

Impact of Work Routine on Customer Experience at IndiGo Airlines

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Abstract

The aviation industry is highly service-oriented, where employee work routines play a crucial role in shaping customer experience. This study examines the impact of work routines on customer experience at IndiGo Airlines, India's leading low-cost carrier. The research focuses on how structured schedules, workload management, shift patterns, and strict operational procedures influence employee performance and, consequently, passenger satisfaction. Using the SERVQUAL model framework, primary data was collected from 120 passengers via a structured questionnaire. The findings validate that well-designed work routines enhance productivity, minimize delays, and fulfill the core brand promise of a 'hassle-free' flight. However, the rigidity of these routines exposes a gap in empathetic complaint resolution. The study concludes with actionable recommendations, asserting that effective human resource management, flexible scheduling, and employee well-being initiatives are essential for IndiGo to maintain operational standards while elevating the emotional resonance of its customer experience.

Keywords: *Work Routine, Customer Experience, IndiGo Airlines, SERVQUAL, Low-Cost Carrier, Service Quality, Turnaround Time, Passenger Satisfaction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The global aviation industry is a highly complex, dynamic, and service-intensive sector. Over the past two decades, the Indian aviation sector has witnessed

exponential growth, transitioning from a government-dominated monopoly to a highly competitive market driven by private players, largely catalyzed by the advent of Low-Cost Carriers (LCCs). Unlike full-service

carriers, LCCs focus heavily on operational efficiency and no-frills point-to-point transit.

In this fiercely competitive environment, customer experience has emerged as the primary differentiator. Delivering a consistent, high-quality customer experience in an LCC model requires meticulous internal coordination, making the concept of 'work routine' pivotal. Work routines are predefined, structured sequences of tasks executed daily by employees. In an airport environment, these routines are heavily time-bound, regulated by aviation authorities, and critical for safety.

IndiGo Airlines, holding the absolute majority of the domestic market share in India, operates on the philosophy: 'Low fares, on-time flights, and a courteous, hassle-free experience.' Ground staff adhere to strict Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) designed to cycle passengers through check-in and baggage drop within minutes. On the tarmac, a synchronized 'pit-stop' style turnaround ensures that within 20 to 25 minutes of an aircraft arriving, it is cleaned, refueled, catered, boarded, and pushed back for its next flight.

A. Statement of the Problem

While structured work routines ensure operational efficiency and punctuality, the high-pressure environment of a low-cost carrier can lead to severe service variability on a human level. The primary problem this research addresses is the dichotomy between operational speed and emotional empathy in service delivery. There is a pressing need to understand whether rigid adherence to time-bound routines at IndiGo positively influences overall passenger perception, or creates a transactional, mechanized environment lacking human responsiveness during moments of service failure.

B. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective is to comprehensively analyze the impact of employee work routines on customer experience at IndiGo Airlines. Secondary objectives include: (i) examining existing SOPs and work routines followed by ground staff and cabin crew; (ii) evaluating customer satisfaction concerning punctuality and operational efficiency; (iii) studying the correlation between rigidity of time-bound routines and quality of staff behavior; (iv) identifying operational bottlenecks employees face during rapid turnaround times; and (v) proposing actionable recommendations to balance operational discipline with empathetic customer service.

II. INDUSTRY AND COMPANY PROFILE

The Indian aviation sector is the third-largest domestic aviation market globally, driven by a burgeoning middle class, increasing disposable incomes, and supportive government policies like the UDAN scheme. The regulatory landscape is governed by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The LCC model, pioneered by airlines such as IndiGo and SpiceJet, commands over 80% of the domestic market share by delivering cost reductions through single-aircraft-type fleets, high seating density, and service unbundling.

InterGlobe Aviation Limited, operating as IndiGo, commands a market share frequently hovering around 60%. Founded in 2006 by Rahul Bhatia and Rakesh Gangwal, IndiGo commenced operations with a single fleet strategy anchored on Airbus A320 family aircraft. This bold strategic decision secured discounted pricing, simplified maintenance, and enabled ultimate scheduling flexibility. IndiGo continued this trend, placing a historic order for 500 Airbus aircraft in 2023.

A. Operational Strategies and Turnaround Time

The cornerstone of IndiGo's work routine is the Quick Turnaround Time (TAT), targeting 20 to 25 minutes per aircraft. This routine requires ground staff, baggage handlers, refuelers, catering personnel, and cabin crew to execute tasks simultaneously. Cabin crew rapidly clean the cabin and secure safety equipment while ground staff manage simultaneous disembarkation and fresh baggage loading. The LCC model also encompasses: (i) single fleet type for reduced training and maintenance costs; (ii) high aircraft utilization of 11 to 13 hours per day; (iii) unbundled fares treating ancillary services as separate revenue streams; and (iv) direct point-to-point transit to minimize connection-related delays.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A 'work routine' in organizational behavior refers to the established, repetitive patterns of action that organizational members follow to accomplish tasks. In aviation, work routines are codified into SOPs for two primary reasons: safety and efficiency. Safety routines are mandated by global aviation authorities including the FAA, IATA, and DGCA. Efficiency routines are designed by management to optimize time and resources. When routines are deeply ingrained, employees rely on

'muscle memory,' reducing cognitive load and accelerating task completion.

A. The SERVQUAL Model Framework

This study utilizes the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [1], the academic gold standard for assessing service quality by measuring the gap between customer expectations and perceptions across five dimensions: (i) Reliability: the ability to perform promised service dependably, translating to flight punctuality and accurate baggage delivery; (ii) Assurance: employee knowledge and courtesy, evaluated through crew professionalism and adherence to safety routines; (iii) Tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, involving aircraft cleanliness and uniform standards; (iv) Empathy: provision of caring, individualized attention, the hardest dimension to achieve in a highly routinized LCC environment; and (v) Responsiveness: willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

B. Literature Review

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [1] posited that service quality is inherently subjective, making human interaction the ultimate deciding factor in customer satisfaction, implying that routines must be flexible enough to allow positive human interactions. Gronroos [2] introduced the concept of 'Technical Quality' versus 'Functional Quality,' arguing that while IndiGo's routines guarantee technical delivery, it is functional quality that secures customer loyalty.

Bitner, Brown, and Meuter [3] found that automating routine tasks can liberate employees to provide better service to customers who require human assistance, directly relevant to IndiGo's deployment of self-service check-in kiosks. Tsauro, Chang, and Yen [4] discovered that LCC passengers maintain high expectations for reliability while lowering expectations regarding tangibles, justifying IndiGo's immense focus on turnaround time routines. Wirtz and Lovelock [6] argued that rigid, high-stress work routines lead to employee burnout, inevitably degrading customer interaction quality.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a Descriptive Research Design aimed at systematically documenting the current work routines at IndiGo Airlines and numerically describing the resulting passenger satisfaction levels. The target

population comprises all domestic airline passengers who have flown with IndiGo Airlines.

A. Sampling and Data Collection

A Convenience Sampling method was adopted due to the impossibility of surveying the entire population. A carefully vetted sample of 120 respondents was selected, statistically sufficient to identify dominant trends and draw objective conclusions regarding service quality. Primary data was collected via a structured, digitally distributed questionnaire (Google Forms) comprising multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale evaluations, and demographic inquiries designed to map directly to SERVQUAL dimensions.

B. Statistical Tools

Secondary data was amassed from IndiGo's official annual reports, DGCA publications, academic journals, and services marketing textbooks. Percentage Analysis was used as the primary statistical tool, calculating the relative differences in responses by expressing the count of respondents choosing a particular option as a proportion of the total sample size. Results were visualized using bar charts and pie charts to provide intuitive insights into passenger sentiments.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The primary data collected from 120 respondents has been systematically tabulated, converted into percentage metrics, and subjected to rigorous interpretation. The analysis is segmented into demographic profiling, operational efficiency metrics, and staff empathy evaluations.

A. Demographic Profile

Table I presents the gender distribution. The analysis reveals a fairly balanced distribution with 54.2% male and 41.7% female respondents, ensuring feedback is not heavily skewed by gender-specific preferences. Table II presents the age distribution: 37.5% of respondents belong to the 26-35 age group, with a combined 62.5% falling between 18 and 35, representing frequent corporate and student travelers who prioritize punctuality.

TABLE I. GENDER DISTRIBUTION

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	65	54.2%
Female	50	41.7%
Prefer not to say	5	4.2%

TABLE II. AGE GROUP OF RESPONDENTS

Age Group	Respondents	Percentage
18-25	30	25.0%
26-35	45	37.5%
36-50	35	29.2%
Above 50	10	8.3%

B. Frequency of Travel and Pre-flight Routines

With 33.3% frequent flyers (5+ annual trips) and 45.8% occasional flyers (2-4 trips), nearly 80% of respondents have interacted with IndiGo's routines multiple times, lending high empirical reliability to their evaluations. Regarding web check-in, 45.8% reported being highly satisfied and 37.5% satisfied, yielding an 83.3% overall satisfaction rate. By pushing routines to the digital sphere before airport arrival, IndiGo successfully reduces terminal congestion and lightens the workload on ground staff.

C. Operational Efficiency Metrics

Table III presents key operational efficiency survey results. The baggage drop speed received 33.3% excellent and 41.7% good ratings, with 75% overall positive responses, validating that ground staff routines effectively eliminate bottlenecks, a critical factor in the Reliability dimension. Zone-wise boarding received 75% agreement on stress reduction, proving that structural discipline is perceived as value-adding by customers. Despite the intense time pressure, 79.2% of passengers rated cabin cleanliness as good or excellent.

TABLE III. OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY SUMMARY (n=120)

Metric	Positive Rating
Baggage Drop Speed	75.0%
Zone-wise Boarding	75.0%
Cabin Cleanliness	79.2%
Staff Politeness	79.2%
Food Service Efficiency	75.0%

Metric	Positive Rating
Flight Punctuality	87.5%
Baggage Arrival Speed	75.0%

D. Empathy and Service Recovery

Table IV presents results concerning empathy and disruption handling, the most critical findings of this study. Only 41.7% found individual complaint handling effective, with 58.3% feeling neutral or dissatisfied. This exposes the primary flaw of rigid routines: while they excel at mass processing, they restrict employees from dedicating emotional energy to empathetically resolve individualized passenger issues. Over 54% of respondents admitted to feeling 'rushed' during boarding or in-flight, directly correlating to the psychological pressure of the 25-minute turnaround. Communication during disruptions fell short, with over 62.5% rating it neutral or poor.

TABLE IV. EMPATHY AND DISRUPTION METRICS

Metric	Effective/Positive	Neutral/Poor
Complaint Handling	41.7%	58.3%
Feeling Rushed (Never/Rarely)	45.9%	54.2%
Disruption Communication	37.5%	62.5%

E. Overall Brand Loyalty

Concluding the analysis, 50.0% of passengers would 'definitely' return and 33.3% would 'probably' return to IndiGo, yielding an 83.3% brand loyalty rate. This solidifies the core thesis: despite notable gaps in empathy and disruption handling, the aggregate benefit of IndiGo's fast, reliable, and punctual work routines overwhelmingly drives customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

VI. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Key Findings

The exhaustive primary data analysis yields the following key insights:

1) Punctuality is the Pinnacle of Satisfaction: An overwhelming 87.5% of passengers expressed high satisfaction with flight timings, validating IndiGo's stringent turnaround routines.

2) Structural Discipline is Appreciated: The 75% satisfaction rate with zone-wise boarding indicates that

when a work routine imposes logical order on a chaotic process, customers perceive it as a valuable enhancement.

3) **Technological Routines Drive Efficiency:** Mandatory web check-in and automated baggage drop routines have successfully streamlined airport operations, scoring 83% satisfaction in pre-flight procedures.

4) **The Empathy Deficit:** Only 41.7% of passengers felt individual requests were handled effectively. Rigidity of time-bound routines leaves employees with virtually no buffer time to exercise empathy or offer personalized service recovery.

5) **Speed Generates Passenger Stress:** Over 54% of respondents reported feeling 'rushed' by staff, indicating that the pursuit of maintaining the timeline routine can cause employee behavior to cross from efficient to aggressive.

B. Strategic Suggestions

Based on the empirical findings, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1) **Introduce Dynamic Buffer Scheduling:** IndiGo should implement AI-driven dynamic scheduling that injects 5-to-10-minute operational buffers during peak seasons or historically delayed sectors, significantly reducing employee burnout and mitigating the 'rushed' feeling.

2) **Implement Service Recovery Empowerment Routines:** IndiGo must introduce an 'Empathy Protocol,' giving frontline employees pre-authorized flexibility, such as immediate meal vouchers or instant seat swaps, to resolve individualized complaints within 60 seconds without managerial approval.

3) **Specialized Disruption Communication:** IndiGo should deploy a dedicated 'Crisis Communication Routine' utilizing automated messaging updates and designated 'Information Champions' during delays whose sole function is transparent passenger engagement.

4) **Decouple Cleaning from Cabin Crew Duties:** By investing in dedicated ground cleaning teams for major hubs, IndiGo can relieve cabin crew of intense turnaround cleaning, allowing them to focus on safety and passenger greeting, thus elevating perceived functional quality.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study on IndiGo Airlines establishes a profound thesis: in the Low-Cost Carrier model, an airline's product is the reliability of its schedule. Meticulously engineered work routines are the absolute bedrock of operational survival and market dominance. The research validates

that IndiGo's relentless adherence to SOPs, from automated check-ins to synchronized pit-stop turnarounds, achieves its primary goal of unparalleled punctuality, translating directly into massive customer loyalty as evidenced by the 83.3% brand retention rate.

However, the pursuit of mechanical perfection comes at a human cost. The rigid, time-starved nature of these routines inadvertently suppresses employee empathy, limiting the capacity to handle anomalies or individual passenger distress with the necessary warmth. The study concludes that the future of competitive advantage in aviation lies not in faster routines, but in smarter, humanized routines. If IndiGo Airlines can sustain its world-class operational discipline while selectively injecting flexibility, empowering employees with empathetic autonomy, and safeguarding staff well-being, it will not merely remain India's preferred airline, but will redefine the global standard for low-cost customer experience.

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