Perception on E-CRM features for Airline Websites in Malaysia: Some Empirical Evidence

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Abstract: *Currently, customers increasingly choose the websites to search and purchase flight tickets. This paper attempts to investigate the website quality in terms of e-CRM features that support online transactions for the purchase of flight tickets in Malaysia. The focus is on the features that support pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase activities of online transaction. Using a survey questionnaire method, a total of 508 responses were collected among those who have experience using Malaysia airlines websites to purchase e-flight tickets. Based on descriptive analysis, the findings revealed that the respondents were generally satisfied with the airline e-ticketing services offered by the top five Malaysia airlines. Related to e-CRM features, it was found that most online buyers generally found the e-CRM features supporting the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase as useful. Specifically, they perceived the websites features supporting their purchase activity are most satisfactory, compared to those supporting pre-purchase and post-purchase. This study is among a few that provides empirical evidence on this issue which Malaysia-based airline companies may use to provide better online customer services in the future.*

Keywords: e-CRM, Airlines Industry, e-Ticketing, Service Quality, e-Trust, E-Satisfaction, E-Loyalty

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of Internet nowadays has brought great changes to how companies compete (Taylor and Hunter, 2002). Companies that do not take advantage of the Internet are viewed as not successful in term of delivering value added services to their customers. This new electronic technology also provides opportunity for companies to choose how they interact with their customers using Customer Relationship Management system (CRM). E-CRM solutions are increasingly applied on companies' websites as tools for interaction with customers as well as information provision.

The technology is having deep impact on service marketing especially the airlines industry. According to Heung (2007) and Ataur and Iftikhar (2008), flight e-ticketing has become popular nowadays as this is one of the methods that an airline company can reduce their cost while at the same time provide good service to customers. Cost reduction is achieved as there is no need for the traditional intermediary travel agent services. The customers,

on the other hand, enjoy the low fare, time saving and convenience provided by airline companies via online services. Additionally, the airlines industry is able to monitor their relationships with their customers by knowing the level of customers' satisfaction and loyalty based on the e-CRM systems (Will, 2009).

An airline e-ticket is used to represent the purchase of a seat on customer airline, usually through a website. An airline combines the issuance and delivery of the ticket into a single operation which is more practical and faster option compared to the conventional manual airline ticketing, effecting sizeable savings for both airlines and travel agent (Taylor and Hunter, 2002; Will, 2009).

In Malaysia, the percentage of Internet users in year 2013 is 67% as reported by the MCMC annual report. It has increased dramatically from 21.4% in year 2000 to 67%. This rise of Internet users has led to successful of internet usage from the use of e-tickets is also gaining popularity. The Internet technology is growing fast and become more

popular among Malaysian people and more services company especially in airlines industry believes in the significant value of Web-based transaction (e-transaction) and realizes the importance of doing business through Internet. The progress is also strongly supported by the Malaysian government as part of the national agenda in promoting Digital Malaysia.

Most of the airlines companies in Malaysia nowadays choose the website as a medium to communicate with their customers in order to increase business value (Will, 2009). Recently airlines companies in Malaysia allowed their customers to check-in online over website, kiosk, smart phone and also can choose their favourite seats (Sulaiman & Mohazer, 2008).

Despite the popularity of flight e-ticketing among Malaysian customers, very limited studies have been undertaken to gauge the perception of customers on the web features of the airline companies. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to present descriptive findings related to the perception of customers on Malaysian airlines e-ticketing system.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 e-CRM Transaction Features

The term e-CRM refers to Electronic Customer Relationship Management where the company create relationship with their customer via electronic channel especially the website. E-CRM is an improvement of the traditional CRM by using the Internet, web browser and other electronic touch points (Ab Hamid, 2008).

As Feinberg et al (2002); Khalifa and Shen (2005) cited in Iftikhar and Ataur (2008), the e-CRM transaction may be classified into three major stages, namely, pre-sales or pre-purchase, during sales or at-purchase, and post-sales or post-purchase. Ross (2005) named these features as marketing, sales and services. Without these transaction features, CRM could not be realised on the websites or the Internet (Khalifa & Shen, 2005).

2.1.1 Pre-purchase

According to Iftikar & Ataur, pre-purchase can be defined as one of the activities which include searching for the product information or how to purchase the product online. If the customer is not familiar doing online transaction, usually an e-mail address will be provided to make further communication between both the company and the customer. In addition, the company will attract new or existing customers by giving special discounts and promotion to their customers.

Usually, this method will be announced by displaying an advertisement on the website or customers can search the promotion offer by keying in the keyword in search when browsing the Internet (Khalifa & Shen, 2005). A total of five constructs has been chosen for this study which are web design, search capabilities, price, promotion and loyalty program. These constructs were adapted from past studies. The selected items of pre-purchase that were used for this study is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Pre-purchase items

Construct	Items	Source
Web design	• The website has an attractive appearance • The website always update the information • Has fast loading page	Alhoiu (2011), Liu et al. (2008), Barnes and Vidgen (2002), Fathwia (2012)
Search capabilities	• Easy to find • Has thing where can find • Information searching system is fast and convenient	Barnes and Vidgen (2002), Fathwia (2012), Alhoiu (2011),
Price	• Price display based on destination and time • Has multiple choice of price • I can choose my best price • The price is reasonable	Benjamin et al. (2013), Huang (2009)
Promotion	• Has promotions advertisement • Easy to make a budget • Enjoys best prices and offer • Regularly read the advertisement • Satisfied with the promotion activities.	Benjamin et al. (2013)
Loyalty program	• The websites offer attractive point redemptions for any purchase • Collect point for every purchase • Offer free flight ticket	Alhoiu (2011), Benjamin et al. (2013), Posselt and Gertsner (2005)

2.1.2 Purchase

The second stage in doing e-transaction is purchase transaction. During this stage, usually customers come out with the decision of buying product in order to complete the e-process. Anderson (2011) defined purchase as an activity of deciding whether want to purchase a product or not. In addition, Alhaiou *et. al* (2009; 2011) highlighted among the

important factor in this phase is security and privacy because this element will effect a customer's decision.

In this study, three constructs have been chosen which are e-booking, e-payment, privacy and security. These factors were also adapted from past studies and the selected items are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Purchase items

Construct	Items	Source
e-booking	• Ease of finding what is you looking for • Booking charges	Benjamin et al. (2013), Posselt and Gertsner (2005)
Payment methods	• Has various payment method • Offer convenient payment procedure • Important factor for re-purchase ticket • Satisfied with payment method • Satisfied with refund process	Alhoiu (2011), Benjamin et al. (2013), Fathwia (2012), Wang et al. (2001)
Privacy and Security	• Not share my info with other sites • Shows great concern for security in every transaction • I feel like my privacy is protected at this web • Has adequate security features • I feel safe in my transaction with this web	Parasuraman et al. (2005), Benjamin et al. (2013), Posselt and Gertsner (2005), Fathwia (2012),

2.1.3 Post-purchase

The last stage in order to complete e-transaction is post-purchase. In this phase, Ross (2005) highlighted that customer service plays an important role because a company will make an assessment on customers so that the company will know about the level of customer satisfaction with e-services. By using this approach, the company can improvise their services in order to make their customer satisfied.

Customer service also act as a communication platform between customers and the management side to answer the entire questions and to interact with customers especially when customer face problems and difficulties with e-transaction (Khalifa & Shen, 2005). In this study, based on past studies, three relevant constructs have been chosen, namely, manage my booking, check-in method and customer service. The selected items for Post-purchase variable is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Post-Purchase items

Construct	Items	Source
Manage my booking	• Use booking number to manage booking • I am pleased using manage my booking • It is easy to manage my booking	Benjamin et al. (2013), Fathwia (2012), Wang et al. (2001)
Check-in methods	• Has various check-in methods in website • Web check-in is very convenience • There is facility check-in via website in e-kiosk	Benjamin et al. (2013)
Customer service	• Responds to complaints' enquires quickly • Customer service always helps me when I got problem • Provides FAQs on web • Provides good after-sales • The websites can understand what I need via Interactive communications	Parasuraman et al. (2005), Benjamin et al. (2013), Posselt and Gertsner (2005), Fathwia (2012), Alhiou (2011)

2.2 E-Satisfaction

Oliver (1999) explained e-satisfaction as an element of delightful fulfilment using the Internet. Kim et al. (2003) added e-satisfaction is essential element and stepping stone for successful business in e-

commerce environment relationship between company and customer which is business to customer (B2C).

Based on Van et al (2014)'s study, it was proposed that online transaction may affect customer

satisfaction because it is involved with three main e-services in doing e-purchasing namely pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. Through these stages, customers can decide whether they are satisfied using companies' e-services or not. The selected items of e-satisfaction variable is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: E-Satisfaction items

Construct	Items	Source
e-satisfaction	• I am satisfied with overall service from electronic to manual ways • The websites always up-to-date • The services not meeting customer needs • I am satisfied dealing with airlines staff • Has a good business strategy to meet customer needs • I have a good relationship with the company • I am satisfied with my decision to purchase from this websites • My choice to purchase from this website was a wise one • I think I did the right thing to buying from this website	Parasuraman et al. (2005), Benjamin et al. (2013), Posselt and Gertsner (2005), Fathwia (2012), Alhiou (2011)

2.3 Flight E-tickets by Malaysia Airline Companies

The travel resource of Malaysia is already supporting a significant industry based on moving domestic and international tourists to and within Malaysia and serving their requirements at its main tourist destinations (Chang and Noor, 2011). To service the requirements of its domestic and international tourists, many airline websites' operations are established with permits to operate e-ticket and reservation for flight ticket services (Noor, 2008). The five established airline companies in Malaysia which has been selected for this study are AirAsia, MAS, FireFly, Malindo and MasWing. All these companies currently have implemented e-ticketing system on their websites as part of their company business strategy.

AirAsia Berhad was established in 2001 and is known as a low-cost airline company. AirAsia operates in more than 61 domestic and international destinations with a base in Malaysia and other hubs in Thailand and Indonesia (Cary & Wong, 2009). This company also become the first company that introduced e-ticketing system with unassigned seat to the customers (www.airasia.com/my, 2015).

MAS Berhad is another established airline company that has implemented e-ticketing services to customers. The company was operated in year of 1937 and owned by the Malaysia government. Currently it is connected to more than 850 routes in 150 countries across the world. MAS started to introduce flight e-ticketing system after it found AirAsia has implemented this method successfully (www.malaysiairlines.com, 2015).

The third company considered by this study is FireFly Berhad. This company was launched in 2007 as one of the subsidiaries under MAS Berhad. This company was based in Subang and Penang. Firefly Berhad provides connections to many routes in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The aim of this company is to bring community closer (www.fireflyz.com.my, 2015).

The fourth company is Malindo Air Berhad which started to operate in 2013 with the slogan "Not Just a Low Cost". Malindo Air was developed by NADI and PT Lion Group from Indonesia (www.malindoair.com, 2015) and represent the second low-cost airline in the country.

Finally, the last company is MASWings which also operates under MAS Berhad. This company was established in 2007 and provides routes within the two states in East Malaysia which is Sabah and Sarawak. MASWings has introduced the e-ticketing system after its parent company has successfully launched its e-ticketing system (www.maswings.com.my, 2015).

In conclusion, the top five airline companies in Malaysia provide e-ticketing services to customers. While purchasing e-ticket is one of the popular activities among online users in Malaysia, it is still not certain whether these customers are satisfied with flight e-ticketing services provided by the Malaysia airline companies. Specifically, it is important to know whether the e-CRM features available on the airline websites are useful to the customers. This study aimed to collect empirical evidence on this issue by using the methodology described in the following section.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative survey method is used for the study as it fits the purpose of the study very well. Both the conventional survey and online survey were used to

collect data. A convenience sampling method was used for this study. The respondents were those who have experience using any airline website to purchase flight ticket online. For the paper-based method, data was collected at various public places in the Klang Valley area, while for the online method, the questionnaire was sent to the respondents via e-mails.

The questionnaire consists of nine sections. The first section is about customer's demographic characteristic. The second section consists of 17 questions with regards to respondents' perceptions towards pre-purchase e-CRM features. The third section asked respondents to give rating towards purchase e-CRM features and the fourth section consists of questions with regards to respondents' perception towards post-purchase e-CRM features.

Refinement of the instrument was done via pretesting and pilot study. These methods were considered before proceeding with the actual main survey. The purpose of the pre-test and pilot study is to ensure that respondents understand the questions in the questionnaire. This would allow the researcher to amend the instrument before distributing for the main survey.

A total of 508 responses were used for the analysis after some cleaning up was done. The total number of responses were obtained from both the online survey and the offline survey.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Profile of Respondents

The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 5. There are five main characteristics of respondents that are considered in this study, namely, age, gender, nationality, education level and profession. Table 2 shows that about 74% of respondents are between 20 to 40 years of age, which implies that a majority of those buying flight tickets online are the young and middle-aged group. About 17% are above 40 years old while only 9% are below 20 years old. The minority group of those below 20 years old is expected as they usually will ask their parents to purchase their flight tickets since they do not have the purchasing power yet.

Related to gender, the result shows that slightly more female respondents than male buy airline tickets online. This finding is similar with the findings of Suthanita and Warithar (2009). Perhaps this reflects the fact that women have more time to go

online than men, as some women are not part of the workforce.

Table 5. Profile of Respondent.

Characteristic	Freq	Valid %
Age:		
< 20 years	49	9.6
20 to 30 years	183	35.9
31 to 40 years	192	37.6
> 40 years	86	16.9
Gender:		
Male	237	46.5
Female	273	53.5
Nationality:		
Malaysian:		
Malay	180	35.3
Indian	43	8.4
Chinese	57	11.2
Others	54	10.6
Non-Malaysian	176	34.5
Education level:		
Non-degree	94	18.5
Degree	174	34.3
Master	173	34.1
PhD	67	13.2
Profession:		
Managerial	139	27.3
Non-Managerial	173	33.9
Self-employment	42	8.2
Unemployment	156	30.6

This study considered the nationality of the respondents as customers of online airline tickets may be Malaysians or non-Malaysians. This characteristic is an important element for this survey because the researcher would like to get a variation in responses towards online transaction. This is similar to the approach taken by Alhiou (2009) and Kumaragu (2011).

The result shows that about 65% are Malaysians and another 35% are Non-Malaysians. Among the Malaysians, the largest proportion is Malay, followed by Chinese and other races.

The level of education is included in the questionnaire to find the background of the respondents in this respect. Past study by Nikhashemi et al (2012) found that not all respondents with higher education buy airline tickets online. Table 5 shows that a majority of airline e-ticket buyers are those having at least the first degree. This is not surprising as it is this group that normally would have the Internet skills and more knowledgeable about online transactions.

Finally, Table 6 indicate the category of employment of the respondents. According to Suthanita and

Warithar (2009), this characteristic was considered in order to get a different view from different level of career in online transaction and also technological usage. Interestingly, the categories of managerial, non-managerial and unemployed have about equal distribution of respondents. The unemployed group actually represents the students. This finding implies that the purchase of airline e-tickets appeals to a large segment of the population, regardless of their profession.

Table 6: Airline E-ticket experience

Characteristic	Freq	Valid %
Years of dealing:		
1. <1 year	67	13.1
2. 1 to 5 years	351	68.8
3. 6 to 15 years	87	17.1
4. >15 years	5	1.0
Frequency of use per year:		
1. One time	139	27.3
2. 2 to 5 times	295	58.0
3. 5 to 10 times	47	9.2
4. >10 times	27	5.3

Table 6 shows that about two-thirds of the respondents have experience between 1 to 5 years in dealing with airline e-ticketing system in Malaysia. Slightly more than half of the respondents use the airline e-ticketing system between two to five times in a year. Another 27% use only once a year and a small minority actually use the website between 5 to 10 times per year. Perhaps this group of respondents represents clerical staff who do bookings for their organisation or some heavy travellers.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

In this study, four main variables were examined, namely, pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase and e-satisfaction. The pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase are part of the Transaction Cycle related to the online transaction. The results of the descriptive statistics are presented and discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.2.1 Pre-purchase

In order to measure pre-purchase variable, 17 items has been tested based on five main construct which is web design, search capabilities, price, promotion and loyalty program. Table 3 shows the mean values for items related to the Pre-purchase variable, which is based on 7-point Likert scale.

Table 7 shows that the mean values for all the items are more than 5.0 except for one, that is, "I am

unhappy using loyalty program" which has 4.24 as the mean value. Since it is a negative statement, it implies that respondents are generally happy with the loyalty program of the airlines. As a whole, customers who participated in the study agreed that all web features of the airline websites related to pre-purchase activities are satisfactory.

Table 7: Mean Value for Pre-Purchase

Construct	Items	Mean
Website Design	Attractive design	6.24
	websites always update	6.29
	fast loading page	5.95
Search Capabilities	easy to search all flight schedules	6.08
	fast and convenience	6.02
	easy to search the tickets price	6.08
Price	clearly stated	6.11
	multiple choice of price available	6.09
	choose ticket price	5.99
Promotions	always show a promotion	6.03
	regularly read promotion advertisements	5.00
	satisfied with the promotional activities	5.77
	don't spend more money	5.85
Loyalty Program	I can collect point	6.30
	redeem free ticket	6.33
	unhappy using loyalty program	4.24
	I am happy enough with pre-purchase	6.17

4.2.2 Purchase

In measuring purchase E-CRM features, a total of 8 items have been used in this study. These items measure three constructs, namely, e-booking, payment method and privacy and security. Table 8 shows the mean value for each item.

Table 8: Mean Value for Purchase Features

Constructs	Items	Mean
e-Booking	can easily make a booking	6.51
	always display booking charges	6.22
Payment methods	Different payment methods	6.39
	offers convenient payment	6.32
	I accept the payment methods	6.32
Privacy and Security	never misuse my personal	6.14
	I am secure giving my personal	6.20
	I feel safe	6.34

Based on the results in Table 8, all the items have mean value of more than 6, which implies that respondents in the sample agreed that the e-CRM features on the website for flight e-ticketing systems in Malaysia are very satisfactory. The highest value is "I can easily make a booking for flight tickets through

website" which has the mean of 6.51. In summary, most respondents are satisfied with all the website features that support the purchase transaction cycle.

4.2.3 Post-purchase:

For this variable, 11 items were used in this study. Table 9 presents the results of mean value.

Table 9: Mean value for Post Purchase

Construct	Item	Mean
Manage my booking	use booking number to make any changes	6.53
	pleased using 'Manage my booking'	6.45
	It is easy to manage a booking	6.38
Check-in Method	Different check-in methods	6.22
	can choose to make online or manual	6.21
	web check-in is not convenient	2.92
Customer Service	quickly resolve problems	5.65
	quick to respond	5.73
	Good after-sales services.	5.90
	FAQs are very useful.	5.99
	happy with the post-purchase	6.23

Table 9 shows that all of the items have mean values of above 5.6 except the statement 'web check-in is not convenience' which is a negative statement. The fact that it has a very low mean value indicate that respondents agreed that web check-in is convenient. In conclusion, respondents in the sample perceived the web features that support post purchase activities related to airline e-ticket are satisfactory.

4.2.4 E-Satisfaction

While the previous section presents findings related to e-CRM features, it would be interesting to find out how respondents perceived their level of satisfaction related to airline e-ticketing systems in Malaysia. E-satisfaction variable is included in the study and Table 10 shows mean values for ten items used to measure this variable.

Based on results in Table 10, the average mean value for all the items is 6.16 on a Likert scale of 7. Therefore, it may be concluded that respondents are generally very satisfied with e-services offered by Malaysia airlines. It is interesting to note that most respondents feel glad that they are using the online flight ticketing system and they are very pleased with the airlines ticket services in Malaysia. The three items that received lowest mean values are related

to the company strategy, dealings with airline staff and response to customer calls. Perhaps the airline companies should give due attention to these issues.

Table 10: Mean Value for e-Satisfaction

Item	Mean
I feel glad when using the website to purchase flight ticket.	6.41
Based on my experience, I found that overall services and websites functions are very easy to use.	6.23
I have no problem using overall services.	6.18
I have no problem dealing with airlines staff regarding to ticket purchasing.	5.90
Airlines companies' corporate strategy gives importance to customers' needs.	5.92
Relationships with customers are given great value in airlines companies.	6.12
Airlines' customer service staffs responds when I call.	5.94
I am satisfied with my decision to purchase from this website.	6.24
I think I did the right thing to purchase from this website.	6.29
Overall, I am pleased with the airlines ticket services in Malaysia.	6.37
Average	6.16

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate customers' perception towards airline e-ticketing systems in Malaysia, focusing on e-CRM features and the level of satisfaction for e-services. The descriptive findings show that the respondents were generally very satisfied with the airline e-ticketing system offered by Malaysia airlines. The five airlines included in the study are AirAsia, Malaysia Airlines, FireFly, Malindo Air and MAS Wings. The results revealed that airline e-ticketing services are not new to customers in Malaysia as most of the respondents have purchased flight tickets online for the last 4 years.

Related to e-CRM features, the findings revealed that most buyers of flight e-tickets for Malaysia airlines are generally satisfied with pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase features of the websites. Overall, they found the websites features supporting their purchase activity are most satisfactory, compared to those supporting pre-purchase and post-purchase. During the actual purchase, e-booking features are perceived as very useful by e-ticket buyers. Additionally, customers like the fact that Malaysia airlines offer them options for making payments for the e-tickets. Most importantly, they also perceived the airline

companies as trustworthy when dealing with their personal information.

For the pre-purchase, customers found the airline websites are well-designed with fast-loading pages and frequently updated information. They are happy with the search capabilities, provision of ticket price information and information related to the loyalty programs provided by each airline company. As far as promotional information, customers perceived the airlines provide those information very well, however, that does not mean that they will take up the promotional offer.

Related to the post purchase stage of the transaction cycle, customers found 'Manage My Booking' and 'Çheck-in Methods' as very useful features on the websites. In particular, customers like the feature that enable them making changes to their booking online, as well as the availability of options for check-in the flights. Customer services, however, were perceived as less satisfactory for the post purchase cycle.

In conclusions, the findings of this study offered some empirical evidence on the perception of customers towards the Malaysia airline e-tickets system and website quality. While buying flight e-tickets are not new to Malaysians and tourists, the collection of empirical evidence related to web features and level of e-satisfaction is scarce. Despite some limitations such as, providing only descriptive analysis, the findings of the study contributes towards providing better understanding on the quality of e-CRM features of the airline companies. As the airline industry is very competitive, it is critical for the Malaysia airlines to focus on providing quality e-services via the websites and ensure that customers are satisfied with these services. Past studies indicated that only satisfied customers were eventually become loyal customers. Having loyalty customers is one of the long-term goals of these companies to ensure sustained advantage. It is hoped that the findings of this study benefits not only to the Malaysia-based airlines but also other airlines in the developing countries like Malaysia.

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