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Proposing a Customer Experience Management Model Based on the Grounded Theory Approach in Aviation Industry (Case study: Taban Airline)

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Abstract
The aim of present study is to achieve a comprehensive framework in the area of customer experience management in Taban Airline to improve business results. The statistical population was the managers and senior experts of Taban Airline. A sample of 16 people was selected by using a purposeful snowball sampling method and in-depth and a semi-structured interview was performed with them. Data analysis was performed using a 3-step coding method in Nvivo software. Finally, a comprehensive model of customer experience management was presented. A total number of 601 open codes were extracted. After methodological modifications, they turned to 182 open codes or concepts, and in the next step, namely ladder of abstraction, they turned to 38 sub-categories and in the final step, they turned to 14 main categories. Finally present the paradigmatic categories and components form the comprehensive Customer Experience Management (CXM) model.
Keywords: Customer Experience Management, Grounded Theory Approach, TABAN Airlines

Introduction

Developed organizations are prerequisite for a developed community, and developed organizations gain their power and authority through strategic human resources as strategic assets. In modern marketing approaches, customer is the main component of all business activities, so that from the perspective of competition in markets, the survival of organizations depends on identifying, attracting and retaining customers. Thus, creating a positive mentality for customers and customer experience management in general is essential. In addition, market instability, acceleration of technological change, competitive pressures, legal and political pressures and a constant change in the customer needs have led organizations operating in an active and dynamic environment to seek new competitive advantages to outperform their competitors and meet the explicit and implicit needs of customers to achieve their financial and non-financial performance in market (Alperin, 2005). In this regard, customer experience management is a strategic process of managing the total customer experience with a service, product, company, business or an organization. Moreover, the issue of globalization has forced most organizations to create their competitive advantage through intangible assets and capitals that are not easily imitated (Longo and Mura, 2011).

Customer experience is a mental reaction to direct or indirect communication with a company and includes all aspects of a product or

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service, including capabilities, type of advertising and promotion, appearance, trustworthiness, and so on. As study conducted by Gartner suggests that 89% of companies have had a competition plan based on customer experience by 2017 (Keiningham et al., 2017). In general, the benefits that companies or organizations gain from the positive experience of purchasers or consumers are the emergence of desirable behaviors that result in reduced costs and increased profitability. In other words, customer experience is an interactive process that is facilitated through cognitive and emotional factors, and is adjusted through contextual factors and customers, resulting in creation of a good or bad memory (Jain and Aagja and Bagdare, 2017). This experience can be considered as emotions, cognitive emotions, and behavioral responses and is triggered by stimuli such as brand, packaging, communication, and environment (Brakus and Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009).

Developing skills in customer experience management by forming a positive mentality plays a crucial role in the survival of an organization and achieving a financial and non-financial performance. Thus, brand managers should do their best to ensure that customer experience creation is based on the formation of positive mentality (Hwang and Seo, 2016). Customer experience management strategies should focus on trying to create a unique, compelling and memorable customer experience, as it has a significant impact on business success and sustainability. Therefore, companies need to explore key dimensions of customer experience quality, as these dimensions lead to extraordinary experiences for their customers (Rais and Musa and Muda, 2016).

Although the customer experience occurs at all steps of decision-making and consumption processes, it is broadly classified into three steps of pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Jain and Aagja and Bagdare, 2017). Although studies such as (Shaw, 200ᵛ), (Farooq et al., 2018), (Berry and Seiders and Grewal, 2002),

(Brakus and Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009) and (Hwang and Seo, 2016) provided models of customer experience, there is no consensus among marketers and researchers on the ways of measuring customer experience (Keiningham et al., 2017). Moreover, customers have different levels of expectations at the business level and different efforts should be made to meet their needs to create positive experiences and ultimately loyalty.

While many executives and marketers are discussing how consumers can meet their needs? Creating, developing, and maintaining a successful relationship between consumers and providers service and product can help them understand them. This is the relationship between brand and customers that is brand loyalty. Loyalty is a kind of positive attitude that is caused by frequent use and can be explained by psychological processes. In other words, the repetition of purchasing is not only an optional reaction but a result of psychological, emotional and normative factors (Rostami and Foroghi Pour and Saboonchi, 2019).

Nowadays, the transportation industry is one of the foundations of balanced and sustainable development in countries, because transportation networks are closely related to important components such as economy, security and justice. Investigating the economic and social development shows a direct correlation between the development of transportation and achieving a higher rate of economic growth. In other words, with an increase in the value added in the transportation sector, GDP increases (Mataleh and Pirzad, 2019).

The airline industry is influential in developed and developing economies and plays a major role in economic activities. Increased competition in providing services in this industry has made customers of this type of service do not need to adapt themselves to the type and quality of services provided by an airline company and freely select the company that provides the highest quality services to them. Thus, the survival of an airline company

in customer retention is through customer experience management (Dick and Basu, 1994), because customer experience management is one of the most important variables affecting customer loyalty.

Evidence suggests that the country's airline industry is affected by poor service quality, high mean age of aircrafts, and structural problems. Also, the existence of a large number of non-economical airports, which their number is being added, the loss of airline companies, lack of attention to customer needs and preferences, poor service, lack of a comprehensive plan in the area of services, etc. indicate that special attention should be paid to this industry in Iran (Mohammadi and Nourbakhsh, 2018) also Taban Airline is no exception. Since its establishment, the managers of this company have wanted to create a suitable environment for domestic and international flights and satisfy its customers. Hence, they always seek to increase and improve the fleet and service in accordance with passengers' expectations to attract and enhance their satisfaction and experience and create a positive experience for those who have used Taban Airline services more than once. Based on the reports of this company from 2006 until now, there have been some shortcomings in providing services in the flights of this company, which have prevented the company to have a completely successful performance in the mind of the customers. Moreover, the managers of this company are looking for a comprehensive model of customer experience management to improve their customer service.

Non-engagement of customer in real experiences that lead to personal value, lack of paying attention to customers' perception of quality and lack of effective interaction with the customer, lack of implementing a customer experience management program with a creative and analytical process focusing on strategies and performance based on gaining knowledge on customers and not using the brand optimally and properly reduce the level of customers' satisfaction. Customer experience includes social, sensory, physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions. The unpleasant experience created in the mind of the customer is one of the most powerful factors that can cause the loss of customer trust and loyalty. Thus, the present study was an attempt to provide a clear and transparent concept of customer experience management and the factors affecting it through a comprehensive study. Therefore, the present study seeks to explain and present a model of customer experience management in Taban Airline Company based on the grounded theory approach.

Literature Review
Customer Experience

Nowadays, human resources are considered as the most important competitive advantage for organizations. Therefore, managers should know how to deal with this strategic resource. Human resource practices in management are one of the important factors in gaining superiority in today's competitive world (Laming and Mason, 2014). (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) addressed the concept of customer experience for the first time in a research paper. They stated that successful business influences people by engaging them in real-life experiences that lead to personal value. Customer perception of an organization is formed during its interaction with all communication channels related to that organization, including face-to-face communication and online channels, including web, telephone, e-mail, cyberspace, etc. customer's positive experience will finally lead into repetition of business (Marlon, 2009). In other words, the customer experience as a comprehensive interactive process is facilitated through cognitive and emotional cues, and is moderated through contextual and customer characteristics that cause good or bad (desirable or undesirable) memory (Jain and Aagja and Bagdare, 2017).

Implementing a customer experience management program is a creative and analytical process that focuses on strategies and performance. Based on customer knowledge

and through using a desired brand, it increases customer satisfaction and retention, allows organizations to be completely customer-oriented, and attract new customers. In this regard, customers value the quality of their interactions with the organization as much as the quality of their products and services, and organizations are responsible to create this perspective (Keiningham et al., 2017). The customer experience is the customer's personal interpretation of the service process, their interactions and customer engagement with the process, and customers' feeling and perception of these cases (Johnson et al., 2001).It can also be stated that the customer experience is all the customer experiences of a service and product provider during the relationship with him, which can be considered as an outcome of direct interaction with the services and products provided (Monavarian et al., 2013).

Customers will have a good, bad or neutral experience regardless of the product or service they purchase. It means that services will always bring experience (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994) and even if the received product or service is ordinary and trivial, it provides an opportunity for service providers to engage customers emotionally (Berry and Carbon, 2007). The experience that is created in the mind of the customer is one of the most powerful factors that can lead to repurchase of the customer or the recommendation of the organization to others people.

Today, the growing relationship of loyalty with the customer experience is increasingly emphasized and has formed one of the foundations of contemporary marketing. Because not only quality, but also creating a pleasant experience differentiates an enterprise (Eghbali and Saeedi and Saeednia, 2021).

Customer Experience Management

Customer experience management is a strategy that focuses on the operations and processes of a business around customer needs. In fact, it is a strategy resulting in a win-win deal between the organization and its customers (Shaw, 2007). (Berry and Carbon, 2007) describe customer experience management as follows: "Merely offering products or services is not enough, but organizations need to provide satisfying experiences for their customers". Competition on this dimension means organizing all the topics and keys that are revealed in the purchasing process and it means customer experience management". (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) consider customer experience management as creating a strong customer experience. (Moorthy, 2005) consider customer experience management as a coordinated effort to achieve specific goals by improving the quality and continuity of customer interaction. (Fatma and Timothy, 2005) defines customer experience management as creating a high level of customer orientation, creating operational efficiencies, creating new income-generating paths, and helping to maximize benefits.

According to (Kamaladevi, 2010), customer experience management is a strategy that focuses on operations and business processes around the individual needs of the customer. In other words, it represents a strategy that leads to a win-win deal between the seller and the customer. According to (Bowser, 2009), customer experience management creates loyal customers by converting "satisfied" customers to "loyal" customers and by reducing bad experiences.Customer experience management has some complex elements that are mentally and materially influential and customers deal with it and perceive it. In fact, it is a set of interactions between customers, product and a company or organization that will increase over time and these personal experiences will emerge at different levels (Jain and Aagja and Bagdare, 2017). Customer experience management involves knowing customers very completely and in a way that can create a customized experience for him, so that not only he remains loyal to the organization or company, but also such a good feeling about the organization or company is created in other people and it is the most valuable way to promote a product or service (Gentile and Spiller and noci, 2007).

Customer Experience Management can provide customers with a new look at the organization from a level beyond customer relationship management, using system data. In this structure, with the help of integrated information systems, better and greater intelligence can be achieved (Hosseini et al., 2019). Some researchers consider customer experience management (CEM) as a sub-branch of customer relationship management (CRM). However, by expressing the concept of customer experience, (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) introduced a different world to the science of marketing with customer relationship management. Customer relationship management is known by looking at profitable customers, maintaining and continuing communication with them, but customer experience management is not looking for merely for customer satisfaction (Jampishtaz and Paparvydamys, 2007). In other words, organizations should make a distinction between customer experience management and customer relationship management (Poulsson and Kale, 2004). Comparison of customer relationship management with customer experience management shows that customer experience is more integrated and empirical than customer relationship management and customer experience management compensates the limitations of customer relationship management. Moreover, customer relationship management focuses primarily on customer history, but customer experience management focuses on the current customer experience (Hwang and Seo, 2016).

Researchers look at CEM in a complex and competitive environment as a business strategy. In addition to interacting with people and processes, customer experience management focuses on customers' feelings and mental reactions in a new way, and is directly or indirectly influenced by factors such as product, type of advertising, brand, employees, etc. In other words, these experiences are received as an internal response from customers. In general, customer experience is an engaging act that is shared between the company, the customer, and the place where the customer perceives value and is stored in memory. Researchers consider CEM in a complex and competitive environment as a strategy in a business. In general, customer experience is an attracting act that is shared among the company, the customer, and the place where the customer perceives value and is stored in memory (Poulsson and Kale, 2004).Strategies of customer experience management should focus on efforts to create a unique, convincing and memorable customer experience. Since it has a significant effect on business success and sustainability, it is essential for companies to discover key dimensions of quality customer experience, as these dimensions lead to an extraordinary experience for their customers (Rais and Musa and Muda, 2016).

Summary of Literature Review

Marketing is the process of identifying, predicting, and meeting customer needs. In this case, each organization will be able to provide a product or service according to customer needs. Because organizations have found that even the best products and services, if they do not meet the demands and needs of customers, will not be in demand by customers. Customer experience management equips organizations with the knowledge that develops the customer experience. Customer experience management creates a distinction and competitive advantage that can ultimately improve and enhance the performance of the organization.

According to the background of domestic and foreign research, it can be said that most of these studies examine the factors or areas affecting the customer experience and in some studies the consequences of the customer experience. But in this research, in the context of the data method, the foundation simultaneously examines the factors and contexts affecting the customer experience, the central focus of the customer experience and its consequences, in order to provide a comprehensive model of customer experience.

Research Methodology

Social phenomena in the social sciences are investigated by different methods and application of each method depends on paradigmatic feature. Since the subject of this research is to explain and present a model of customer experience management in Taban Airline based on the grounded theory, it is a developmental in terms of result, applied in terms of aim, qualitative in terms of data type. The method of present research is grounded theory method. Also, the dominant paradigm of research is the interpretive-constructive paradigm. The studies conducted using the grounded theory method are both theoretical and applied. They are considered theoretical since they seek to discover a limited theory or paradigm model or at least theoretical categories and are applied since they are conducted based on local culture and can better solve the problems of the organization.

The statistical population of the present study includes managers and experts of Taban Airline. Research data were collected using semi-structured individual interviews. Sampling was performed in two dimensions. In the first dimension, purposeful sampling was used, and in the second dimension, theoretical sampling was used. The number of samples in this study was 16 people. Using the snowball method, the interviewees were asked to introduce people who had sufficient knowledge on subject of study for further interviews. The basis for concluding the interviews was theoretical saturation. In qualitative studies, it is usually determined after the research whether the theoretical explanation of the research is significant from the participants' perspective or not, and the accuracy of events and their sequence in the theory process needs to be ensured (Creswell, 1998).To achieve this goal, the results of the analysis were reviewed by 5 managers of the company and the process of reaching the model is explained to them. In other words, the findings of this work should confirm the general findings of the research. The "triangulation" technique (Christensen, 2013) has also been used to evaluate the validity and quality of the findings. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to increase the scope and depth of information through constant and continuous mental engagement with data. To achieve this goal, after coding the data by the researchers, two marketing experts were asked to code some of the interviews to assess the accuracy of the coding. It should be noted that the research data were analyzed using a three-step coding approach based on Nvivo software.

Research Findings

The present study investigates customer experience management at Taban Airline to provide a comprehensive model. To achieve this goal, grounded theory method was used. After reviewing the theoretical literature of both domestic and foreign studies and using the methodological principles of grounded theory, interviews were performed with the managers of Taban Airline. These interviews were examined in depth using three-step open, axial and selective coding analysis method. Finally, a comprehensive model of customer experience management based on the experiences of Taban Airline managers and their views on customer management experience was presented.In the open coding step, the texts of interviews were reviewed line by line and were coded. The goal of open coding is to develop the basic concepts that eventually formed the empirical body of the theory and the model of customer experience management. Using these concepts, the main categories were obtained. In the axial coding step, open codes and concepts were re-examined and the sub-categories and main categories were obtained by continuously comparing them and examining their dimensions and characteristics.

Furthermore, in axial coding, categories were linked to subcategories to form more accurate and complete descriptions of phenomena. Accordingly, in this step, the concepts and open codes obtained from the open coding step were first re-examined and by considering their similarities and differences and attaching, micro-categories were obtained. The same

process was used for converting micro-categories into main categories. The process of emergence of these categories was in the form of back and forth between data, basic concepts and emerging primary categories.

Finally, those categories emerged that were rich in both dimensions and characteristics. In this step, the components of the paradigm (causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and outcomes) were formed. In the first step, 601 open codes were extracted, which after methodological modifications and adjustments, they were reduced to 182 open codes or concepts. These codes and concepts were reduced to 38 subcategories in the next step, namely ladder of abstraction, and 14 main categories were obtained in the final step.In the present study, the categories of "customer orientation quality", "economic status", "macro policy-making" and "facilities and resources" were obtained as causal conditions for "customer experience management". Also, the categories of "trans-institutional support", "economic interactions" and "management system" were considered as contextual conditions. Based on the coding of interviews with managers and experts of Taban Airline, the intervening factors in customer experience management were obtained to be "human resource capability" and "customer capability". Based on the analysis of the present study data, "Decision-making system transformation", "financial system transformation" and "communication system

transformation" were found as strategies for achieving customer experience management in Taban Airline. According to the analysis of interviews conducted with managers and experts of Taban Airline, the outcomes of customer experience management in the company include organization-oriented outcomes" and "customer-oriented outcomes". In the third step, namely selective coding, the central category is presented and its relationship with other categories is examined. The central category is considered as the heart of the paradigm model and has a degree of abstraction and relevance that articulates the relationships among all the main categories with each other it has relationship with all main categories.

Selective coding is the final step of coding in grounded theory. In this step, the theory emerged and it was refined, and the relationship of its main categories with the central category was established. In fact, in this step, the central category emerges and the contextual theorizing is completed. The description of relationships and the problem formation process were presented in the form of a paradigm model. Accordingly, in this section, the central category was presented and examined first. In the next step, the paradigm model and the extracted conceptual model were presented. Table 1 presents the components of the paradigm model and its dimensions. Then, the paradigm model of the research is presented (Figure 1).

Table 1.

Paradigm components, main categories and sub-categories

Paradigm components	Sub-categories	Main categories	Central category
Causal conditions	Respect and value	Customer orientation quality	Customer experience management
	Accountability and commitment		
	Responsibility		
	Quality of service		
	Quality of interactions		
	economic status	Economical-political status	
	Economic policy-making		
	Political crises		

| Paradigm components	Sub-categories	Main categories	Central category
Contextual conditions	Rules and regulations	Macro policy-making	
	Government policies		
	Macro-organizational strategies		
	Technical and technological infrastructure	Organizational facilities and resources	
	Specialization and training of human resources		
	financial facilities	Trans-institutional support	
	Government support		
	International interactions	Macroeconomic interactions	
	Institutional interaction		
	Integrated and coherent management	Management system	
	Legal supervision		
Intervening conditions	Employee personality status	Human resource capability	
	Job security		
	Human resource training		
	Human resource recruiting		
	Customer awareness	Customers capability	
	Customer training		
Strategies	Strengthening management cohesion	Decision-making system transformation	
	Strengthening technical and technological resources		
	Improving program and vision management		
	Improving human resource management		
	financial resources floating	Financial system transformation	
	Economic austerity		
	Strengthening communication channels	communication system transformation	
	Personalization of interactions		
Outcomes	Economic profitability	Organization-oriented outcomes	
	Organizational value creation		
	Strengthening inter-organizational interaction		
	Strengthening organizational discipline		
	Customer satisfaction	Customer-oriented outcomes	
	Customer loyalty		
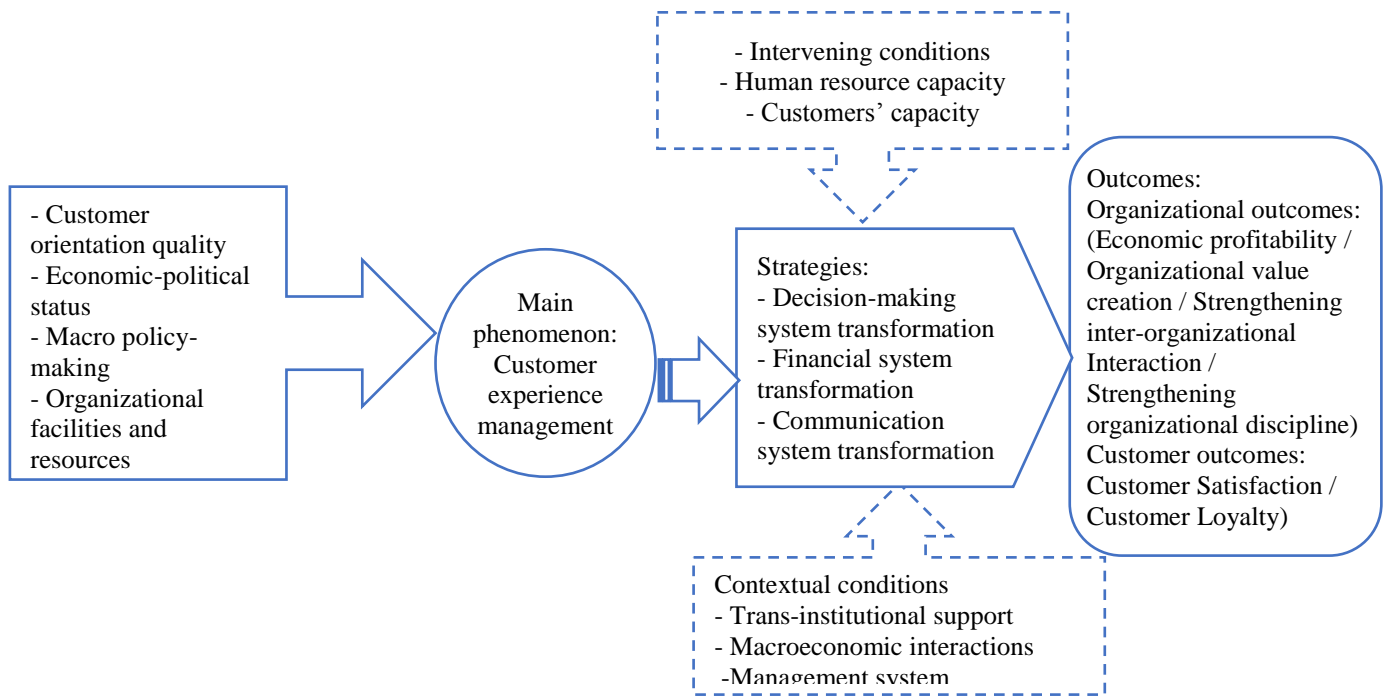
Figure 1. *Paradigm model of customer experience management*

Conclusion

As stated earlier in the results section, the comprehensive customer experience management (CXM) model has several categories that are related to each other to form this model. These categories include causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes. Causal conditions include customer orientation quality, economic status, macro policy-making, facilities and resources, contextual conditions include trans-institutional support, economic interactions and management system, and intervening factors include human resource capability and customer capability. Strategies of customer experience management include decision-making system transformation, financial system transformation, and communication system transformation and the outcomes of customer experience management in the company include organization-oriented outcomes and customer-oriented outcomes. The interrelationship of these paradigmatic categories and components form the comprehensive customer experience management (CXM) model.

However, such a relationship does not happen per se, but requires a central category that can relate these categories to each other. The central category in the present study is "customer experience management". According to the research results, customer experience management includes three dimensions of interactive desirability, environmental desirability and behavioral desirability. Interactive desirability means that the communication and interaction of Taban Airline employees with customers is continuous and at the personal communication level. Such interaction can lead to customer retention and their transformation from satisfied customers to loyal customers. If this desirability is at the appropriate level, it can be stated that the customer experience management in the company is well done. Environmental desirability means that the space and environment for providing customer service in Taban Airline is appropriate so that customers can easily use the available facilities and

resources and a feeling of satisfaction is formed in them.

Thus, environmental desirability, as opposed to behavioral desirability that is related to employees' behavior and treatment with customers, is related to the appropriateness of the environment and space where services are provided. Behavioral desirability means that the behavior and treatment of the company's employees with customers is desirable and appropriate. Such a respect and behavior can lead to customer retention and their transformation from satisfied customers to loyal customers. Behavioral desirability is related to the way of communicating with personnel and human resources, which are interacting with customers during providing services, and before and after it.

Thus, the following recommendations can be proposed based on the results of this research:

- If customers are segmented, more specialized experiences can be obtained in future research.

- After conducting the research, the researcher concluded that if the statistical sample is selected from other airlines of Iran, the model will have different changes, and these changes are due to the different performance of other companies, as research environment is the same.

- If electronic observation is used in addition to the semi-structured interview and the results of electronic observation are provided to a behavior management expert, different dimensions will be added to the model.

-These three reasons were among the important motivators of the researcher, but the researcher inevitably conducted this research within the defined framework, due to temporal, spatial, and instrumental limitations. It should be noted that most studies conducted on customer experience have used a general approach and very few studies have deeply investigated the subject. The present research tries to use a new approach and indigenized data and utilize an innovative methodology i.e grounded theory and find new methodological processes and procedures. The results of the research can be useful for managers of different units of airlines including customer relationship unit, commerce unit, operation unit and CEOs of airlines in Iran.

Research Innovation

Research innovation can be considered in several areas. The first area is the use of capacities and attention to the indigenous conditions and limitations of society. The second area is the study of customer experience management in the commercial aviation industry and in particular an airline. The third area of research innovation is the study of customer experience management with a qualitative method and in particular, the use of grounded theory. Research in this area with qualitative research methods is very limited. In this research, using the grounded theory research method, a comprehensive and new model of customer experience management is presented. Finally, the fourth area can be considered the study of customer experience management with a new approach (CXM). Different models have been proposed in the field of customer experience management, but in the present study, using data, a native model of customer experience management has been presented.

Limitations

Results of the present study were derived from interviews with experts, so they are considered more an attitude survey and it is recommended to use real data, and real information to obtain a real indigenous model.

Existence of different models of customer experience management and lack of overlap among them and the probability of lack of generalizing this research results to other companies operating in this industry are considered as limitations of the research.

Lack of full cooperation of managers and experts of the company to conduct interviews in some cases can be considered as another limitation for this research.

Another limitation of the study was outbreak of Covid-19 and widespread restrictions on access to experts and managers. In a situation where most airline companies were shut down or partially shut down, and their economic, social, and political status is poor due to Covid-19 crisis, it was difficult to coordinate with managers and experts to conduct interviews. Also, in many cases, it was very difficult to conduct in-person interviews due to health protocols and the risks of transmitting of the mentioned disease.

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