

ENHANCEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY BY EDS INDUSTRY WITH PUBLIC POLICY PLAYING A CATALYST ROLE

*Ms. Anicar D Manavi,
PhD Research Scholar
Department of Management
Pondicherry University
Karaikal Campus-609605*

*Dr. D.H. Malini Srinivasa Rao
Assistant Professor
Department of Management
Pondicherry University
Karaikal Campus-609605*

*Ms. Preethi P K,
Teacher of English
Frontline Millennium Senior Secondary School
Peruntholuvu Road
Tiruppur - 641606*

ABSTRACT

Being innovative in delivering the service has become basic characteristic of a successful service vendor. In this backdrop, one of the fastest growing industries in logistic sector, Express Delivery Services (EDS) is coming out with innovative approaches to meet the demand of its customers, and trying to be cost efficient as well. For a firm to be more competent in the market by adapting innovative strategies, the role of public policy is expected to be as catalyst. But at times public policy turns out as hindrance to the EDS to be responsive towards customers' need, and as cause for escalation of cost of delivering service. This paper with descriptive approach, tries to explain various challenges the EDS providers facing under current public policies like tax system, foreign trade, technology, infrastructure, state level regulatory, Indian Post Office Act, 1898 at macro level on one hand and at micro level decisions regarding man power policy, technology adaptation, and distribution design in various organizations on other hand. As part of findings, it is ascertained that there is a need of integrated approach by the federal system of public policy in India. This context is explained with the help of various available literatures and results of in-depth interviews conducted with some of the EDS providers and their customers. This paper will provide implication for further research in the field of service delivery, good governance and public policy by academicians and researchers, and management implication to related companies and public policy makers.

Keywords: EDS, service, public policy

“The difficulty lies not much in developing new ideas as in escaping from the old ones”

- Keyens

1. Introduction:

In most of the cases service provider have accurate knowledge of customer expectations. However there are certain constrains which prevent them delivering the service as per consumer expectations (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). These might be due to rapid changes or stagnation nature of internal environment and/or external environment of business. This ultimately leads to the gap between management perception of consumer expectation and the firm's service quality specifications (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). One among those issues which acts as barrier in providing better quality services is Public Policy. In this backdrop, Express industry, which has the high potential growth rate opportunity in Indian logistic market, is considered for the study of possibility of service quality enhancement with the existence of better public policies. Express industry in India offers distribution services of documents, small packages and freight on time definite basis carried by fleets of fully owned or dedicated aircraft, trucks, trains and delivery vans both in domestic and overseas, which is valued at Rs. 10,000 crores and is growing at around 25% annually (Express Industry Council of India). Express delivery service (EDS) companies experience a host of problems in their service delivery. These problems often end up increasing the cost of services, time wasting and poor service delivery (Orunga). In the era of online shopping, today's consumer is not only dictating how and when they would like to receive goods, but reserving the right of making changes in their parcel orders till the last minute. Being able to estimate and understand the pulse of customer expectations, express service providers facing their own challenges in constructing service specifications as per their perceived consumer expectations.

2. Literature Review:

Various literatures related to the impact of public policy on the growth of private sector are reviewed and presented here. It is presented by Aschauer (1990) in his report on 'Public investment and Private Growth' claimed that in the growth of private sector's productivity, profitability, and investment, the public investment in infrastructure is significant. Staab (2003) while explaining economic performance of developing countries says that economies of business-friendly governments can perform better and can also support private sector's growth without leading to the cronyism and nepotism. The feedback from the private sectors who generally seek assistance of government in establishing a low-cost, predictable environment is essential while framing the policies, thus Bettcher (2011) advocated for continuous public-private dialogues. A document by Altenburg & Drachenfels Von(2008) while considering 'Doing Business Agenda' states that along with minimal regulatory government intervention, there is a need of good investment climate for infrastructure and socio-economic development, and it also presupposes the growth potential of micro enterprise, in turn leads to aggregate economic growth. Findings of Viren et al (2007) suggest that in almost all countries the public investment, not on only infrastructure but also on public health and expenditure have contributed positive to private sector productivity growth.

When the review of literature is narrowed down to service quality and EDS industry in particular, the common expectations from express service providers by their clients are

attitude, behavior, expertise, and problem solving capacity of employees, access to information, range of service and flexible operating time, punctuality, (Chandragiri, Rao, & Akthar, 2008), reliability, responsiveness (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), accurate tracking system, security and easy process. Service quality has become a great differentiator (Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml, 1988). Thus it's always better to exhibit the differentiation of services provided at the specification design of services rather than at the end stage of delivery alone. Then the question of why there exists a gap in fulfilling their expectations becomes apparent. As per Zeithaml et al (1988) A variety of factors—resource constraints, short term profit orientation, market conditions, management indifference—may account for the discrepancy between managers' perceptions of consumer expectations and the actual specifications established by management for a service. Studies are mostly concentrated on internal factors as limitations where limited is explained regarding how external factors can be cause for the standards gap.

3. Need of the Study:

Most of the available literature focuses either on the public-private relationship or on the growth of private sector in terms of profit making. There are very limited literature is available on the impact of public policy on the enhancement of better service quality by private sector to their customers in service process. This paper focuses on the public policy as one of the factors for existence of gap between service specifications and management perception on customers' expectations on service quality. For instance, e-commerce companies are promising for same day delivery, to have a competitive edge in the market, which is mostly dependent on express delivery services. Though they are served with premium prices for using fastest mode of transportation, some of the issues like high road traffics, waybills, limited connectivity through airways etc., are unfavorable for service providers in either fulfilling the promise made by them or taking a back step in promising their customers on faster delivery service. Hence it's felt essential to study the impact of various public policies on providing better qualitative Express service.

Most common hurdles faced by almost every parcel and courier service provider are lack of human resource specialized in the field, adopting of right technology, large number of express service providers are still out of organized sector, demand for service is based on consumerism, fluctuation in fuel prices, gaps in physical and IT infrastructures, documentation process, cascading effect of tax system, etc.,. The need of the study is more evident when the 2016 Logistics Performance Index (LPI) statistics from the World Bank is observed. Though the ranking got improved when compared to previous year reports, still there are gaps which have to be addresses for further improvement. The LPI is based on a worldwide survey of operators on the ground (global freight forwarders and express carriers), providing feedback on the logistics "friendliness" of the countries in which they operate and those with which they trade. Below table highlights that India is moving behind in ranking from as time passing.

Table 1

Year	Overall LPI		Customs		Infrastructure		Ease of Shipment		Logistics Services		Ease of Tracking		Timeliness	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
2007	3.07	39	2.69	47	2.90	42	3.08	40	3.27	31	3.03	42	3.47	47
2010	3.12	47	2.70	52	2.91	47	3.13	46	3.16	40	3.14	52	3.61	56
2012	3.08	46	2.77	52	2.87	56	2.98	54	3.14	38	3.09	54	3.58	44
2014	3.08	54	2.72	65	2.88	58	3.20	44	3.03	52	3.11	57	3.51	51
2016	3.42	35	3.17	38	3.34	36	3.36	39	3.39	32	3.52	33	3.74	42

Source: The World Bank Report 2007 – 2016 : (Logistics Performance Index, 2016)

In this context it is worth to mention about India Post and the express services provided by it as a public sector player. While the Indian government has attempted to bring in contemporary legislation, it has arguably been mixed with the intention of providing a protected position to the government postal department, and this move has been opposed by the express industry as any such move would have adverse impact on the industry (CARE Research, 2014). Hence any change with respect to its express delivery services regulation in the current governing Indian Post Office Act, 1898 have considerable impact on private players models of express service and customers preferences especially small and medium players.

4. Research Methodology:

This paper is constructed as qualitative paper following descriptive design to explain current status of the phenomenon rather than proposing solutions to the problems. Various reports, journal papers, and news articles are considered as secondary data to analyze the public policy impact on private sectors' services to their customers. Viewpoints of customers and personnel of EDS industry in the geographical area of states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, India, are presented by conducting in-depth interviews from the month of 1st April 2016 to 31st May 2016. The customers selected here are business customers by using snowball sampling due to the limitation of customer database availability and time with the customers to discuss on the topic.

5. Discussion on public policy as a limiting factor for better EDS:

There are multi number of policy issues which are challenging the EDS providers in maintaining their responsiveness and efficiency. These limiting factors are broadly classified under two heads and explained in detail as follows:

- Public Policy - EDS at macro level
- Public policy - EDS at micro level

On one hand Public policy issues such as cascading effect of current indirect tax policy in India, Foreign Trade Policy, Policy amendments for categorizing the material, Regulatory delays, Regulations on usage of drone technology, competitors from unorganized sector, policy privileges to India Post and Current status of Infrastructure which includes Air side infrastructure for Cargo operations, Road Infrastructure, City Traffic management, Railways, Information Technology and Electricity are considered as common problem to the every member in the industry and effects the customers altogether and thus it is considered as “public policy’s impact on EDS at macro level”. On the other hand its impact on internal organizational working such as human resource, adapting advanced technology, and distribution model are considered mostly related particular categories of firms, hence effects on these are categorized as Public policy’s impact on EDS at micro level. Here each issue is ventilated specifically.

5.1.Public Policy - EDS at macro level:

These are hurdles which are hardly under the control of EDS provider. While concepts like online trading, net banking, etc, have impacted the volumes of document shipments; e-commerce has made rapid progress in the consumer psyche and has opened new vistas for the EDS industry for handling non-document shipments (CARE Research, 2014). Indian customers exhibit strong value and variety seeking behaviour hence developing capabilities in the process of product and service delivery will induce loyalty (i.e., process loyalty) (Chandra & Jain, 2007). Most of the business of express industry depends on consumerism but the booming rate of consumerism is so high that handling the volume of orders is becoming a great challenge; these are intensifying EDS providers to come out with bouquet of innovative services. However there are some issues directly related to public policy, affecting the service quality of EDS. Some of the major hurdles or concerns raised by service providers such as poor airport infrastructure, cumbersome customs procedures & complex taxation systems, and inordinate checkpost delays (Mitra, Mukherjee, Pal, & Dutta, 2009) are discussed here.

5.1.1. Infrastructure:

Liberalization of express delivery services alone will not guarantee greater market access or better quality services unless the companies have access to allied infrastructure (Mukherjee, Pal, & Goswami, 2010). Infrastructure ranking of India in Global Competitive Index for the year 2015-2016 is 81 among 140 nations, other related statistics are presented in below table reflects that India need to build better infrastructure to become infrastructure friendly nation for EDS providers.

- **Air side infrastructure for Cargo operations**

Air side infrastructure for cargo operations is equally important for seamless and smooth operations to achieve better efficiency. Express Delivery Service companies are strongly of the view that their operations require airport facilities with landside and city side access at all major international airports. In the absence of these, it is said that it could take as much time for shipments to get to the aircraft as it takes to fly to the destination (The working Group on Air cargo/ Express Service Industry, 2012). A list of provisions in National Civil aviation policy 2016, are framed to address these kinds of issues (Ministry of Civil Aviation, 2016).

Table 3

Competitiveness Rankings (among 140 countries)	Rank	Score
Global Competitiveness Index	55	4.3
2nd pillar: Infrastructure 1-7 (best)	81	3.7
A. Transport infrastructure 1-7 (best)	32	4.6
• Quality of overall infrastructure 1-7 (best)	74	4.0
• Quality of roads 1-7 (best)	61	4.1
• Quality of railroad infrastructure 1-7 (best)	29	4.1
• Quality of port infrastructure 1-7 (best)	60	4.2
• Quality of air transport infrastructure 1-7 (best)	71	4.3
• Available airline seat kilometers millions of seats km/week	11	3726.6
Source: Global Competitiveness Report – (World Economic Forum, 2015-16)		

- **Road Infrastructure:**

Roads carry nearly 60% of country's freight and close to 85% of total passenger traffic⁶. This over dependence on road freight movement results in huge logistics cost of nearly 14% as a percentage of GDP for India which for developed countries is in the range of 7-9%, while for other developing nations' ranges between 9-11% except for China where it is 18% (CARE Research, 2014). Though the level of basic infrastructure has generally improved over the period of years given the investment made in the road sector, the overall speed of travel still remains low at 35-40 kilometers per hour. In addition, road transport has to pass through multiple checkpoints adding to the transit time. This leads to sub-optimal utilization of surface transport for express delivery services (Chaturvedi, Kumar, Mohan, & associates, 2012). EDS providers incur Rs.200,000 million which is the cost of additional fuel consumption in India due to poor condition of roads and various delays caused (ICRIER, 2012).

- **City Traffic management:**

Over the last two decades, India's urban population increased from 217 million to 377 million and this is expected to reach 600 million, or 40 per cent of the population by 2031 and the gap in urban infrastructure investment is estimated at \$827 billion over the next 20 years, with two-thirds of this required for urban roads and traffic support (The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, 2014). Roads of Tier-I cities in India are flooding with vehicles. This increasing rate of traffic has a greater impact on the quality of service delivery by EDS provider. Many of the personnel from EDS industry highlighted this problem that even after effective calculation of time taken to deliver the parcel based on city traffic system still they miss delivery timings due to huge traffic. So there is a need of efficient traffic management by respective state governments in every city.

- **Railways:**

The use of the railway network for courier/express services is not only a cleaner mode of transportation (since it uses less fossil fuel than road transport) but also a faster one since in India there are delays at different toll points and interstate borders for road transport, which the railways do not face. However, Indian trains do not usually have dedicated courier vans, which lead to the loss of parcels, documents, etc (Mukherjee, Pal, & Goswami, 2010).

- **Information Technology:**

EDS providers being part of private sector are investing heavily on construction of integrated Information technology infrastructure for providing better service to their customers. In the same way there is a need of integrated information technology from public sector there by delays such as process of documentation filing, verification at checkpoints, rectification of errors can be minimized to the large extent.

- **Digital India:**

The Digital India programme is a flagship programme of the Government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy (Digital India Programme). A column by Sarit Bose, Director, Protiviti India on Business India website presents one of the implications of Digital India programme in providing better transportation service presented as below.

“Indian railway and India Post India, has become a large market place for retail, manufacturing, logistics, communication, travel & leisure and healthcare . This growth has to be supported by a strong logistics backbone and a 'digitally transformed' Indian Railways and India Post can provide the much needed support to this endeavor. There is a large segment hailing from remote villages and other such locations that are not able to avail these services. Private courier and logistics providers - who work as the backbone for the supply and delivery for these providers - do not have the network or infrastructure yet to deliver a package to the furthest and the remotest corners of India with the same Service Level Agreement (SLA) as that of a metro city. That is precisely where the Indian Postal Services can help. With more than 154,000 post offices, of which almost 90 per cent are in rural areas, the geographical reach and manpower strength it can offer is phenomenal. With production and manufacturing across the country being encouraged and travel & leisure being on the rise, Indian Railways will have a growing role to play in the entire dynamics.” (Bose, 2015)

- **Electricity:**

Many areas in India, including urban centers are facing problem of electricity. This is forcing the EDS industry to invest more on storage of electricity, in the times of power fluctuations. Erratic power outages have also meant low dependence on technology and a more manual operation (Chandra & Jain, 2007).

5.1.2. Tax Policy:

The major policy obligation is the tax structure for courier companies. The variable tax structure in India (at various levels – centre, State and even city) is a problem (Nag & ICRIER, 2008). The inter-state movement of goods in India is subject to multiple taxes and clearances. Implementation of Goods and Service Tax (GST) is expected to streamline the processes and reduce a lot of these delays. With GST, multiple tax regimes with different rules and rates across states will merge into a single tax structure (Chaturvedi, Kumar, Mohan, & associates, 2012). “Express Industry Council of India (EICI), in a recent seminar titled “Delivering Opportunities for ‘Make in India’ and e-Commerce” in New Delhi, highlighted that the next phase of growth is likely to come with the implementation of Goods

and Services Tax (GST) and allowing exports through the courier channels. E-commerce has become an important platform for micro and small manufacturers/exporters and the rapid progress made by both e-commerce, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have opened up new vistas for the EDS industry for handling non-document shipments” (ITLN, 2016).

5.1.3. Competitors in Unorganized sector:

The players in the express industry can be broadly classified into three categories: organized players, semi-organized players, and small unorganized players. Difficulty in taxing the unorganised sector incomes further contributes to the narrowing of the tax base. It can be an enormous mission to ensure tax compliance in this sector. If the predicament of non-compliance continues, the taxpaying sector (Organised Sector) will start losing out to the unorganized segment; thereby growth and development will come to a halt (Tax Research Department, 2015). The existing regime in the transportation and logistics industry is seen to engage with the unorganized players for tax considerations. This is contributing for unequal platform between organized and unorganized players in the industry.

5.1.4. Foreign Trade Policy:

Small exporters are presently troubled by high delivery cost for shipments outside India as they are required to route their shipments via the cargo route. Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) notification issued in April 2015 permitting exports through courier will address this lacuna. However it is awaiting implementation from Customs. Indian exporters need to be very competitive in their pricing as well as backed by a reliable and efficient supply chain (Dev Patel, 2015).

5.1.5. Policy amendments for categorizing the material:

There is no proper policy which can categorize all the materials which are couriered. For example, there is no proper definition of gift, full supplement, non allopathic medicines, etc., making it difficult to categorize products (Nag & ICRIER, 2008). This segment of categorizing the goods has been updated from time to time by coding each and every product by government of India, which is helping the EDS to be more customers friendly.

5.1.6. Regulatory delays:

There are various challenges the EDS industry faces across spectrum from the basic infrastructure to regulations and procedures. Firstly Documentation cumbersome, Documentation (like sales tax forms, way bills, permits, transit pass, etc.) is different for different states and sometimes require non-essential details and the carriers / customers have to comply with every step in order to ensure smooth transition and delivery of goods or face a business loss (penalties for later delivery or even loss of future business). Personnel from leading logistics Distribution Company shared their experience regarding how these waybills and permits force them to opt for airways than surface transport. He said that once they want to deliver the consignment worth of 4.5tonnes within seven days from Chennai to Bhubaneshwar on surface through EDS provider but no EDS provider was ready to accept posing the containers should cross two states and they have get permits. And finally to be responsive to their customers they opted for airways. Secondly documentation at Air cargo level, It is the law of the land that IGM should be filed by the Carrier (or any other person authorized to issue Delivery Order) prior to arrival of the air craft. Presently precious time is consumed in filing of Import General Manifest (IGM, normally on arrival) by the Carriers taking away the advantage of advance filing of Bills of Entry (The working Group on Air cargo/ Express Service Industry, 2012). Many a time's manpower at checkpost is poor in

operating computers and they are partially informed which create lots of mess and delays in checkpoints.

5.1.7. Regulations on usage of drone technology:

In October 2014, the government of India banned drones after private users like a pizza joint in Mumbai experimented with the unmanned airborne mini-vehicles. The Director General of Civil Aviation cited security threats to ban drones in Indian airspace. In some countries, under some restrictions usage of drone is allowed. For instance, The German Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure went so far as to establish a restricted flight area exclusively for use by DHL's parcelcopters (Palermo, 2014). As of 2015, delivering of packages with drones in the United States is not permitted. Drone startup Flirtey has reported that it has recently completed the first federally-sanctioned drone delivery in a US urban area without the help of a human to manually steer it (Fortune, 2016).

5.1.8. Privileges to India Post:

Though most of the above discussed problems are common for both Private EDS provider and public sector's India Post, there are certain areas where later one have some advantage over private EDS. "At present, the postal sector enjoys certain benefits. For instance, postal vehicles do not pay toll taxes at highways check posts. This also benefits EMS services of India Post. On the other hand, courier and express companies have to pay toll taxes." (Mukherjee, Pal, & Goswami, 2010). This is a kind of discriminatory treatment towards private sector as per the EDS players.

5.2. Public policy - EDS at micro level:

5.2.1. Human Resource:

This industry is highly in need of experts in operation research, legal matters and marketing to construct an efficient and responsive distribution channels even though decision support advanced technology is available. Most of the customers expressed their perception that India Post is omnipotent in channel and snail in operation tracking. Especially there is a need of change in recruitment policy where they have to make provisions for intake of experts in the field of logistics on permanent basis. Express service companies' accord low priority to investments in human resources (Mitra, Mukherjee, Pal, & Dutta, 2009). Though the private sector express market leaders are good at this but their services are dearer to the small scale business firms on cost basis. Thus India Post can provide better services to this segment of customers. If the postal department continues with present system of manpower planning of more generalists than specialists, it not only losses its market share to private sector but also situation forces the small scale producers to increase their cost of logistics by opting private premium service and losing their profit margin and competitiveness in market or may remain their operations to limited area. At the same time it creates a situation of lack of experienced persons to maintain or improve service quality where it may lead to the vacuum of consistency in decision making.

5.2.2. Hub and spokes model:

The industry follows a hub and spoke model, with a central consolidator the 'Hub', while 'Spokes' provide services through the distribution centre's across locations (CARE Research, 2014). Within the above framework, while certain players (like Blue Dart, First Flight, Aramex) operate largely with owned networks, some players such as DTDC, Professional Couriers and others function largely on support of franchisees with limited investment in owned networks. Most of the players prefer a blend of owned and franchisee network to expand their coverage (CARE Research, 2014). In a franchise model, some organization decision of location is based on taxation model of the central and state governments. GST might come as a breather and help with the standardization, simplification

and automation of organization structure and compliance requirements associated with the trading and movement of goods especially inter-state movement of goods.

5.2.3. Technology:

Sweeping changes in technology have been impacting the global express delivery industry. This witnessed with the advancement and implementation of the information technology enabling tracking, scheduling, and helping the industry scale up operations (Chaturvedi, Kumar, Mohan, & associates, 2012). This involves huge investment in IT where only leaders in the express market are able to manage. Other small players who are large in number at times quit the industry quoting difficulties in integrating, process with information technology as problem in reaching consumer expectations on service quality. Still there is hope. Government can motivate small EDS providers, considering the future estimates of growth opportunity to the sector by providing credit facilities. It all lies in technology. Finding the right technology and adopting it to customize services will give them a greater step ahead in the industry.

Conclusion and scope for further studies:

Henceforth even in designing distribution and organizational models which are mainly based on the cost-responsiveness efficient frontier there is considerable impact of public policy and initiatives. “The cost-responsiveness efficient frontier is the curve representing the lowest possible cost for a given level of responsiveness. A firm that is not on the efficient frontier can improve both its responsiveness and its cost performance by moving toward the efficient frontier. In contrast, a firm on the efficient frontier can improve its responsiveness only by increasing cost and becoming less efficient. Such a firm must then make a trade-off between efficiency and responsiveness” (Chopra & Meindel, 2007). In this back ground, as responsiveness is the basic promise by express delivery service provider to its customers, this often costs their efficiency. For example Freight movement has slowly been shifting from rail to road with implications on quality of transfer, timeliness of delivery and consequently costs except for commodities which over long distances, predominantly, move through the extensive rail network (Chandra & Jain, 2007). Many a times when they focus on cost efficiency this apparently affect their responsiveness in service quality. Thus balancing cost and responsiveness is a common challenge to all EDS providers.

This paper throws light on the existing public policy hurdles on the path of smooth run of EDS, especially in Indian context there are limited research taken place where only a few working papers and reports from statutory institute websites are available for references to the stakeholders. Booming of e-commerce in Indian market, to provide better customized services to their customers, online retailers like flipkart are coming out with ekart logistics (currently it is spun off from flipkart) clearly shows there are many obstacles stopping EDS provider in providing better services to their business clients and individual customers as well.

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