

CUSTOMER-SATISFACTION ANALYSIS AT SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we seek to find the drivers of overall satisfaction at San Francisco International airport (SFO). Our analysis is based on a sample of over 3,000 customers at SFO who were surveyed in mid-2013. We use stepwise linear multiple regression to determine which variables, and at what levels, are significant predictors of overall satisfaction. We find that several variables are impactful, and for the majority of variables, not surprisingly, it is the extreme ratings on the scale (Unacceptable on one end, Outstanding on the other end) that make a difference.

Keywords: Satisfaction analysis, multiple regression, Stepwise regression, San international airport, Survey data.

Introduction:

The objective of this analysis is to gain an understanding of the factors that may influence customers' satisfaction at the San Francisco International Airport (SFO). A questionnaire was designed by airport staff and was collected by customer interviews using a stratified random sample of flights. The interviews were held at all airport terminals and boarding areas from May 1 through May 23, 2013. Our focus is to determine the variables/factors that are statistically significant in terms of predicting overall satisfaction with SFO. Our primary analysis utilizes stepwise linear multiple regression in this endeavor, as described in the Methodology section.

Literature Review:

Most of the work done to analyze how satisfied customers are at airports relates to a specific airport. Al Refaie et al. (2014) studied potential drivers of satisfaction and loyalty at the Jordan airport. They studied very different factors than those in this study - primarily, ticket pricing and flight performance. Their results indicated that satisfaction was related to the reservation process, ticketing process, and perceived value. Loyalty was driven most by service recovery, price and perceived value.

Another study was done by Mattazo et al. (2012), studying customer satisfaction at the Augusto Severo airport in Brazil; (as an aside, in 2014, this airport stopped serving civilian flights and is currently serving the military exclusively.) They used multiple linear regression and adaptive modelling, and determined that key variables affecting satisfaction were confidence in the safety of the premises, waiting time for a taxi, availability and quality of seats in the airport, as well as prices of the food at terminal restaurants. The variables considered varied substantially from our study.

Another study by Suki (2014) considered passenger satisfaction with airline service at the major airport in Malaysia. Using structural equation modelling, and a sample of $n = 300$, Suki's key finding was that customer service is a major determinant of the content of word-of-mouth and recommendations.

A study by Chang (2013) examined factors affecting airport access mode-choice by elders at Taiwan Airport. His key finding was that the elderly strongly prefer to be driven to the airport by family members as opposed to taking a taxi, relative to the general population.

A study by Baker (2013) examined not just one airport, but focused on several airports, while comparing *different airlines*: legacy airlines vs. low-cost airlines. Perhaps surprisingly, he found that the low-cost airlines received significantly better ratings on service quality than the legacy airlines.

A study that examined the San Francisco Airport (SFO) was conducted more than 30 years ago by Harvey (1987), based on a survey conducted in 1980. He focused on choice of 3 airports in the San Francisco Bay area including SFO. He also distinguished between business travellers and non-business travellers. His main findings, using multinomial logit models, were that ground access time and frequency of direct flights to destinations were the key factors in airport choice and that the effects were not linear. A study that followed up the Harvey (1987) study was by Hess and Polak (2005). They also used multinomial logit models and found results that reinforced the earlier study. Yet another follow up study about airport choice was conducted by Ishii et al. (2009) of 4 airports in the San Francisco Bay area. They also distinguished between business travellers and non-business ("leisure") travellers, and the results were somewhat similar to those of the Harvey (1987) and Hess and Polak (2005) studies in that they also used multinomial logit models and found that non-price characteristics, such as airport access time, airport delay, flight frequency, the availability of particular airport-airline combinations, and early arrival times, strongly affected choice probabilities.

None of these studies of airport choice in the San Francisco area were similar to the study in this paper, which looked at SFO in particular, and did not at all focus on choice among different airports. Our study went into greater detail at one specific airport (SFO) and considered very different variables than the other studies cited. Also, there are many studies of other issues at airports, such as productivity at airports, employee satisfaction at airports, and scheduling aircraft; we did not cite these articles, viewing them as too peripheral to our study. There were also a few other studies of various activities in airports outside the United States (e.g., the main airport in the UAE) that we did not reference, since they either duplicated findings of other studies or did not deal explicitly with customer satisfaction.

Method:

The complete dataset includes 69 variables and 3536 observations. Each variable represents a question in the questionnaire; however, we do not utilize all of the variables. For space considerations, we do not include the questionnaire, in its entirety, in this paper. We will, however, list and describe in detail the questions that we shall use in our analysis.

Variables Description:

We selected the following questions from the questionnaire as candidate variables for our analysis. In order to ensure the accuracy of the model, we conducted data cleaning, including scale recoding, as shall be described, to satisfy the ordinal characteristics of the answers. As noted, our goal was to determine which variables affect overall satisfaction with SFO. Thus, our dependent variable, Y, is part of a section, with the instruction : "How does SFO rate on each of the following attributes?" Specifically, Y represented SFO overall, with the "attribute" worded: "SFO Airport as a whole."

The possible choices for a responder were:

- 1 = Unacceptable
- 2 = Below Average
- 3 = Average
- 4 = Good
- 5 = Outstanding
- 6 = Have never used or visited

If the responder did not reply to the question, it was coded as a 0. These responder choices were utilized for all of the independent ("X") variables also. Table 1 lists the 14 independent variables we used. These 14 variables (along with Y) represent all of the attributes listed in that section of the questionnaire. The independent variables are listed as questions A through N, and in the table, we continue the precise labeling as reference back to the section 7 of the questionnaire.

Table 1: Attributes/Independent Variables

| Variable label | Attribute |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Q7A_Art | Artwork and exhibitions |
| Q7B_Food | Restaurants |
| Q7C_Shops | Retail shops and concessions |
| Q7D_Signs | Signs and directions inside SFO |
| Q7E_Walk | Escalators/elevators/moving walkways |
| Q7F_Screens | Information on screens/monitors |
| Q7G_Info.arr | Information booths - lower level |
| Q7H_Info.dep | Information booths - upper level |
| Q7I_Wifi | Accessing and using free Wifi at SFO |
| Q7J_Road | Signs and directions on SFO roadways |
| Q7K_Park | Airport parking facilities |
| Q7L_Airtrain | Airtrain |
| Q7M_LTPark | Long term parking lot shuttle bus |
| Q7N_Rental | Airport car rental center |

Data Preparation:

As noted earlier, each question in the questionnaire has seven possible values on the database. We delete those observations with a "0," indicating a missing value. A value of 6 (supposedly) stands for those customers who have never used or visited this criterion. There were 70 observations for Y with the value, 6. The answer actually does not make sense, since each responder was a "customer" at the SFO airport. It

would not appear viable that a customer who never used/visited this airport answered the questionnaire. Thus, we also deleted all observations for which Y was coded "6." We, of course, want to consider the responses of those customers who used/visited SFO airport and evaluated Y; thus, Y ranged from 1 to 5. We did not want to commit to a linear relationship between Y and any of the independent variables. Therefore, we created 5 dummy variables for each of the 14 "X's." This will allow us to capture non-linearity relationships up to a 4th degree equation (which is more than sufficient non-linearity, especially for these X's which should all exhibit a monotonic relationship with Y, if any relationship at all. It was reasonable for a response to be coded "6" for one or more of the *independent* variables. After all, some responders perhaps never used the parking facilities, or never rented a car at SFO, etc. Indeed, the minimum number of 6's for any X was 90 (for Q7D_Signs). Thus, we set the coded-value 6 in each variable as the reference category and replaced each of the original 14 variables by the following 5 dummy variables (illustrating this for Q7A_Art, and at this point, dropping the "Q7X_" part of the variable name for exposition/brevity purposes.)

Art-Out = 1 if the response is Outstanding, 0 otherwise.

Art-Good = 1 if the response is Good, 0 otherwise.

Art-Ave = 1 if the response is Average, 0 otherwise.

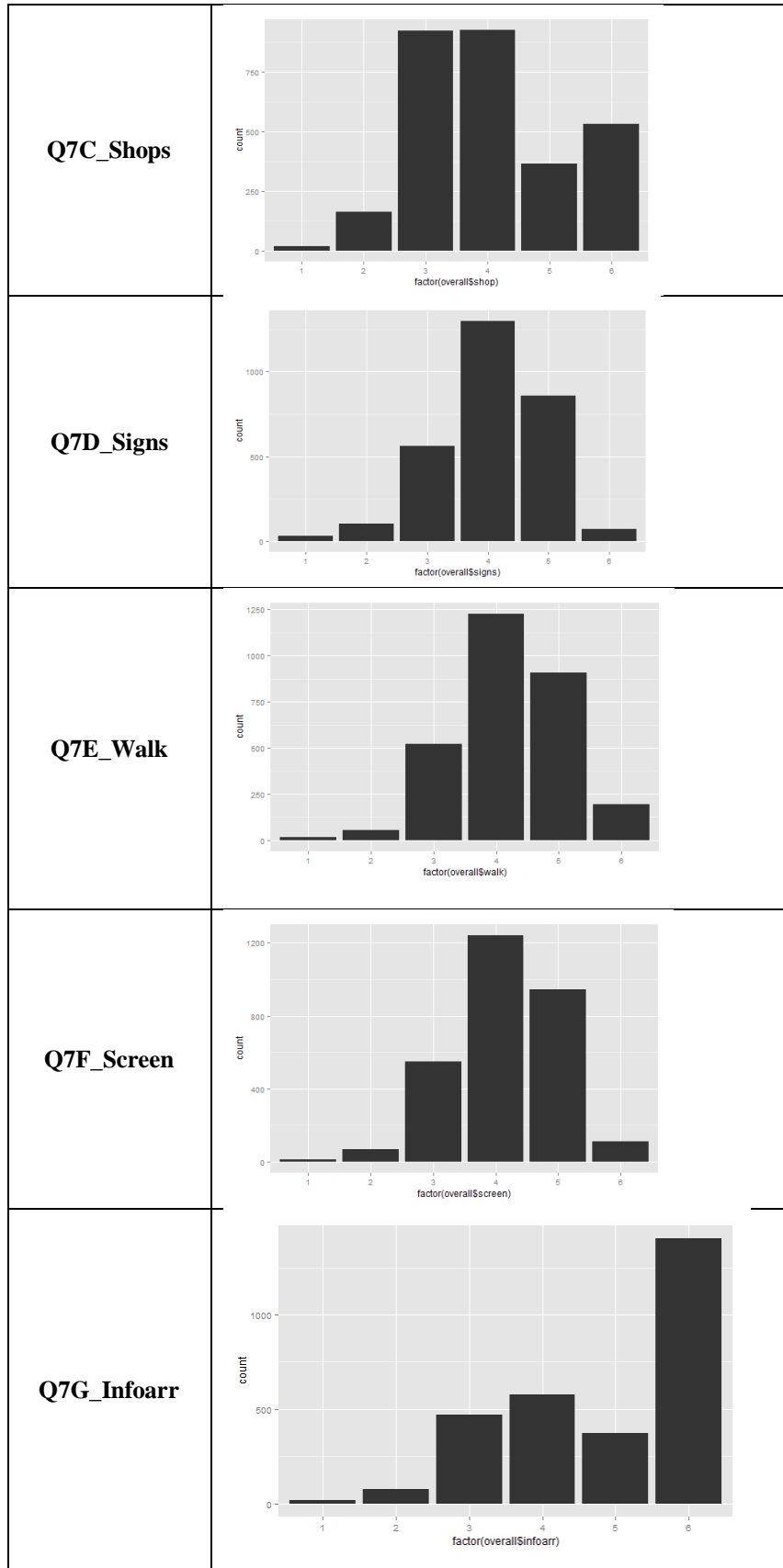
Art-B.Ave = 1 if the response is Below Average, 0 otherwise.

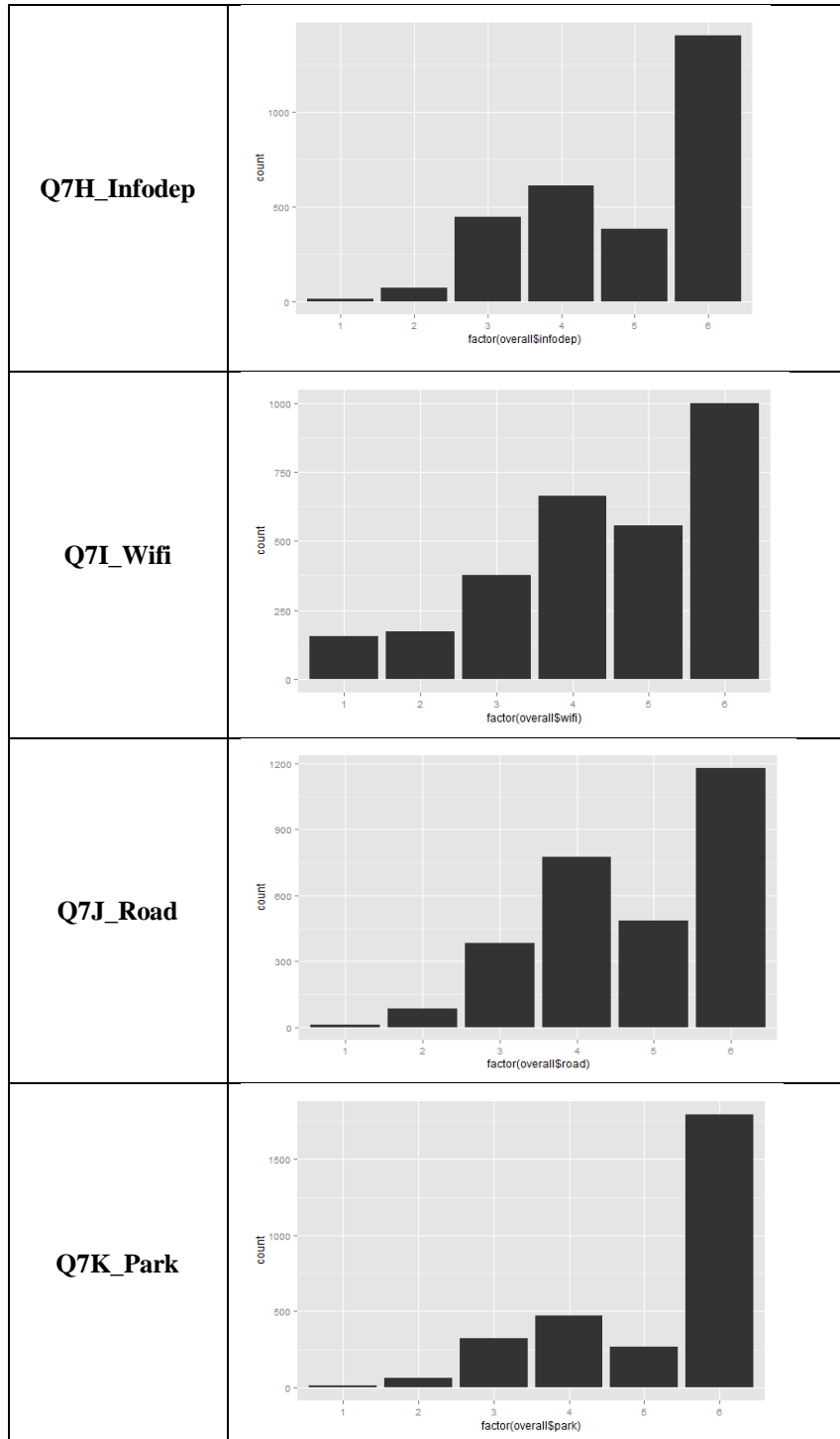
Art-Unacc = 1 if the response is Unacceptable, 0 otherwise.

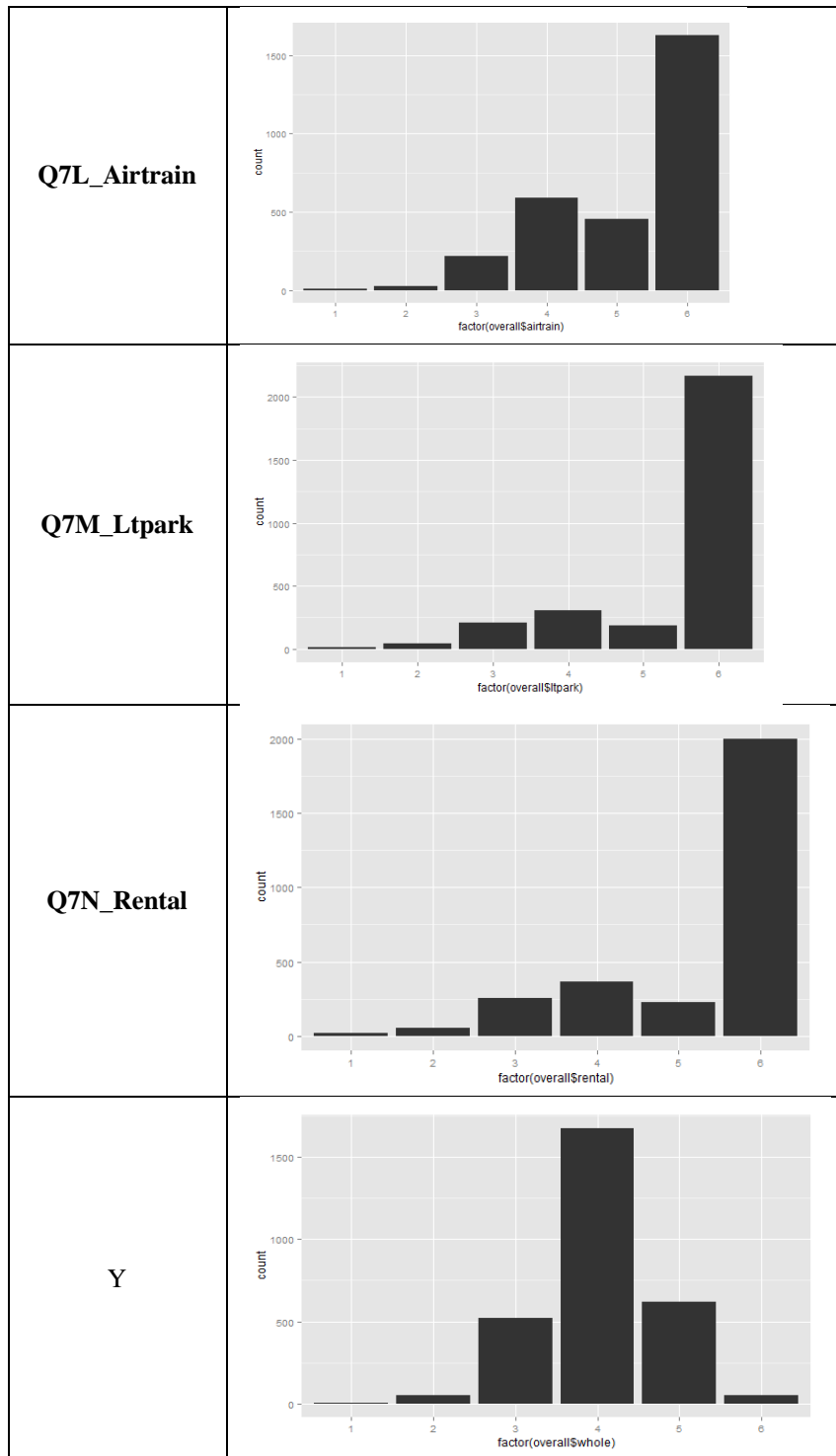
Table 2 indicates the distribution of each variable among the 6 categories. All of the variables had a sufficient frequency for being a "stand-alone" category (as opposed to being combined with another category), except, perhaps, for Q7L_Airtrain, which had a frequency of 10 for the category: Airtrain-Unacc = 1 if the response is Unacceptable, 0 otherwise. There is evidence from the database marketing literature that "adequate" category frequencies are not a matter of proportion of the data points, but, rather, the absolute number of data points in the category (e.g., Magliozzi & Berger, 1992). There is no general agreement on the exact minimum frequency that is "adequate" for a stand-alone category, but a rule of thumb often used is at least 15, and Q7L_Airtrain is the only variable with a frequency below that for any category.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution for the 14 Independent Variables

| Question | |
|----------|--|
| Q7A_Art | |
| Q7B_Food | |







Results:

Stepwise Linear Multiple Regression Model:

We run a stepwise linear multiple regression with the 70 independent dummy variables. We used the default SPSS values of "p to enter" = .05, and "p to delete" of .10. There were 34 steps implemented by the stepwise-regression process, with 33 "enter-a-variable" steps and 1 "delete a variable" step, resulting in a final model with 32 X variables. With a "p to delete" of .10, it is possible that the final model has

variables with a p-value between .05 and .10 (as opposed to a p-value < .05); however, only one of the 32 final-model variables has a p-value over .05, Shop-Out, with a p-value of .061.

The R² for our model is 0.546, and the adjusted R² is 0.541. Table 3 shows the ANOVA table for the final model. The p-value of the F test can be seen to be .000 (0, to three significant digits.)

Table 3: ANOVA Table for final model of stepwise regression

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| Regression | 767.66 | 32 | 23.989 | 106.864 | .000 |
| Residual | 637.086 | 2838 | 0.224 | | |
| Total | 1404.746 | 2870 | | | |

The histogram in Figure 1 displays that the distribution of standardized residuals in this model is very close to a normal distribution.

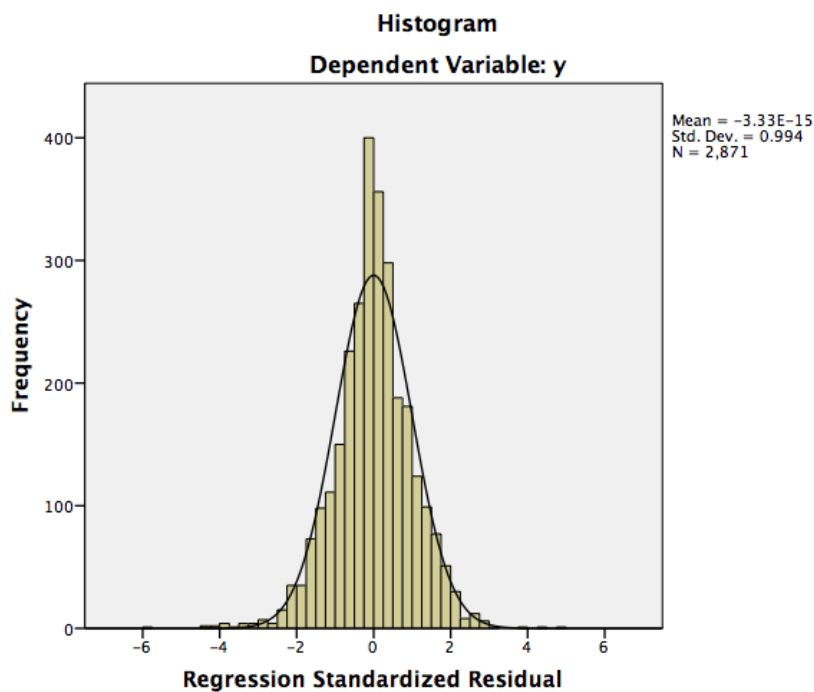


Figure 1: Histogram of standardized residuals for final stepwise regression model

The final stepwise regression model (34th step, with 32 variables in the model) is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Final model of stepwise regression

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | t | Sig. |
|------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------|
| | B | Std. Error | | |
| (Constant) | 3.805 | 0.028 | 133.983 | .000 |
| Sign-Out | 0.352 | 0.034 | 10.486 | .000 |
| Sign-Good | 0.172 | 0.025 | 6.939 | .000 |
| Art-Out | 0.199 | 0.026 | 7.533 | .000 |
| Screen-Out | 0.12 | 0.028 | 4.295 | .000 |
| Food-B.Ave | -0.277 | 0.044 | -6.275 | .000 |
| Food-Ave | -0.131 | 0.024 | -5.429 | .000 |
| Food-Unacc | -0.632 | 0.115 | -5.506 | .000 |

| | | | | |
|---------------|--------|-------|--------|------|
| Wifi-Out | 0.121 | 0.026 | 4.73 | .000 |
| Art-B.Ave | -0.34 | 0.066 | -5.143 | .000 |
| Airtrain-Out | 0.096 | 0.027 | 3.541 | .000 |
| Shop-Unacc | -0.652 | 0.127 | -5.136 | .000 |
| parkAve | -0.105 | 0.031 | -3.38 | .001 |
| Screen-B.Ave | -0.493 | 0.062 | -7.912 | .000 |
| Screen-Unacc | -0.823 | 0.146 | -5.637 | .000 |
| Screen-Ave | -0.197 | 0.028 | -6.939 | .000 |
| Shop-Out | 0.07 | 0.037 | 1.875 | .061 |
| Park-B.Ave | -0.153 | 0.064 | -2.383 | .017 |
| Shop-B.Ave | -0.196 | 0.047 | -4.173 | .000 |
| Shop-Ave | -0.076 | 0.024 | -3.152 | .002 |
| Road-Out | 0.095 | 0.028 | 3.392 | .001 |
| Road-B.Ave | -0.173 | 0.054 | -3.203 | .001 |
| Ltpark-Unacc | -0.379 | 0.13 | -2.927 | .003 |
| Art-Good | 0.071 | 0.021 | 3.282 | .001 |
| Walk-Out | 0.078 | 0.028 | 2.732 | .006 |
| Rental-Ave | -0.106 | 0.034 | -3.087 | .002 |
| Art-Unacc | -0.351 | 0.129 | -2.713 | .007 |
| Rental-Unacc | -0.278 | 0.113 | -2.465 | .014 |
| Infodep-Out | 0.071 | 0.034 | 2.11 | .035 |
| Infodep-B.Ave | -0.146 | 0.059 | -2.466 | .014 |
| Infoarr.Ave | -0.062 | 0.028 | -2.248 | .025 |
| Food-Out | 0.08 | 0.037 | 2.198 | .028 |
| Wifi-Unacc | -0.082 | 0.041 | -2.013 | .044 |

Interestingly, all 14 of the core variables are represented in this final model, ranging from 4 of its categories for Art (Artwork and exhibitions), and Food (restaurants), to only 1 of its categories for 6 of the variables: Walk (Escalators/elevators and moving sidewalks), Screen (Information on screens and monitors), Info.Arr (Information booths, lower level), Park (Airport parking facilities), Airtrain (Airtrain), and LTPark (Long-term parking shuttle bus). When there was only one *positive* category, that category was always *outstanding*; this adds to the credibility of the results. You can also see that 25 of the 32 variables have a p-value < .01. Here is the actual regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y_c = & 3.805 + 0.352 \text{ Sign-Out} + 0.172 \text{ Sign-Good} + 0.199 \text{ Art-Out} + 0.12 \text{ Screen-Out} \\
 & - 0.277 \text{ Food-B.Ave} - 0.131 \text{ Food-Ave} - 0.632 \text{ Food-Unacc} + 0.121 \text{ Wifi-Out} \\
 & - 0.340 \text{ Art-B.Ave} + 0.096 \text{ Airtrain-Out} - 0.652 \text{ Shop-Unacc} - 0.105 \text{ Park-Ave} \\
 & - 0.493 \text{ Screen-B.Ave} - 0.823 \text{ Screen-Unacc} - 0.197 \text{ Screen-Ave} + 0.07 \text{ Shop-Out} \\
 & - 0.153 \text{ Park-B.Ave} - 0.196 \text{ Shop.B.Ave} - 0.076 \text{ Shop-Ave} + 0.095 \text{ Road-Out} \\
 & - 0.173 \text{ Road-B.Ave} - 0.379 \text{ Ltpark-Unacc} + 0.071 \text{ Art-Good} + 0.078 \text{ Walk-Out} \\
 & - 0.106 \text{ Rental-Ave} - 0.351 \text{ Art-Unacc} - 0.278 \text{ Rental-Unacc} + 0.071 \text{ Infodep-Out} \\
 & - 0.146 \text{ Infodep-B.Ave} - 0.062 \text{ Infoarr-Ave} + 0.08 \text{ Food-Out} - 0.082 \text{ Wifi-Unacc}
 \end{aligned}$$

This equation has one property that is consistent and very indicative of a "macro" internal validity. All categories in the model that are *outstanding* or *good* have a positive sign (meaning that it increases the overall assessment of SFO), while all categories in the model that are *average*, *below average*, or *unacceptable* have a negative sign (indicating a decrease in the overall assessment of SFO.) It may not have been predicatable how the category, *average*, played out, but for the other 4 categories,

expectations are realized. Of course, not all categories of all variables are in the model; recall that we had 70 eligible (categorical) variables.

From the specific coefficients of the variables in the regression model, we can see the impact of each dummy variable (and, we should remember that, because this model is the result of a stepwise regression, there is relatively little correlation among the variables.) As mentioned earlier, the reference (“dummy”) category of each dummy variable represents those customers who never visited/used this attribute. Also, as noted earlier, if the coefficient of a variable is positive, it suggests that if a customer selects this answer, it has a positive influence on his/her overall opinion of the SFO airport, and if the coefficient of a variable is negative, it suggests that if a customer selects this answer, it has a negative influence on his/her overall opinion of the SFO airport, and, all the categories in the final model are statistically significant. The magnitude of the coefficient reflects how much positive or negative impact this variable is predicted to have on the dependent variable (overall opinion about SFO.) Among these 32 variables, 20 of them have negative coefficients and 12 have positive coefficients. The absolute values are all less than 1, which demonstrates that there no single variable that changes a customer’s overall evaluation by as much as one full point.

Three variables have coefficients that have absolute values larger than 0.5 while others are in the range from 0.07 to 0.493; the three all have negative coefficients. The coefficients are -.632 for Food-Unacc, -0.652 for Shop-Unacc and -0.823 for Screen-Unacc. Note how these largest coefficients accompany categories at the extreme; this is another result that is “as it should be.” Apparently, Screen-Unacc (recall: “Screen” refers to information on screen and monitors) has the comparatively greatest influence on customers’ overall opinion (holding all other variables constant.) With other variables being held constant, the average evaluation of the whole SFO airport decreases by .823 (on, basically, the 1-5 scale), when the customer believes that the information on the screens and monitors is *unacceptable*, compared with customers who selected *never used* in the question Q7F_Screens - see Table 1.

The variable, Sign-Out, with the coefficient at .352, has the comparatively greatest *positive* influence on the overall evaluations. With other variables held constant, the average evaluation of the whole SFO airport increases by .352 when the customer believes that the signs and directions inside SFO are *outstanding* compared with customers who selected *never used* in question Q7D_Signs – again, see Table 1.

Summary:

The overall evaluation on SFO increases if the customer believes that:

- the signs and direction inside SFO are outstanding or good
- the artwork and exhibitions at SFO are outstanding or good
- the information on screens and monitors at SFO is outstanding
- the accessing and using of free wifi at SFO is outstanding
- the airtrain to SFO is outstanding
- the retail shops and concession at SFO are outstanding
- the signs and directions on SFO roadways are outstanding
- the escalators/elevators and moving sidewalks at SFO are outstanding
- the information booths at the departure area (upper level) of SFO are outstanding
- the food/restaurants at SFO are outstanding

The overall evaluation on SFO decreases if the customer believes that:

- the food/restaurants at SFO are unacceptable, below average, or average
- the artwork and exhibitions at SFO are unacceptable or below average
- the retail shops and concessions at SFO are unacceptable, below average or average
- the parking facilities at SFO are below average or average
- the information on screens and monitors at SFO are unacceptable, below average, or average
- the signs and directions on roadways to SFO are below average
- the long term parking lot shuttle bus to SFO is unacceptable

- the rental car center at SFO is unacceptable
- the information booth at the arrival area is average
- the information booth at departure area is below average
- the wifi is unacceptable

There are six categorical variables that might be thought of as conspicuous by their absence. One is Signs-Unacc and another is Park-Unacc. In the case of both "Sign" and "Park," the category of *below average* (B.Ave) is significant and negative in the stepwise regression final model, while the category *unacceptable*, which is obviously a worse assessment than *below average*, was not in the final model of the stepwise regression. In examining these two variable, we find (1) that Sign-Unacc has a p-value (.055) that is just a relatively tiny amount above .05, and does (as would be expected) have a negative coefficient, and (2) that Park-Unacc has a relatively small p-value (.149) and also has a negative coefficient. Therefore, it would seem quite reasonable to ascribe these two variables not being in the stepwise regression final model as a case of being close to inclusion in the final model, being directionally correct, but simply suffering the vagaries of multiple regression analysis and a complex pattern of variables' overlapping contribution to determining overall satisfaction.

The other four categorical variables that seem "missing" are Road-Unacc (since Road-B. Ave is significant and negative), Infoarr-B.Ave and Infoarr-Unacc (since Infoarr.Ave is significant negative), and Infodep.Unacc (since Infodep-B.Ave is significant and negative). These four variables do not have especially low p-values (if they were to enter the model), and we have no explanation why they did not enter the final model, except that possibly, it is related to the fact that in all of these cases, only about 50% of the customers indicated either non-use or left the question blank.

Discussion:

Based on the results of the stepwise regression analysis, we can make certain inferences, if the survey results hold true.

For Art, about 20 times as many customers indicated *outstanding* or *good* (significant positive) than indicated either *below average* or *unacceptable* (significant negative.) So, no change is strongly suggested for this variable.

For Food (restaurants), we have a different situation. About 3 times as many customers indicated either *average*, *below average* or *unacceptable* (significant negative), than indicated *outstanding* (significant positive). So, we would view this as a strong endorsement to improve the food/restaurants. Changing the lower ratings to *good* would at least remove the negative effect on satisfaction; it might take too many resources to change these ratings to *outstanding*, which would be needed to obtain a positive effect.

For Shops (retail shopping and concessions), we have, basically, the same relative frequencies and pattern of significance as for Food. Again, about 3 times as many customers indicated either *average*, *below average* or *unacceptable* (significant negative), than indicated *outstanding* (significant positive). Thus, we have the same recommendation as above for Food.

For Signs (signs and directions inside SFO), about 74% of the customers indicated either *outstanding* or *good* (significant positive). None of the other categories had a significant coefficient. So, we would view this in a similar way to Art, with no strong indication that there should be changes.

For Walk (escalators/elevators and walkways), about 34 percent of the customers indicated *outstanding* (significant positive), while there were no categories with a significant negative. So, unless changes would result in raising indications all the way to *outstanding*, it is likely not cost effective to make changes.

For Screens (information on screens and monitors), about 23% of the customers indicated either *average*, *below average* or *unacceptable* (significant negative). The rest were either *good* or *outstanding* (the latter being significant positive). So, unless it is very cost effective, we would view this as, perhaps, at most, a modest indication that there should be change.

For Infoarr (information booths on arrival [upper] floor), under 20% of the customers gave a rating of *unacceptable*, *below average*, or *average* (the latter, significant negative). This suggests that changes should be implemented only if relatively cost effective to achieve a status of *good* (and eliminate the

negative effect.) For Infodep (information booth on departure [lower] floor), again, under 20% gave a rating of *unacceptable*, *below average*, or *average* (the latter two, significant negative). However, for Infodep, there is a significant positive coefficient for *outstanding*. So, again, we mention cost effectiveness, but in this case, if ratings rose to *outstanding*, there would be not only the elimination of the negative effect, but, indeed, a positive effect.

For Wifi, the only effect was a negative one for the category Wifi.Unacc. Since this category was chosen by only 5.3% of the customers, there is no strong indication for change.

For Road (signs and directions on SFO roadways), only about 3% of the customers chose *unacceptable* or *below average* (the latter, significant negative). Given this low number, and the fact that to achieve a significant positive, the ratings would need to reach *outstanding*, there is no real indication of need for change. The situation for Park (parking facilities at SFO) is similar. Only about 13% chose either *unacceptable* or *below average* or *average* (the latter two, significant negative), while none of the other categories were significant. No change seems indicated.

For Airtrain, only 42% of the customers indicated an opinion, and only about 1% indicated either *unacceptable* or *below average*. Since rating the airtrain as *outstanding* has a significant positive coefficient, and about 15% of the remaining 41% (42% - 1%) already rate the airtrain as outstanding, no change is strongly indicated.

For both LTPark (long-term parking) and Rental (car rental center), a rating of *unacceptable* had a significant negative coefficient, while no other categories were significant. Given that for each variable, fewer than 1% of the customers gave a rating of *unacceptable*, no change is indicated.

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