

Safeguarding the Brand Image: Analyzing Risk Perception among Airline Travelers in India

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Abstract:

Risk has been analyzed as a prime factor which determines the travel behaviour of passengers. Availability of more choices and brands has also increased the competition among airline authorities to maintain their image among consumers. Being a most progressive airline in India, Indigo has enlisted itself to the preference list of travellers among other low cost carriers. The aim of this study is to understand the role of risk perceptions in defining brand image of travel product like Indigo airline in India. Findings of this study revealed that when it comes to risk, image and travel behaviour tends to get affected. Thus, lesser the risk factor more positive will be the image of that particular brand among tourists.

Keywords: Airline industry, brand image, Risk Perception, Travel Behaviour.

Introduction:

The airline industry has evolved as a competitive market segment in recent decades. It is the desire for ease and comfortable travel during these fastest pace society that it has become one of the most favourable modes of travel today. At present passengers have more viable options while selecting their travel modes. Keeping in view such scenario, the airline corporations should understand customer choice and behavioural pattern in order to be in the consumer preference list. Zeithaml et al. (1996) have analyzed and added that consumers' preferences in terms service providers; all depends upon how well the travel services meet their choices and expectations which ultimately affects the overall image of a service provider be it an airline. In fact, Gartner (1993) defined the image as crucial process which cannot be ignored even in the case of tangible or intangible attributes (McCartney, 2008). According to selection of a significant brand by the consumers is increased by its image in the market (Hsieh et al., 2004). Being available with inexpensive or budgeted fares in the region, Indigo airline is serving its customers with efficient reservation system and frequent travel services. In fact has inserted its best image as pioneer even in struggling scenario of airline sector.

However, airline with superior reputation like Spice Jet suffer more than those with deprived reputation after they make an error or mistake and even results in major decline in market (Rhee & Haunschild, 2006). It was established in 2005 as a low cost carrier and had named as a second largest low cost carrier in India by the end of 2008; whereas in December 2014, about Rs. 275 crore losses was incurred by the brand (Financialexpress.com, 2016). Due to increased competition in Airline sector in India, brands are still trying to retain highest market share. The India market is dominated by low cost carriers like IndiGo airline. It is supposed to be the only domestic airline that has depicted all time

earnings. In fact during the crisis stages, Indigo airline sustained and retained its position as India's most preferred low cost carrier. According to analysis conducted by Indian airlines Annual review, 2015 Indigo attained its position in the market (Indian airlines Annual Review, 2015).

Whereas, the airlines like Spice Jet, one of the most ideal budget carriers by tourists in India has faced a stiff dispute to trounce the crisis from financial deficiency. It had once pitched a thrust in low-cost air transport, which had made air travel cheaper for the masses. In 2012, Spice Jet suffered a loss of over ₹390 million (5.8 million US dollar) due to hike in international crude rates (Sahu, 2012). Consequently, in order to make their customers to be with their brand, airlines must become increasingly concerned about understanding their image among travellers thus making them rely on airline brand and its service. However, available management practices required to be reframed to incorporate risk as a significant determinant to predict behaviour amongst consumers (Oh, 1999).

In comprehensive impression of downturn and high risk, it is important for brand management authorities in airlines to incorporate value thereby defining secure travel services which in turn generates loyalty and repurchase intentions, ensures a preferred status amongst other competitors (Ozment & Morash, 1994). Various researches have been conducted in reference to customer behaviour which defined the influence of people's perceptions about the value, cost and service image of various corporations (McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Varki & Colgate, 2001). In fact, airline safety is more important for travellers opting for Low Cost Carriers than on-time airline operation (Mikulic & Prebezak, 2011). Discussing such aspects in service sector like airlines has become a requirement in the vision of analyzing airline brand image, risk perception associated with airline travel and tourist behavioural intentions. Considering to the popularity of Indigo airline in recent years in the low-cost airline business, this study is framed to analyze the image of this airline brand among travellers and to analyze the risk perception of travellers selecting the Indigo as an airline brand. Since the risk perception has been defined a major construct for defining the travellers' choice for airline brands, this study also intends to analyze the travel behaviour of passengers.

Literature Review:

The terms safety and security are used frequently in aviation. Aviation sector is amongst major travel segment which has remained influenced with numerous negative events including risk and dangers (Baker, 2014). According to Tsaur et al. (1997), Risk associated with travelling has been explained as a way of perception and experience associated with products that arises during process of purchasing and consuming travel services (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). In tourism terminology, it has been looked in association with the travel safety, which further influences tourist's choices and travel decision (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998) which ultimately lead the shift in choices for related assets like airlines. Fear of flying can also lead to a change in people's behaviour (Singenstroth, 2015) and in fact results in generating anxiety amongst them (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005).

Numerous authors like Roselius (1971), Jacoby & Kaplan (1972) cited in Cunningham et al., (2005) has provided a more refined approach towards the concept and presented it (Perceived Risk) as a

multidimensional construct associated with finance, physical loss, psychological, time, performance, and social. In most of the cases of high risk perceptions, consumer tends to postpone or avoid a brand (Cunningham et al., 2005). Such kind of risk perception further mend tourist's travel awareness, motivations and concerns towards other available alternatives and choice for travel brands (Baker, 2014).

Additionally, Schiffman & Kanuk (2000); Demir (2011); Beneke et al. (2012) and Arslan et al. (2013) have characterized travel perception as : *Financial Risk*: The risk of economic failure due to a poor selection or losing funds by purchasing a poor or unknown brand. Such kind risk also involves fear of not receiving a sufficient product of required quality thus showing their worth for money or price and available at a very less price somewhere else. So every purchase activity linked with some kind of financial results either positive or negative. Overall it is assumed that more a price for a brand higher will be the risk. *Socio-psychological Risk*, a risk seen in association with self image or personal status in the society before or while purchasing of a specific product or service brand where people. *Physical Risk* involves the probability of receiving harm from a purchased product which has been induced in consumer perception where people are perceiving risk towards their health, or a severe threat to life. *Performance Risk*, the risk which includes the imperfect performance of a product which results in the failure of that particular product to meet consumer expectations. According to Chen et al. (2009), travel risk is the perceived negative outcomes that may occur in passengers' travel behaviour. If tourists feel unsecured, they will avoid any activities beyond set tour schedules (Chiu & Lin, 2011). Thus, understanding association between perceived travel risks and their travel behaviour among travellers will help airline marketers to understand the impact of perceived risk on brand image and preferences.

To this Kossmann (2006) has also added that like any other product, reputation of an airline also relies on its image and in case of low cost airlines, passengers are found highly concerned as they are considered to be less safe (Mikulic & Prebezak, 2011). While conducting such purchasing practice, incurs high consumer involvement and complex buying behaviour as the purchase is quite risky (Kotler et al., 2008). In most of the cases travellers modify their behaviour and generally reframe their travel plans (Hartz, 1989); and even postpone their travel plans (Azim, 2009; Dolnicar, 2007).

Travelers who carry with positive image regarding an airline consider a bad flight experience as an exception to their notion for airline (Ostrowski et al., 1993). A brand starts losing its credibility during such situations, where when a actual potentiality and capability of an airline is neglected by the consumer (Janiszewska & Insch, 2012). In other words, a brand with a favourable image is generally linked with appropriate quality and worthy of price rather than others (Dowling, 1994). Since in airline sector, image is observed to have a direct influence on passenger behavioural intentions (Park et al. in 2006), companies needs realize the fact that creating positive image amongst consumers as it will help get into the preference and purchasing list (Esch et. al., 2006).

Overall the literature provides the setup for the hypotheses for the study that:

H1: Travel Risk Perception has a significant impact on tourist behaviour

H2: There is an association between airline brand image and tourist travel behaviour in lieu of risk involvement

Research Methodology

On the basis of previous literature and other secondary sources like newspapers etc. with regard to risk perception, airline brand image and travel behavior, the theoretical concepts have been drawn. Whereas primary data includes the responses collected from the tourists/passengers using the services of targeted airline i.e. Indigo airline. A structured questionnaire with three major sections was adopted for present research. The first section was comprised of questions associated with respondents' demography including age, age, reasons to fly and travel frequency (from the last one year). Respondents were requested to provide their responses on 5-point likert scale where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strong agree. The concerned scale for risk perception has been identified and adopted and modified according to their relevance for the study. It has been adopted from the studies conducted by Schiffman & Kanuk (2000); Demir, (2011); Beneke et al. (2012) and Arslan et al. (2013). The three item scale for Brand image was adopted from the research conducted by Park et al. (2006). For the purpose of the study the travellers opted or travelling through Indigo airlines were targeted as this airline have attained a significant position in the travel market as discussed previously but the analysis of risk may add a newer dimension in brand. The data was retained from passengers available at waiting hall in Delhi airport who opted Indigo airline in order to define a strategic approach for improvements in their services and conducting the strategic plan for refining their image in terms of safety perception for better acceptability and to withstand according to consumer needs. The travel behaviour was analyzed using 5-item scale developed with the help of extensive literature and modified according to the requirement of the study with the help of academics' and airline management reviews. Since exact population was unknown, so sample of 385 respondents was targeted to retrieve the responses for questionnaire (according to Krejice & Morgan 1970) out of which only 256 reliable and valid responses were finally used. Simple random sampling design was conducted for the process of collection. The responses were further coded and examined with the help of SPSS 22.0. For the purpose of descriptive analysis, the mean and standard deviations techniques were applied. Additionally, Regression analysis was applied to give a directional approach to the research constructs. The reliability analysis for the retrieved responses has been performed using Chronbach Alpha and overall it was found to be above 0.883 which indicated the reliability of the overall data for further analysis process whereas $\text{Alpha} \geq 0.60$ is the minimum acceptable level for internal consistency (Sekaran, 2003). The reliability test for Travel Risk Perception was 0.797, Airline brand image was 0.754 and for Passenger Travel Behaviour was 0.721.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Out of 256 completed respondents 149 (58.2%) were male and 107 (41.8%) were female. From the overall respondents, 68 (26.5%) passengers were age bar between 18-28 years, 76 (29.6%) were belonged

to 29-39 years, 69 (26.9%) respondents were having age bar 40-45 and 43 (16.79%) passengers were above 50 years.

Respondents were further asked to mark their travel frequency with the targeted airline. Results indicated that out of 256 respondents, 69 respondents indicated 1 to 2 times as their frequency to travel, 86 respondents had travelled 3to5 times, 56 travelled 6 to10 times from the last 12 months and only 45 respondents had travelled more than 10 times.

Table1: Travel Risk Perception associated with Airline brand

Attributes	Mean	S.D	Alpha value
Socio-psychological Risk			
Travelling through low cost airline doesn't suit my personality	3.24	0.61	.623
I am worried that my travel will change my friends' opinions about me	3.32	0.71	
I am worried that my travel will change my family's opinions about me.	3.35	0.73	
Physical Risk			
There are food and beverage safety problems	3.39	0.67	.677
I often fear of terror actions while travelling	3.38	0.76	
Political unrest also scares me during the travel	3.39	0.72	
Financial Risk			
I do not think I received sufficient service for the amount I paid for the service	3.49	0.80	0.70
There are extra expenditures (extra baggage and food etc.) during my travel	3.50	0.80	
The travel with this airline is more expensive than any other airline in my country.	3.43	0.62	
The services and other charges in this airline cost too much for my budget	3.52	0.79	
Performance Risk			
The airline services aren't satisfactory in terms of service quality.	3.24	0.68	0.61
The airline personnel aren't friendly and kind	3.39	0.74	
I think that my travel with newer airline is a waste of time	3.43	0.80	

Further the respondents were requested to provide their response about the various statements which indicate their risk perceptions while travelling. Overall, results revealed that travellers often fear of extra expenditures during the travel (Mean=3.52, S.D=0.79) in terms of Financial Risk. In terms of categorized pattern of travel risk, travellers are worried about their family's opinion about them (Mean=3.35, S.D=0.73) in terms of Socio-psychological risk and in terms of Physical risk travellers often felt safety issues related to food and beverage (Mean=3.39; S.D= 0.67) and remains fearful about political unrests while travelling (Mean=3.39; S.D=0.72) and terms of Performance risk they felt that travelling through such airline could be a waste of time (Mean=3.43, S.D=0.80) (Refer table 1).

Table 2: Airline Brand Image

Statements	Mean	S.D	Alpha value
I always had a good notion for this airline	3.55	0.79	.754
I believe that this airline provide a better and safe travel service than its competitors	3.75	0.74	
This airline has a good image amongst others	3.82	0.72	

In order to analyze the image of targeted airline brand, respondents were further asked to specify their level of conformity on various statements. Analysis revealed that respondents felt that this airline have a good image among other passengers (Mean=3.82, S.D=0.72) as well that the selected airline provide a better and safe travel service than its competitors (Mean=3.75, S.D=0.74) (Table 2).

Table 3: Tourist Travel Behaviour

In case of risk/crises:	Mean	S.D	Alpha value
I would/have changed my flight	3.23	0.60	.721
I would cancel my trip	3.20	0.61	
I would change my travel route	3.24	0.59	
I would travel anyway	3.30	0.63	
I would change my travel dates	3.22	0.53	

To know about the travel behaviour of passengers in lieu of risk involvement, passengers were further asked to indicate their responses on 5-point likert scale (from 1=highly disagree to 5= highly agree). Accordingly, they tend/prefer to travel anyway if they require (Mean= 3.30; S.D= 0.63) or change their travel route (Mean=3.24; S.D= 0.59), will change the flight (Mean=3.23; S.D= 0.60) or change their travel dates (Mean=3.22; S.D=0.53) (Table 3).

Hypotheses Testing:

Hypothesis 1: Travel Risk Perception has a significant impact on tourist travel behaviour

Table 4: Model Summary for Risk Perception and Tourist Travel Behaviour

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.828 ^a	.685	.682	.23226

a. Predictors: (Constant), Socio-Psychological Risk,

PhysicalRisk, FinancialRisk, PerformanceRisk

The simple correlation (R) has been defined to be 0.828 (Table 4) which indicate a significant and good relation between the two variables. Regression analysis indicates the coefficient of determination i.e. $R^2 = 0.685$ which implies that 32% of the variation in Risk Perception including Socio-Psychological Risk (SPR) Physical Risk (PR), Financial Risk (FR) and Performance Risk (PERR), is explained by the regression.

Table 5: ANOVA^a for Risk Perception and Tourist Travel Behaviour

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.546	4	10.136	187.900	.000 ^b
	Residual	18.611	345	.054		
	Total	59.157	349			

a. Dependent Variable: TTB

b. Predictors: (Constant), PERR, PR, SPR, FR

Furthermore Anova (table 5) analysis explains the significance ($p < 0.05$) of regression model that predicts the dependent variable (Travel Behaviour) by the usage of independent variable (Risk Perception).

Table 6: Impact Analysis for Risk Perception and Tourist Travel Behaviour
(Multiple Regression)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	β		
1	(Constant)	.363	.108		3.357	.001
	SPR	.368	.028	.464	13.168	.000
	PR	.201	.025	.276	8.046	.000
	FR	.119	.028	.160	4.277	.000
	PERR	.169	.027	.229	6.289	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Tourist Travel Behaviour (TTB)

Positive sign indicate the positive and direct relation among various factors of Risk perception and Travel behaviour of passengers (refer table 6) and are significant. Overall Analysis also confirms significant impact F calculate was (187.90) (refer table 5) and its significance at 0.05 (refer table 5 and 6), and hence the 1st hypothesis of the study is accepted that *Travel Risk Perception has a significant impact on tourist travel behaviour in airlines.*

Hypothesis 2: There is an association between airline brand image and tourist travel behaviour

Table 7: Model Summary for Brand Image and Travel Behaviour

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.695 ^a	.484	.482	.29630

a. Predictors: (Constant), Airline Brand Image (ABI)

The simple correlation (R) has been defined to be 0.695 (Table 3). Regression analysis indicates the coefficient of determination i.e. $R^2 = 0.484$ which implies that 52% of the variation in brand image is explained by the regression.

Table 8: ANOVA^a Analysis for Brand Image and Travel Behaviour

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28.605	1	28.605	325.821	.000 ^b
	Residual	30.552	348	.088		
	Total	59.157	349			

a. Dependent Variable: TTB

b. Predictors: (Constant), ABI

Furthermore, Anova (table 8) explains the significance ($p < 0.05$) of the regression model predicts the dependent variable by the usage of independent variable (Brand Image).

Table 9: Regression Coefficients^a For Airline Brand Image and Tourist Travel Behaviour

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.529	.096		15.879	.000
	AIB	.462	.026	.695	18.051	.000

a. Dependent Variable: TTB

The Regression analysis depicted an existence of a positive and direct relationship between the Airline Brand Image (ABI) and Travel Behaviour of airline travellers (TTB) where $r = 0.695$. Accordingly, regression equation can be elaborated as:

$$\text{Travel Behaviour} = 1.529 + 0.695(\text{Airline Brand Image})$$

In other words the equation indicates that Travel Behaviour (dependent variable) in lieu of risk perceptions changes to 0.695 units for each unit of change in image of airline brand (independent variable) and hence validates the 2nd hypothesis of the study that *there is an association between airline brand image and tourist travel behaviour*.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

Risk has evolved as a prime factor for the airlines these days. Besides efficient services airline authorities require to maintain their image among passengers or travellers as a safe and secure travel brand that not only satisfy their basic needs but also shows the concerns for their secure travel and worth for the money and time. Results of the study indicated the risk associated with the travel brands like they felt of risk of involvement of extra expenditures during the travel (Mean=3.52/S.D=0.79) (Financial Risk), they have status among family members (Mean=3.35/S.D=0.73) (Socio-psychological risk) risk of food and

beverage safety (Mean=3.39/S.D= 0.67) and political unrest (Mean=3.39/S.D=0.72) (Physical Risk) and wastage of time with newer airline brand (Mean=3.43/S.D=0.80) (Performance Risk). Results also revealed that they have a very good image of targeted airline and in fact felt safe while opting and travelling with this airline brand. On the other hand, when they are asked about what would they do in case of crisis/risk, respondents revealed that they prefer to change their flight, cancel their trip and moreover prefer to change travel dates (Table 3). Thus, the authorities require inducing the sufficient remarks or policies that make customers to buy a particular airline brand over the other or at least create orientations that supports and increase the goodwill of that brand (Sapatnekar, 2015). The study results also depicts that Airline brand image affects travel behaviour of passengers. So, airlines brands should induce its brand image among its present service consumers so as to remain sustained in tourist preferences especially in terms of risk or fear. Airlines need to understand the basic consumer requirements so as to maintain their trust among travellers thus making an aligned image and travel behaviour pattern among them. Looking such aspects from tourists' perspective and balancing it with the organizational efforts is the prime need of the hour.

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