Research Paper

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COMMUTERS' SATISFACTION ON THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY AIR ASIA, DOMESTIC SKIES AT TIRUCHIRAPPALLI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

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ABSTRACT

The whole structure of industry and commerce rests on the well laid foundation of transportation. Thus, an effective transport system is a prerequisite for the economic development of a country. It is evident that economic growth in India over the true decades has increased demand for all transport services, particularly air services. Service quality of any sector is evaluated through the achievement of the customers' expectation. Low cost carriers have gained importance among the minds of the commuters due to the increase trend in air travel due to tourism ,family and business activities. Among the low cost carriers Air Asia has got considerable crowd booking and hence the researcher has attempted to examine the quality of services provided by domestic skies thereby revealing the satisfaction of the commuters on the services imparted to them.240 commuters were selected for the study and the collected data were analysed by adopting various tools such as percentage analysis. Chi-square test, Discriminant analysis and Freidman rank test. From the analysis the commuters were found to expect more on the ground service delivery. Hence the employees must be prepared to convince and assist the commuters with the boarding and arrival procedures promptly and convincingly.

KEYWORDS: transportation, commuters, tourism, Service quality, real estate, community welfare

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1.1 The magnitude of Service Industry:-

Marketing is techniques to create and allocating the required services upto the customers' expectations. According to the researcher, marketing is

"….the intimate and optimistic measure of a company's contribution in the market in order to capitalize the organizational wealth".

Marketing enables in meeting the wants of a customer, which may be tangible or intangible. Service marketing will involve direct contact with the customers. India's economic growth has introduced many creative strategies in all industrial sectors including the service industry. The intangible industries involve in various activities such as transportation, communication services, financial institutions, real estate, community welfare, social and personal services institutions. The service sector contributes around 60 per cent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and has been realized as one of the biggest and fastest evolving sector both in domestic and in the global landscape.

Quality can be considered in both internal and external perspectives. Internal quality is thezero-defect which means doing the job in a right way and according to the available resources. The external quality is the perception of the customers' which is a crucial aspect that every service industry should be aware off. Service quality is the level of consistency between the customer's expectation and the degree of the received services. Every service sector will have to concentrate

in adopting a suitable strategy in considering the need of the customers which helps to build customer loyalty and enriching customers. This revision will increase the goodwill of the firm.

Every individual are engaged with many busy activities in their daily life. People are in need of a proper mode of transport to accomplish their work .Transportation removes the hindrance of distance. The growth of domestic and foreign trade heavily depends on diversified means of transport. Among the various means of transport, aviation plays a major role in moving goods and people within and outside the country. The airline industry must adapt various marketing strategies to achieve business success. The airlines must always be obliged to induce people to interconnect their feedback with service provided by the airliners.

Air travel is a product of the 21st century which increases the quality of life style by widening people's tour activities and thereby elevating the cultural practices. The aviation sector has transformed and revolutionized the life of the populace. In the present era, majority of the customers decide to choose airways for reaching the longest destination at the earliest, and it is here where passenger air transport has bloated up with an increase in the number of aircrafts and airline companies and thereby in turn increasing the economic growth of the country. Further, there is a drastic change in the commuters' perception, where they expect excellence in the quality of services.

The whole structure of industry and commerce rests on the well laid foundation of transportation. Thus, an effective transport system is a prerequisite for the economic development of a country. It is evident that economic growth in India over the true decades has increased demand for all transport services, particularly air services. There are 88 scheduled international carriers-5 Indiancarriers and 83 foreign carriers. Currently India has air connectivity with 55 countries throughmore than 300 routes. The scheduled international passenger traffic for the second quarter(April-June)of the year 2016 stands at 13,296,993 while the international passenger traffic for the corresponding period in the year 2015 stood at12,153,343thereby witnessing a growth of 9 percent.

Service quality of any sector is evaluated through the achievement of the customers' expectation. It is essential to catch the voice of the customers (V.O.C) and evaluate the voice of the process (V.O.P) to narrow down the gap. This will increase the quality of the rendered services.When the customers receive services beyond their expectation, it leads to high satisfaction level and if the expectation is more than the received quality, it leads to dissatisfaction. Every industry providing tangible or intangible products cannot survive in a business environment without the customers. Ultimately, developing an optimistic affiliation with the customers by rendering high-quality service will benefit the industry to capture high market share. Listening to clients' preference is a diplomatic way to earn customer loyalty and furnishing excellent customer service in a favourable culture must permeate throughout the organization.Expectations' serve as the normative standard in the appraisal process.

1.1.2 Aviation market in India:-

New Delhi in India has become the third largest aviation market in terms of domestic passenger traffic, beating Japan. India's domestic air passenger traffic stood at 100 million in 2016 and was behind only the US (719 million) and China (436 million), Sydney-based aviation think-tank **Capa Centre of Aviation** said in its latest report. India acquired the third spot globally by unseating Japan, which flew 97 million domestic passengers in 2016.Domestic air traffic has shown a consistent growth of 20 -25% throughout 2015 and 2016, peaking in January this year at 25.13%. However, the domestic travel demand rose 16% in February this year, ending the long streak of over 20%.

In the airline industry it is decisive to analyse the insight of the commuters regarding the service offerings. A thorough analysis will depict the culture of hospitality in the respective airlines, and considering the quality of services, the commuters choose their airline. Hence this study reveals its significance by attempting to analyse the service quality of the commuters of Air Asia in domestic skies at Tiruchirappalli International Airport.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Indian Air sector has undergone huge transformation following the liberalization of the aviation sector, welcoming the private players with full service airways and affordable carriers into the industry. This industry survives on the quality of services imparted to the commuters. Currently airliners have introduced many innovative strategies to boost up the loyal commuters towards their airlines and this has gained a competitive advantage. Every commuter whether travelling in a business class or an economic class expect a high quality service that makes their travel comfortable. Services should be offered by professional personnel who can adhere to the needs of the commuters at any time when

needed. A word of mouth creates lots of image to the airliner. Any commuters who have experienced the service offered by a flight confess to others on the travelling experiences. If it is a positive experience then it creates more market but if it is a negative experience then it reduces the market of the airline.

Air Asia is a Low cost carrier which meets up the demand of economic commuters. Examining the proficiency of the domestic skies, the airline is in the fourth position compared to other airliners. Many commuters revealed bitter experiences while travelling with Air Asia. Hence it becomes a necessary issue to address to the problems incurred while delivering the services to the commuters.

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1.2.1 Low Cost carrier

Air Asia is a Low cost carrier which meets up the demand of economic commuters. Examining the proficiency of the domestic skies, the airline is in the fourth position compared to other airliners. Many commuters revealed bitter experiences while travelling with Air Asia. Hence it becomes a necessary issue to address to the problems incurred while delivering the services to the commuters. Hence it is the need of the hour to bring out the primary perceptions of the commuters on the quality of services provided by the airline.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Air Asia India is an Indian low cost carrier headquartered in Chennai, India. The airline is a joint venture with Air Asia is holding 49% stake in the airline. The airline commenced its operations on 12 June 2014 with Bangalore as its primary hub. It is the first foreign airline to set up a subsidiary in India. As of May 2017,

Air Asia India is the fourth largest low cost carrier in India, after Indigo, Jet Airways and Go Air. The fleet operates to nearly 17 destinations within India.

Tiruchirappalli International Airport is the airport that serves the flyers program from Tiruchirapalli in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. The airport is ISO 9001:2008 quality certified and was declared an International Airport on 4 October 2012. It is the second largest airport in International passenger traffic after Chennai in Tamil Nadu, and Third largest in terms of total passenger traffic next to Chennai and Coimbatore. Hence the researcher has attempted to analyze satisfaction of the Air Asia commuters in Tiruchirappalli International airport.

The airline quickly scaled it up to three daily flights in the subsequent years even as it spread to other destinations such as Madurai, Coimbatore and Kochi."Tiruchirappalli handles about 3,000 domestic passengers a day, of which about 30% are handled by AirAsia. AirAsia enjoys over 80% seat occupancy in all its Tiruchirappalli flights. The domestic air industry offers service with both full cost and Low cost carrier. Air Asia have captured a wide market among the economic commuters by providing their domestic service to nearly 17 destinations in and around India The study is limited to the commuters' travelling short and medium haul distance at domestic skies.

The study focuses on the factors that affect commuter's satisfaction by analysing the causal relationships between the service provider and the commuters. It is the intention of the researcher to determine the perception of the commuters about the in-flight and ground services offered by Air Asia. The outcome of this study may contribute to the improvement of the strategy formulation and resource allocation. Not only it enhances the service quality of the airline but also the image of the airline among the minds of the commuters who have availed the services and are yet to avail the services.

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1.4 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to **Wiredja (2015)**, the three non-processing domains making the composition of airport domains departure, processing domains, check-in, security, immigration & customs, boarding, non-processing domains, airport's accessibility, airport's facilities, retail area. **Kirk (2013), in** the Taxonomy of Passenger Activities (TOPA) model, captured all passenger processing and discretionary activities, and has provided a novel perspective and detailed understanding of: (i) what passengers do in the airport, (ii) how passengers are processed, (iii) and how they spend their discretionary time, and (iv) where the airport can potentially improve passenger experience. **Kittichai Thanasupsin, Suraphan Chaichana And Sudtida Pliankarom (2010),** observed the travelers' perceptions on the services provided by the low-cost carriers and full-service airline travelers by developing a logit model and found out the significant factors influencing mode selections to be the group size, fare deviation to income ratio, waiting time deviation multiplied by income, punctuality, and safety. Airlines may consider offering fare promotions for selected flights, times, and occupations (such as student). They may also offer a reduced fare for group traveling. **Kotler, P. J., & Armstrong, G. M. (2010)**, revealed that the commuters satisfaction is based on the brand awareness and the crew must be friendly and polite in serving the food. **White and Dolan (2009)** revealed that every person living in modern Western societies is dominated by mundane activities performed routinely, many motivated by obligations, although needs and desires are also common motives. **François A. Carrillat et al (2009),** state that Service Quality has a stronger impact on satisfaction and purchase intention in industries where the amount of customer processing is low and the service component of the offering is large (e.g., financial adviser) than in industries where the amount of customer processing is high and where the service part of the offering is limited. **Silke J. Forbes (2008),** studied the effect of Service Quality and expectations on customer complaints. Customer complaints measure consumers' dissatisfaction with the quality of a product or service. If product quality is unobservable ex ante, customer complaints may be driven by expectations as well as by the actually experienced quality level. **Matzler and Sauerwein (2002)**, by using CIT, proposed the determinants connected with dissatisfaction are fornd

to be different from those that create satisfaction. The three-factor structure that has uncovered the following observations: (1) Basic factors. They are minimum requirements that cause customer feel dissatisfied if it not fulfilled; however, they do not lead to customer satisfaction if fulfilled or exceeded. It is suggested that the fulfillment of basic factors is necessary and critical, but not sufficient to create satisfaction. (2) Important performance factors or performance factors. These factors can lead to satisfaction if fulfilled or exceeded; however, they can also lead to dissatisfaction if not. (3) Excitement factors. These factors can increase satisfaction if delivered; however, they do not cause dissatisfaction if they are not well delivered. **Zeithaml et al., (2002)**, dimension in SERVQUAL can lead to the four factors that will affect the customer satisfaction of Air Asia. These factors include product features, personnel performance, service quality, environment, location and price. The researcher has chosen five factors in studying the customer satisfaction. The five factors include online purchasing flight ticket, check-in counter service, flight attendant, aircraft condition and food service. This is because these are the five main parts in determining the customer satisfaction.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyses the socio – economic status of the Air Asia commuters in Tiruchirappalli region.
2. To analyse the perceptions on the quality of services offered by the domestic airline in view of the commuters with different demographic patterns.
3. To examine factors discriminating the level of satisfaction of the passengers towards the ground and In-flight services
4. To analyse the commuters perception regarding the factors affecting the quality of services provided by the airline.

1.6 HYPOTHESES

1. Commuters of selective demographic profile (Age, Occupation, Income, Frequency of travel and Purpose of travel) have similar opinion on the satisfaction of the services provided by the airline.
2. There is no discrimination between the perceived quality of ground services and In-flight services provided.
3. There is equal rank in the factors affecting the quality of the services provided by the airline.

1.7 METHODOLOGY
1.7.1 RELIABILITY

The reliability of the questionnaire (the instrument used to gather data) was empirically examined in order to understand the coherence in the responses made. Reliability of the scales was ensured with Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The overall reliability of the questions showed 0.835 of effectiveness revealing the fitness of the questionnaire for further analysis.

1.7.2 Tabulation of data

The essential data were scrutinised by using SPSS version 20.The perception of the commuters regarding the in-flight and ground services were classified into Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree. Their perceptions were cross analysed with the independent variables.Tools such as Discriminant analysis, ANOVA, Friedman rank test and frequency tables were used to analyse the objectives.

1.8 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The demographic and socio economic status of the respondents are categorised from which further analyses are made in order to examine the framed objectives. The services offered by the airline comprises of both in-flight and ground services. The researcher had collected data from 300 commuters who have travelled in Air Asia from Tiruchirappalli International airport. The incomplete responses were removed for the data analysis and hence the researcher could conduct the study for 240 commuters. The software package utilized for the analysis is SPSS version 20.

1.8.1 Descriptive Statistics tool is used to analysis the demographic profile of the respondents. Percentage analysis is used to statistically measure the commuters' characteristics.

Table 1.8.1(a) Distribution of the commuters by their demographic and economic profile

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	157	65.4
Female	83	34.6
Age		
below 20 yrs	43	17.9
21-30	82	34.2
31-40	72	30.0
41-50	43	17.9
Education		
Hr.Sec	25	10.4
Ug	50	20.8
Pg	65	27.1
Diploma	52	21.7
Others	48	20.0
Occupation		
Govt Emp	19	7.9
Pvt Employee	39	16.3
Business	72	30.0
Profession	62	25.8
House Wife	48	20.0
Monthly Income		
below 10000	19	7.9
10001-20000	58	24.2
20001-30000	82	34.2
30001-40000	63	26.3
above 40000	18	7.5
Mode of Purchase		
Online	34	14.2
Agent	72	30.0
Direct	81	33.8
Others	53	22.1

Frequency of Travel		
Weekly	34	14.2
Fortnightly	62	25.8
Monthly	54	22.5
Yearly	47	19.6
Rarely	43	17.9
Level of Satisfaction of the commuters		
Highly Satisfied	34	14.3
Satisfied	54	22.5
Neutral	62	25.8
Dissatisfied	51	21.2
Highly Dissatified	39	16.2

The demographic pattern of 240 domestic commuters of Air Asia making their travel from Tiruchirappalli International Airport are revealed using the frequency tables and it is explored that majority of the commuters are male under the age group between 21-30yrs with a PG degree qualification enrolled with doing business earning an income between Rs.20001-Rs.30000 per month. Majority of the commuters' have got their ticket through direct purchase in the airline counters at the airport. Most of the commuters are found to be frequent flyers.

1.8.2 Objective 2

Commuters belonging with different demographic profile have different perceptions towards the quality of the services provided by the airline on which their level of satisfaction varies. The researcher has examined the changes in the opinion of the commuters among the demographic categorical variables. Age, Income, occupation, Frequency of travel, Purpose of visit and mode of purchase of the commuters are analyzed using one way ANOVA to find the existence of different opinion among the cadres of the commuters.

Table 1.8.2(a) Table revealing the opinion of the commuters towards their level of satisfaction

Independent factors	P value	Subsets		Comments
Monthly Income				The commuters earning an income between 20001-Rs.30000 have different opinion than others and they seem to be more satisfied than others.
above 40000	.001	3.22(a)		
10001-20000		3.24(a)		
30001-40000		3.32(a)		
below 10000		3.89(a)	3.89(b)	
20001-30000			4.02(b)	
Age				Commuters of age 41-50 have different perceptions on the services provided and also have high satisfaction than the other group commuters.
31-40	0.04	3.26(a)		
below 20 yrs		3.49(a)		
21-30		3.55(a)		
41-50			4.26(b)	
Purpose of Travel				Nowadays domestic commuters make their vist on family grounds and they have revealed their satisfaction towards the services provided by the airline
Medical	0.02	3.15(a)		
Tour		3.62(a)	3.62(b)	
profession work		3.64(a)	3.64(b)	
family visit			4.00(b)	

Occupation				
govt emp		3.32(a)		The opinion of government and Private employees differs .and the Private employees are satisfied than the other groups
Profession	0.04	3.44(a)	3.44(b)	
Business		3.53(a)	3.53(b)	
house wife		3.63(a)	3.63(b)	
pvt employee			3.97(b)	
Frequency of Travel				
Yearly		3.30		Majority of the commuters make a fortnight trip. Such a frequency of travel among the commuters happens due to the increase in the demand of travel
Monthly		3.41		
Fortnightly	0.001	3.50		
Weekly		3.74	3.74	
Rarely			4.09	

Hence it is proved that there is a difference of opinion among the different categories of the commuters.

1.8.3 Objective 3

The third objective is to analyze the services that discriminate the satisfaction of the commuters. Two kinds of airline services are offered to the commuters. Ground services and in-flight services. It is interesting to know which service the commuters expect more. Such expectations should be considered by the airline to provide maximum satisfaction to the existing and upcoming commuters. Hence to analyze the framed objective discriminant analysis is adopted.

VALIDITY OF THE ANALYSIS

Table 1.8.3(a) revealing the Classification Results of the Discriminant function					
Satisfaction			Predicted Group Membership		Total
			1	2	
Original	Count	Dissatisfcation	81	50	131
		Satisfaction	38	71	109
	%	Dissatisfcation	61.8	38.2	100.0
		Satisfaction	34.9	65.1	100.0
Cross-validated[b]	Count	Dissatisfcation	81	50	131
		Satisfaction	38	71	109
	%	Dissatisfcation	61.8	38.2	100.0
		Satisfaction	34.9	65.1	100.0

It is found that out of 131 dissatisfied commuters ,81 are correctly classified and likewise out of 109 satisfied commuters 71 are correctly classified. Overall it is revealed that 73.3% of grouped cases are correctly classified which shows that the tool is fit to discriminate the factor that contributes towards the satisfaction of the commuters.

1.8.3(b) SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEST

Test of function	Value	Significance P value
Box's M	2.875	.035
Wilks' Lambda	.889	.000
Chi-square	27.774	

To test the null hypothesis of equal population covariance matrices the Box's M value is determined and it proves to be significant. Similarly the pvalue of wilks lambda and chi-square shows a significant value revealing the discriminant discrepancies.

1.8.3(c) Canonical Discriminant Function Unstandardised Coefficients	
Services	**Function 1**
Ground sum index	.225
In-flight sum	.049
(Constant)	-9.806

1.8.3(d) Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients	
Services	Function 1
Ground sum index	.988
In-flight sum	.217

From the derived coefficients it is inferred that the commuters are more satisfied with the ground services and also expect proper guidance towards the procedures involved in the boarding process. Hence it is feasible if the service providers concentrate more on handling the ground services by addressing the employees during any hindrances and coping their stress in the boarding procedures.

1.8.4 Objective 4

The commuters' perception in choosing the airways is being analyzed through ranking analysis. Five factors are considered to test the most affecting factor in choosing Air Asia.

1.8.4(a) Factors affecting in choosing Air Asia

Factors	Mean Value	Rank	P value
Price	3.01	III	
Speed	2.89	IV	0.001
Frequency	2.65	V	
Ground	3.04	II	
Catering	3.40	I	

The commuters feel that the airline can improve the catering facilities by providing fresh and healthy snack and food during the travel period. And also they insisted to provide frequent hydration by having sufficient quantity of water bottles so that even the sick patients will have a comfortable journey without any conjestion.

1.9 FINDINGS

The domestic skies gained more importance because of the positive changes in the activities of the people. Earlier days, only the posh community could avail the skies and now this vision has changed, as the commuters' choice of patterns are shifting. But for the lower stratum air travel is still a mirage. Majority of the commuters are found to travel fortnightly which may be because of their frequent formal or informal commitments. It is obvious that people are ready to avail the air services due to time consumption and reasonable fare while they make their travel . Majority of the commuters' prefer to buy a fair priced ticket which makes them opt for the economic class seats and this may be due to   the moderate income status, most of the commuters' do not prefer to spend more just for a travel. There are various reasons influencing to choose the flights.

Most of the commuters are frequent flyers and expect more considerations for them so that the airline can focus on creating a brand loyalty among the commuters. The ground services is about to contribute about 75% of satisfaction among the commuters and hence these services can be given priority to boost up the quality of the airline services.

1.10 IMPLICATIONS

Regarding the services the commuters feel that the airline employees could be more patient in delivering prompt ground services especially to the senior citizens by keeping their personal stress away from their work. Emergency utilities such as baby and adult diapers, water bottles and the like can be made available inside the flight.

The commuters also expect the toilets to be maintained at frequent intervals .The service providers can be moulded to be more professional by conducting on the job training and give situational training so that they will have experience and spot ideas to address the commuters' problems more effectively.

The Pilots take-off and landing can be more professional and with utmost care without bringing a panic situation among the minds of the commuters. Spot suggestion boxes can be implemented in the gropund counters and also inside the flight, so that immediate feedback of the commuters can be collected and necessary actions can be taken. This will insist the employees to be well cautious in providing the services.

1.11 CONCLUSION

Air travel is common in current trend due to the increase demand in the daily commitments of the people. Hence it becomes an important issue to analyse the services rendered to the commuters. The Air Asia domestic commuters travelling in low cost carriers are focused and it is found that they are moderately satisfied with the overall services provided by the airways and that they expect more prompt service in the ground level where the commuters can be shown special and individual attention in the boarding and arrival procedures.

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