

Are We In The Age Of Global Aviation Reformation?

Like

Statisticians say, Aviation industry will not return to normal operations and demands level until 2022. Current global trends, on the other hand, seem to point towards a new, advanced normal. Evolution appears inevitable.



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What we are witnessing today is an entirely unimagined scenario, perhaps limited to science fictions. To put it in a finer phrase, this is 'reality is stranger than fiction' personified. For aviation industry, the global pandemic has brought a relatively stronger shock.

If we look at numbers, airline capacity dropped between seven to seventeen times in comparison to the drop during global financial crisis; further impacting air passenger and revenue-passenger-kilometers, and average international passenger load, which slumped to a historical low of 28 percent, subsequently reduced by lockdown and ban on international travel and travellers in many countries.

New decade beginning with a global pandemic has forced a subliminal change in the way things operate within airline and overall travel industry. With the uncertainty surmounting travel regulations and overall sentiment, managing reopening and recovery, especially at international scale, will be a significant challenge.

Modernization is at the brim, with plenty technological advancements awaiting in the corner for the limelight to shine on them. Robotics, machine learning, artificial intelligence, smarter machines, emission efficient equipment, ancillary remodelling, security and privacy modifications and many others appear to be the sound future of aviation. Where the vision of a possible threat seems to be looming, with just a minor shift in angle, one can see an astounding opportunity at recreating the industry to its relatively advanced version.

As former US President Nixon said while addressing the nation in 1973, "We will not have to stop air travel, but we will have to plan it more carefully." This year, pushed by the global pandemic, the new planning stage for global aviation has begun.

Capacity Restructuring – In the last half a century, a substantial restructuring of the average pitch – number of centimeters separating one point on a seat with the exact point on the seat in front or behind it – has been witnessed. In numbers, average pitch in the 70s was approx. 34 inches, which today, in most network carriers has reduced to about 31 inches, making it three inches lesser. That brings us to the evident point of social distancing where more is, apparently, less. Future aircrafts may likely find this fact taken into consideration when planning structure and space of seating and brooding over the safe passage of robots which may make an entrée in the flights sooner or later.

Ancillary Remodelling – Modern air travel may bring newer options for ancillaries, considering recent behavioural changes due to coronavirus. As legroom has been a high-selling ancillary, it may soon receive an enhanced top-up of social distancing which people will gladly or safely choose to pay for and afford. A certain part of aircraft, especially the part with economy class may also receive a business-class like semi-upgrade with middle-seat/space advancing to ancillary services; which may eventually get linked to airplane capacity and subsequent upgrades anywhere between check-in and the time of boarding.

Downsizing to Resizing – Unfortunately for many companies, including those in aviation industry, downsizing was imperative. Now with the threat of this global pandemic still looming while teaching a significant lesson, an imminent resizing cannot be overlooked, especially with the declining faith in the ever celebrated human touch. IT and robotics may inadvertently take precedence over humans where services like in-flight, security, boarding assistance, baggage check etc. are required. This may or may not lead to further downsizing but shall certainly ensure a structural resizing of roles fitting the modern aviation environment advancing on the grounds of technology.

Distribution Restimulation – Today, airline bookings are available through airlines own systems, global distribution systems and new distribution capability (NDC). It has become evident over the course of a few months that all three may see a radical change through innovative solutions that fit the current and anticipated business environment. While new customer propositions through modified travel regulations may reinstate speed across distribution channels, stress upon demand recovery may infuse more marketing budgets, ideas, propositions and innovations within distribution capability, especially in NDC. Empowering distribution channels with AI (Artificial Intelligence) shall remain a point of emphasis and an impending goal of innovation heads at the distribution channels; picking pace most definitely to bring some kind of certainty in these uncertain times.

Safety Restandardisation – Safety shall remain at the epicentre of the cumulative efforts for all four expected advancements. Risk management through safe infrastructure and processes shall bring substantial changes, thereby restandardising the safety norms. As bridge to the wider world, aviation is often expected to carry the onus of community transmission over national and international boundaries, leaving researchers and innovators on toes for reimagining safer air travel through the lens of technology – from requesting permissions for accessing location on airline’s app anywhere between a day and a few before travel to symptom identification by infusing artificial intelligence with robotics for generating swifter responses for prospective threat of infection and its subsequent transmission; among others.

Innovation is required at its peak during these incredibly uncertain times, having jolted the entire human race to the core. For aviation industry, reimagining travel is an absolute necessity while placing individual and communal safety at the very centre of all endeavours. Many in the industry have already taken note of this wave of change and perhaps, have stepped on the planning stage - with fervour or sheer necessity, depends on the perspective.

As we stand witnessing a major shift in how things are processed and the way they shall be managed in future, from booking funnel to capacity choices to safety standards to pricing, we cannot ignore the apparent uncertainty sending mixed signals about the ongoing global restructuring of aviation industry together with several others. A gradual process, with results to be seen in the times to come, this new age of evolution will change the face of industry phenomenally anywhere between the late half of this decade and the beginning of next decade to say the least.

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Sandeep Dwivedi

The author is Chief Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient

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