AN ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION FROM THE QUALITY OF ONLINE SERVICES OF SAUDI AIRLINES

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to find out the satisfaction level of the Saudi Airlines customers from its online services, which is an important interface between the customers and the company in present day information technological advancement. The study is quantitative study based on primary data collected from the customers of Saudi Airlines. The study sample size was 400 respondents from across the country. The researcher personally administered a close-ended structured questionnaire in Arabic language. The results show that the customers of Saudi Airlines are somewhat satisfied not satisfied or highly satisfied with its online services. However, they are not satisfied with the refund on online cancellation of ticket. Study recommends that the management of the Saudi Airlines should focus on enhancing the service quality of the online services. The customer may be tempted to move to other airlines whenever available. The study is exploratory in nature and focuses on the elements of investigation in isolation. A detailed study may give better understanding of the effectiveness of the online services of the Saudi Airlines.

Keywords: Airlines, Saudi Airlines, Saudi Arabia, Online services, Customers Satisfaction, service quality

INTRODUCTION

Online shopping has gained remarkable popularity recently. The boom in the information technology especially the internet and the devices such as laptops, tablets, and phablets and smart phones played major role. The information technology changed the way of business as well. One such effective change was the way the consumers and sellers come together for a transaction for example over internet, popularly known as ecommerce, online shopping and all. Internet has centralized the information for all including the consumers. Internet has empowered the consumers, they are informed, they have wider choices, all these just a click away. The consumers can compare the prices, the quality, features and any information they would like locally and internationally. The online shopping is competing the traditional shopping at the retail shops, an article in Times of India (2014) said, the online retailers have affected the sales at shops during the festival season in India, the article said "poor sales at the brick-and-mortar shops as online stores such as Flipcart, Snapdeal, and Amazon are snapping customers away. Not just for mobiles and electronic goods, but white goods, shoes, clothes, household goods, books – you name it. The discount euphoria has hijacked the Diwali rush from retail showrooms this year, and not surprisingly, the mood in markets is distinctly downbeat". The enhanced role of internet and ecommerce and its growing popularity in present day business motivated lots of researches to understand the service satisfaction in relation to the virtual business environment (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004; Choi et al., 2000; Yang and Peterson, 2004). The most important aspect of online retailing from the customer's perspective is the increase in access and choice, especially with regard to from scores of online retailers located anywhere in the world, leading to a breakdown of borders and to growth in numbers of competitive alternatives. In 2009, (Urban et al.,) summarized the definition of e-commerce as the process of buying, selling, transferring, or exchanging products, services or information via internet and other computer networks. The fast development in information technology and expansion in the internet users across the world made e-commerce an important tool of business operations. Organizations, operating under intensive competitive market, employ the internet as an innovative marketing tool in offering information and online transaction (Becerra and Korgaonkar 2011; Grandon et al., 2011; Hernandez 2010; Kim et al., 2010; Lu 2010). Online business has become an inevitable component of the present day business.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The air travel industry is part of a steadily growing service sector (Lovelock, Patterson, and Walker, 2004). Klopenborg and Gourdin (1992) and Shostack (1977) classified air travel as one of the more intangible service industries. Many studies attempted to identify the key dimensions

of service quality or customer satisfaction in the context of narrowly defined online industries, such as travel agencies, retailing and portal services (Evanschitzky et al., 2004; Kaynama& Black, 2000; Szymanski & Hise, 2000; Van Riel et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2003; Zeithaml et al., 2001). In this section, the researcher presents the existing literature regarding customer satisfaction and its importance as justification for this study.

Why Customer Satisfaction

Importance of consumer satisfaction as well as the impact of consumer satisfaction has been widely researched. Researches showed that a satisfied customer spreads favourable word of mouth views and attracts new patrons as well (Bearden & Teel, 1983). Satisfaction is an overall customer attitude toward a service provider (Levesque & McDougall, 1996) or according Zineldin (2000) an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers anticipated and what they receive. Whether traditional or online shopping, customer satisfaction is equally important as it build customer loyalty (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003), lead to repeat purchases (Reibstein 2002), spread positive word of mouth (Bhattacherjee (2001) as well as improves the company's market share and profitability (Reichheld 2000). Satisfied customers are more likely to return while dissatisfied customers are morel ikely to go elsewhere (Heskett et. al., 1994; Strauss et al., 2001; Zairi, 2000). Consumer satisfaction has been widely adopted as an important determinant of Internet shopping (DeLone and McLean 1992, 2003, Rai et al., 2003).

Antecedents of Internet shopping satisfaction

Many researches have confirmed antecedents of internet shopping satisfaction. Some of the antecedents of the online shopping satisfaction were; Accessibility, Information availability, customization/personalization, speed of acquisition, security, atmospherics, service/experiential, convenience, price across brands, assortment, physical presence (Abbott et al., 2000). Cho and Park (2001) put the following antecedents for consumer satisfaction from online shopping, product information, consumer service, purchase result and delivery, site design, purchasing process, delivery time and charge, payment methods, ease of use, additional information and services. Reibstein (2002) found the following features important for online shopping satisfaction namely, ease of ordering, product selection, product information, product prices, navigation, on-time delivery, product presentation, customer services, privacy policies, and shipping and handling. Another important antecedent was web design (Kim & Lim 2001). Ho and Wu (1999) identified five antecedents of customer satisfaction to be appropriate for online shopping on the internet. These are logistical support, technical characteristics, information characteristics, home page presentations and product characteristics. Bizrate includes an overall score for online

retailers, and ratings on the attributes of ease of ordering, product selection, product information, price, on-time delivery, product representation, customer support, privacy policies, shipping, and handling (Tam, 2002).

There are large number of variables that would appropriately find a place in the study of customer satisfaction from online services of airlines. However, the researcher has considered the following variables for studying the satisfaction from Saudi airlines online services namely; speed of online services, getting tickets, making payment, getting boarding pass, selecting the seats, cancellation of tickets, refund on cancellation of tickets, and overall standard of the website. These variables play important for an airline traveler.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Saudi Airlines is in the process of liberalization. It has already privatized the catering services. The next step is to open the international airlines sector to the private companies for indigenous companies as well as foreign companies. In present time, online business is gaining importance. The contribution of online business is remarkably impressive for some of the industry. The advancement in technology has mandated for all businesses to enhance their online interface with the customers through their websites. Thus in this study the researcher investigated the effectiveness of the Saudi Airlines website.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the research was to find out the satisfaction level of the customers of Saudi Airlines to identify the main areas of focus and improvement needed.

HYPOTHESIS

H1:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied with the speed of the online services

H2:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied online ticketing

H3:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied online payment

H4:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied with online boarding pass services

H5:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied with online seat selection

H6:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied with cancellation of tickets

H7:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied with refund on cancellation of tickets

H8:   Saudi Airlines customers were satisfied with the overall standard of the website

METHODOLOGY

Survey Instrument

This research is a quantitative study based on primary data collected from customers of Saudi Airlines. The researcher collected data through a structured close-ended questionnaire, originally developed into English then translated into Arabic for the convenience of the respondents, as they were all Arabic speakers.

The online services included seven areas of investigation considered representative of the overall online services of airline companies. The seven areas were; Speed of the online services (Saudi Airlines website), Online-ticketing facilities, Online Payment, Online Boarding pass services, Online Seat selection, Online cancellation of the tickets, Refund on Online cancellation of ticket, and last question enquired about the overall standard and services of the website.

Likert scale measured the intensity of the satisfaction of the users. The rating used were 5 to 1 on which, 5 equal to Highly Satisfied, 4 equal to Satisfied, 3 equal to Somewhat Satisfied, 2 equal to Dissatisfied, and 1 equal to Highly Dissatisfied.

Sampling technique

Convenience sampling methodology identified the respondents to administer the questionnaire. The sample consisted of group of individuals pursuing bachelor degree in various specializations in business from College of Business Rabigh, King Abdulaziz University.

The respondents came to the campus for counseling classes before the exam and then for the exam. They came from different parts of the country to write the final exam. All the respondents were employees in various companies in the country. The respondents were in all age groups. The researcher administered questionnaires on confirmation that the respondent had used the services of Saudi Airlines at least ones. The effective sample size was 400 respondents.

Analysis of data

Percentage, frequencies, mean and standard deviation analysis method were used for analysis. For the testing of hypotheses ANOVA and t-test were used. The reliability of data were analyzed on Cronbach Alpha analysis.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Reliability of data

Cronbach Alpha value presented in table 1, was .918, which represented high reliability of the collected data.

Table 1: Reliability test

Online Services	**.918**
Speed of online services	
Getting tickets online	
Payment online	
Getting boarding pass online	
Selecting the seats online	
Cancellation of tickets online	
Refund on cancellation of tickets	
Overall standard of the website	

Profile analysis of the respondents

Table 2 presents the profile of the respondents. Respondents' profile were analyzed across the six variables namely; Nationality, Class of travel, Destination of travel, Time of using Saudi Airlines services, Travelled by other airlines, Frequency of travel. The respondents were mainly Saudi nationals (91.2%) only 8.8% were Non Saudis. The respondents who travelled in only business class were (9.8%), only economy class (57.3%) and both classes (33.0%). In response to the question 'the destination of the travel' 47.3% said that they used services of Saudi Airlines for only domestic travelling and 11.0% said they used it for only International travel and 41.8% said they have used the services of Saudi Airlines for both domestic as well as International destinations.

A large number of respondents had been using the services of the Saudi Airlines for more than 10 years (32.5%), 26.3% of the respondent have used the services of the Saudi Airlines for 6 to 10 years and 41.3% had used it for less than 6 years. Majority of the respondents had used the services of other airlines as well, approximately 67.5% confirmed to this. The users had been using the Saudi Airlines frequently as much as 84.8% are frequent travelers.

Table 2: Basic profile of airline customers

Profile	N	%
Nationality		
Saudi	365	91.2
Non Saudi	35	8.8
Total	400	100.0
Class of travel		
Business Class	39	9.8
Economy	229	57.3
Both	132	33.0
Total	400	100.0
Destination of Saudi Airlines		
Domestic	189	47.3
International	44	11.0
Both	167	41.8
Total	400	100.0
Using Saudi Airlines since		
1 to 5 years	165	41.3
6 to 10 years	105	26.3
More than 10 years	130	32.5
Total	400	100.0
Travelled by other Airlines		
Yes	270	67.5
No	130	32.5
Total	400	100.0
Frequently Travelling by Saudi Airlines		
Yes	339	84.8
No	61	15.3
Total	400	100.0

Customer Satisfaction with online services of the Saudi Airlines

The results in table 3 and table 4 presented the satisfaction level of the customers from the online services of the Saudi Airlines. Table 3 presented the results through mean values and standard deviation, and table 4 presented the results in percentage. The mean values have been interpreted as follows; Mean value equal to and less than 3 represented dissatisfaction of the customers, mean value more than 3 and less than 4 interpreted as somewhat satisfaction of the customers, mean value of 4 and above mean the customers were satisfied and 5 represented as high satisfaction of the customers. The results in table 3 showed that the customers of Saudi Airlines were somewhat satisfied with the online services indicated by mean value between 3 and 4 except for refund on cancellation of tickets for which the mean value is less than 3.

Table 4 presented results in percentages and grouped the customers into three categories namely; Satisfied customers, somewhat satisfied customers, and Dissatisfied customers. The results showed that only 44.8% of the customers were satisfied from the speed of the online services. From other services the percentage of satisfied customers were as follows; getting ticket online 55.3%, payment online 58.8%, getting online boarding pass 56.0%, selecting seats online 53.8%, cancellation of tickets online 45.8%, refund on online cancellation of tickets 36.5%, and from overall standard of the website 47.3%. For all the online service variables, the customers are somewhat satisfied except for the refund on online cancellation of tickets. Satisfaction of the customers across the profile variables namely; nationality, class of travel, destination of travel, duration of using Saudi airlines, travelled by other airlines, frequency of travelling by Saudi airlines, see appendices (table 6 through 10).

Table 3: Customer satisfaction on online services of the Saudi Airlines

Online Services Area	N	Mean	SD	HD	DS	SS	S	HS
Speed of online services	400	3.27	1.318	60	39	122	91	88
Getting ticket online	400	3.54	1.248	40	34	105	114	107
Payment online	400	3.61	1.219	35	33	97	124	111
Getting online boarding pass	400	3.56	1.237	37	36	103	115	109
Selecting seats online	400	3.52	1.216	37	34	114	115	100
Cancellation of tickets online	400	3.29	1.302	51	54	112	93	90
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	400	2.99	1.329	79	54	121	83	63
Overall standard of the website	400	3.35	1.213	46	33	132	112	77

SD = Standard deviation/ HD = Highly Dissatisfied/ DS=Dissatisfied/ SS=Somewhat satisfied/ S= Satisfied/ HS= Highly satisfied

Table 4: Customer satisfaction on online services of Saudi Airlines

Online Services Areas	Dissatisfied %	Somewhat satisfied %	Satisfied%
Speed of online services	24.7	30.5	44.8
Getting ticket online	18.5	26.2	55.2
Payment online	17.0	24.2	58.8
Getting online boarding pass	18.3	25.7	56.0
Selecting seats online	17.7	28.5	53.7
Cancellation of tickets online	26.3	28.0	45.7
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	33.3	30.2	36.5
Overall standard of the website	19.8	33.0	47.2

DISCUSSIONS

The fast development in technology especially the information technology enhanced the importance of online business and services. The customers directly contact the company for anything and everything. The website of a company is the interface between the company and the customer. In services industry such airlines, and hotels the online services such as the company website play very important role for almost everything a customer needs. In airline industry online service occupy important place as the customers can directly purchase the tickets, know the availability of the tickets, availability of seats, cancellation of tickets, seat selection etc. The main objective of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the online services of the Saudi Airlines. The satisfaction levels of the customers represented the effectiveness of the online services. There were eight hypothesis proposed for testing from the results to arrive at conclusion whether the customers of Saudi Airlines were satisfied or not with the online services.

To measure the satisfaction of the airline customers eight variables were investigated namely; speed of the online services, getting tickets online, payment online, getting online boarding pass, selecting seats online, cancellation of the tickets online, refund on cancellation of tickets, and overall standard of the website. The results in table 5 showed that except for refund on online cancellation of tickets, for all other variables the customers are in the satisfaction zone as mean value is more than 3 for all of them. The result is statistically significant at 95% confidence level except for refund on cancellation of tickets. Based on the result the null hypothesis is accepted and alternate hypothesis is rejected as the mean value of more than 3 indicates satisfaction of the customers. However, this result is significant for Saudi Airlines because the airlines industry of Saudi Arabia as a part of liberalization strategy in its third phase will be opened for airline companies from other countries. In that case somewhat satisfied customers will be more vulnerable to shift from Saudi Airlines to other airlines.

Table 5: One sample t test - Customer satisfaction on online services of Saudi Airlines

Services	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speed of online services	400	3.27	1.318	4.098	399	.000
Getting ticket online	400	3.54	1.248	8.573	399	.000
Payment online	400	3.61	1.219	9.963	399	.000
Getting online boarding pass	400	3.56	1.237	9.013	399	.000
Selecting seats online	400	3.52	1.216	8.512	399	.000
Cancellation of tickets online	400	3.29	1.302	4.492	399	.000
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	400	2.99	1.329	-.113	399	.910
Overall standard of the website	400	3.35	1.213	5.811	399	.000

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study suggested that the customers of Saudi Airlines Company are somewhat satisfied with the online services. The results showed that for all the eight variables investigated satisfaction was less than 4 indicating that the customers were not in satisfaction zone. However, for the variable refund on cancellation of tickets online the customers were not satisfied.

Managerial Implications

Saudi Arabian Airlines industry is under reforms. Sooner the industry will witness the entry of foreign airlines. The indigenous industry which till now enjoyed the monopoly status will have to face the competition. The low satisfaction of the Saudi Airlines customer will encourage the customers to move to other airlines. Thus, it is high time for the company to focus on improving the quality service of online services to enhance the customers' experience and bring them from 'somewhat satisfied' zone to 'satisfied and highly satisfied' zone.

Future Research

The present study is exploratory in nature. The researcher selected the variables investigated randomly from related literatures. A study to identify the variables in measuring the service quality of online services especially for the airlines industry may enhance the reliability.

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APPENDIX

Table 6: ANOVA - Customer satisfaction on online services of Saudi Airlines

Services	Saudi			Non Saudi			F	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev			
Speed of online services	365	3.25	1.341	35	3.49	1.040	1.028	1	.311
Getting ticket online	365	3.53	1.279	35	3.63	.877	.215	1	.643
Payment online	365	3.60	1.242	35	3.66	.968	.063	1	.801
Getting online boarding pass	365	3.57	1.249	35	3.46	1.120	.252	1	.616
Selecting seats online	365	3.51	1.244	35	3.60	.881	.176	1	.675
Cancellation of tickets online	365	3.28	1.326	35	3.40	1.035	.261	1	.610
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	365	2.99	1.352	35	3.06	1.083	.091	1	.764
Overall standard of the website	365	3.33	1.228	35	3.54	1.039	.944	1	.332

Table 7: ANOVA - Customer satisfaction on online services of Saudi Airlines

Services	Business Class			Economy			Both			F	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev			
Speed of online services	39	3.18	1.315	229	3.34	1.310	132	3.18	1.335	.676	2	.509
Getting ticket online	39	3.49	1.295	229	3.52	1.212	132	3.58	1.303	.116	2	.891
Payment online	39	3.49	1.254	229	3.59	1.216	132	3.67	1.221	.358	2	.699
Getting online boarding pass	39	3.54	1.211	229	3.55	1.240	132	3.57	1.249	.010	2	.990
Selecting seats online	39	3.67	1.084	229	3.45	1.237	132	3.59	1.217	.889	2	.412
Cancellation of tickets online	39	3.28	1.191	229	3.33	1.306	132	3.23	1.334	.270	2	.763
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	39	3.08	1.222	229	3.02	1.316	132	2.92	1.387	.348	2	.706
Overall standard of the website	39	3.26	1.251	229	3.38	1.169	132	3.34	1.283	.169	2	.845

Table 8: ANOVA - Customer satisfaction on online services of Saudi Airlines

Services	1 to 5 years			6 to 10 years			More than 10 years			F	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev			
Speed of online services	165	3.33	1.256	105	3.30	1.468	130	3.16	1.269	.666	2	.514
Getting ticket online	165	3.59	1.179	105	3.57	1.336	130	3.43	1.263	.681	2	.507
Payment online	165	3.68	1.115	105	3.65	1.337	130	3.48	1.247	.999	2	.369
Getting online boarding pass	165	3.59	1.153	105	3.68	1.260	130	3.42	1.317	1.302	2	.273
Selecting seats online	165	3.45	1.176	105	3.65	1.232	130	3.49	1.253	.850	2	.428
Cancellation of tickets online	165	3.39	1.162	105	3.48	1.394	130	3.02	1.358	4.568	2	.011
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	165	3.09	1.244	105	3.21	1.392	130	2.69	1.340	5.278	2	.005
Overall standard of the website	165	3.46	1.197	105	3.37	1.288	130	3.20	1.164	1.701	2	.184

Table 9: ANOVA - Customer satisfaction on online services of Saudi Airlines

Services	Domestic			International			Both			F	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev			
Speed of online services	189	3.13	1.360	44	3.50	1.131	167	3.37	1.305	2.151	2	.118
Getting ticket online	189	3.45	1.256	44	3.59	1.127	167	3.62	1.269	.843	2	.431
Payment online	189	3.57	1.186	44	3.57	1.149	167	3.66	1.278	.314	2	.731
Getting online boarding pass	189	3.52	1.236	44	3.57	1.149	167	3.60	1.266	.188	2	.829
Selecting seats online	189	3.46	1.200	44	3.48	1.110	167	3.60	1.261	.646	2	.525
Cancellation of tickets online	189	3.37	1.185	44	3.41	1.106	167	3.18	1.466	1.097	2	.335
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	189	3.04	1.312	44	3.23	1.138	167	2.87	1.389	1.483	2	.228
Overall standard of the website	189	3.28	1.242	44	3.48	1.089	167	3.40	1.213	.700	2	.497

Table 10: ANOVA - Customer satisfaction on online services of Saudi Airlines

Services	Travelled by other Airlines 'Yes'			Travelled by other Airlines 'No'			F	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev			
Speed of online services	270	3.24	1.310	130	3.33	1.338	.409	1	.523
Getting ticket online	270	3.55	1.280	130	3.51	1.183	.092	1	.762
Payment online	270	3.60	1.260	130	3.62	1.136	.031	1	.860
Getting online boarding pass	270	3.56	1.250	130	3.55	1.214	.016	1	.899
Selecting seats online	270	3.57	1.217	130	3.42	1.212	1.360	1	.244
Cancellation of tickets online	270	3.21	1.342	130	3.47	1.202	3.569	1	.060
Refund on online cancellation of tickets	270	2.84	1.322	130	3.31	1.293	11.103	1	.001
Overall standard of the website	270	3.29	1.227	130	3.49	1.176	2.568	1	.110