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PASSENGER EXPECTATIONS ON DOMESTIC AIRLINE SERVICES: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Air transportation industry in India is increasing rapidly in recent years. Similarly, the numbers of airline companies and passengers traffics are increasing radically. Thus, searching and understanding the expectations of passengers in airline services are getting importance for airline companies. This study measures and compares differences in passengers' expectations of the preferred domestic airlines. In this study, 400 questionnaires were applied for domestic airline passengers in Tamilnadu. The data were collected by using 5- point Likert type questionnaire filled by the respondents. The findings confirmed that significant differences exist between the domestic flights and passenger groups regarding their demographic factors such as age, gender, educational qualification, monthly income and occupation and also family size. Therefore, the author made an attempt to study passengers' expectations on domestic airline services with special reference to state of Tamilnadu..

KEYWORDS

Airline, Domestic, Expectations, Passengers, Pre-flight, in-flight, Post-flight and Services.

INTRODUCTION

Expectations of airline passengers are not only wrought by how well an airline performs versus its direct competitors, they are also increased by standards set by other industries. Innovative products and services in one industry can raise the bar for all industries, including commercial aviation. Airlines and airports have to tune into the customer from perception when scheming passenger services, so they activate more from the outside-in. Airline passengers have hoisted their prospects around seating packages, staff interactions, priority treatment, requiring airlines to think more like retailers and less like a mode of transportation amid rising operating costs. Faced with rising operating costs, evolving customer needs and global challenges, the airline industry offers a great learning place for other industries. On and off the runway, passengers are pushing airlines to think more like retailers and less like a mode of transportation. Expectations around pre-flight, in-flight and post flight services that experiences the subject to passengers. Differences across passengers' go ahead of the typical leisure and business divide. Behaviors, preferences and attitudes are shaping that passengers desire and with emerging markets fueling travel growth, so too are cultural differences.

DOMESTIC PASSENGER AIR TRAFFIC IN INDIA 2012-2014

According to the Airport Authority Report (AAI) 2014, the domestic passenger traffic in January 2014 has stagnated to 10.21 million from 10.21 million in January 2013 registering a flat growth. The total passenger traffic during the reporting month has shown an increase of 1.7 per cent during January 2014 as compared to January 2013. In February 2014, total passenger traffic demand rose by 4.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2013. International passenger traffic was increased by 5.0 per cent and domestic passenger traffic increased by 3.5 per cent during February 2014.

PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF DOMESTIC AIRLINE SERVICES

An Expectation has been viewed as multiple ways in service marketing literature. According to Zeithaml et.al (1993) stated that "expectations are viewed as predictions made by customers about what is likely to happen during an impending transaction or exchange". Basically, expectations are classified into two categories i.e., predictive and normative. In predictive expectations, subjective probabilities are the occurrence of the future events (Bearden and Teal, 1983; Westbrook, 1987; Boulding et al., 1993). In normative expectations, what the customers expect from an excellent service provider or what the customer hopes for (Zeithaml et al., 1993) or desires (Prakash 1984). These two types of expectations are also sometimes referred to as "will" expectations and "should" expectations respectively (Boulding, et al. 1993).

To explore the service expectations of airline passengers, the respondents were asked to rate their expectations of airline service by using Likert five point scale ranging from very high to very low. From the consumer behavioral point of view the service expectations and its levels will vary from individual to individual. In the high profile service such as airline services need to be assessed carefully because the status, usage, purpose of airline passengers are highly volatile. To analyze the service quality, expectations of domestic airline passengers is yet another objective framed in this study in order to find the expectations of passengers' pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services. To extract right information from the respondents, one sample t- test is employed to know their expectations in pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services.

PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF PRE-FLIGHT SERVICES

This study aims to understand what is expected of the airline companies by the passengers to provide the desired service quality and to identify service quality receptiveness. The expectations construct has been viewed as playing a key role in consumer evaluation of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, (1985) its meaning in the service quality literature is similar to the ideal standard in the consumer satisfaction/ dissatisfaction literature. In this study the airline services are classified into three categories i.e., Pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services.

PRE-FLIGHT SERVICE IS EXAMINED BY RATING THE VARIABLES LISTED BELOW:

1. Ticket booking and flight scheduling
2. Convenient waiting lounge
3. Transferring of service in departure
4. Check – in and boarding
5. Announcement

TABLE NO. 1.1: ONE-SAMPLE STATISTICS FOR THE PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS ON PRE - FLIGHT SERVICES

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PREFS1	400	4.1775	.90446	.04522
PREFS2	400	3.8700	1.00779	.05039
PREFS3	400	3.8450	.90444	.04522
PREFS4	400	4.0200	.82844	.04142
PREFS5	400	3.9000	1.01122	.05056

From the above table, it is found that the mean values of five variables of pre – flight services ranges from 4.1775 to 3.8450 with varying standard deviations. The significant t – values for all these variables are presented in the following table.

TABLE NO. 1.2: ONE-SAMPLE t - TEST FOR THE PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS ON PRE – FLIGHT SERVICES

Variables	Test Value = 3		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference		9five percent Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
PREFS1	26.038	400	.000	1.17750		1.0886	1.2664
PREFS2	17.266	400	.000	.87000		.7709	.9691
PREFS3	18.686	400	.000	.84500		.7561	.9339
PREFS4	24.625	400	.000	1.02000		.9386	1.1014
PREFS5	17.800	400	.000	.90000		.8006	.9994

From the above table, it is shown that domestic airlines passengers have strong expectations like ticket booking and flight scheduling ($t=26.038$, $p=0.000$) and check – in and boarding ($t=24.625$, $p=0.000$) and they have moderate level of expectations with regard to convenient waiting lounge ($t= 17.266$, $p=0.000$) transfer of service in departure ($t=18.686$, $p=0.00$) and announcements ($t=17.800$, $p=0.000$). The t-values are statistically at five percent level. Therefore, it is concluded that the passengers' expectations of pre – flight service are moderate.

PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS OF IN – FLIGHT SERVICES

IN-FLIGHT SERVICE IS EXAMINED BY RATING THE VARIABLES LISTED BELOW:

1. Service of attendants
2. In – flight food and beverages
3. In – flight entertainment
4. Comfort and cleanliness of seat and leg room
5. Cleanliness of toilets

TABLE NO. 1.3: ONE-SAMPLE STATISTICS FOR THE PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS ON IN-FLIGHT SERVICES

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
INFS1	400	4.2550	1.90501	.09525
INFS2	400	3.8000	1.07372	.05369
INFS3	400	3.4650	1.14107	.05705
INFS4	400	4.0200	.98845	.04942
INFS5	400	4.0875	.99867	.04993

From the above table, it is identified that the mean values of five variables of in – flight services ranges from 4.2550 to 3.4650 with varying standard deviations. The significant t – values for all these variables are presented in the following table.

TABLE NO. 1.4: ONE-SAMPLE t- TEST FOR THE PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS ON IN – FLIGHT SERVICES

Variables	Test Value = 3		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference		9five percent Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
INFS1	13.176	400	.000	1.25500		1.0677	1.4423
INFS2	14.901	400	.000	.80000		.6945	.9055
INFS3	8.150	400	.000	.46500		.3528	.5772
INFS4	20.638	400	.000	1.02000		.9228	1.1172
INFS5	21.779	400	.000	1.08750		.9893	1.1857

The above table shows that domestic airlines respondents have strong expectations with regard to service of attendants ($t=13.176$, $p=0.000$), comfort and cleanliness of seat and leg room ($t=20.638$, $p=0.000$) and cleanliness of toilets ($t=21.779$, $p=0.000$). They have moderate level of expectations with regard to in-flight food and beverages ($t= 14.901$, $p=0.000$) and in-flight entertainment ($t=8.150$, $p=0.000$). The t-values are statistically at five percent level. Thus, it is proved that the passengers' expectations of in-flight service are high.

PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF POST FLIGHT SERVICES

Post-flight service is examined by the following variables:

1. Check – out and settling
2. Baggage reclaim
3. Remedial measures for missing/delayed baggages
4. Transfer of service after arrival
5. Offering travel partners for example, Car rental, hotels.

TABLE NO. 1.5: ONE-SAMPLE STATISTICS FOR THE PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS ON POST FLIGHT SERVICES

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
POSTFS1	400	4.0850	.92732	.04637
POSTFS2	400	4.0050	1.01615	.05081
POSTFS3	400	3.8400	1.02324	.05116
POSTFS4	400	3.8275	.86580	.04329
POSTFS5	400	3.4800	1.05469	.05273

The above table shows that the mean values of five variables of post – flight services ranges from 4.0850 to 3.4800 with varying standard deviations. The significant t-values for all these variables are clearly shown in the following table.

TABLE NO. 1.6: ONE-SAMPLE t – TEST FOR THE PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS ON POST FLIGHT SERVICES

Variables	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	9five percent Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
POSTFS1	23.401	400	.000	1.08500	.9938	1.1762
POSTFS2	19.781	400	.000	1.00500	.9051	1.1049
POSTFS3	16.418	400	.000	.84000	.7394	.9406
POSTFS4	19.115	400	.000	.82750	.7424	.9126
POSTFS5	9.102	400	.000	.48000	.3763	.5837

From the above table it is shown that domestic airlines passengers have strong expectations with regard to check out and settling ($t=23.401$, $p=0.000$) and baggage reclaim ($t=19.781$, $p=0.000$) along with that they have moderate level of expectations with regard to remedial measures for missing or delayed baggages ($t=16.418$, $p=0.000$) and transfer of service after arrival ($t=19.115$, $p=0.000$) and offering travel partners such as car rental, hotel etc. ($t=8.150$, $p=0.000$). The t values are statistically significant at five percent level. Hence, it is proved that the passengers' expectations of post-flight service are moderate.

INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

In this study it is essential to find the influence of independent demographic variables on the pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight factors. The total average scores of pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight variables are considered as dependent factors and the independent demographic variables as well as passengers details are considered as independent factors individually.

INFLUENCE OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE OF PASSENGERS AT THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

The three types of place of residence-urban, semi-urban and rural areas of passengers as well as their perceptual difference are identified through one-way analysis of variance. The mean value comparison is done by referring annexure tables.

TABLE NO. 1.7: INFLUENCE OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE OF PASSENGERS AT THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY

Domestic Airlines Chain of Services		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pre-flight	Between Groups	7.333	2	3.667	7.122	.001
	Within Groups	204.384	397	.515		
	Total	211.717	399	-		
Post-flight	Between Groups	5.728	2	2.864	4.370	.013
	Within Groups	260.209	397	.655		
	Total	265.938	399	-		

From the above table, it is found that pre-flight ($F=7.122$, $p=0.001$) and post-flight experiences ($F=4.370$, $P=0.013$) are statistically significant at five percent level. This leads to the mean wise comparison of different place of residence. It is found that semi-urban passengers expect better pre-flight (mean = 4.1596) and post-flight services (mean=3.99). This means that the expectations of semi-urban passengers of pre-flight and post-flight service are high and in case of in-flight services the f and p values are not statistically significant at five percent level. Hence, the place of residence is not influencing the passengers' expectations on domestic airlines chain of services.

INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION WISE CLASSIFICATION OF PASSENGERS AT THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

The five types of educational qualification such as up to higher secondary, graduate; post graduate, professional and other categories of passengers as well as their perceptual difference are identified through one-way analysis of variance. The mean value comparison is done by referring annexure tables.

TABLE NO. 1.8: INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION WISE CLASSIFICATION OF PASSENGERS AT THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY

Domestic Airlines Chain of services		Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig
Pre-flight	Between groups	6.736	7	1.123	2.152	.047
	Within Groups	204.982	393	.522		
	Total	211.717	400	-		
Post-flight	Between groups	9.559	7	1.593	2.442	.025
	Within groups	256.379	393	.652		
	Total	265.937	400	-		

From the above table, it is found that pre-flight ($F=2.152$, $p=0.047$) and post-flight experiences ($F=2.442$, $P=0.025$) are statistically significant at five percent level. This leads to the mean wise comparison of different education qualification of the passengers. It is found that the passengers of higher secondary educational qualifications level expect more of pre-flight (mean = 4.2323) and post-flight services (mean=4.0452) and in case of in-flight services the f and p values are not statistically significant at five percent level. Hence, the educational qualification is not influencing the passengers' expectations of domestic airlines chain of services. This states that passengers of up to higher education expects some better quality of pre-flight services as well as post-flight services.

INFLUENCE OF OCCUPATION OF PASSENGERS AT THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

The six types of occupation status such as Business, Profession, Private Employees, Government Employees, Student and Other categories of passengers as well as their perceptual difference are identified through one-way analysis of variance. The mean value comparison is done by referring annexure tables.

TABLE NO. 1.9: INFLUENCE OF OCCUPATION OF PASSENGERS AT THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY

Domestic Airlines Chain of Services		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pre-flight	Between Groups	7.868	8	1.124	2.161	.037
	Within Groups	203.849	392	.520		
	Total	211.718	400	-		
In-flight	Between Groups	11.904	8	1.701	2.154	.037
	Within Groups	309.516	392	.790		
	Total	321.420	400	-		
Post-flight	Between Groups	9.347	8	1.335	2.040	.049
	Within Groups	256.591	392	.655		
	Total	265.938	400	-		

From the above table, it is found that pre-flight ($F=2.161$, $p=0.037$), in-flight ($f=2.154$, $p=0.37$) and post-flight experiences ($F=2.040$, $P=0.049$) are statistically significant at five percent level. This leads to the mean wise comparison of different occupational status of the passengers. It is found that professional passengers expect some better pre-flight services (mean = 4.1732), while in case of in-flight and post flight services student categories expect some more (mean=4.2519) better services. This entails that students have more expectations of in-flight as well as post-flight services.

INFLUENCE OF MONTHLY INCOME OF PASSENGERS AT THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS' EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

The five types of monthly income such as up to INR.20, 000, INR.20, 001– 30,000, INR.30, 001– 40,000, INR. 40,001– 50,000 and INR.50, 001 and above of passengers as well as their perceptual difference are identified through one-way analysis of variance. The mean value comparison is done by referring annexure tables.

TABLE NO. 1.10: INFLUENCE OF MONTHLY INCOME OF PASSENGERS ON THREE STAGES ON PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY

Domestic Airlines Chain of Services		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pre-flight	Between Groups	14.621	6	2.437	4.859	.000
	Within Groups	197.097	393	.502		
	Total	211.718	399	-		
Post-flight	Between Groups	22.662	6	3.777	6.102	.000
	Within Groups	243.275	393	.619		
	Total	265.937	399	-		

From the above table it is found that pre-flight ($F=4.859$, $p=0.000$) and post-flight experiences ($F=6.102$, $P=0.000$) are statistically significant at five percent level. This leads to the mean wise comparison of different monthly income wise classification of the passengers. It is initiated that maximum passengers income level ranges from INR 40,001 – 50,000 and they have some more expectations of pre –flight services (mean = 4.2421) and in case of post-flight services maximum (mean = 4.1860) passengers ranges from INR 40,001 –50,000 and they have some more expectations of post flight services and in case of in-flight services, the f and p values are not statistically significant at five percent level. Hence, the monthly income is not influencing the passengers' expectations of domestic airlines chain of services. This identifies that maximum income of passengers ranges from INR 40,001 – 50,000 and they have more expectations of pre-flight as well as post-flight services.

INFLUENCE OF PASSENGERS FAMILY SIZE AT THREE STAGES OF PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

The three types of family size such as 1-3, 4-6 and above 6 of passengers as well as their perceptual difference are identified through one-way analysis of variance. The mean value comparison is done by referring annexure tables.

TABLE NO. 1.11: INFLUENCE OF PASSENGERS' FAMILY SIZE ON THREE STAGES OF PASSENGERS EXPECTATIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY

Domestic Airlines Chain of Services		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pre-flight	Between Groups	3.973	2	1.987	3.796	.023
	Within Groups	207.744	397	.523		
	Total	211.718	399	-		
In-flight	Between Groups	9.004	2	4.502	5.721	.004
	Within Groups	312.416	397	.787		
	Total	321.420	399	-		
Post-flight	Between Groups	5.147	2	2.574	3.918	.021
	Within Groups	260.790	397	.657		
	Total	265.937	399	-		

From the above table, it is identified that pre-flight ($F=3.796$, $p=0.023$), in-flight ($f=5.721$, $p=0.004$) and post-flight experiences ($F=3.918$, $P=0.021$) are statistically significant at five percent level. This leads to the mean wise comparison of different family size of the passengers. It is shown that passengers from a family which consists of maximum 4-6 members passengers expect better pre –flight services (mean = 4.0450), (mean=4.0502) and (mean=3.9281) and they have more expectations of all the three stages of chain of services. This implies that passengers from a family of 4-6 members have more expectations of pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- ◆ The expectations of pre-flight and post-flight services are high among semi-urban passengers and also the passengers of up to higher secondary education level qualification. The professionally employed passengers expect some better pre –flight services, while in case of in-flight and post flight services, student categories expects some better services. In case of income groups, maximum income of passengers ranges from INR 40,001 – 50,000 and they have more expectations of pre-flight as well as post-flight services.
- ◆ The airline passengers give much importance to external aspects of airline service providers and they are very particular about their conveniences in ticket booking and facilities in aircrafts.
- ◆ The airline passengers of Tamilnadu are very much concerned about reliability of the service providers such as proper records, sympathetic and reassurance and remedial measures.
- ◆ Since the airline services are costlier, the respondents expect more responsiveness from the airline service providers regarding passenger's grievance redressal mechanism, transfer of services and cancellation or delay in flights etc.
- ◆ In case of assurance, the passengers are expecting a constructive mechanism to handle all the procedures and formalities as well as they expect more representativeness from airline service providers during their travel.
- ◆ Since the airline service comprises lot of formalities, the passengers expect the empathetical response and support from the airline service providers in case of cabin services, care and concern over passenger needs and proper information about cancellation and rescheduling of flights.
- ◆ The air travel is basically risk in nature hence, it is common for a passenger to feel fear and uncertain about their travel. Therefore, confidence building becomes very essential on the part of airline service providers.
- ◆ Safety and security becomes very crucial factor which is to be considered more in airlines. Consequently, the passengers expect more protective measures and trust formation from the side of airline service providers.
- ◆ The airline services involve a complex mechanism from ticket booking to check out. Hence the passengers expect methodical approach and efficiency mechanism in handling all those things.

CONCLUSION

Understanding and measuring the expectations of airline passengers is a difficult task and it is an important for service providers. Consecutively to have a successful business and to maintain their competitiveness in relation to other airlines, airline managers should employ proper strategies, gain insight into factors that influence travelers' decision making in their airline preferences, and also to focus on the factors that have the greatest impact on travelers' preferences. Adhering to the needs and expectations of passengers will result in offering high levels of service and consequently pleasures but will also contribute to shaping attitudes and expectations. Considering the research findings the airline companies are able to plan ahead to try to meet the expectations of airline passengers when boarding a domestic air carriers.

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