A Tale of Two Airlines: A Comparative Case Study of High-Road Versus Low-Road Strategies in Customer Service and Reputation Management

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Customer surveys from Ryanair and Southwest Airlines passengers were examined to determine their perceptions on customer service for the period of 2012-2013. Southwest Airlines (n=149) was rated significantly higher than Ryanair (n=165) in overall rating (p=0.0228), seat comfort (p<0.0001), cabin/Staff service (p<0.0001), and value (p=0.0004). Additionally, passengers would recommend Southwest Airlines at a higher rate than Ryanair (p=0.0006). Open area comments emphasized that customer service and policies had a large impact on the ratings. Specifically, 53% of Ryanair customers complained about inefficient or unwelcome processes and discourteous or unfriendly service compared to 29% for Southwest Airlines. Ryanair customers complained about check-in procedures, open seating policy, and fees ranging from oversized carry-on bags to fees for printing out boarding passes. The largest area of complaint for Southwest customers concerned how fees for the period of 2012-2013. Southwest Airlines (n=149) was rated significantly higher than Ryanair (n=165) in overall rating (p<0.0001), seat comfort (p<0.0001), cabin/Staff service (p<0.0001), and value (p=0.004). Additionally, passengers would recommend Southwest Airlines at a higher rate than Ryanair (p=0.0006). Open area comments emphasized that customer service and policies had a large impact on the ratings. Specifically, 53% of Ryanair customers complained about inefficient or unwelcome processes and discourteous or unfriendly service compared to 29% for Southwest Airlines. Ryanair customers complained about check-in procedures, open seating policy, and fees ranging from oversized carry-on bags to fees for printing out boarding passes. The largest area of complaint for Southwest customers concerned how

HYPOTHESIS

H0. Customers will award Southwest Airlines a significantly higher “overall ranking” than Ryanair.

H1. Customers will rate Southwest Airlines significantly higher than Ryanair with regard to seat comfort, cabin service, food and value.

A greater proportion of customers will recommend Southwest Airlines at a higher rate than Ryanair.

Southwest Airlines - “The Somebody Else Up There Who Loves You”

“Ding! You are now free to move about the country!”

• Poor Customer Service 29%

• 10% overall concerned poor handling of flight delays

Ryanair Director of Customer Service - “We’re the airline everyone loves to hate.”

SOUTHWEST VS RYANAIR

Southwest Airlines - “The Somebody Else Up There Who Loves You”

“Always looking for a new way to con passengers into falling foul of a regulation so they can extort money to keep you paying more.”

RYANAIR

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RESULTS – ALL NULL HYPOTHESES WERE REJECTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall/Airline Rating</th>
<th>Alien Rank</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryanair (n=149)</td>
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<td>.0228</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest (n=145)</td>
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<td>.0001</td>
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| Note: Data taken from Skytrax, survey on Ryanair (2017b) and Southwest (2017c) survey for inclusive dates of Jan 2012-Dec 2013. Analyzed with Mann-Whitney U test. Overall ranking, seat comfort, cabin/Staff service, food and value. 53% of Ryanair customers rated their experience significantly lower than Ryanair on 10% overall concerned poor handling of flight delays.

Southwest customers rated significantly higher (p<.05) than Ryanair customers on:

• Overall rating

• More willing to recommend airline to a friend

• Seat comfort

• Cabin/Staff service

• Food

• Overall value

Price is a big factor to customers

Southwest customers rated significantly higher (p<.05) than Ryanair customers on:

• Overall rating

• More willing to recommend airline to a friend

• Seat comfort

• Cabin/Staff service

• Food

• Overall value

Customer service programs add value and are important to customers

REFERENCES


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