emotional cues and underlying sentiments beyond surface-level content. Incorporating AI-powered sentiment analysis could complement qualitative findings

by uncovering patterns in user emotions and helping researchers classify complaint intensity, urgency, or tone more systematically.

Finally, the analysis did not distinguish between traveler segments, such as business versus leisure passengers or domestic versus international travelers. Future research should consider segmenting passenger profiles to uncover how needs and satisfaction levels vary across customer groups, enabling airports to develop more targeted service improvement strategies.

7. Declatation of Research and Publication Ethics

Since this study does not qualify as research requiring scientific research and publication ethics approval, no ethics committee approval was obtained.

8. Authors' Contribution to the Article

Itır Ceren Morcote Santos prepared this work on his own.

9. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

This study is not subject to any conflict of interest.

10. Grand Support

No support was received from any institution for this study. The necessary expenses during the

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