Empirical Study on Effect of Employee Engagement to Achieve Maximum Customer Satisfaction in the Airline Industry – A Case Study of Etihad Airlines

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Abstract

As we talk; volume of businesses taking place within the aviation sector is increasing at an overwhelming rate. As a result, competition among various airline organizations across the world is becoming a subject worth not to debate. We all agree that financial strength is a paramount prerequisite for airline companies, being a gate pass to the deepening competition in the market. In the year 2003, Etihad airline kicked off its operations. To a layman, the span duration between 2003 and now might not be ample for this airline company to have secured much financial power. However, financial analysts beg to defer with this acclamation saying that financial strength is mandatory essentiality for airline companies. This particular research paper indentifies the financial power of an airline company as the specific product being offered. The research paper goes on to highlight that it is impossible for an airline company to realize a successful sale of product supposing the clients are not satisfied. Therefore, airline companies have identified the essentiality of paying close attention to their customer's grievances along with heeding to them in order to secure a competitive edge in the market.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction; Airline Industry; Case Study.

1. Introduction

A few years ago, airline companies have been witnessed to realize the crucial importance of maintaining excellent customer care services. Outstanding customer care services speak volume in the overall success of organizations; leave alone the airline based ones.

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An airline that aims at exploring the height of success in not only the local front, but also the international front has an absolute duty of cross checking and probably evaluating its customer care services. As we talk, the fact that organizational competitiveness is almost at peak is irrefutable. Owing this revelation, Etihad airline has got no other alternative apart from remitting the best customer care services. In essence, outstanding customer care services to ensure that customers are satisfied since their expectations are met. Gauging customer satisfaction might not be necessarily an easy task. However, [4] asserts that airline sectors with an aim of taking their organizations to greater heights ought to conduct surveys on customer satisfaction.

Etihad's capacity to comprehend the imminent need of customer satisfaction in its overall success is one thing. However, having the right knowledge of sourcing customer's views regarding the services being offered by Etihad is a totally different thing [11]. As such, this paper kicks off by discussing at least three distinct ways that Etihad Airline Company can employ in order to get an insight of what their clients are saying about their services.

The use of comment cards in collecting data from customers in various organizations/ institutions is on the rise. In essence, comment cards entail some questions upon which a visitor to a particular institution is expected to fill following his stay/ expenditure at a given organization. Comment cards aim at remunerating a feeling of the clients in relation to the services that are being offered at a particular service provider. The organization seeking to know the customer's feelings is therefore obliged to avail some resources to these clients at all times. Such resources include clipboards or any other writing material that is of convenience [2]. A writing material should definitely be accompanied by a writing material such as a pencil since it is not prudent to expect a visitor to provide his or her own. There should also be a copy highlighting the survey schedule that notifies the clients on the specific time that they are bound to be supplied with comment cards and ultimately, an actual copy stipulating these guidelines. Duration of one week is enough to collect at least two completed daily comment cards from visitors, who are most cases the clients [7]. The collected comment cards are then sampled and certain factors are put into consideration such as age, sex and race among others prior coming up with a final conclusion on the analysis drawn.

2. Comment cards

The use of comment cards has proved to reap success on the part of the organization seeking to establish the extent at which its customers are satisfied with the services being offered. Comment card offers a visitor or a customer for that matter with a chance to express their views regarding the services being offered without fear of intimidation [6]. This is partly due to the verity that a customer is assured of privacy while writing his or her comments and at the same time privacy is guaranteed in the sense that there is no face to face dialogue and instead questions are posed on a piece of writing material. On the other hand, comment cards do not necessarily give a true and fair view of the matter due for interrogation. In most cases, comment cards have failed due to the missing of sampling days [5]. Continued missing of the sampling days has in most cases led to misleading report from the analysis of the comment cards. It is also quite imperative to note the visitor's inability to fill the daily quota affects the presentation of a true and fair view of the client's feelings and views towards the quality of services sought from a particular provider.

3. Customer visits

Customer visit is yet another way that an airline company can employ so as to remunerate the exact feelings/ satisfactions of customers. Customer visits can be attained through a number of ways but the most common way is to moving from one place to another, say from one company to another whilst interrogating staff across various departments regarding the extent at which they are satisfied with particular service that are offered by a particular organization. In our contextual case, customer visits would entail conducting visits across various countries which receive the services of Etihad Airline Company [22]. A major advantage associated with this data collecting method is the ideal fact that it is almost possible to obtain the exact feelings about customer satisfaction particularly owing the face to face dialogue. However, customer visits might suffer from a major challenge since during the visits, customers might behave differently as compared to an instance where they are only required to put down their feelings in form of writing. Consequently, this might lead to giving out of biased piece of information due to customer's exaggeration, thus a major challenge [20].

4. Interview questionnaire methodology

Comment cards and customer visits are suitable ways of obtaining data from customers with an aim of assessing customer's satisfaction in relation to service offered by not only Etihad Airline Company but also among other organization [17]. However, in this particular research paper, I seek to employ interview questionnaire methodology. We all agree that customers hold the ultimate view/opinion regarding the services that are being offered by Etihad Airline Company. There prevails a number of ways in which quality of an airline can be gauged but in the case surrounding Etihad Company, I seek to use the Servqual method [10]. Therefore, it would be prudent to have a clear guideline of the factors employed in Etihad' Servqual methodology prior bisecting the actual questionnaire design used.

5. Servqual in Etihad Airline Company

A number of aspects are used as point of references in gauging the quality of airline services. According to [8] reliability, consistency along with augmented product plays a pivotal role in gauging the quality offered by an airline company. However, I seek to incorporate aspects such as timelines, price, safety, customization and assurance in the list of essential factor to consider in gauging customer satisfaction.

6. Design of the Questionnaire

Survey forms formed the most suitable design upon which data regarding customer satisfaction in Etihad Airline Company. The Airline is based in Abhu Dhabi Middle East and therefore, the sample forms in this particular survey were prepared in Arabic, being the most popular language among mot customers and English, being an international language. The sole purpose of preparing the survey forms in the two languages was to heighten communication, rate at which customers would respond to the set questions along with fostering convenience. Survey forms were also designed to pose varied questions to the customers with an aim of exhausting the areas highlighted in the Servqual model [23]. Client's demographic sketches for instance frequency of flight and sex of each and every passenger was accounted for in the forms.

On the other hand, statements with regard to customer satisfaction whereby perceptions regarding Etihad's service were rated and arranged in a chronological order depending on their positivity towards the response in the survey questions. In other words, number 5 was used to represent passage who agreed strongly while number 1 represented passengers that disagreed strongly. It is worth noting that the survey was also intended to identify the approximate distance/ time it would take for Etihad Company to attain excellent offers in terms of services that are actually way beyond the expectations of the clients [19]. At the expense of expectations, this survey paid a considerable attention to perceptions which were later examined by the airline's board of executives. This means that the contributions of the airline executives were also intertwined in drawing the final conclusions.

7. Distribution and Evaluation of the Survey

On a specific day, the survey took place in 85 Etihad's flights. Application of the questionnaires took place during the exact time of these flights. To be precise, we found it wise to conduct the analysis an hour just before the flights took place. Of course, this aimed at facilitating representativeness of the questionnaires. Out of the 17 distributed questionnaires, 10 attained completion. Therefore, evaluation was based on the 10 completed questionnaires [15].

8. Reliability analysis

In order to prove that the entire survey questions had a close relationship, a reliability analysis was conducted. Reliability analysis was also conducted to ascertain that whether or not the entire questions were perceived in a similar stance by passenger from the various flights. In Etihad's customer satisfaction study, results unraveled were enough to prove that indeed, customer had a similar perception in accordance to the questions posed on the questionnaires. The shine more spotlights on the reliability analysis, the popular cronbach's alpha internal consistency statistical methodology was used, [21]. This particular statistical method has a coefficient that varies amid 0 and 1, whilst putting into consideration three decimal behind these two integers. Therefore, the coefficient sought in drawing the suitability of the reliability analysis conclusion was 0.898, thus satisfactory. Reliability of six factors was evaluated and their coefficients noted as illustrated in the table below. In the six factors tabulated in table 1, a number of related questions were asked and coefficient of their reliability was noted as per the cronbach's alpha internal consistency statistical methodology. This was then illustrated on a table 2 as shown below.

Table 1: Related Questions and Coefficient of their Reliability

Factor	Reliability [0.3 decimal places]
Empathy	0.658
Technological services	0.896
Image	0.867
Services in a flight	0.786
Staff	0.785
Ground services	0.876

Table 2: Factors against reliability

Questions	Factors Reliability						
Empathy factors	A	B	C	D	E	F	
Acceptability of staff's attitude in emergencies	.756						**.756**
Technological services							**.923**
Ease of using the web		.890					
Sufficiency of web contents		.956					
Image factors							**.906**
Corporate image is reflected on the crew appearance			.867				
Etihad's flight experience portrays its image			.945				
Etihad's services factor							**.825**
Sufficiency of catering food				.867			
Sufficiency of newspapers and magazines				.876			
Sufficiency of phone services				.912			
Sufficiency of in flight entertainment				.645			
Staff factor							**.874**
Knowledge of staff					.898		
Friendliness and politeness					.967		
Reliability of behavior					.756		
Ground services factor							**.840**
Flight frequency acceptability						.895	
Reasonable fair versus services						.785	

In table 2, the reliability column shows the average coefficients basing on the passenger responses to the questions posed in the question column. This research paper went further to analyze the percentage of the

overall respondents against factors such as nationality, gender, education level, passenger's airline of choice, regularity of flight and the purpose of the flight. Table 3 illustrates various respondent percentages against various factors highlighted above.

Table 3: Factor against % of respondents

Factor	Total respondents [%]
Nationality	
Arabica	40
More than one	52
Other	4
Gender	
Male	65
Female	32
Education level	
Primary	7
High school	23
College and university	68
Airline of choice	
Etihad	48
Other	38
Flight frequency	
Once per month	54
More than once per month	22
Purpose of flight	
Vocation	32
Business	48
Other	12

9. Significance of the statistical findings

On the table illustrating factors against reliability, technological factor is the one with the highest coefficient followed by image factor, staff, ground services factor, Etihad's services factor and empathy come in the last position. In other words, the order in which these factors appear starts with the highly voted factor and ends with the factor that is voted by the least number of people [12].

10. Recommendations and Conclusion

First and foremost, there is a great level of customer satisfaction basing on the factor of technology. The two

items acting a reference points in this particular instance revolves around the user friendliness of Etihad's website along with the suitability and the relevancy of the web contents. Considering the two factors, customers seem to derive an overwhelming level of satisfaction. This factor can easily be attributed to the fact that Etihad Airline Company was established recently [18], during a time when radical changes in the field of technology were taking place. As a result, Etihad airline has exploited the benefits that come along with e-commerce, thus advancing the customer services channels. In essence, Etihad's airline has it web contents published in various languages [precisely Arabia and English]. This has gone a long way in retaining as well as attracting new customers to the services of this particular airline. A part from incorporating different languages in the website, Etihad Airline has integrated modern payment channels on their websites adding yet another reason for the pleasing customer satisfaction [14].

The factor of Etihad's image comes second. Statistical findings by [9] ascertain that an airline's image plays a pragmatic role in the overall customer's repurchase of the services offered. The significance of this particular assertion is the fact that Etihad Airline has done a superb job in demarcating a thick line in its image with reference to others. For this reason, regular commuters of this Airline can identify say the planes at ease, even if they are scattered in distinct locations across the world. Staff factor comes in the third place in the comprehensive evaluation. Although not the best in regard to offering the best customer satisfaction, Etihad's employees are doing a commendable job in attending their client's demands. Two factors are worth attributing to this significance [16]. First, Etihad Airline has been increasing its employees significantly and thus, efficiency in meeting the distinct client demands has increased. In addition, there has been a rigorous training among these staff, thus heightening the knowledge and skills of serving. It is recommendable for the airline to conduct a wide range of research in order to place its staff on a better position in competing with other international airlines. Ground services dimension comes forth.

A reference point used in gauging this factor was logicalness of fare against the expected services. From one perspective, it is logical to understand the reason behind the higher fare charges by this airline especially looking at the excellence of technological employment [1]. However, the logic losses meaning since it goes forth to diminish customer satisfaction. Therefore, Etihad Airline should consider striking a balance between the services offered and the fare charges. A major challenge also lies in Etihad's services factor. The most probable reason underlying this phenomenon is that web services are excellent. The Airline should understand that web services do not suite each and every passenger. Therefore, there should be effective ways to say incorporate entertainment across the various levels of education. High school passengers are way fewer that those in colleges and above [13]. Due to the difference in education background, primary school passengers can be set to have their own entertainment.

There is a severe challenge in Etihad's Airline empathy factor. There is huge customer dissatisfaction with regard to attitudes of various staff in emergency situation. This affects passenger's satisfaction on an individual level [3]. This can be attributed to the rampant increase in the number of newly recruited staff. Intensifying the rate of recruitment is not a bad move for Etihad. However, care should be taken to ascertain that recruitment is done on the merits. The fact that more men responded to the question compared to women should also give an insight on what needs to be done to strike a gender balance. Business purpose flight was the highest voted and

this should help executives at Etihad to conform to the requirements of business oriented passengers, such as cargo services.

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