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Service Quality in Airline Businesses: A Research on THY

Havayolu İşletmelerinde Hizmet Kalitesi: THY'de Bir Araştırma

Abstract

Recently, businesses have been competing each other with their high-tech investments and their technology. Especially, ın a service sector like airline services, ıt is so important to have a good equipment and great technology. According to this, the purpose of this research is to determine whether there is a significant difference between the consumers' service quality expectations and service quality perceptions . To achieve this purpose, the scale which was suggested by Parasuraman et.al(1988), was formed as 5 dimensions and 22 statements(Servqual), has been adapted for airline travel sector. This questionnaire was implemented to the passengers at İstanbul Atatürk Airport with a "face to face" method. Then collected data was analysed in SPSS 16 program.

Keywords: Airline services, service quality, servqual

Jel Codes: M10, M31

Introduction

Airline sector is high-tech investment in general. High-tech environments are characterized with change and uncertainty. Customers have difficulty envisioning how technology can meet their needs. They are not aware of new technologies that are avaliable how those technologies might be used to solve their current problems(Mohr et. al.,2005:134). That's why it is a complicated problem for airline firms to get latest high-tech product and innovations. On the other hand, all businesses can provide "the same types of service-airline transportation, tax-return preparation, shampoo and blow dry services" but the difference can be made by satisfying customers. Especially, in differentiating the quality of services, "competing service businesses may look alike, but they do not feel alike"

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(Berry et. al., 1985). Delivering high-quality service to customers is the key strategy to survive in the competitive services industries such as airline transportation services(Zeithaml et.al,1996). Service quality influences a businesses' "competitive advantage" by keeping "customer patronage" in order to increase market share(Park et. al. ,2004).

That's why airlines businesses have to understand passengers' needs and expectations. In practice, most airline businesses measure passengers perceptions of their service offerings without any knowledge of passengers expectations. If there are some misunderstanding in expectations or needs, then serious problems in service implementations can be happened. It is so important for airline management to take a right decision about customers' wants and needs(Chen and Chang,2005).

The expectations has been playing as a key role in "consumer evaluation of service quality" since consumer was the essential element of the marketing practices(Berry et. al. ,1985.; Gilbert and Wong,2003). Passengers' expectations influences the service decisions of airlines and service quality of airline services. With emprical studies, ıt has showed that passengers' needs, expectations and preferences should be understood carefully and airlines businesses should make marketing strategies according to consumers' expectations(Aksoy et. al.,2003). With this study, ıt was tried to be determined service quality degree of one sample airline firm.

1. Literature

Well(1999) determined air transport as transporting service of scheduled or non- scheduled passenger, freight and transport of mail for commercial purposes. In this sector there have been lots of firms that some has thousand of aircraft and some has a few ones. Levine(1986) had studied about airline competition and determined that this subject would be substantial and contiuning academic interest. Airline firms are competing in the high-tech investment sector wtih it's other challenges. It is clear that successful marketing strategies have been fundamental for all the high-technology firms that have maneged to survive the technology crash of 2001 and even to thrive after it(Viardot,1995:1).

According to Southwest Paper[2]:

"The airline industry's extremely high fixed costs made it one of the worst net profit margin."Contributions to fixed costs in the airline industry include the costs of planes, fuel, pilots, flight attendants, and additional staff for

[2] http://www.mcafee.cc/Classes/BEM106/Papers/UTexas/351/Southwest.pdf

baggage and customer service. The need to meet government regulations and hire experienced employees can cost an airline company millions of dollars." Shortly, airline transporting services are one set of complex technical and technical services. And these Technologies need both great capital to get pyhsical evidences and personnel(Küçükönal and Korul,2002: s.69).

In 1988 Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry developed "SERVQUAL" to measure service quality based on some factors that come from focus groups(Landrum et. al.,2009). These factors are called as "tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy" and 22 scale items regarding expectations and performance. SERVQUAL with ıts five basic factor have been tested through numerous empirical studies in various sector(An and Noh, 2009) such an airlines service businesses by many researchers. The SERVQUAL has been "one of the most widely used" and "applied scales for the measurement of perceived service quality in recent years"(Bigne et al., 2003; Liou et. al.,2010). "Grönroos (1993) suggested that measuring passenger experiences in airline service quality is a theoretically valid way of measuring perceived quality". (Liou et. al., 2010). A number of studies have addressed service quality issues. Service quality researches is generally based on concepts which are perceived and evaluated by customers(Liou and Tzeng, 2007). So SERVQUAL scale is commonly used to measure service quality in service businesses. Also SERVQUAL scale provide useful determination customers' expectations and perceptions and so it allows managers to better understand customers' evaluations of service quality(Parasuraman and Berry, 1993). It can be said the most serious problem is whether management could perceive correctly passengers's expectations and needs/wants(Gilbert and Wong, 2003:519). Because in the airline services industry, the meaning of service quality is beloged to the passengers(Butler and Keller,1992).

2. Research Methodology

We designed a questionnaire which depends on literature and make it easier to be answered by participants. Firstly, we asked the demographics as gender(sex), age, income, educational level, marital status, purpose of airline trip and frequency. Then, the service quality dimensions(SERVQUAL) were explored considering the previous studies. SERVQUAL does not include specific dimensions for each service sector but it presents general quality dimensions for service industries. The questions addressed expectations and perceptions and rated using 5-point Likert scale. Both expectations and perceptions were rated from 1(strongly unimportant) to 5(strongly important). We used SERVQUAL's service quality dimensions with 22-

items. We implemented the survey to the passengers at İstanbul Atatürk Airport, Turkey.

We used the "convenience sampling method" because ıt was not possible to reach the population. Firstly, the questionnaires were handed to passengers who were waiting for the flight. Then the questionnaires were given to tha passengers that were getting off the plane. By this we tried to determine the expectations of the passengers and then to the perceptions. After collecting questionnaires and evaluating them, 120 were properly completed. Assumming that the sample was a random, the data were analyzed by SPSS 16.0 and presented.

3. Results

Passengers were classified according to their gender(sex), age, marital status, education, income, travel purpose, travel frequency and flight counts. The factors which influenced the preference of airline firm was presented in table 1.

Tablo 1. Demographics of Passengers (N= 120)

N=120 VARIABLES	THY(Turkish Airline)			
	1. group: Passengers that waiting for the flight		2. group: Passengers that waiting for the luggage	
	Frequency	%Of Total THY Passengers N=58	Frequency	%Of Total THY Passengers N=62
Gender				
Female	40	70,8	45	77,5
Male	18	29,2	17	22,5
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0
Age				
18-24	18	30,0	24	38,7
25-34	6	12,0	10	16,1

35-44	20	33,3	12	19,3
45-54	8	16,6	6	9,6
Older than 55	4	8,3	10	16,1
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0
Marital Status				
Married	28	46,6	36	58,0
Single	30	53,3	26	42,0
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0
Education				
Elementary school	4	5,0	2	3,2
High school	10	18,3	22	35,4
University	42	73,3	32	51,6
MBA	2	3,3	6	9,6
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0
Income				
Less than 750TL	25	36,6	20	32,2
751-1500TL	11	20,0	12	19,3
1501-2250TL	13	26,6	22	35,4
2251-3000TL	7	13,3	6	9,6
Higher than	2	3,3	2	3,2

3001TL				
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0
Purpose of trip				
Business	14	25,0	24	16,1
Holiday	34	60,0	36	58,0
Education	8	15,0	10	38,7
Other	-	-	2	3,2
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0
Number of flight recent year				
1 time	16	27,5	10	16,1
2 times	15	25,0	3	4,8
3 times	7	12,0	4	6,4
More than 4 times	20	29,0	45	72,5
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0
The first factor for preferring the airline firm				
Price	9	16,6	10	16,1
Flight services	4	6,6	5	8,0
Fligth time	2	3,3	5	8,0
Safety	41	70,0	41	66,1
Employee	-	-	-	-

Exact time	2	3,3	1	1,6
Other services	-	-	-	-
Total	58	100,0	62	100,0

As showing in table 1, %70,8 of first group were female and %29,2 of them were male. The most of passengers were in 35-44 age group(%33,3) and 46,6 percent of pasengers were married. %han 73,3 of passengers had university degree and %18,3 of them had high school degree. %36,6 of them had less than 750TL income, %26,6 of them had 751-1500TL income and 20,0 of them had 1501-2250TL income. Passengers had a trip for holiday at most(%60,0) then they had a trip for business secondly(%23,3). Most of them had a flight more than 4 times(%29,0). Also, passengers gave much more importance for safety(%70,0) in choosing airline firm. In addition, %77,5 of second group were female and %22,5 of them were male. The most of secong group's passengers were in 18-24 age group(%38,7) and 58,0 percent of pasengers were married. %51,6 of them had university degree and %35,4 of them had high school degree. %32,2 of them had less than 750TL income, %19,3 of them had 751-1500TL income and %35,4 of them had 1501-2250TL income. Passengers had a trip for holiday at most(%58,0) then they had a trip for education secondly(%38,7). Most of them had a flight more than 4 times(%72,5). Also, passengers gave much more importance for safety(%66,1) in choosing airline firm.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results of Expectations and Perceptions

	N	**N of Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Expectations of passengers	**58**	**22**	**0,820**
Perceptions of passengers	**62**	**22**	**0,890**

In this study, Cronbach's Alpha values were used to be determined the reliability of the scale. Firstly , it was found for expectation-related items' Cronbach's Alpha value as 0,820 and perception-related items' Cronbach's Alpha value as 0,890. Also, 5 main dimensions of service quality's Cronbach Alpha values were analyzed. In expectations, Cronbach's Alpha was found to be 0,710 for tangibles, 0,737 for reliability, 0,580 for responsiveness, 0,620 for assurance and 0,760 for empathy. In perceptions, Cronbach's Alpha was

found to be 0,800 for tangibles, 0,755 for reliability, 0,484 for responsiveness, 0,810 for assurance and 0,800 for empathy. According to the Cronbach's Alpha values, it can be said that the scale of this study was reliable.

Table 3. Reliability Results for Service Quality Dimensions

Dimensions	N	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (Expectation)	N	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (Perception)
Tangibles	**58**	**5**	**0,710**	**62**	**5**	**0,800**
Reliability	**58**	**4**	**0,737**	**62**	**4**	**0,755**
Responsiveness	**58**	**4**	**0,580**	**62**	**4**	**0,484**
Assurance	**58**	**4**	**0,620**	**62**	**4**	**0,810**
Empathy	**58**	**5**	**0,760**	**62**	**5**	**0,800**

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Dimensions	THY		
	Expectations	Perceptions	Gaps
	Mean	Mean	
Tangibles			
- **Q1**	4.80	4.30	-0.50
- **Q2**	4.10	3.90	-0.20
- **Q3**	4.56	4.49	-0.07
- **Q4**	3.71	3.67	-0.04
Reliability			
- **Q5**	4.65	4.24	-0.41
- **Q6**	4.50	4.10	-0.40
- **Q7**	4.80	4.30	-0.50

- **Q8**	4.75	4.25	-0.50
- **Q9**	4.65	4.35	-0.30
Responsiveness			
- **Q10**	4.10	3.90	-0.20
- **Q11**	4.50	4.00	-0.50
- **Q12**	4.60	4.50	-0.10
- **Q13**	3.43	3.40	-0.03
Assurance			
- **Q14**	4.60	4.50	-0.10
- **Q15**	4.60	4.10	-0.40
- **Q16**	4.70	4.20	-0.50
- **Q17**	4.60	4.10	-0.50
Empathy			
- **Q18**	3.40	3.35	-0.05
- **Q19**	3.50	3.35	-0.15
- **Q20**	3.30	3.10	-0.20
- **Q21**	3.45	3.45	0.00
- **Q22**	3.77	3.60	-0.03

We had impelemented our questionnaire to the passengers who were waiting for the flight at first and it was wanted them to answer the expectation part of SERVQUAL. Then the questionnaire was implemented to the passengers who were waiting for the luggage that meant these passengers had a flight. The secong group of passengers had answered the perception part of SERVQUAL. So, before flight the expectation could be determined and then after flight the perception could be determined. When the expectations and perceptions were compared, it was seen that there were some gaps. In this context, the mean and gap figures obtained as a result are shown on Table 4. It can be said that passengers mostly preesured from "Q3: Employees good-looking", "Q4:Materials", "Q12: Employees will always be willing to help customers", "Q13: Employees will never be too

busy to respond to customers' requests.", "Q14: The behavior of employees will instill confidence in customers", "Q18: Give customers individual attention", "Q21: Have customer's best interests at heart", "Q22: Understand the specific needs of customers".

According to table 4, ıt can be said that passengers' expectations and perceptions had gaps but we couldn't know whether ıt was significant. Because descriptive Statistics was not enough to say that there was a significant gap between expectations and perceptions. That's why One-way ANOVA test was used to determine the significant differences. Table 5 shows ıf there was a significant gap between perceptions and expectations in THY.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA Test Results

TANGIBLES	**F**	**Sig.**
Q1: Modern looking equipment	**15,677**	**0,000***
Q2:Physical facilities	**10,003**	**0,000***
RELIABILITY		
Q6: A sincere interest in solving customer's problem	**8,760**	**0,001***
Q8: Provide the service at the time of promised	**14,300**	**0,000***
Q9: Insist on error free records	**12,544**	**0,000***
RESPONSIVENESS		
Q11: Employees will give prompt service to customer	**9,800**	**0,001***
ASSURANCE		
Q14: The behavior of employees will instill confidence in customers	**10,389**	**0,001***
Q15: Customers will feel safe in transactions	**10,880**	**0,001***

(*Indicates significance level < 0,05)

According to Table 5, there were significant difference between expectations and perceptions in

- Q1(p= 0,000<0,05;F:15,677);
- Q2(p= 0,000<0,05;F:10,003);
- Q6 (p= 0,001<0,05;F:8,760);
- Q8(p= 0,000<0,05;F:14,300);
- Q9 (p= 0,000<0,05;F:12,544);
- Q11(p= 0,001<0,05;F:9,800);
- Q14(p= 0,001<0,05;F:10,389);
- Q15 (p= 0,001<0,05;F:10,880).

Passengers perceived not enough value to get their expectations in airline's modern looking equipment and phsical facilities. Also they perceived not enough value to get their expectations in reliability (Q6,Q8,Q9), responsiveness(Q11) and assurance(Q14,Q15) situation for airline. It was seen that passengers had higher expectations than they perceived.

Conclusions

SERVQUAL scale has been used to determine service quality in every kind of service areas. Because of being easy used-form and the reliability of SERVQUAL, it was preferred to use SERVQUAL to determine THY firm's service quality as a sample from an area of airline service.

A total of 120 passengers answered the questionnaire which were composed of two groups. Totally, it was seen that %79,1 passengers were female and %60 of them in young ages as 18-35. In addition, %65 of the passengers had auniversity degree and %45 of them had income nearly 1500TL. It was seen that %58,3 passengers had a tirp for holiday and nearly %70 of them had already travelled before. Then it was seen that almost %70 of the passengers preffered airline firm according to it's safety situation.

Cronbach's Alpha test was used to determine the scale's reliability situation. All of the SERVQUAL dimension were tested seperately and It was seen that "tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy" dimension had high Cronbach Alpha's value in both expectations and perceptions. At total, this scale had 0,820 for expectation and 0,890 for perception.

With descriptive statistics it was presented passengers' perceptions and expectations in airline services for THY. One-Way ANOVA test was used to be showed the significant differences between expectations and perceptions. THY's passengers' expectations and perceptions were found to be close

results but there was a significant gap. Modern equipment and physical facilities are so important for passengers in general. It was determined that passengers expected the latest technology from the airline firm and most of variables were related to safety and reliabilty in airline services. When the passengers give a great importance for the safety, the airline firms should provide their services in this concept. The safety can be provided by the latest technology in general and then the passengers will see the most safe airline firm through its high-tech equipments.

To sum up, airline service firms need high-tech equipment to provide best services in their area. Because airline firms need great aircrafts, great personnel, great communication services, internet etc. Airline services is a growing market in both Turkey and the world. But the one who has the latest tehcnological equipment, will be the best. The sample demographics can be varied for the further research and with the bigger size of samling, further researhes can give different results. This study can give a little difference for the literature with using of different kinds of airline firms.

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HAVAYOLU İŞLETMELERİNDE HİZMET KALİTESİ: THY'DE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

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Özet

Günümüzdeki işletmeler, sahip oldukları yüksek teknolojik yatırımları ile rekabet etmektedirler. Özellikle havayolu hizmetleri gibi hizmet sektörlerinde güçlü bir teknolojiye ve iyi donanımlara sahip olmak çok önemlidir. Buna dayanarak; bu çalışma ile tüketicilerin havayolu hizmetlerinden beklentileri ile algıladıkları hava yolu hizmetleri arasında bir fark olup olmadığını ortaya çıkarmak amaçlanmıştır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda Parasuraman vd.(1988) tarafından geliştirilen , 5 boyut ve 22 ifadeden oluşan Servqual ölçeği havayolu hizmetlerine uyarlanmıştır. Oluşturulan anket formu İstanbul Atatürk Havalimanında, yolculara "yüz yüze" anket yoluyla uygulanmıştır. Toplanan anketler ise daha sonra SPSS 16 programında analiz edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Havayolu hizmetleri, hizmet kalitesi, servqual

Jel kodları: M10, M31

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