Measurement and Test of Service Quality Gap Model in the Airline Industry: A Quantitative Investigation of Selected Airline Companies

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Abstract-

This study prepares a profile for airline passengers and tests the Gap Model of service quality in airlines industry. Every organization must maintain its service quality so that it can attract more customers to buy its products. This involves mixed method approach including quantitative and qualitative methods used in defining five dimensions and scales for airline service quality measurement. The qualitative study reveal that image and Terminal Tangibles are not necessarily to be included in the scale as this Terminal tangibles are not under the control of Airline management in process of service delivery. The other dimension "Image" projected is not considered to be in a delivery process of service quality. This study is descriptive in which primary the data were collected from the 431 respondents. To compare the various parameters of the service quality mean for expected and perceived quality was compared. For components of service quality, combined means of relevant statements were calculated and compared through P-E formulae (Perceived – Expected). This study is based on the items of the scale of AIRQUAL model which is specifically designed for Airlines based on the SERVQUAL model of service marketing. This study comprehensively presents the gaps between individual statements of the service quality in the Airlines Industry in India and present the combined gaps for components of service quality.

Keywords: Service Quality, AIRQUAL, Comparative Mean, Service Quality Gap

Introduction

Companies are now days started focusing on building long and strong connection with customers by offering high level of satisfaction that will automatically leads to loyalty among customers and retain them for life long. Significant decline in demand for air travel, rising cost and worldwide economic shutdown are also some of the hurdles face by Airline industry. This study also instigates the importance of demographic variables age and income while investigating the service quality model in the context of airlines.

It is recommended that Airline service providers should the various service quality gaps under the service quality dimensions determined in the study. The responsiveness dimension of service quality has shown the maximum gap the negative direction. Responsiveness is something, which is being given more importance nowadays as compared with the other service quality aspects.

The second most important gap has been found with tangibility and reliability. However, the marketers are addressing tangibility largely but they should be able to communicate it in the same spirit to their customers. Reliability is something that requires at most attention. If the reliability is not established in the operations, customers prefer to switch from one service provider to another service provider. The gaps in the service quality with respect to assurance and empathy cannot also be ignored. It is important to address these gaps because if they are not addressed timely they may crease bigger problems and cause higher dissatisfaction in future. The aviation industry also must pay attention to retain the satisfaction and loyalty of young and mediocre income customers whose satisfaction and retention have been found significantly lower than the higher age groups and higher income groups respectively.

The research was conducted which shows that technical, functional and dimensional quality plays a vital part in finding the satisfaction level of its customers with their airline services. It is found that customers are more satisfied with functional quality rather than the technical qualities. Additionally as per the cluster analysis, it is identified that customer is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the service quality, in fact, they lie between intermediate and satisfied **(Leon & Martin, 2020).**

Customer oriented strategy needs to be developed and implemented in order to improve the quality of service provided to the customers. Giving importance to service dimensions will assist service providers improve their service quality (**Othman et. al, 2020**). This Airline business is quite unsteady and extremely competitive as all airlines try to have comparable fare charges and same type of regular flyer programs. In such situation, service quality is an essential factor that has impact on satisfaction of passenger, choice and loyalty for airline.Air India travellers are content with the standard of facilities provided. It can be registered for by high point of pessimistic service gap attained in the palpable and empathy aspects. It is essential for the operator of the business to understand the perception of its customers on the service been provided to them. Matching perceived quality with expected quality is what service quality management means.

With strategic models in "service quality", management are able to find out the quality issues and makes quality improvement programs that led to efficiency improvement, increase profitability and enhance overall performance of the Airline company. Hence it can be said that service quality remains intangible and difficult to measure and define.There are many studies, researches are done on measuring the airline service quality, and most of them has aim to reveal the connection between quality of service and related issues. Airline service providers should the address the various service quality gaps under the service quality dimensions determined in the study.

Literature Review

Ingaldi (2016) found that SERVPERF model of measuring service quality is not much known to people, but in fact, it is an interesting procedure of measuring service quality. The basic

presumption of SERVPERF model is that it is used to improve the service quality. "Cronin and Taylor created "SERVPERF model" they identified that they were unable to investigate in customer expectations, as the expectations were confusing and unsteady. They found that expectations of customers were changing rapidly. The SERVPERF model examines only the quality of the service received by the customer and compares it with the ideal service.

Singh (2016) examines a study that showcases a structure for standardizing the service quality of complete service national aviation sector in Indian perspective. It begins with the acknowledgement of service quality features of Indian local aviation sector. After acknowledgement of features and conclusion changes (air taxis), analytic hierarchy process chain of command was organized preserving in mind entire goal of recognizing standard air service, which was preserved at the highest degree in the ranking. After that, parallel preference loads of each major basis, sub basis and domestic preference loads of conclusion changes in terms of each sub basis were regulated by set wise juxtaposition.

Ghotbabadi et. al, (2015) found that in early 1980, service quality has been studied by the researchers in wide manner, it is when the Nordic model was introduced by Groonroosin order to measure the service quality. Groonroos believe in differentiating technical qualities as a result for the performance of service and its functional qualities as a particular acknowledgment of the service provided to customer. Matching perceived quality with expected quality is what service quality management means.

J. D'silva (2015) concluded that service quality is an important part of the service or product that is been provided to the customer. Identifying expectations of customers and their perception about the quality of service, it is essential for providers of service to identify if the customer is satisfied with the service provided to them as well as their behavioral intentions. SERVQUAL is a service quality model developed by "Parasuraman et al. (1988)," for its effective relevancy. The SERVQUAL model uses 5 dimensions and 22 variables to find out the gap between the perception of provider of service comparing it to the expectations as well as experience of customers.

M. Sharifi (2014) found that in order to develop sustainable competitive advantage, customer loyalty is found to be an important element. So many researches have been conducted that includes loyalty programs like giving reward points. The study was conducted by using SITEQUAL model to find the influence of relationship marketing on the loyalty of customers. Companies provide retail, commercial, and investment banking services. Therefore, increasing satisfaction level of customers by making them use internet, which can help the firm in identifying customer's needs. SITEQUAL model helps in measuring the quality of an internet-shopping website.

Kumar &Sikdar (2014) concluded that paramount significance is assumed by the measurement of service quality in the retail sector. Development of sound and trustworthy RSQS tool will help retailers in operating in different formats. This research develops the dependability and strength

of four paradigms of RSQS model involved of "Reliability, Physical Aspects, Problem Solving, and Personal Interaction." The effectiveness of "policy" dimension, which was a part of RSQS model, was not able to develop in Indian retail sector. Usual practices of retail sector to develop a pleasant experience of shopping in expectancy to supply beneficial customer service. By reliable and effective RSQS model, retail sector can avail benefits, as it would make them measure overall perceptions of customer's feelings with reference to quality of service.

Chikwendu et al. (2012) confronts that majority of the earlier air service research have employed the SERVQUAL technique to examine "service quality". Nevertheless, the 22- item scale of SERVQUAL on behalf of five proportions is not suitable for estimating all facets of aircraft "service quality" because of the features of aircraft "service quality".

Santouridis et. al, (2012) studied that the rapid expansion and build-up of services that are been provided on the internet has made many researchers to take efforts and develop instrument that can measure the quality of those services. Regardless the fact, that the research in this sector in as of now at early stage, various such tools have been developed by several researchers. Among other instruments, ES-QUAL model plays an important role, as it focuses on measuring the quality of nature of services instead of technical quality of websites measured by other models. With reference to the importance of ES-QUAL model, the highest rank is received by the efficiency as it has a considerable positive impact on all three dependents variables, which are perceived overall quality, value, and loyalty.

Shen & Yahya, (2020) revealed that quality of services as well as the price of the flight is one of the major determinants of passenger satisfaction that affects and leads to the loyalty of customers, recommending that good services and affordable prices make customers more satisfied and make them loyal to the firm. This study provides proof to the influence of quality of service and price of ticket on loyalty and satisfaction of customers from the point of view of conceptual framework. Along with this, this research work has adopted the AIRQUAL model as five dimensions of quality of service to explore the effects on loyalty of customers with reference to low cost carriers (LCCs).

Monoarfa et. al, (2020) studied that in the air transport industry, the AIRQUAL model is found to be more adequate to evaluate the quality of services. This model, the quality of physical quality is examined as per the performance of services of flights while on flight also the quality of service at the time of departure. It is found by the researchers that the quality of service has a positive and considerable impact on Brand Credibility; it means that brand credibility will be increased by the better service level.

Fananiar et. al, (2020) examined the impact of AIRQUAL model (Airline Tangible, Terminal Tangible, and Empathy) on satisfaction of customers and word of mouth for airlines. More attention is required by airline industry and improvement towards Airline Tangibility and after that empathy element. For instance, on time arrivals and departures, transport provided from

airport to city, compensation scheme given for baggage that are lost in transit, proper care of baggage, to meet the demand of consumers, the number of flights are sufficient.

Deepa et. al, (2020) revealed that satisfaction of customers is significantly as well as positively affected by five dimensions of AIRQUAL model, five dimensions are airline tangibles, terminal tangibles, personnel services, empathy, and image. Important theoretical participation given by this study is to identify the variables driven by the industry and determined the forecasters for airlines service quality (ASQ) for considering the behavior of customers. This will improve and enhance the efficiency service quality in air transport industry. In airline industry, service quality is an important elements and very much desired. System of providing good quality services in any airline firm makes an impression about that airline that leads to loyalty and satisfaction in its customers.

Sudhakar&Gunasekar, (2020) conducted a study, applied AIRQUAL model, and tried to understand the effects of components of airlines of the satisfaction of its customers. Eight types of components have been included in the study to identify the results and they have been rated by online by travelers of that airline. The outcome of the study shows two components; it is found that value for money and service have high influence in increasing the satisfaction level of its customers. Indian customers are to get influenced by the value of money component ignoring the type of airline they are flying from, on the other hand foreign nationals give more emphasis on the service quality when they are flying from LCC.

Althaqaf et. al, (2019) conducted a study using AIRQUAL model and studied about the satisfaction of customers. It is identified in a study that overall satisfaction level of customers was below average. As compared to international travelers, domestic travelers were found to be more satisfied with reference to price, timings, and services of airline. Hence, this gave a clue that this satisfaction of domestic customers might be because of government subsidies on local flights, time frames are also short for local flights, and most of the customers are not concerned about the quality of food, timings, management of baggage, entertainment etc. Therefore, satisfaction level is high among those customers.

Hasan, et al. (2019) found that AIRQUAL model was advanced mainly on the behind of the common feature of SERVQUAL and SERVPERF measurements that were procedure-based evaluation of service quality and functional throughout companies. AIRQUAL implemented the service quality features of air services only and is an amalgamation of five company particular features: air service tangibles, terminal tangibles, personnel, empathy and impression. The main cause for the growth of AIRQUAL as a service quality measurement scale was that the present balances of service quality were expanded and implemented in various nations and traditional situation.

Brochado, et al. (2019) found thattravellers' views on quality of service, pleasure and repurchase purposes in north Cyprus domestic air service. To estimate aircraft "service quality" 43-item scale (AIRQUAL) framed on different factors such as air service tangibles, destination

tangibles, staffs, sympathy reflection, client pleasure, repurchase pupose, and personal interaction, dependability, durability and size problems. About 583 feedback forms were gathered by employing impossibly critical specimen method with the support of SPSS and LISREL graphical technology. The outcome was that air service tangibles was discovered to be the most crucial feature to influence both client pleasure and repurchase purpose and moreover projected that client pleasure is optimistically connected to repurchase and assured proposals**.**

Methodology

The present study is an empirical study conducted to test Service Quality Gap Model in the context of Airline Industry. In addition to this, the study also finds theQuantitative Investigation of Selected Airline Companies. The present study is descriptive in nature which is based on the primary data. It includes perception of consumers about the services rendered by service providers. Primary data has been collected from 431 respondents. The data analysis has been done with the help of t-test, ANOVA, Exploratory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling based on the SERVQUAL model. The mediating effect of customer satisfaction has also been checked on customer loyalty through mediation analysis in the AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) software.

Data Analysis

4.4.1 Comparative mean Values of Perceived and Expected Quality:

Table 4.16 shows the comparative mean values of the perceived and expected service quality for airline industry.

Table 4.16 Comparative Mean values for Perceived and Expected Service Quality

Service Quality Statements	Perceived	Expected
How is the quality of in-person assistance provided by employees of the airline	4.22	5.94
How is the on-time departure and arrival service of the airline	4.34	5.87
How is the attention given to infants and elderly passengers of the airline	4.36	5.64
How convenient are the schedules of flights offered by the airline	4.38	6.10
How are the airline services in best interest for its passengers	4.34	5.82
How safe is the journey of the airline	4.47	5.97
How the service of crewmembers with respect to time and quality as is promised	4.47	5.97
How passenger's needs are taken care by cabin attendants	4.41	6.06
How is the consistency in the delivery of quality of services of the airline	4.28	6.03

How is the knowledge of the employees of the airline	4.61	6.05
How is the communication of cabin attendants	4.53	6.08
How is the humbleness and politeness of the employees with the passengers	4.48	6.16
How is the professionalism of cabin attendants towards passengers	4.39	6.16
How is the confidence of the crewmembers while guiding and helping passengers	4.55	5.94
How is the response to the passengers' issues by cabin attendants of the airline	4.21	5.92
How is the promptness of cabin attendants in response to the passengers	4.10	5.81
How is the cabin attendant's attitude in helping passengers	4.04	5.87
How is the response of staff when they see a passenger clueless	4.00	5.78
How proactive are the crewmembers in responding the passengers	4.07	5.97
How is the overall interior of the airline	4.39	6.20
How is the cleanliness and hygiene inside the airline	4.49	6.05
How effective are the air conditioners of the airline	4.38	5.81
How is the quality of the meals provided by the airline	4.38	5.92
How comfortable are the seats space of the airlines with respect to space and legroom	4.57	5.99
How neat looking and well uniformed are the crewmembers of the airline	4.60	6.53

Table 4.16 shows the Perceived and Expected mean values to identify service quality gaps of domestic airlines. "How is the quality of in-person assistance provided by employees of the airline" (Perceived mean value 4.22) & (expected mean value 5.94), "How is the on-time departure and arrival service of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.34) & (expected mean value 5.87). "How is the attention given to infants and elderly passengers of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.36) & (expected mean value 5.64), "How convenient are the schedules of flights offered by the airline" (perceived mean value 4.38) & (expected mean value 6.10). "How are the airline services in best interest for its passengers" (perceived mean value 4.34) & (expected mean value 5.82), "How safe is the journey of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.47) & (expected mean value 5.97).

"How the service of crewmembers with respect to time and quality as is promised" (perceived mean value 4.47) & (expected mean value 5.97), "How passenger's needs are taken care by

cabin attendants" (perceived mean value 4.41) & (expected mean value 6.06). "How is the consistency in the delivery of quality of services of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.28) & (expected man value 6.03), "How is the knowledge of the employees of the airline" (perceived mean 4.61) & (expected mean value 6.05).

"How is the communication of cabin attendants" (perceived mean value 4.53) & (expected mean value 6.08), "How is the humbleness and politeness of the employees with the passengers" (perceived mean value 4.48) & (expected mean value 6.16). "How is the professionalism of cabin attendants towards passengers" (perceived mean value 4.39) & (expected mean value 6.16), "How is the confidence of the crewmembers while guiding and helping passengers" (perceived mean value 4.55) & (expected mean value 5.94). "How is the response to the passengers' issues by cabin attendants of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.21) & (expected mean value 5.92), "How is the promptness of cabin attendants in response to the passengers" (perceived mean value 4.10) & (expected mean value 5.81).

"How is the cabin attendant's attitude in helping passengers" (perceived mean value 4.04) & (expected mean value 5.87), "How is the response of staff when they see a passenger clueless" (perceived mean value 4.00) & (expected mean value 5.78). "How proactive are the crewmembers in responding the passengers" (perceived mean value 4.07) & (expected mean value 5.97), "How is the overall interior of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.39) & (expected mean value 6.20). "How is the cleanliness and hygiene inside the airline" (perceived mean value 4.49) & (expected mean value 6.05). "How effective are the air conditioners of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.38) & (expected mean value 5.81), "How is the quality of the meals provided by the airline" (perceived mean value 4.38) & (expected mean value 5.92), "How comfortable are the seats space of the airlines with respect to space and legroom" (perceived mean value 4.57) & (expected mean value 5.99). "How neat looking and well uniformed are the crewmembers of the airline" (perceived mean value 4.60) & (expected mean value 6.53). Overall, it is found that the expected value is significantly higher than the perceived value.

4.5. Gap Model of service quality in airline industry

Table 4.17 P-E ANALYSIS (Perceived Quality-Expected Quality)

Dimensions of Service Quality	Perceived (P)	Expected (E)	Difference (P-E)
Tangibility	4.47	6.08	-1.61
Reliability	4.41	6.01	-1.60
Responsiveness	4.08	5.87	-1.79
Assurance	4.51	6.08	-1.57
Empathy	4.33	5.88	-1.55
Total	**21.80**	**29.92**	**-8.12**
Average	**4.36**	**5.98**	**-1.62**

Table 4.17 shows the difference between the perceived mean values and expected mean values. In the dimension of service quality, the highest difference is found in the "Responsiveness," where perceived value is 4.08 and expected value is 5.87 (difference is -1.79), next is "Tangibility," the perceived value is 4.47 and expected value is 6.08 (difference is -1.61). With reference to "Reliability," the perceived value is 4.41 and expected value is 6.01 (difference is -1.60). Regarding "Assurance" the perceived value is 4.51 and expected value is 6.08 (difference is -1.57). The last dimension of service quality on the basis of difference shown above is "Empathy" the perceived value is 4.33 and expected value is 5.88 (difference -1.55). The total perceived value is 21.80 and expected value is 29.92 (difference is -7.92). The average perceived value is 4.36 and expected value is 5.94 (difference is -1.62).

Findings and Conclusion

This study gives very useful inputs for the marketers handling the operations of airline service providers. The study reveals that there is a consistent gap in the service quality perceived and expected. Get requires immediate and attention from the key decision-makers in the airline industry. Though in most of the past studies such gaps have been identified but this study also relates the perceived quality with satisfaction and retention at the same time. Hence it is proved that the marketers have to pay attention to address the service gaps if they want to achieve high satisfaction and high customer retention. A major objective of this study is to find the service quality gap between perceived and expected service quality. The data has been captured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from excellent to worst. The comparison of the service quality has been made with the help of mean and t-test.

The quality of services viewed by clients varies in various traditional situations and therefore the features of service quality should be limited to particular cultures. As an outcome, most of the measurement scales expanded to examine service quality are for personal traditional situation. Therefore, significant scales must be engaged in thesis studies to fetch novel features that are fixed within the traditional situation. The study also finds the gaps between the perceived and expected quality (P-E) based on the SERVQUAL model.

The outcome was that air service tangibles was discovered to be the most crucial feature to influence both client pleasure and repurchase purpose and moreover projected that client pleasure is optimistically connected to repurchase and assured proposals. The structural Equation modeling establishes the casual relationships among the constructs. In this study, the casual relationships have been established between perceived quality and customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction and customer retention.

In this study, the service quality gaps have been found by subtracting the expected service from perceived service. The t values for all the statements of service quality under all the constructs were found negative and the differences were found statistically significant. Hence, it has been

concluded that there is a significant and negative gap between the perceived service quality and expected service quality.

Exploratory factor analysis is applied to combine the variables under the various constructs or factors. The items under one construct/factor are highly correlated to each other but less correlated with the items in the other factor. Following are the results of the exploratory factor analysis. The total number of statements was 35; from which 7 constructs were finally extracted (five constructs were the dimensions of service quality and two constructs were customer satisfaction and customer retention).

It was found from the study that for almost all the items of expected and service quality under determinants of service quality ("empathy, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and assurance"). In most of the cases, the correlation value is above 0.5 or very close to it. For some of the statements under Tangibility, Assurance and responsiveness, the correlation value is higher than 0.6, which shows a significant correlation between perceived and expected service quality for airlines.

The mean values for the various statements of empathy that the level of perceived empathy is slightly above the moderate value of the scale.The second order CFA is based on the relationships of service quality constructs with the "Perceived Service Quality". The perceived service quality, as a construct is constituted by the five dimensions of the service quality viz. Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. The relationships of all these dimensions were found significant with the "Perceived Service Quality".

The reliability of all constructs was checked with Cronbach's alpha. The minimum value of reliability of a construct should be 0.7, hence the reliability of all the constructs is above the critical value, hence the constructs formed are robust.Service quality in airlines has been a popular area of interest of the scholars and academicians. This study has been carried out for further investigation. This chapter includes the analysis of the primary data collected through a structured questionnaire prepared on 7-point Likert scale. The questionnaire captured perceived as well as the expected value of the various aspects of the service quality. The data analysis has been done with the help of t-test, ANOVA, Exploratory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling. The mediating effect of customer satisfaction has also been checked on customer loyalty through mediation analysis in the AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) software.

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