



A Comparative Study on Customer Satisfaction of Different Airline Services at Patna Airport with Reference to Service Quality Gap Model

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Abstract

The growing contribution of service sector (more than fifty percent) in the total GDP of India speaks volumes about the structural transformation in the economy from an agriculture-based economy to knowledge-based economy. This also reflects the rise in urbanisation and the middle class with its disposable income. A greater contribution of service sector in the economy is also the indicator of India's integration with the global economy. India's Aviation sector is one of the largest growing sectors in the same line. This article delves into customer satisfaction of the three main airlines – Indigo, Spice jet and Air India from Patna Airport and its impact on the airline performance. The satisfaction of customers is imperative for the survival and growth of the airlines. In this article, we measure customer satisfaction taking into consideration the five gaps that can be created by a service organisation as suggested in Service Quality Gap Model and its overall impact on the customer satisfaction.

Keywords: service sector, customer satisfaction, Service quality Gap model, Patna airport.

1. Introduction

The growing service sector which is currently more than fifty percent contribution in the total GDP of India is an indicator of the kind of structural shift that the country is witnessing. It is expected to grow further in the coming years. The growth of India's service sector has caught global attention because, unlike other countries which has witnessed economic growth in the form of a shift from agriculture to industries, India has registered a shift from agriculture to the service sector. Various service sector like e commerce, Information Technology, healthcare, hospitality, trade, Transport and Tourism has seen tremendous growth in the past few years. The growth in the service sector at such pace is evidently a reflection of the growing middle class with more disposable income. It also speaks about the rise in education and skilled workers in the economy which is moving it from an agriculture to knowledge-based economy. The availability of such skilled labour, digitization and technology based low-cost operations has led to this exponential growth in the service sector. The service sector in India is characterized by a broad range of industries which offer various services to individuals, businesses, and

the government. These sectors are critical to the growth and development of the nation and provide employment opportunities to millions of people. There are various sub-sectors in the Indian services industry. Talking specifically about the aviation sector, it has become one of the most rapidly growing sectors in Indian economy. The growing tourism sectors has demanded for more and more connectivity across the nation and international as well. The important Government initiatives like UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagarik) has deeply focussed on creating connectivity especially in the regions that are undeserved. According to an SBI Research Report, the weighted mean annual income of the Indian middle class rose from Rs 3.3 lakh per annum in 2013 to Rs 13 lakh per annum in 2023. Due to various low-cost operating Airlines, the rising middle class is choosing more and more of Air travel over other means of transport. The report also predicts that India's per capita income is expected to increase from ₹2 lakh in FY23 to ₹14.9 lakh in FY47. This projected growth in income levels will likely continue to drive demand for air travel, further boosting the aviation sector. The huge investments

taking place in the recent years by the government has led to tremendous infrastructural developments and hence more customers are attracted by the various facilities provided by the airlines. The adoption of advanced technologies in aviation automation, digitalization and improved customer services has revolutionised the Airlines industry. In service sector, customer satisfaction matters the most because of its intangible nature. According to Richard Oliver – “Everybody knows satisfaction until they are asked to define it. Then it seems like nobody knows about it”. [1]

2. Literature Review

1996; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996). In this research, we follow the stream of existing literature and use reflective measurement models with these suggested indicators to establish the satisfaction and Loyalty of customers.

The research utilized the AIRQUAL Model, developed by Bari et al. (2001), to delineate the five dimensions of service quality within the airline industry. Bari's study, conducted in North Cyprus, encompassed five dimensions: airline tangibles (reflecting the overall condition of the aircraft), terminal tangibles (evaluating the quality of services available at the terminal), personnel services (assessing the quality of service provided by the airline's staff), empathy (measuring hassle-free and problem-free experiences), and image (capturing the value of image, goodwill, and brand recognition).

- 2023; Farooq et al., 2018; Javed Ali et al., 2021; Kos Koklic et al., 2017; Wahab & Rady, 2018) in studying Airline service qualities and customer relationship management.
- This research draws its conceptual framework from “Service Quality Gap Model” (1985) also known as Five Gaps proposed by
- Ekiz et al. (2006), terminal tangibles are associated with the service quality available within a terminal setting
- Expectation-Disconfirmation, Equity Theory, and Comparison-Level Theory attempt
- to explain customer satisfaction (Skogl&Siguaw, 2004) and Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory is arguably the most

influential in studying customer satisfaction.

3. Objectives of the study

- To study the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in Airlines on Patna Airport.
- To understand the factors that leads to customer satisfaction in Airline services with reference to Service Quality Gap model at Patna Airport.
- To draw comparative analysis of Indigo, Air India and Spice Jet customer satisfaction at Patna Airport and make suggestions for improvement. (Figure 1)



Figure 1 Plain Airport

Patna Airport is named after the Independence Activist Jay Prakash Narayan hence named – Jay Prakash Narayan Airport which is a domestic Airport. As of now, it enjoys the status of being the 15th busiest Airport in India. The Airports Authority of India, which is the Miniratna organisation of Government of India is working on an aggressive plan to expand the airport to meet the growing demand from the city. The airport is enabled with Digi Yatra facility since July 2024, so that passengers travelling from the airport can avail it for seamless check-in experience and save their time. It will be able to serve more than 8 million passengers per year (previously proposed as 4.5 million), as compared to only around 3 million passengers per year at present. Around 13.1 acres of land near the airport is used for its construction. (Table 1)

Table 1 Number of Passengers Flying from Patna Airport in the Same Year

Year	Passenger
2022-23	3748635
2021-22	2967681
2020-21	2710000
2019-20	4525765
2018-19	4061900
2017-18	3111273

It is clearly evident that the Airport has to handle growing number of demands each year. Therefore, this research paper aims at doing the comparative analysis of service provided at the Patna airport. We will analyse three main Airlines – Indigo, Spice Jet and Air India operating from the Airport. We will be able to find out which Airlines has the maximum customer satisfaction and why based on the famous Service Quality Gap Model proposed in Service Marketing. [2]

4. Conceptual Framework

Service Quality gap model is a model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1980s. It is used to analyse and identify the gaps in service quality that an organisation provides to the customers and identifying gaps between customer expectations and perceptions. The Gap Model of Service Quality is a framework that helps businesses identify and shut gaps between customer expectations and actual service delivered. It emphasizes five key gaps: Knowledge Gap, Policy Gap, Delivery Gap, Communication Gap, and Customer Gap. By paying attention to these gaps, companies can improve customer satisfaction, improve service quality, and build long-term relationship with trust with the organization. These gaps occur at different stages of service delivery, from understanding customer needs to executing the service. By addressing these gaps, businesses can improve service quality, better the customer satisfaction, and build relationships based on trust with their audience. Out of the above mentioned five gaps, four gaps can be created by the organisation due to different reasons and the fifth gap happens because of the influence of four gaps. this fifth gap can cause gap between customer expectation and perception which ultimately determines the

customer satisfaction level or dissatisfaction level.

4.1. G1- Knowledge Gap/ Listening Gap

This occurs between the customers expectation and the management's perception of expectation. This means that the business doesn't understand what the customers expect. This first gap can be detrimental the service organisation as it can eventually lead to suboptimal resource allocation or efforts channelised in the direction which will not be appreciated by the customers. understanding customer's need is of utmost importance to the organisation as this will be the real input in designing the process, procedure and design of the service itself. if we take the example of airlines, the G1 may be represented in a way where the customers may want speedy boarding process to avoid standing queues for long and the company may think that the bettering of ticketing system with offers would lead to customer satisfaction. The reason why it is also called the Listening gap is that this kind of gap is created when the organization does not pay proper attention to the feedback, suggestions or the complaints of the customers. In this regard, it is appropriate to quote here that Peter. F Drucker, the father of modern management said that - "Organizations should be able to know their customers so well that products and services should be able to sell themselves."

4.2. G2 – Policy Gap

This is the gap between customer expectations and the service design/ procedures. when the customers need and expectations are clearly understood by the organization, it may seem that the organization is well on the track to deliver those services. However, it may seem faulty. This may be due to poor service design and no concrete or inappropriate policy to substantiate it. In terms of Airlines an example of it could be when the Airlines do understand that there could be some customers needy of special help than others (vision issue, walking issue etc) and may need special assistance but they arrange wheel chair for a person who has blurred vision because that's what there is available in their service design

4.3. G3- Delivery Gap

This gap occurs when there is difference in the policy and delivery. it means that the execution part failed to live up to the expectation. It is for a very special and

rightful reason that the extended service mix consists of one P for people. People hold special values in service delivery and hence the satisfaction obtained. Poor execution may be the outcome of Improper training, inadequate motivation, remuneration etc. since the people of a service organisation delivering the service cannot be separated from the organisation itself because of the boundary spanning role that they play, they can play significant role in creating this gap. For example, in an Airline, the company may promise faster hassle-free boarding services but if the employees are overworked and underpaid, it may take a toll on their effort to deliver what is promised.

4.4. G4- Communication Gap

This Gap happens because the company's external communication in terms of its advertisement and other marketing campaigns sounds great but in actual practice the services do not meet those expectations. The expectation of a service is made by feedback. Experience sharing by other customers and company's communication through advertisements and promotions. This Gap happens due to overpromising, misleading promotions, or a lack of coordination between marketing and service teams. Companies may exaggerate features to attract customers, but when expectations are not met, customers feel misled and dissatisfied. [3]

4.5. G5- Customer Gap

This happens between what the expectation of the customer was and what he perceived of the service after receiving it. if the above mentioned four gaps are not taken care of by the organisation, they eventually may lead to Gap 5. This gap may lead to direct service failures and lost customer, lost revenue, negative word of mouth etc. Certainly, none of the company would invite this.

5. Research Methodology

- **Data Collection:** The methods consist of analysis of primary data collected at Patna Airport through the passengers and other people who have taken the service of Airlines from Patna airport. A structured questionnaire of 12 questions based on the Five Gaps model was circulated with the last question being an open -ended question for suggestions and feedback.

- **Sampling Technique:** Random sampling method was used to collect the data. A total of 62 participants were used to conduct this research. It was tried to make the research age inclusive in order to comprehensively understand expectations and suggestions of all the age. (Figure 2)

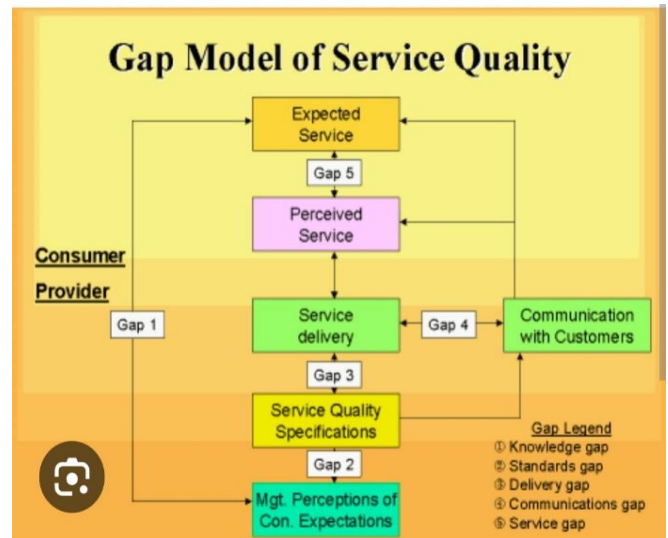


Figure 2 Research Methodology

6. Questionnaire and Responses

1. What is your age?
62 responses

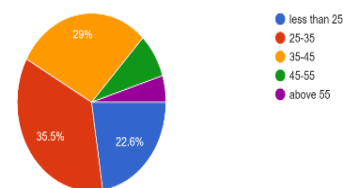


Figure 3 Questionnaire

2. Which Airlines have you flown most frequently from Patna Airport in the last two years?
62 responses

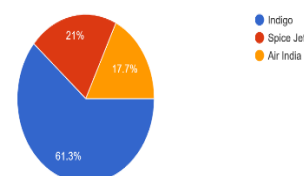


Figure 4 Pie Chart

3. Do you feel that the Airlines aligns their services as per the customer's need?
62 responses

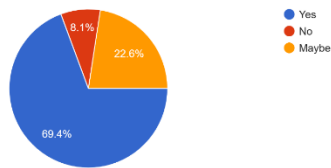


Figure 5 Pie Chart

8. Do you feel that the staff are thoroughly trained to be empathetic to the elderly and needy people (irrespective of the shifts of the staff and timing of flight)?
62 responses

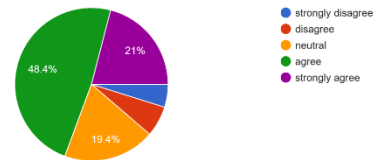


Figure 10 Pie Chart

4. Does the Airline take adequate feedback and suggestions from you and do you feel they are incorporated?
62 responses

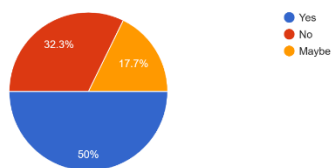


Figure 6 Pie Chart

9. Do you feel that the Airline's advertisements and promotions accurately reflect actual service and there is no misleading claims or promotional agenda?
61 responses

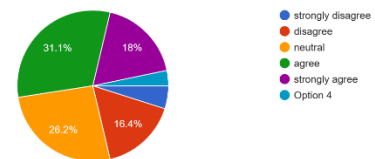


Figure 11 Pie Chart

5. Do you think the policy and procedure of the Airline (Check in, baggage handling, lost baggage, money refund, customer handling at different points) aligns with the convenience of the customers?
62 responses

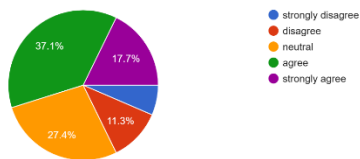


Figure 7 Pie Chart

10. When faced by a service failure (miscommunication/ problems in Layover/ baggage lost/ staff argument/non-compliance to the policy/mishandling...ne is quick to resolve the issues empathetically?
61 responses

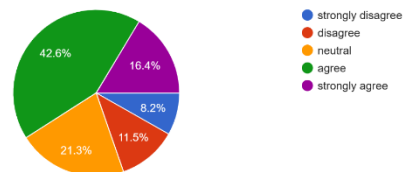


Figure 12 Pie Chart

6. Do you think the standards of customer service of the Airline has gone up over the years as per the market standards (with special reference to technological upgradation)?
62 responses

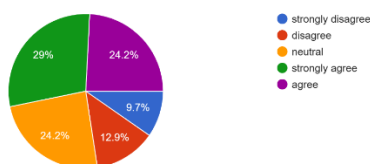


Figure 8 Pie Chart

7. Do you feel the Airlines has no lag between the promises/ communication that are done to customers and the delivery/practice (irrespective of timing of the flight and shifts of the staff)?
62 responses

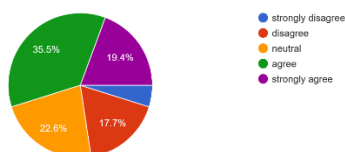


Figure 9 Pie Chart

Would you like to give any suggestions for Airline service to provide better customer satisfaction in future? [4]

Analysis-

Q1. What is your age?

- 29% respondents are in the age group of 35-45 years.
- 35.5 % respondents are in the age group of 25-35 years.
- 22.6% respondents are in the age group of less than 25 years.
- 12.9% respondents are in the age group of 45 to above 55 years of age.

Q2. Which Airlines have you flown most frequently from Patna Airport in the last two years?

- 61.3% respondents were the frequent flyers from Indigo

- 21% Spice Jet and
- 17.7% were from Air India. (Table 1)

Q3. Do you feel that the Airlines aligns their services as per the customer's need?

Table 1 Airlines Aligns

Airlines	Yes (In percentage)	May be (In Percentage)	No (In percentage)
Indigo	57.8	34.2	0.08
Spice Jet	84.6	0	0.15
Air India	81.8	18.1	0

Q4. Does the Airline take adequate feedback and suggestions from you and do you feel they are incorporated? (Table 2)

Table 2 Airline Take Adequate

Airlines	Yes (In percentage)	May be (In Percentage)	No (In percentage)
Indigo	47.3	23.6	28.9
Spice Jet	61.5	15.3	23
Air India	69.2	9.0	9.0

Q5. Do you think the policy and procedure of the Airline (Check in, baggage handling, lost baggage, money refund, customer handling at different points) aligns with the convenience of the customers? (All figures in percentage) (Table 3)

Table 3 Procedure of the Airline

Airlines	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Indigo	0.07	0.15	34.2	28.9	13.1
Spice Jet	0	0.15	23.0	46.1	23.0
Air India	0.09	0	0.09	45.4	36.3

Q6. Do you think the standards of customer service of the Airline has gone up over the years as per the market standards (with special reference to

technological upgradation)? (All figures in percentage) (Table 4)

Table 4 Customer Service

Airlines	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Indigo	0.05	15.7	18.4	28.9	23.6
Spice Jet	23.0	0.07	23.0	15.3	38.4
Air India	0.09	0	27.2	18.1	36.3

Q7. Do you feel the Airlines has no lag between the promises/ communication that are done to customers and the delivery/practice (irrespective of timing of the flight and shifts of the staff)? (All figures in percentage) (Table 5)

Table 5 Airlines Communication

Airlines	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Indigo	0.07	21.0	28.9	28.9	0.07
Spice Jet	0	23.0	0	46.1	23.0
Air India	0.09	0	18.1	45.4	36.3

Q8. Do you feel that the staff are thoroughly trained to be empathetic to the elderly and needy people (irrespective of the shifts of the staff and timing of flight)? (All figures in percentage) (Table 6)

Table 6 Thoroughly Trained

Airlines	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Indigo	0.02	0.05	21.0	47.3	23.6
Spice Jet	0.07	0.07	15.3	46.1	23.0
Air India	0.09	0.09	18.1	54.5	0.09

Q9. Do you feel that the Airline's advertisements and promotions accurately reflect actual service and there is no misleading claims or promotional agenda? (All figures in percentage) (Table 7)

Table 7 Airline's Advertisements

Airlines	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Indigo	0.02	21.0	31.5	47.3	23.6
Spice Jet	0.07	0.07	15.3	46.1	23.0
Air India	0.09	0.09	18.1	54.5	0.09

Q10. When faced by a service failure (miscommunication/ problems in Layover/ baggage lost/ staff argument/non-compliance to the policy/mishandling of customers), do you feel the Airline is quick to resolve the issues empathetically? (All figures in percentage)(Table 8)

Table 8 Airline Quick

Airlines	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Indigo	0.07	13.1	31.5	34.2	13.1
Spice Jet	0.07	15.3	0.07	46.1	23.0
Air India	0.09	0	0.09	63.6	18.1

7. Interpretations

There is no skewed representation of people belonging to different ages who were respondents. Therefore, the research is almost all age inclusive. According to the respondents Gap 1 – Knowledge Gap/ Listening gap is the least for Spice Jet (84.6%) and most for Indigo (57.8%) with Air India in between the both (81.8%) of them. This means that Spice Jet is better among the two for bridging the gap between what the customers expect and the understanding of the company for those expectations. Holistic business has the customer at its heart. Knowing the customers well helps Spice Jet to make optimal utilisation of resources and create better design for service delivery.

- Although 61.5 % customers of Spice Jet have agreed that the Airlines is agile in taking feedbacks and suggestions which is less than the number of respondents of Air India whose 69.2 % respondents have agreed on the same question. It is almost as good as Spice Jet in using the feedback for catering the needs of its customers. Indigo customers at 47.3% meaning less than 50% of the respondents are dissatisfied with the way the Airlines is

making effort to take feedbacks and suggestions.

- When it comes to Gap 2, Policy Gap – Spice Jet and Air India are almost parallel to each other with 46.1% and 45.4% customers agreeing to their Policy and Procedure being customer centric and Indigo customers are indifferent at 34.2%, being neutral.
- Only 28.9% Indigo customers agree to the policy and procedure being customer centric.
- When it comes to Gap 3, Delivery Gap- Indigo and Spice Jet almost recorded similar responses at 47.3% and 46.1% respectively in perceiving that the staff of the Airlines are well trained and the customers are treated well by them irrespective of the timing of the flight and the shifts of the staff.
- However, the efforts of making the customers to perceiving them same thing in a strongly agreeing category is very feeble for Air India. Less effort will go into converting the customers of Indigo and Spice Jet for the above case. [5]
- Since, the customers of Airlines include all ages where the whole expectation of people

belonging to certain age group changes, catering to two vulnerable category can enhance service satisfaction to another level and can convert the customers into repeat customers and maintain better relationship based on trust with them. It appears that all the Airlines very well understand this fact and try to minimise the Gap 3.

- Since the service delivery is greatly affected by Technology Upgrade, which is both cost cutting and strategic advantage for the companies whereas cost cutting, time saving and error free smooth delivery for the customers. In the same vein, the customers of Spice Jet and Air India strongly agree more than the customers of Indigo to perceive the incorporation of technology upgradation in the past few years in various service encounters they have with the Airlines. [6]
- Gap 4- Communication gap is least among the customers of Air India (54.5 %) and highest among the customers of Spice Jet (46.1 %) with Indigo at 47.3% in between both of them. Clearly the expectation of the customer is built by the Advertisements and Promotions and the satisfaction level is determined by whether the expectation was met during service delivery or not. If it leads to dissatisfaction, it may lead to serious consequences -lost customers, negative feedback etc.
- Service Failure – no matter how good and error proof the service is designed, performed and delivered errors and failures can take place. It is how the Service Failure is fixed which enhances service satisfaction and builds better relation with the customers. In this line – Indigo needs to improve on how it addresses the service failure (34.2%) while Air India scores the best (63.6%) with Spice Jet in between both of them (46.1%).
- Gap 5 – Customer Gap – Analysing all the data, it can be interpreted that the customer perception and expectation has the least gap in Air India and most in Indigo with Spice Jet in between both of them. This represents that

Air India is most customer centric Airlines operating from Patna Airport according to the service Quality Gap model.

8. Suggestions

Although Indigo is a low cost and most in number operational flight from Patna Airport, it should not take customers for granted. The ultimate service satisfaction is judged by its customer which is what is the fuelling force for the business of a company.

It may lose out on its international flyers in case of low cost operating other international airlines to other cities because in the world of global connection through internet, spillover effect is real and contagious and negative feedback/ reviews can build negative perception of the airline elsewhere as well. In management, when providing services there is no best way of doing anything. There is always a better way, so Air India and Spice Jet can improve themselves making more and more customer centric which will help in enhancing service satisfaction.

9. Limitations

- Shift wise data (morning/afternoon/ night) could not be taken.
- Customers of different segments like economy, premium economy and business could not be segregated which could have impacted the research.
- More time needed to collect more samples was a limiting factor.
- The reason for the fact that despite customer dissatisfaction, why Indigo was still the most taken flight from Patna Airport. (Was it because of it being more in number, promotional campaigns, discounts, customer reward etc.)

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