

How Can AI Help Airlines Listen Better?



Source: Pixabay (2020)

Background

While airlines have traditionally relied on conventional metrics such as Net Promoter Scores (NPS) and Customer Satisfaction (SCAT) scores to rate customer service experience, these metrics may not fully capture the complexities of customer feedback or the reasons behind customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (McKinsey & Company, 2024). With Large Language Models (LLMs), AI can help airlines go beyond simple numerical metrics, providing depth and context to support customer feedback scores.

Airlines deal with thousands of customer inquiries and complaints every day. The heavy reliance on AI chatbots and the shortage of human customer service agents have led to inadequate customer support and inquiries being overlooked (Schwerin, 2023). Consequently, valuable insights reflecting the true state of an airline's customer service may be buried within the vast number of interactions. By utilizing LLM-based advanced analytics tools, airlines can extract meaningful insights by analyzing extensive customer interaction data from various channels such as call centers, emails, live chats, and social media (McKinsey & Company, 2024). This approach can help airlines identify specific customer concerns and experiences that were previously unnoticed.

Furthermore, AI can help airlines process and categorize customer feedback in a more nuanced way. For example, while call centers tend to sort messages into generic categories like “complaints about loyalty program,” LLM-based tools can replace those categories with more specific ones, such as “where are my loyalty points after my last flight?” (McKinsey & Company, 2024). As a result, it becomes much easier to identify within the organization who is responsible for resolving the matter and to facilitate a prompt response. At the same time, nuanced categories allow airlines to track trends in inquiries and complaints so that the airline may respond proactively if issues about specific services intensify.

On the other hand, AI can act as an agent of change to monitor customer experience at various service touchpoints throughout the customer journey (McKinsey & Company, 2024). AI is capable of collecting real-time data, analyzing customer sentiment, and generating actionable insights (Forbes, 2024). By incorporating AI at critical touchpoints such as check-in and

boarding, airline managers can receive real-time data regarding check-in efficiency and boarding process updates, enabling timely remedial actions when necessary to ensure a smoother passenger experience (McKinsey & Company, 2024).

Challenges

It is believed that most people fill out a customer survey only when they are either really satisfied or extremely upset with the service (Schlappig, 2024). This leads to extreme data existing within the pool of immense customer interactions analyzed by AI, and companies could risk drawing the wrong conclusions based on the analytic results generated by AI. To mitigate this risk, airlines must complement AI-driven insights with targeted outreach efforts to obtain a more representative sample of customer feedback.

Discussion Questions

1. Why might traditional metrics like NPS and SCAT fail to capture the full complexity of customer feedback?
2. What are the potential benefits and challenges of utilizing LLM-based analytics tools to process customer interactions across various channels?
3. How might real-time data collection and analysis at critical service touchpoints, such as check-in and boarding, improve the overall passenger experience?
4. What are the risks of misinterpretation of analytics results when relying solely on AI-driven insights, and how can these be mitigated?
5. How might the integration of AI and advanced analytics tools shape the future of customer service in the airline industry?

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Keywords

- Airline
- Customer Service
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Large Language Model (LLM)
- Real-time Data Collection
- Data Analysis