A Study on Consumer Behaviour with Reference to Indian Domestic Airlines in Pune

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ABSTRACT

It took many years to say the satisfying customers are the most important aspect for making sales and profits in the long run. In the competitive world customers are more attracted to the customers who are providing better service rather a better price. The service became more important factor as the increase of buying power of the consumer. This paper is to identify best service quality practices prevalent in the domestic civil aviation sector in India. Methodology followed is Qualitative research and Quantitative, Principal Component analysis. The quality service practices identified by the study will benefit the public sector and private sector to improve their overall customer value and thereby customer loyalty and profitability. The study is confined to only domestic airlines and will be conducted only in Pune metro.

Keywords: Service quality, Public sector Airlines, Private Airlines, Principal component Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

A country's transportation sector plays an integral role in the growth and development of an economy. According to the Indian Aerospace Industry Analysis report, in terms of passenger traffic, India is currently the ninth largest aviation market in the world. (Source: The International Air Transport Association (IATA) Press Release No.:57 on 16 October 2014) With regards to air cargo tonnage, India leads the South Asian region -consisting of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Currently, India has 128 airports - including 15 international airports. (Source: Nathan Economic Consulting India January Pvt. Ltd., India 24, 2012 submitted a report to The Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Govt. of India).

The aviation sector has become the most important segment in the economic development of a nation. It plays a vital role in moving people or products from one place to another, either being domestic or international, especially when the distances involved are long. Indian aviation industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. Till 1991, the only public airlines in India has enjoyed monopoly in its operations and businesses and therefore could dictate its own terms to its customers who have no other choice but to accept whatever have been available irrespective of quality of service, pricing, hospitality and comfort.

The scenario has changed following globalization and air space having open to competitions. The subsequent events have moved very fast as more and more new players entered with lot of advantages of being new operators as compared to the airlines which have been in operation since independence. Introduction of low cost carriers also change the perception that air travel is reserved only for the elites. As a result, the sector which is completely dominated by full-service airlines till a decade ago is now dominated by low cost carriers. In a way, low cost carriers address the rising aspirations of the Indian middle class couple with their high price sensitivity. Low cost carriers make air travel accessible to many and also boosted air cargo as well. In 2003 the introduction of a new type of airline service called low cost carriers (LCCs) or no-frills air service - by Air Deccan, reinvigorated India's civil aviation sector. The Indian aviation sector was exposed to intense competition with the advent of a low-cost airline - Air Deccan back in 2003. The success of Air Deccan spurred the entry of other LCCs like Spice Jet, Indigo, Go Air and subsequently low fare offerings from Jet airways and Kingfisher airlines (Sunil Patel, 2014).

According to the reports of Center for Asia Pacific Aviation India Pvt. Ltd (CAPA-Aviation News on 19-Jun-2015) the market shares of domestic airlines are IndiGo remained (19-Jun-2015) the largest domestic airline in May-2015, with a 38.9% market share and 2.8 million passengers. Overall traffic increased 20.6% to 322.3 million passengers. IndiGo maintained its market share lead over Jet Airways (18.3%), Air India (15.8%), SpiceJet (11.7%), GoAir (8.6%), JetLite (3.2%), Air Asia India (1.3%), Vistara (1.3%), Air Costa (0.9%) and Air Pegasus (0.1%).

Latest Market Share: (source DGCA)

Market Share (%)										
Air India	Jet Airways	Jet Lite	Spice Jet	Go Air	IndiGo	Air Costa	Air Asia	Vistara	Air Pegasus	Trujet
16.0	18.7	2.7	13.2	8.1	35.6	0.8	2.3	2.0	0.3	0.4

Challenge in the domestic carriers markets in India is becoming tough as the customers' needs and wants are growing in variety. In such an occasion, low cost carriers need to be aware of the latest shift and trend to be able to react on time. Thus, precise and timely information on a wide range of customer needs and expectations become critically important nowadays. Understanding and meeting customers' expectations and subsequently being different from competitors are important in order to survive in the today's world of globalization. It is imperative that low cost carriers' measure and monitor service quality and satisfaction. The speed and intensity of change in service offerings has accelerated in recent years within the low cost airline industry (Atilgan et. al., 2008).

Low cost airline passengers not only consider the price but also the quality of service when selecting a flight (Jou, Lam, Hensher, Chen and Kou 2008). Quality of service is an important factor to develop

and maintain relationships with customers (Park, Robertson and Wu 2006). Passengers can assess and evaluate the quality of the airline through a comparison between experiences and their expectations on a number of attributes of the services (Gronroos 2007).The level of service quality has a direct impact on the satisfaction of air transport passengers (Saha, Theingi 2009). Quality of service has a positive influence on interest repeat purchase, recommend, and choose a better alternative in which three have a relationship with customer loyalty (Jones, Mothersbaugh, and Beatty2000). Service quality conditions influence a low cost carrier's competitive advantage by retaining customer support, and with this comes market share. Delivering high quality service to customers is essential for low cost carrier survival, so low cost carriers need to understand what customers expect from their services. Service quality is one of the best models for evaluating customer's expectations and perceptions. Service quality is a composite of various interactions between customers and airlines, With employees seeking to influence customers' perceptions and the image of the carriers (Gursoy et. al., 2005; Ishaq, 2012). Service quality is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations. Delivering quality service means conforming to customer expectations on a consistent basis (Parasuraman et. al., 1985). In 1988 Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry developed a generic instrument called SERVQUAL to measure service quality based on input from focus groups. It consists of five factors (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and contains a two-part, 22 scale items regarding expectations and performance. These five factors have been tested through numerous empirical studies in so various industries by many researchers (An & Noh, 2009) that it is also used in a variety of organizations. The SERVQUAL has been one of the most widely used and applied scales for the measurement of perceived service quality in recent years (Bigne et. al., 2003). Gronroos (1993) suggested that measuring passenger experiences in airline service quality is a theoretically valid way of measuring perceived quality. Understanding exactly what customers expect is the most crucial step in defining and delivering high quality service. The domestic carriers need to review its service strategy to increase customer satisfaction and subsequently customer loyalty. They should have strong commitment to service excellence as they also act as the ambassadors that carry the image of the nation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ariffin et. al., (2010) revealed that caring and tangible was the only dimension that helped explained passengers' satisfaction for low cost carriers. Although airlines needed to focus on the attributes that create competitive advantage such as low fare tickets, on time performance, schedule reliability, ease of booking procedures, after sale service, food on board, in flight entertainment and frequent updates about product developments, at the same time they must also ensure that their tangible, physical evidences or service environments of their offerings were being taken care of as perfectly as possible. Wong and Musa (2011) identified seven brand satisfaction dimensions which were tangibles, price, core service, reputation, publicity, word-of-mouth, and employee. The level of brand dissatisfaction was also higher for Malaysian Airlines compared with Air Asia though its brand image is Low Cost Carrier. Air Asia was perceived better than Malaysian Airlines in price, publicity, and word-of-mouth. On the other hand, Malaysian Airlines was perceived better in tangibles, core service, reputation, and employee. Aydin and Yildirim (2012) found that there was a significant relationship between airline firms' preference and airline services preference. For THY (Turkish Air Lines) passengers, "safety" factor was found to be the most important to prefer this airline company. Riandarini et. al., (2015) indicated that there were differences in causality between customer loyalty models of FSA (Full Service Air Lines) with LFA (Low Fare Airlines).

The quality of service and price together created satisfaction and encouraged the creation of a good image in the minds of passengers FSA and LFA. Quality of service had a greater influence on satisfaction than the price effect and the direct effect on the image quality of service was greater than its indirect effect through satisfaction. FSA found that customer satisfaction did not encourage loyalty, customer satisfaction LFA opposite effect on passenger loyalty. Johan et. al., (2014) found that perceived quality had the strong positive relationship with customer loyalty, and it was the most significant variable that affected customer loyalty. Mahmud et. al., (2013) showed that service quality influenced insignificantly toward customer's satisfaction with a positive relationship and price influenced insignificantly toward customer's satisfaction with a negative relationship, service quality influenced insignificantly toward customer's loyalty with a negative relationship and price influenced significantly toward customer's loyalty with a negative relationship. Customer satisfaction gave significant positive impact on customer loyalty. This implied that when customers felt satisfied then certainly they would also have a loyalty to the flight services industry. His research also recommended that the aviation services industries to maintain a consistent quality of service and continue to set the right price and fair, then the customers would certainly feel satisfied and be followed by loyalty to always use the services of the airline industry. Zangmo et. al., (2014) found that among the five SERVQUAL dimensions, passengers were most satisfied with the 'assurance' with 'reliability' being the least. Under the 'tangibles', passengers perception of in-flight entertainment services was low. Among the five items under 'reliability', airline website updating had the lowest level of satisfaction in passenger perception and a convenient flight schedule was the second lowest. Under the 'responsibility', efficiency of handling delayed flights was the lowest and promptness of responding to complaints was the second lowest. Understanding passengers' specific needs was the lowest and giving individual attention to passengers is the second lowest perceived under the fifth dimension 'empathy'. Passengers were most satisfied with employee's appearance of neatness and tidiness, kindness and willingness to help. Further, passengers were more satisfied with safety, the image of the organization and the language skills of the employees. The results further showed that about 72% of respondents agreed that Drukair provides quality service, and they were satisfied. Furthermore, 77% of respondents agreed to be loyal customers in that they were willing to recommend Drukair to others and to say positive things about Drukair (Drukair Royal Bhutan Airlines).

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Airlines industry is growing at a fast pace on one hand and other side the competition faced by the airlines to sustain in the market is getting difficult with the increase in fuel cost, airport taxes and along with more number of low cost carriers enter into this business makes it more difficult to run the business. The aviation industry has been identified as one of the more intangible service industries (Clemes et. al., 2008) and plays an important role in the global economy (Tiernan et. al., 2008).Customers become very choosy in selection of airlines because they know how to spend their hard earned money and they plan their trip, by exploring all the possibilities to get the best deal and they want to make sure every penny spent is worth it and get the best. Customers want best service at affordable rate with higher service quality, so issue comes up with it is low cost carriers; ultra-low cost carriers need to compete with hybrid and full service carriers. Therefore, the uphill tasks for domestic carriers are huge, so to maintain the quality and better service and keep their ticket cost low to attract customers is not an easy task they have in their hand.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the specific objectives of the study.

1. To find out the most significant service quality dimensions and service quality perception of the passengers with different socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. To achieve these purposes, the 5 - dimensional scale, suggested by Parasuraman et. al., (1988) will be applied to the airline travel sector i.e Indian Domestic Airlines (Full Service, Hybrid, Low cost and Ultra Low Cost carriers).

2. To test the demographic parameters with preference of Airlines.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study will be conducted among the travellers of Indian Domestic Airlines. The sampling unit of this research is voter belonging to Pune city. So the study can be regarded as special cases since one city is taken as sampling frame. Target sample size will be 242. For the purpose of the study the entire sample of respondents surveyed will be categorized i.e. stratified into classes with respect to the gender, age, education and type of airline. Stratified random sampling will be adopted to select the sample of 242 respondents. Based on the option chosen opted by the respondent they will be divided in to strata's and from each stratum respondents were selected at random as respondents for the study. The respondents were interviewed and the data was collected using a well-structured interview schedule.

The first section of the questionnaire will include questions pertaining to the demographic profile of the respondents. The second section a structured questionnaire with a total of 27 questions were prepared regarding the services provided by airlines. The primary data was collected will show various facets of the respondents. Simple percentages were worked out to study general characteristics like age, gender, education, type of airline used. The sample respondents were asked to indicate the response levels on Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Agree. Likert scale was used to find the response Cronbach's Alpha is calculated in checking the reliability of the data. Factor analysis is conducted for grouping the statements for political knowledge. To get with comprehensive results, the study proposed to adopt factor analysis and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) methods to analyze the data. The idea behind PCA and factor analysis is to reduce the dimensions of the observation, put the common variance together and come up with common factors and specific factors. In this paper, weighted average method is being used to know the most the most important and the least important variable in terms of preferred services.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frome Table 1 Out of 242 respondents 148 i.e. 61% are male and remaining 94 i.e. only 39% are female.

More than half respondents i.e. 64% belong to the age group of less than 35 years, 26% belong to the age group of 35 to 45 years whereas only 10% are more than 45 and above respectively.

65% of the respondents are graduates, 28% are post graduates and only 7% (18 respondents) are under graduates which are not very significant portion of the overall population. Majority of the respondents are either students (39%) or employees (49%). Only 9% have their own business and the remaining are retired or have any other occupation.40% of the respondents belong to income group between ₹50, 000 to ₹1, 00,000 and next highest (26%) is the income group of ₹1, 00,000 to ₹1, 50,000. Only 15 out of 242

respondents said that they do not travel by airways, reason being majorly booking procedure (82.6%) or costly (11.6%).

Table 1

Category		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	148	61%
	Female	94	39%
Age	Less than or equal to 35 Years	154	64%
	Between 35 to 45 Years	64	26%
	More than 45Years	24	10%
Level of Education	High school and under Graduate	18	7%
	Graduate	157	65%
	Post graduate	67	28%
Occupation	Student	94	39%
	Business	22	9%
	Employee	118	49%
	Retired and others	8	3%
Monthly Income	Less than ₹50,000	28	12%
	₹50,000 to ₹1,00,000	96	40%
	₹1,00,000 to ₹1,50,000	62	26%
	More than ₹1,50,000	56	23%
Do you travel by Airways	Yes	206	85%
	No	36	15%
Which airline company do you prefer	Indigo	86	36%
	Jet Airways	46	19%
	Air India	27	11%
	Spice Jet	19	15%
	Air Asia	16	8%
	GoAir	27	11%
	Others (Vistara, air carnival, air costa, alliance air, true jet etc)	21	9%
How do you know about the Airline	Online Advertisement	82	34%
	Travel Agency	12	5%
	Newspaper	14	6%
	TV	20	8%
	Friends/Peer Group	86	36%
	Other (Magazine, SMS, Networking Apps)	28	12%
Purpose of Travel	Official	38	16%
	Occasional	60	25%
	Leisure Trips	56	23%
	All of the above	78	32%
	Other	10	4%

(Contd...)

Category		Number	Percentage
Preferred Class	Business	36	15%
	Economy	164	68%
	No Specific Preferences	42	17%
When do you prefer travelling via Airlines	Always	82	34%
	Emergency	92	38%
	No Transport Available	40	17%
	Other	28	11%
How do you book your tickets	Airlines Website	106	44%
	Travel Agents	22	9%
	Other Websites	86	36%
	Through Family/Friends	18	7%
	Others (call centres, office will book)	10	4%
Who decides your Airline/Carrier	Yourself	184	76%
	Family Member	30	12%
	Company	12	5%
	Others-Secretary/ Travel Agent	16	7%
Purchase decision	Service Quality	58	24%
	Price	122	50%
	Brand image	52	21%
	Peer Group Influence	10	5%

Most of the respondents prefer Indigo (36%) followed by Jet Airways (19%) and Air India (11%). Indigo is chosen widely because of its attractive price deals.34 % of respondents said that they know about the company from online advertisement whereas 36% said from friend/peer group.

Almost 32% respondents choose airlines for Occasional and Leisure Trips while only 16% choose for Official purposes.68% replied that they prefer economy class whereas 15% preferred business class and 17% responded that they have no such preference.38% prefer airlines only when there is emergency whereas 34 % said that they always prefer travelling via airways.44% said that they book tickets through computer website directly where as 36% book their tickets through other websites such as makemytrip.com, Goibibo.com, Yatra.com.76% of the respondents say that they themselves decide their carrier/airlines.50.4% i.e. for almost half of them price is the most significant factor for purchase decision whereas for 24% and 21.5% of respondents their purchasing decision depends upon quality, service provided respectively and the brand image.

From Table 2 KMO value is 0.952, which is greater than 0.5 indicating that Factor Analysis could be useful for the given data set. Bartlett's Test value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. It means the data do not have any identity matrix.

Total Variance Explained-Component 1, 2, 3 and 4 have the values 16.301, 1.446, 1.228 and 1.170 respectively (From Table 3). These values are greater than 1. So, these four components can be extracted and are significant for the data analysis. The cumulative percentage is 74.610% of the total variance. That means these four components explain and signifies the total variance very effectively.

Table 2
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.952
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3698.411
	do	351
	Sig.	.000

Table 3
Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	16.301	60.373	60.373	16.301	60.373	60.373	15.864	58.754	58.754
2	1.446	5.357	65.730	1.446	5.357	65.730	1.553	5.750	64.504
3	1.228	4.547	70.277	1.228	4.547	70.277	1.395	5.167	69.671
4	1.170	4.332	74.610	1.170	4.332	74.610	1.333	4.938	74.610
5	.961	3.561	78.170						
6	.941	3.487	81.657						
7	.633	2.343	84.001						
8	.549	2.034	86.034						
9	.514	1.902	87.937						
10	.420	1.556	89.493						
11	.401	1.485	90.977						
12	.355	1.316	92.293						
13	.307	1.136	93.429						
14	.247	.916	94.345						
15	.225	.834	95.180						
16	.216	.799	95.979						
17	.206	.763	96.742						
18	.155	.574	97.316						
19	.140	.517	97.834						
20	.111	.410	98.243						
21	.106	.392	98.636						
22	.086	.318	98.954						
23	.080	.296	99.250						
24	.067	.248	99.498						
25	.050	.186	99.684						
26	.046	.172	99.856						
27	.039	.144	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Factor 1 has the highest correlations-Employees are sincere and hold patience in resolving passengers' problems = 0.935, Employees instils confidence to passengers = 0.922, Employees of the carrier have

knowledge to answer your questions = 0.918, the employees of the carriers are always courteous and understand your specific needs = 0.916So, from the above correlation significance we can name the component as 'Behaviour of the Employees'.

Factor 2 Check in process is efficient in the carrier = 0.890,the flight departs and arrives on time from the above correlation significance, we can name the component as 'Check in Efficiency'.

Factor 3 has the following correlation-Appearance, attitude and uniforms of employees are good = 0.769, the carrier provides quality food and beverages = 0.660, from the above correlation significance, we can name the component as 'Hygienic factors'.

Factor 4 has the following correlation-The carrier has pre-flight services (early baggage check-in, email and sms reminder) = 0.746, the carrier has adequate in-flight entertainment (newspapers, magazines) = 0.695, from the above correlation significance, we can name the component as 'Additional Services'.

After doing the factor analysis, (Table 4) it can be easily identified that the 4 factors which are significant for the turning around for Airlines are as follows: Behaviour of the Employees, Check in Efficiency Hygienic Factors, Additional factors like entertainment and pre booking reminders.

Table 4
Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component			
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*
The carrier has clean and comfortable interiors.	.812	.070	.209	−.056
The carrier offers high seating comfort.	.393	.302	−.128	.244
The carrier has adequate in-flight entertainment (newspapers, magazines)	.055	−.249	−.076	.695
Appearance, attitude and uniforms of employees are good.	.051	.079	.769	−.055
The carrier provides quality food and beverages.	.363	−.053	.660	.197
The flight departs and arrives on time.	.498	.440	−.445	.125
Check in process is efficient in the carrier	.041	.890	.066	−.054
The carrier has pre-flight services (early baggage check-in, email and SMS reminder)	.028	.256	.153	.746
Information on ticket prices, flight schedule are easily available on time.]	.866	.234	.075	.028
Has easy, accurate and speedy reservation and ticketing facilities.	.853	.329	.043	−.018
The carriers have convenient flight schedules and enough frequencies.	.888	.206	.073	.073
The carriers have non-stop service to various destinations.	.806	.225	−.008	.071
The carrier offers onboard shopping with wide selection of products.	.820	.086	.046	−.055
The employees of the carriers are always courteous and understand your specific needs.	.916	.086	.053	−.012
The carrier has efficient baggage handling services both during check-in and delivery.	.917	.133	.066	.020
In case of delay carrier immediately makes an announcement and provides all necessary information (waiting time, receiving of food packets, hotel stay, rebook a flight).	.885	.087	.038	.104
It has proper remedial procedures for deployed or missing baggage.	.869	.091	.015	.165
Employees are sincere and hold patience in resolving passengers' problems.	.935	.062	.067	.107
Employees are capable to respond to emergency situations.	.901	−.079	.045	.111
Employees of the carrier have knowledge to answer your questions.	.918	−.014	.084	.125

(Contd...)

	Component			
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*
Employees instil confidence to passengers.	.922	.026	.040	.111
The carrier makes you feel safe.	.926	.078	.047	.057
Probability of flight breakdowns is less.	.912	.075	.096	.036
The carrier provides seat preference.	.891	.064	.047	.037
The carrier provides meal preference.	.873	−.009	.046	.092
The carrier has facilities of pre order system.	.905	−.004	.091	.037
The carrier has a sound loyalty program to recognize you as a frequent customer.	.641	.052	−.115	.225

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
[a]Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

From the study, it can be well concluded that there are various factors that play a major and vital role for the proper turn - around of the Airline Industry. The most important factor for the Airline Industry is how and what way the employees of a particular airline company behave when the customer is on board for a flight. This is quite understood because Employees represents the culture that is followed in the particular airline industry like any other industry.

Another important factor is the efficiency in Check in and Check out for the customer because that's where most time of a customer is spent. It can also be concluded that Hygienic Factors also play a very vital role for airline industry. So, Proper hygiene and cleanliness is required to be maintained throughout the journey of the customers. Finally, Additional Factors which can be Pre Flight services such as email and SMS reminders and in-flight entertainment must also be taken care of for better customer satisfaction and customer delight.

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