Voice of Turkish Customer: Importance of Expectations and Level of Satisfaction at Airport Facilities

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Abstract

Delivering high-quality service to passengers is essential for airports survival. Service quality conditions influences an airports competitive advantage by profitability. To deliver better service to passengers, airports managers needed to understand passengers' need and expectations. Passenger expectations are a key performance indicator for the operation of an airport. Passengers evaluated airports different factors: getting to the terminal; leaving the airport; check-in process; baggage claim, security check, gate areas, concessions, and immigration/customs control etc.

The objectives of this study understanding importance of customer expectations and level of satisfaction perceived by customers concerning the capabilities, facilities and services of airport. Primary data were collected from passengers departing Ataturk airport in Istanbul which is the biggest airport in Turkey

Keywords: Customer expectations, Perceived satisfaction, Airport facilities, Turkey

1. Introduction

Understanding, creating, communicating, and delivering customer value and satisfaction are at the very heart of modern marketing practice. The customer, rather than marketing, is at the center of modern business philosophy, and customer service satisfaction is the primary aim. In service industries such as the airline and airport industry, the distinctive features of services require that managers understand customer needs and expectations, and keep promises (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). Understanding travelers' airport choice behaviors is an important topic in the aviation industry. Airport managers need to know how travelers make airport-choices, because each airport must constantly generate adequate passenger traffic (i.e., attract travelers) to justify its existence (Suzuki, 2007)

The airport business within the air transport industry. Air transport business is a rather complex macro industry. Within the industry, a mass of activities are being undertaken by a complementary and combined network of actors: passenger and cargo airlines, integrators, airport authorities, handling agents, in-flight catering firms, General Sales Agents, car rentals, air brokers, hardware providers like aircraft manufacturers and air terminal building firms, tour operators and travel agents, all of them striving to satisfy, at least partly, end demand needs. (Jarach, 2001)

Marketing did not play a significant role in the management of airports until the 1980s, prior to which time the airport was commonly viewed as a free public service or utility provided by governmental or quasi-governmental entities. Deregulation of the airlines and other sectors of the air transport industry, however, motivated airports to begin competing for airline routing. Marketing was first introduced at airports that sought to either enlarge or protect their airline customer base. As air travelers became more sophisticated and demanding, airports came to believe that they could influence airline routing decisions by a "pull" strategy of directing marketing efforts to end users, offering enhanced services or the promise of exceptional levels of customer satisfaction. As a result, by the 1990s, many airports

were concentrating greater attention and investments on a wide array of marketing activities in an effort to survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Like many service industries, the airport industry turned to service quality as a strategy for achieving competitive advantage (Lee-Mortimer, 1993, Fodness, Murray, 2007)

Air passengers' expectations have grown considerably in recent years especially in regard to quality of service. Furthermore, as airports are working more and more in a competitive environment, quality criteria have been widely. (www.transport.ie) Today's air travelers have meaningful choices among airports and there is an increasing urgency among airport marketers to differentiate themselves by meeting the needs of customers better than the competition. While passengers' perception of airport service quality is only one of several variables that contribute to overall airport attractiveness, it is nevertheless an important variable because of the increasing importance of a customer orientation to competitive advantage in this industry (Fodness, Murray, 2007)

Aviation trade publications and airport press releases provide evidence that managers in the airport industry clearly understand the importance of their customers' perceptions of service quality (Bomenblit, 2002). Academic and industry researchers regularly measure passenger perceptions of airport services quality to benchmark performance metrics directly from the "voice" of the customer (Chen, 2002), to identify opportunities for service improvement (Yeh and Kuo, 2002) and to avoid losing valuable passenger traffic (Rhoades et al., 2000). In addition, airport marketer's research passenger needs and wants for the purposes of enhancing non-aviation related revenues from restaurant and retail offerings (Danyliew, Cohen, 1997)

2. The Importance of Measuring the Performance of Airports

Airport managers need to have information to enable them to monitor performance and to identify areas that are performing well and those that are not. Once performance is known, management can examine the underlying processes taking place so that appropriate corrective action can be proposed. (Park, 1999)

The nature of the expectations underlying airport service perceptions is unclear. Unlike the more widely accepted gap-theory model for measuring service quality (i.e. subtracting a customer's perceived level of service received from what was expected), both academic and commercial airport researchers are more likely to measure service quality by establishing and monitoring service performance measures which may or may not be informed by direct customer input (Yeh, Kuo, 2002, Fodness, Murray, 2007)

Information on an airport and its related systems can be generated from its own operational and technical characteristics, as well as from traffic flow and demand pattern characteristics. The collection of information on passengers is often conducted by means of airport passenger surveys. Various survey methods have been used in airports around the world. Generally, airport survey methods or techniques are divided into direct and indirect methods. Direct methods for collecting data can be directly obtained at the airports. These survey techniques start and end at the airport. Direct data collection methods include direct observation, photographic techniques, monitoring, tailing, time-stamping, questionnaires, and interviews. Indirect methods are used when required data cannot be directly obtained from passengers at the airport. Mail back questionnaires, telephone questionnaires, statistics and documented data are options. (Park, 1999)

Service measures based on the subjective perception of service quality by airport users are collected through surveys in which respondents are asked to grade their experience on a 5-point scale. Common measures included overall customer satisfaction at the airport, signage/user friendliness of terminal, cleanliness of terminal, cleanliness of restrooms, check-in satisfaction, catering overall satisfaction, value for money in the shops, baggage delivery overall satisfaction, availability of baggage trolleys, and overall standards of car park facilities. Subjective criteria are used together with objective measures to develop a picture of service performance. Objective measures recorded at more than half of the airports surveyed included response time to customer comment cards, availability of trolleys (percentage of satisfied passengers), check-in waiting time, security check waiting time, baggage delivery time, taxi waiting time, and punctuality/ delayed flight departures attributable to the airport (percentage over a certain time/total departing flights) (Humphreys, et al., 2002)

In addition to business measures, managers, regulators, and government bodies need to measure the service performance of airports. Service measures are used to assess the day-to-day service quality delivered by the different parts of an airport

to its users. Short- and long-term summaries of this information provide a vital input to airport management. Service measures are particularly useful for identifying operational problems. (Fodness, Murray, 2007)

3. Research

Objective of the Study: The aim of this study is to determine the order of importance of customer expectations and level of satisfaction perceived by customers concerning the capabilities, facilities and services of Istanbul Atatürk Airport.

Limitations of the secondly Research: The research is limited by the questionnaire answered between the 26th and 30st of April, 2008 by 140 passengers. Data were collected from passengers departing Istanbul Ataturk Airport. The international terminal of the Istanbul Ataturk Airport was chosen as the main data-collection point which is one of the largest international airport in Turkey. And it's located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia.

Research Method: Face-to-face interview is the method for the research.

Collection of the Research Data: A pilot work has been done with 22 passengers to learn about how good the questions in the questionnaire form serve for the objective of the research. According to answers to those questions, some modifications have been done in the questions Then, the research questions were asked on between the 26th and 30st of April, 2008 by 140 usable questionnaires were gained in the research and Microsoft Office Excel and 13, 0 (Statistics Pack for Social Sciences) were used in the analysis.

Reliability Analysis of the Research: It is possible to say that the research is reliable as a whole, according to the coefficient of reliability $\alpha = 0.8811$.

4. Research Findings

(Insert Table 1 Here)

As can be seen Table 1, 78, 6 of Turkish passengers and 21, 4 % foreign passengers and 57, 1 % of male and 42, 9 % of them are female passengers. When the distribution of the subjects according to their age range is analyzed it can be seen that 21.4% of them are aged between 22-29, 50.7 % of them are aged between 30-37, 12,9 % of them are aged between 38-45, 7,9% of them are aged between 46-53 and %7.1 of them are aged 54 or more than it. Consequently it is seen that passenger intensify between "30-37".

When the distribution of the members related to their education background is examined, it can be seen that 61.5 % of the members are university graduates, 10, 7% of them are master's degree graduates and 2.1 % of them are doctor's degree graduates. When the proportion of the members who are graduates and postgraduates is analyzed in terms of the general sum a high proportion has been occurred as 74. 3%.

When the monthly incomes of the members are examined, it has been seen that 37,8 % of them have monthly income as 1000-2000, 33,6% of them have monthly income as 2001-3000, 6,4 % of them have monthly income as 3001-4000, 3,6% of them have monthly income as 4001 – 5000, 18,8 % of them have monthly income as 5001- more than it.

(Insert Table 2 Here)

As can be seen Table 2 regarding passengers' frequency of using the Istanbul Atatürk Airport, it can be seen that 68,3% of passengers have flown 1-3 times, 28,6% 4-6 times, 1,4% 7-9 times and 1,4% 10-13 times over the past year

(Insert Table 3 Here)

As can be seen in Table 3, customers find a vast majority of airport capabilities and facilities "important" while they regard the variety and number of cafes and restaurants, telephone and fax services, shopping facilities within the terminal, duty-free options, lounges of the cooperative banks as "neither important nor unimportant".

Table 3 also shows satisfaction level perceived by customers about the relevant capabilities and facilities. With regard to this dimension, it is clear that customers are satisfied with terminal size and cleanliness, toilet facilities, duty-free options, telephone and fax services, variety and number of products in duty-free. It is also noticeable that some of these capabilities and facilities mentioned are among those considered by customers as "neither important nor unimportant." On the other hand, some capabilities and facilities regarded by customers as "important" but to be on a low satisfaction level are also shown in Table 3. Among these capabilities and facilities are transportation to the terminal, parking lot capabilities and services, walking area, announcements, direction and signage, flight information screens, airport information services,

behavior of check-in attendant, behavior of security personnel, choice of bars and cafes / food and drink prices, internet / Wi-Fi availability, smoking lounges / segregation, check-in waiting time, waiting duration for security check, shopping facilities, behavior of the personnel in duty-free shops, baggage claim speed, and baggage trolley availability.

However, although transportation to the terminal, announcements, choice of bars and cafes / food and drink prices, internet / Wi-Fi availability, smoking lounges / segregation, check-in waiting time, waiting duration for security check, and baggage claim speed are regarded by customers as "very important," it is clear that they are considered to be "not satisfactory." In other words, customers are not satisfied with these capabilities and facilities which they regard as important.

5. Conclusions

Airports populations are larger than most country. Their business activities can contribute billions of dollars to the economy. Many international airports show high growth number of passengers. This growth continuously challenges the quality experience of passengers at airport terminals. Customer satisfactions have to a primary goal of all airports. If an airport cannot attend to all services efficiently, airport satisfaction will be low and passengers' perception of the airport facilities becomes negative. For passengers, the primary goal is a quick, avoiding crowded check-in areas and long check-in queues not to mention slow security screening, and inefficient boarding processes. At this stage, passenger satisfaction depends to a large extent on how quickly and easily they can get their boarding passes, how simple it was to check in baggage, and how much control they had over the process.

Poor quality airport services can influence operations all the way down the line, affecting airports, airlines and passengers alike. Today, organizations offering airport services are challenged to achieve a balance between quality, service levels and costs for a number of reasons. However, airports can increase customer satisfaction, provide high levels of reliability and meet the quality standards expected in the industry by getting complete control over their entire airport services.

The prime objectives of many airports have to maximize customer satisfaction by aiming for high service levels. Currently, however, this concept is necessary to enable cross comparisons of design or physical standards and operational standards affecting passenger perceptions. Thus, airport authorities and airport managers should be able to develop updated operational standards based on passenger perceptions to provide more comprehensive service levels to maximize their satisfaction.

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Table 1. Demographics

Nationality	Frequency	Percent
Turkish	110	%78,6
Other	30	%21,4
Sexual	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Man	80	%57,1
Women	60	%42.9
Age	**Frequency**	**Percent**
22 - 29	30	%21,4
30 - 37	71	%50,7
38 - 45	18	%12,9
46 - 53	11	%7,9
54 and more	10	%7.1
Education	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Primary school	21	%15,0
High school	15	%10,7
University	86	%61,5
Master	15	%10,7
Doctorate	3	%2,1
Monthly income(TL-$)	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1000 - 2000	53	%37,8
2001 - 3000	47	%33,6
3001 - 4000	9	%6,4
4001 - 5000	5	%3.6
5001 and more	26	%18,6
Total	**140**	**100,0**

Table 2. Regarding passengers' frequency of using the Istanbul Atatürk Airport

Regarding passengers' frequency of using the Atatürk Airport	Frequency	Percent
1-3 times	96	68,6
4-6 times	40	28,6
7-9 times	2	1,4
10-13 times	2	1,4
Total	**140**	**100,0**

Table 3. Comparison of the Importance and Perceived Satisfaction Levels for the customers on the airport capabilities and facilities

Airport Capabilities and Facilities	Mean Expectation	Mean Satisfaction
Transportation to the terminal	4,4929	2,6143
Parking lot capabilities and services	4,1429	3,8429
Terminal size	4,1357	4,0000
Terminal cleanliness	4,6071	4,2000
Toilet facilities	4,5857	4,1357
Walking area	4,4857	3,8857
Directions & signage	4,4571	3,6286
Flight Information screens	4,4643	3,5929
Announcements	4,4643	2,5857
Variety and number of cafes and restaurants	3,8714	3,6714
Choice of bars & cafes / food & drink prices	4,1786	2,5143
Telephone / Fax services	3,2929	3,1786
ATM Cash machines	4,0786	3,5429
Internet/wifi availability	3,4643	2,6857
Smoking lounges / segregation	3,2286	2,9786
Airport information services	4,4357	3,9643
Check-in waiting time	4,7429	2,3143
Behavior of check-in attendant	4,5429	3,8500
Waiting duration for security check	4,7286	2,1000
Behavior of security personnel	4,4929	3,8214
Shopping facilities within the terminal	3,5286	3,4643
Behavior of duty-free attendant	4,0500	3,7857
Duty-free options	3,2500	3,4500
Variety and number of products in duty-free	3,3714	3,4500
Lounges of the cooperative banks	3,0643	3,1357
Baggage claim speed	4,8143	2,4357
Baggage trolley availability	4,6286	4,0071

1= Exactly not important 5 =Exactly important   1= Exactly not satisfaction 5 =Exactly satisfaction