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Passengers' Expectation on Service Quality Dimensions in Domestic Airline Services

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aimed to measure the passengers' expectation levels of service quality in the domestic airline services in Tamilnadu against their perceptions levels of the service quality and also to find out the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service quality. In this study, the airlines services are classified into three stages such as pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services. Using a SERVQUAL survey instrument a study was conducted with a sample of 400 by applying proportionate random sampling method. The study found that customers have higher expectations for service quality in domestic airline services.

KEYWORDS : Airlines, Domestic, Expectations, In-flight, Post-flight, Pre-flight, Quality and Services.

Introduction

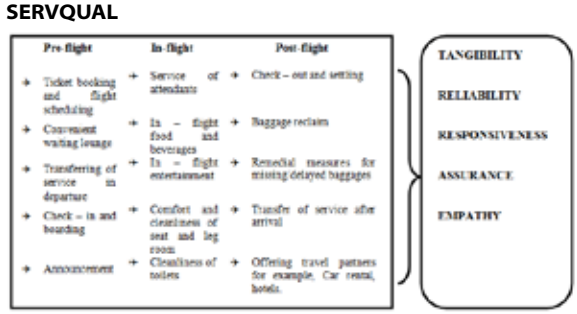
Service Quality is essential in any business dealing as it helps to create the acquaintance between the business and its patrons (Blem, (1995). In today's aggressive business milieu, service quality is very imperative to magnetize and preserve customers. This is due to the reality that customers obtain their perceptions of service quality on the levels of satisfaction they experience with a particular business. Businesses need to be able to gratify customers and convene their expectations of service quality in order to gain competitive advantage (Gagliano & Hathcote (1994). Thus marketers need to constantly evaluate customers' expectations of service quality in order to avoid customer discontent (Zeithaml, Bitner, 1996). Various Researchers agrees that, undoubtedly, expectations play major role in the conceptualization of service quality. For example, Bebko (2000) stated that "understanding customers' service quality expectations is the key to delivering service quality". But, there are many problems in operationalization of this service quality aspect.

Measuring Service Quality through SERVQUAL Instrument

Service quality can be described as a basis of differences between expectation and competency along the important quality dimensions. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry identified ten requirements useful for customers' evaluation of the quality of services: reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding the customers and service accessibility. Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1988) proposed a service quality scale (SERVQUAL), a generic instrument that has dimensions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles, the constructs were found to have high correlation. This instrument continues to be widely used in marketing studies of customer satisfaction and consumer preference, in spite of some argument that other models may be better. The stage of performance that a top quality service will need to give was conditioned through the expectation of the customers. Service quality is judged low when the performance was below expectation.

The SERVQUAL model is a common analytical tool used to measure customer service and perceived satisfaction. Reliability is the service company ability to deliver promises on time. In this study we focused on five factors that could predict the quality of the service provided by the investigated airline service provider. Responsiveness is the degree to which customers perceive service providers' readiness to assist them promptly. Assurance is the degree of courtesy of service providers' workers and their ability to communicate trust to customers. Empathy is the care and importance the service provider gives to an individual customer, and the degree to which specific customer needs and preferences can be understood and articulated. Lastly, tangibility is the evidence of facilities, personnel, and communication materials used by the company while offering services to customers. Pariseau and McDaniel (1997)argued that if there is an agreement that service quality exceeds, meets or falls below expectation, there would be a common ground for continuation or improvement of the service quality level.

Measuring variables of Domestic Airline Services with SERVQUAL



Research Methodology

Both primary and secondary data were used for this research work. To collect the primary data questionnaire was used with a proportionate random sampling method with a sample of 400 respondents of domestic airlines and to collect secondary data various magazines, books, journals, working papers and various websites were utilized. To analyze the primary data we have used statistical tools like Karl Pearson co-efficient of correlation analysis. This paper aimed to measure passengers' expectations on service quality dimensions in domestic airline services.

Research objective

- To find out the relationship between customers expectations and service quality in passenger flight services.
- To study the relationship between preferences of passengers expectations and dimensions of service quality
- To evaluate the relationship between expectation and satisfaction of dimensions of service quality.

Analysis and Discussion

An Empirical Relationship between Customers' Expectation and Service Quality in Passenger Flight Services.

In this research, the customers' expectations are ascertained at three stages namely pre–flight, in–flight and post–flight services. At this juncture, an important question arises to establish the relationship between customers' expectations and their perceptions towards prevailing service quality. This relationship in its order would reveal that customer expectations of service quality elements at three different stages. Therefore, in order to ascertain an empirical relationship, Karl Pearson co – efficient of correlation is applied to rank the indispensable service quality parameters.

Table No: 1.1 Service Quality Parameters

Factors	Correlation	Pre- flight	In – flight	Post – flight
Tangibility	Pearson Correlation	.545(**)	.487(**)	.613(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.499(**)	.400(**)	.580(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.516(**)	.438(**)	.597(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.239(**)	.172(**)	.281(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000
	N	400	400	400
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.508(**)	.424(**)	.494(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level is (2 – tailed)**

It is identified from the above table that there is a perfect correlation between customers' expectations and service quality factors at different stages. It is statistically proved that service quality can be recognized through perceived quality at the third stage or post flight services. Passengers are not able to describe the service quality at initial stage of pre– flight services and at second stage of in– flight services. Therefore, customers ranked their preferences of expectations of service quality in the following manner.

Table No: 1.2 Passengers' Expectations on Airline Services

Factors	Correlation	Pre- flight	Rank	In – flight	Rank	Post – flight	Rank
Tangibility	Pearson Correlation	.545(**)	2	.487(**)	3	.613(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.499(**)	2	.400(**)	3	.580(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.516(**)	2	.438(**)	3	.597(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.239(**)	2	.172(**)	3	.281(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.508(**)	1	.424(**)	3	.494(**)	2
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	

The above table declared that post – flight services are ranked as first except empathy factor among five dynamic factors of service quality. They placed rank one for pre – flight services on empathy factor, customers expect employees understanding from pre – flight services to post – flight services.

From the above table the ranks of preferences for passengers' expectations are also arranged in the following manner. In pre–flight, In–flight and Post-flight services, the order of service quality parameters are given in following table.

Relationship between Preferences of Passengers' Expectations and Dimensions of Service Quality

The different five dimensions of service quality and three different stages of chain of services are considered to establish a parametric relationship among the variables.

Table No: 1.3 Relationship between Preferences of Passengers' Expectations and Dimensions of Service Quality

Factors	Correlation	Pre- flight	Rank	In – flight	Rank	Post – flight	Rank
Tangibility	Pearson Correlation	.545(**)	1	.487(**)	1	.613(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.499(**)	4	.400(**)	4	.580(**)	3
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.516(**)	2	.438(**)	2	.597(**)	2
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.239(**)	5	.172(**)	5	.281(**)	5
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001		.000	
	N	400		400		400	
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.508(**)	3	.424(**)	3	.494(**)	4
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000		.000	
	N	400		400		400	

The above table denotes that the ranks of preferences for expectations are arranged in the following manner. In Pre – flight services, Tangibility (r=0.545, Rank – 1), is considered as the most important factors from the customers' point of view, these factors include facilities in ticket booking centers and flight scheduling, transfer of service in departure check in boarding etc the next importance given to Responsiveness (r=0.516, Rank–2), Empathy (r=0.508, Rank–3). They are expecting response from service providers in the form of proper attention and immediate answer to passenger needs and requests, cancelled or delayed flights and also from missing and lost baggages. The respondents are providing somewhat importance for Reliability (0.472, Rank–4), and Assurance (0.239, Rank–5) factor of service quality. They need not bother about the image and history of airlines and trustworthy and credibility of services in the pre – flight services.

In in–flight services, Tangibility (r=-0.487,Rank–1) and Responsiveness (r=0.438,Rank–2) play vital role; in that stage respondents were depended on crews, consequently, they are expecting proper service of attendants, quality food and beverages and immediate response to passengers' needs and request on in- flight services. They ranked frequent cabin service and rounds of flight attendants, ability of flight attendants to speak in various dialects. Variables of Empathy r=0.424, was Ranked as 3, whereas reliability factor r= 0. 400 was Ranked as 4-perfect amenities in aircraft in- flight services. The variables of assurance was ranked as five r=.172 for in–flight services, these were

expected by customers of this particular factor.

In Post-flight services, Tangibility (r=0.613, Rank–1) and Responsiveness (r=0.597, Rank – 2) are taken as the most interesting and important elements from the customers' view point. These elements include check out and settling, baggage reclaim, transfer of service after arrival, remedial measures for missing/delayed baggage and providing travel partners for the customers such as car rentals and hotel arrangements etc. The respondents specified less weightage for other elements such as reliability (r=0.580, Rank = 3), Empathy (r=0.494, Rank= 4) and they provide assurance factor as (r= 0.281, Rank = 5).

Relationship between Expectation and Satisfaction of Dimensions of Service Quality

Passengers' satisfaction begins when a company provides good services to passengers at their expectations level. If passengers are satisfied with their service they will buy more services, and do so more often. Passengers' gratification is an essential aspiration for each airline providing passenger services. The customer has a wide choice to select the suitable airline services according to their necessities. Therefore, airlines service providers are continuously working at three stages of services for their development and innovation to differentiate themselves from competitors. There are many factors that can help airlines to build its customer base, and passenger service and satisfaction can be a determining factor in the success of an entire operation. The delivery of high service quality is essential for airlines' survival and competitiveness. In this study, it is identified that there is a strong association between passengers' expectations and satisfaction of five airlines service quality factors.

Table No: 1.4 Relationship between Expectation and Satisfaction of Dimensions of Service Quality

Stages of Airline services	Correlation	Overall satisfaction on service quality factors
Pre- Flight services	Pearson Correlation	.325(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
In – Flight services	Pearson Correlation	.342(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400
Post – Flight services	Pearson Correlation	.391(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

The above table depicts that the Karl Pearson coefficient values are statistically significant with 0.01 levels. It denotes that there is a correlation between pre – flight, in – flight and post – flight services and overall satisfaction with service quality factors. Further it is identified that the satisfaction with service quality is completely identified after the flight experience of the passengers. The above table revealed that the correlation values are as finally proved (pre- flight services and overall satisfaction with service quality factors=0.325), (In-flight services and overall satisfaction with service quality factors = 0.342) and (post - flight services and overall satisfaction with service quality factors = 0.391).

Major findings of the study

- The expectations of passengers are very high of three major services namely pre – flight services, in- flight services and post-flight services.
- It is found that there is a high expectation of pre–flight services in case of ticket booking, flight scheduling and check–in and boarding services. Apart from this, the passengers' expectations are moderate in case of convenient waiting lounge, transferring of service after departure and announcement of service expectations. The t value and p values are statistically significant at five percent level.
- It is confirmed that there is a high expectations of in–flight services such as service of attendants, comfort and cleanliness of seat and leg room and cleanliness of toilets and also there is a reasonable expectations in case of in – flight food and beverages and in–flight entertainment. The t value and p value are statistically significant at five percent level.
- It is found that there is a high expectation in case of process of check out and settling and baggage reclaim services and there is a moderate expectation of remedial measures for missing/delayed baggages, transfer of services after arrival and offering travel partners. The t value and p value are statistically significant at five percent level.
- It is found that the domestic airline passengers unanimously felt that in domestic airline services the services, expectations are fulfilled by the airline service providers. The perceived satisfactions of the passengers are sufficient and convenient.
- In overall satisfaction about airline services, it is found that the passengers felt moderately satisfied in the factors namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

Conclusion

Based on the research outcome, this research paper can conclude that passengers ' expectations of service quality in domestic airline service are high in pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services ; therefore this proves that the customer expectation of service quality is not in line with the acceptable levels of service quality in the aviation sector. The service provided by domestic airlines may however, be perceived as at the adequate level, which is the moderate level of service the passengers will endure without being disappointed, however the passenger expectation is still beyond the levels of service quality in the airline services. The airline service sectors should improve their service quality on all the factors discussed in this research paper as contributing the most to the Customer Perceived Service and Expected Service gap in order to match customers' expectations.

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