Research Paper COMMERCE

Service Quality in Jet Airways: A Study

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ABSTRACT

At the turn of the past century, the techniques of measuring service quality and its dimensions formed a major thrust in marketing literature due to which the scholars and practitioners have been operating on the quality of services delivered. Serving and satisfying a customer is the primary goal of the hospitality industry where the service providers themselves become part of the product. The airline industry is a typical service industry, one in which the involvement of service components is relatively high and, hence, special attention need be paid to the service quality, as it could potentially increase passenger satisfaction, profits, and market share. This study, therefore, aims to understand the service quality indicators of private sector airline i.e., Jet Airways. After conducting a thorough review of literature, in-depth interviews, and two rounds of pilot tests, five dimensions (responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and reliability – RATER) and 20 indicators were obtained and the implications and suggestions were then discussed.

KEYWORDS Service Quality, RATER, Jet Airways, Airline/Aviation Industry

Genesis:

Padam hi sarvatra gunairnidheeyat – Good qualities put their foot prints everywhere.

– Kalidasa's aphorism from *Raghuvamśam*

The crust and core of all that the external world stands for is: serving and satisfying customers, which is the fundamental goal of the hospitality industry where the service providers themselves become part of the product. Aviation, a typical service industry, involves a relatively high number of service components and, hence, special attention need be paid to the service quality, as it could potentially increase passenger satisfaction, profits, and market share. Quality is the management's topmost competitive priorities and a prerequisite for sustenance and growth. The quest for quality improvement has become a highly desirable objective in today's intensely competitive markets. It is reckoned as the prime mover towards enhanced business performance and several researchers have underlined the quality improvement initiatives resulting in a sustainable competitive advantage.

Introduction:

The provision of high quality services to passengers is the core competitive advantage for airlines profitability and sustained growth (Chen, 2008). In recent years, the air transportation market has become more challenging and airlines have turned to focus on service quality to increase service satisfaction. Service quality conditions influence an organisation's competitive advantage by retaining customer patronage and market share (Park et al., 2004).

Competition, these days, is not only rife, but growing more intense constantly and aviation industry is no exception which has always been famous for its continuous struggle: cutting costs, managing fluctuating demand, keeping up with tight quality requirements while trying to maintain superior services and satisfy needs of various customer groups. Lately, the Indian air travel market – both domestic and international – has been experiencing great competition due to deregulation and customers' increased awareness of service quality. Under the circumstance, airlines not only attempt to establish more convenient routes, but also introduce more promotional incentives, including mileage rewards, frequent flyer membership programme, sweepstakes, among others hoping to consolidate the market share and enhance profitability. However, the marginal benefits of marketing strategies gradually wane because most of the airlines act similarly. Recognising this limitation of the marketing strategies, some air carriers now tend to focus on the commitment of improving customer service quality.

Service Quality – The Concept and Its Measurement:

Service quality can be regarded as a composite of various attributes. It not only consists of tangible attributes, but also intangible/subjective attributes such as safety, comfort, which are difficult to measure accurately. Different individual usually has wide range of perceptions toward quality service, depending on their preference structures and roles in process (service providers/receivers). To measure service quality, conventional measurement tools are devised on cardinal or ordinal scales. Most of the criticism about scale based on measurement is that scores do not necessarily represent user preference. This is because respondents have to internally convert preference to scores and the conversion may introduce distortion of the preference being captured.

Service industry is a composite of various attributes: intangibility, perishablility, inseparability, and heterogeneity; all of which make it all the more difficult to measure service quality. To explore the past related research document, the most common methods for evaluating airline service quality is the statistical method. Five-point Likert scale is the major tool in evaluating service quality. Nowadays, the fuzzy set theory has been applied to the field of management science, like decision-making. However, it is scarcely used in the field of service quality.

Results and Discussion:

Conceptualisation and measurement of service quality perceptions have been the most debated and controversial topics in the services marketing literature to date. Service quality measurement is one of the most significant measurement tools for firms to understand consumers' needs and wants by analysing the experience of consumers and customers' satisfaction on the services provided.

Scale items were grouped according to five key dimensions

of SERVQUAL: responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and reliability elements of the customers' experience. The five dimensions of SERVQUAL are defined as follows:

Responsiveness: The willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;

Assurance: The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence;

Tangibles: The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials;

Empathy: The provision of caring, individualised attention provided to its customers by the organisation; and

Reliability: The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

This section presents empirical findings of the survey whose objective is to test the service quality attributes and dimensions of Jet Airways and to assess what features of the service process are most important for the target group depicted in Table-1. The hundred respondents, chosen randomly, were asked to separately evaluate each service attribute, according to the gap between their perceptions and expectations, using a five-point Likert scale: Great, Best, Good, Average, and Poor with five different scores being assigned to them 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

Table-1: ANOVA Values for Independent Variables on ServQual

Demographic Variables		Organisational Change		F	Sig
		Mean	SD		
Gender	Female	– 1.5	3.3	0.51	0.4781
	Male	0.1	5.9		
Age	< 25 Years	– 2.6	3.7	2.1	0.0914
	26-35 Years	0.6	4.9		
	36-45 Years	– 0.9	6.8		
	46-55 Years	3.8	4.7		
	> 56 Years	– 2.2	3.6		
Marital Status	Single	0.3	0.3	2.4	0.0996
	Married	– 1.1	5.1		
Annual Income	< ₹ 3 lacs	9.2	0.2	1.22	0.312
	₹ 3-5 lacs	– 0.2	4.2		
	₹ 5-10 lacs	0.2	6.1		
	> ₹ 10 lacs	– 1.3	5.8		

[Source: Field Investigation]

Table-2: Anova Values for ServQual Attributes and Indicators

Item	Attribute/Indicator	DF	Anova SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
	Responsiveness					
01	Handling of Delayed Flights	2	729.6081	182.4020	31.29	<.0001
02	Check-In/Baggage Handling Service	2	364.6456	91.1614	15.64	<.0001
03	Handling Passengers	3	257.7740	64.4435	11.06	<.0001
04	Vernacular/Foreign Language Skills	3	359.5580	89.8895	15.42	<.0001
	Assurance					
05	Back Office Operations	4	853.3434	213.3358	36.6	<.0001
06	Error-Free/Fair Transactions	4	231.8726	57.9681	9.95	<.0001
	Tangibles					
07	In-Flight (Digital) Services/Entertainment Facilities	3	96.7465	24.1866	0.88	0.4793
08	Food and Beverages/Cuisine Provided	3	635.6909	158.9227	5.78	0.0003
09	External Appearance of the Airplane	3	197.2006	49.3001	3.36	0.013
10	Provision of Pillow/Blankets	3	1702.4542	425.6136	29.03	<.0001
11	Crew/Staff Grooming/Appearance and Attitude	3	344.4096	86.1024	10.14	<.0001
12	Cleanliness of Cabin/Toilets	3	1027.8690	256.9673	30.25	<.0001
	Empathy					
13	Convenient Operating Hours/Flight Schedules	3	544.4553	136.1138	16.02	<.0001
14	Personal/Individual Attention to Customers	3	612.0920	153.0230	18.01	<.0001
15	Consideration to Women/Children/Differently Abled	4	367.1002	91.7750	3.08	0.02
16	Crew/Staff Behaviour Towards Delayed Passenger	4	151.7296	37.9324	1.27	0.2871
	Reliability					
17	Punctual/Providing Service at the Promised Time	3	108.0985	27.0246	1.09	0.3647
18	Insistence on Error Free Records	3	130.3927	32.5982	1.32	0.2692
19	Sincerity of Interest in Solving Customer's Problem	2	205.3302	51.3325	2.08	0.0909
20	Frequent Flyer Incentive/Programme	3	740.9150	185.2287	7.50	<.0001

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	Responsiveness Mean
0.226484	– 5.9031E+17	5.243014	– 0.888180
R-Square	**Coeff Var**	**Root MSE**	**Assurance Mean**
0.587409	– 4.3E+17	3.829181	– 0.890507
R-Square	**Coeff Var**	**Root MSE**	**Tangibles' Mean**
0.781961	– 3.3E+17	2.914707	– 0.883245
R-Square	**Coeff Var**	**Root MSE**	**Empathy Mean**
0.160432	– 6.2E+17	5.462282	– 0.881013
R-Square	**Coeff Var**	**Root MSE**	**Reliability Mean**
0.366343	– 5.6E+17	4.968839	– 0.887293

[Source: Field Investigation]

Table-2 portrays the calculated values of service quality of Jet Airways as perceived by the respondents.

Responsiveness: *All the four indicators of this attribute i.e., Items-01 through 04 represent a poorer p-valve at 5 per cent level of significance and Jet Airways needs to up the ante so that its overall responsiveness is projected in a much better positive light than that is perceived right away.*

Assurance: *Both the indicators of this attribute Item-05 (i.e., Back Office Operations) and Item-06 (i.e., Error-Free/Fair Transactions) represent a poorer p-valve at 5 per cent level of significance and the private carrier needs to upgrade the backend and/or follow-up procedures so as to enhance its image technologically.*

Tangibles: *All the indicators of tangibles' attribute except Item-07 (i.e., In-Flight (Digital) Services/Entertainment Facilities) are on the downside represented by a poorer p-valve at 5 per cent level of significance point towards an urgent need for Jet Airways to improve its material and aesthetics on massive scale by innovating so as to rule the roost.*

Empathy: *A significant attribute, empathy scores not so well among the respondents in terms of p-valve at 5 per cent level of significance particularly Item-13 (i.e., Convenient Operating Hours/Flight Schedules) and Item-14 (i.e., Personal/Individual Attention to Customers). The prime takeaway is to sensitise the decision-makers so that empathy springs overtime.*

Reliability: *Here, the private carrier has an upper hand over the government carrier in that except Item-20 (i.e., Frequent Flyer Incentive/Programme) all other components of the Reliability attribute have a stronger p-valve at 5 per cent level of significance, implying that Jet Airways should maintain its current momentum in so far as reliability is concerned and go beyond to redefine its reliability in the wake of new efficient carriers.*

Conclusion:

Understanding the customers is essential to creating successful travel/flight programmes. Knowledge of customers' behaviours can assist the airlines/carriers in successfully meeting their needs. Perhaps, the most important is the need for an organisation to position itself towards service with a basic knowledge of customer behaviour. Here, the focus of marketing activities in the airline industry should take into consideration the customers' needs and wants in order to achieve its objective. Generally speaking, the awareness of the importance of aviation is at an all-time high in most of the societies today and will continue to increase in the future. Therefore, the airlines should certainly stay abreast of the changes which go a long way in assisting the organisation in attracting/retaining customers.

The overall findings of the study have significant implications for understanding and enhancing service quality in the public and the private sector alike, particularly with respect to the preparation of effective marketing and management strategies for the improvement of the daily operations of travel programmes. Nevertheless, some limitations of this study need to be considered. The study was carried out in the airports, hotels and resorts setting and was limited to the passengers/clientele therein through random sampling technique for data collection. Thus, the results cannot be generalised to other settings. In spite of what has been said above, future research should also explore additional variables in terms of customers' satisfaction, perceived values, and future intentions of participating in air/travel programmes.

Paying attention to service quality should be the practice of the day if airlines aspire to improve market share and further enhance financial performance in both domestic and international markets. A necessary procedure should be followed by airlines in order to have valid and reliable measures to better understand the variables likely to have a bearing on the service quality offered by their organisation such as perceptions and expectations of airline passengers.

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