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C O N T E N T S

Editorial Note

- Glass Ceiling: A study of women in Senior Management roles within the Mauritian Banking Sector**
GUNNOO Leenshya **01-16**
University of Technology Mauritius
MUNGRAH Kooshali
University of Technology Mauritius
- The Status of Inter-Sectorial Physical Infrastructural Integration in Selected Sectors in Addis Ababa City, Ethiopia**
Misiker Negash Bitew **17-29**
Ethiopian Civil Service University, College of Finance, Management and Development, Ethiopia
Admassu Tesso Huluka
Associate Professor in Ethiopian Civil Service University, College of Finance, Management and Development, Ethiopia
- An Examination of the Application of Corporate Governance Principles in the Global Business Sector of Mauritius**
Bhavna MAHADEW **30-37**
Lecturer in Law
University of Technology, Mauritius
- Legal Awareness on Child Trafficking: A Critical Assessment of the Role of Physicians.**
Bhavna MAHADEW **38-44**
Lecturer in Law
University of Technology, Mauritius
- Analyzing the Dynamics of Trade in Services of India**
Arnob Paul **45-59**
Department of Economics,
Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India
Sushanta Kumar Nayak
Professor and Head, Department of Economics,
Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India
- An Empirical Study into the Influence of Brand Image on Smartphone Purchases in Raipur, Chhattisgarh**
Jayant Isaac **60-69**
Associate Professor, Faculty of Management Studies,
The ICFAI University Raipur, India
Rahul Singh
MBA Student, Faculty of Management Studies,
The ICFAI University Raipur, India

A Comparative Journey into Luxury Sportswear Online Buying Trends: With A Special Focus on Pune City. Harshi Garg Research scholar, School of commerce and management, IIMT University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India. Priyank Sharma Associate professor, school of commerce and management, IIMT University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India.	70-77
Factors Affecting Adoption Intention of AI: A Comprehensive Review with Bibliometric Analysis Purva Kansal Professor, University Business School, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India Apoorva Dawara Research Scholar, University Business School, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India	78-92
Does Perceived Service Quality of Airlines Influence Passenger Satisfaction? An Empirical Investigation Ranjit Roy Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India Kingshuk Adhikari Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India	93-102
Identification of Factors Influencing Retail Investors Perception for Investment in Mutual Funds Smarajit Sen Gupta Assistant Professor, Eastern Institute for Integrated Learning In Management, Kolkata, India Sarmistha Biswas Associate Professor, Eastern Institute for Integrated Learning In Management, Kolkata, India	103-115
Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Organizational Culture among Academicians in ED Tech Startups: A Comprehensive Analysis Surbhi Jain PhD Scholar, Amity Institute of Psychology and Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India. Mamata Mahapatra Professor & PhD Supervisor, Amity Institute of Psychology and Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India.	116-124
Empowering Rural Women through ORMAS and Transformation by Mission Shakti in Odisha Kailash Chandra Dash PhD. Research Scholar Department of Business Administration, Sambalpur University, Burla, Odisha, India Tushar Kanti Das Professor and Head, Department of Business Administration, Sambalpur University, Burla, Odisha, India	125-133

Social Sell: How Retail Merchants wield Social Media to persuade the Customers 134-144
Shobin Mathew

Research Scholar, Dept of Journalism and Science Communication, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India.

S. Jeneffa

Professor and Head, Department of Journalism and Science Communication, School of Linguistics and Communication, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

Short Term Impact of Acquisition on Stock Returns- A Study Based on BSE Listed Select Companies In India

Subhajit Bhadra

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Management and Marketing, West Bengal State University, West Bengal, India.

145-154

Ashoke Mondal

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Does Perceived Service Quality of Airlines Influence Passenger Satisfaction? An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the primary challenge faced by majority of airlines is meeting heightened expectations of passengers. Effectively addressing this challenge necessitates dedicated focus on enhancing service quality. Providing better quality service is important for survival of any airline operator nowadays. The present research work makes an attempt to find the impact of service quality dimensions on satisfaction of passengers. The study focuses on 257 individuals who have travelled from Silchar Airport. Structured questionnaire with seven-point Likert type scale has been employed for obtaining responses of passengers. Statistical tools, such as, descriptive statistics, one way ANOVA, correlation coefficient and multiple regression have been used for the present study. The study reveals that all the five dimensions used have a positive correlation with passenger satisfaction. Further, all the selected dimensions have a positive and significant influence on passenger satisfaction.

Keywords: Competence, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness and Tangibility.

JEL Code: M31, L93, O14

Introduction

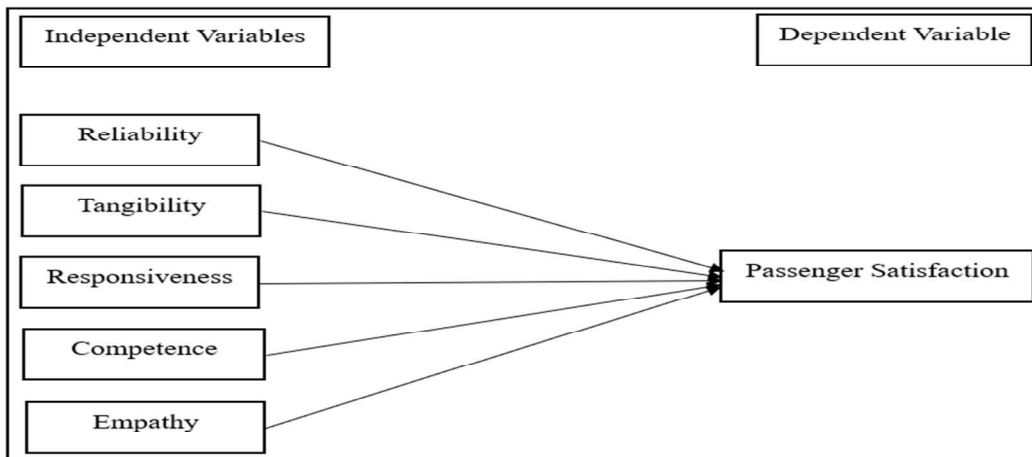
Service industry plays a crucial role in the overall economy throughout the world. Understanding the clients and providing high quality of service is the strategy that can be used by the service providers to place themselves effectively in the highly competitive market (Parasuraman, et. al., 1988; Bitner, et al., 1990; Brown & Swartz 1989; Cronin and Taylor 1992). In today's highly competitive market, service quality is essential not only for retaining existing passengers but also for attracting the potential one. Organization that provides high quality service will have better chance of surviving in the long run (Adhikari and Paul, 2016). The Indian aviation sector is one of the fast-growing industries. It has undergone huge transformation following the liberalisation of Indian economy. The aviation sector is facing an intensified competition due to entry of new private players (Subha and Archana, 2013). With the growth in aviation sector and advancement in technology, the airline sector is more competitive than it has ever been. Travelers today enjoy benefits from competitive environment as they have wide range of choices (Park, et al., 2020). The success of airline services primarily centers on a range of factors, including the availability of diverse facilities, amenities, pricing structures, efficient ground services, in-flight services, seamless travel experiences, and other related aspects (Murugeswari, 2018). With growing importance of the service sector, specifically in airline industry, it is important for the airline companies to gain a deep understanding of their customers and deliver the desired service to their customers. (Pappachan, 2015).

Review of Literature

Service quality can be perceived as a combination of multiple characteristics. It not only consists of tangible features which can be observed and measured, but also intangible/subjective features which are challenging to quantify precisely. Different people usually have different perspectives regarding quality service, depending on their experiences (Tsaur, et al., 2002). Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined service quality as capability of an organizations to meet or surpass expectations of the customers. It is the difference between customers anticipated service and the perceived service (Zeithaml, et al., 1988). Service quality may be considered as a strategic approach of managing business as it enhances the customer satisfaction which not only helps in instil confidence among customer but also helps in financial performance (Adhikari and Paul, 2016). The phrase 'customer satisfaction' does not simply proclaim a happy consumer, but it is much bigger and multidimensional (Adhikari and Nath 2014). Customer satisfaction is a post purchase evaluation, where perceived performance of the product matches or surpasses the expectations or desires. If the perception doesn't match or exceeds the expectation, dissatisfaction occurs (Kotler and Keller, 2016, p 679). In the airlines industry, ensuring passenger satisfaction is crucial. Due to increasing competition, passengers' satisfaction can impact passengers' decision and also their recommendations for prospect customers. Passenger satisfaction can be explained as the assessment of services received in comparison with the

cost associated with it. Customer satisfaction increases loyalty of the customers, repurchase intention, and prevent the customers being affected by the intense competition (Adhikari & Nath, 2014). Majority of the studies in the sector focuses on customer satisfaction as the key determinant of success (Park, 2019; Shah, et al.,2020; Giao and Vuong 2021; Herlina and Dewi, 2022).

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework Depicting Association Between Service Quality Dimensions and Passenger Satisfaction



Source: Developed by Authors

In light of the phenomenal increase in the population, the need for service quality of airlines and passenger satisfaction also gaining importance nowadays. The emphasis on the customer centric strategies explains the evolving nature of the sector, where success is intricately linked with the quality of service and passenger satisfaction. Numerous research works have been done on service quality and satisfaction of passengers and its importance. This section delves into various relevant studies and their major findings related to service quality of airlines and passenger satisfaction.

Shah and et al. (2020) revealed that service quality affects the satisfaction of passengers and loyalty of passengers. Shen and Yahya (2020) revealed that passenger satisfaction is strongly influenced by the price and quality of service, which then leads to passengers' loyalty. A study conducted by Giao and Vuong (2021) found that customer loyalty was positively impacted by service quality. Furthermore, this study highlights empirical evidence of the mediating effects of perceived value, airline image, customer satisfaction, and trust. The study recommended that, in order to attract new and retain existing customers, airlines managers should be aware of customers' expectations as well as passengers' loyalty towards low-cost carriers. The research carried out by Setyanta (2021) revealed that passenger satisfaction is influenced by three factors, i.e., price, quality of service and trust. Herlina and Dewi, (2022).found that service quality and price both exert positive and significant relationship with satisfaction of passengers. Furthermore, customer satisfaction is revealed to have positive impact on passenger loyalty. Chikwendu and Ezenwa (2012) concluded that passengers expressed satisfaction with the empathy, responsiveness, and technical dimensions of service quality. However, they identified the reliability and tangible dimensions of service quality as areas requiring improvement. Murugesan and Perumalsamy (2016) opined that customers are satisfied with the quality of in-flight amenities, cabin spotlessness and seat luxury. Murugeswari and Kanagaraj (2017) found that the service quality dimensions influence the overall opinion about customer satisfaction and also, provide total satisfaction to customers. Malyadri and Satyanarayana (2014) found that companies have not met customers' expectations in delivering what they had promised concerning "service quality". Singh (2014) found that select dimensions have a direct and positive influence on satisfaction of passengers, airline image and passengers' intention. The passengers are found to be pleased with the quality of services provided in-flight.

The literature review clearly depicts that service quality of airline is one of the most sought research areas for researcher highlighting the importance of studying service quality of airlines. The need for research arises as there were no significant studies carried out on service quality of airlines in Northeast India especially in Assam or Barak Valley of Assam. Table 1 reveals the dimensions used in the present study.

Table 1: Service Quality Dimensions

Dimensions	Author and Year
Reliability	Chen and Liu (2017); Gilbert and Wong (2003); Abdullah and et al. (2007)
Tangibility	Malhotra et al. (2005); Thapa and et al. (2020); Chikwendu and Ezenwa (2012)
Responsiveness	Gilbert, and Wong, (2003); Malhotra et al. (2005)
Competence	Selnes (1998); Singh, Kumar and Kumar (2019); Singh and Mujoo (2022)
Empathy	Lerrthaitrakul and Panjakajornsak (2014); Martey and Frempong (2014); Dolekoglu and et al. (2016)

Note: Extracted from the Literature

Need of the Study

Numerous research endeavours have highlighted the importance of service quality in service industry, especially in the era of fierce competition. Identifying and delivering the quality service has become the key differentiator for the service provider seeking to excel and thrive in the highly competitive market (Zeithaml et. al., 1988; Zeithaml, 1988; Lovelock, 1983; Surprenant and Solomon, 1987; Adhikari an Paul, 2016). Service quality is a multifaceted concept which can be studied from different perspective. Previous researchers have applied the concept of service quality in different service industries, but there is a notable gap in research concerning to service quality of airlines, especially focusing on domestic airlines operating from Silchar Airport. Due to the entry of private players in the airline industry, there exist a fierce competition in airline industry. The number of passengers has notably increased in recent years. So, it is crucial to understand the perception of passengers about the service quality of airlines and the service provided by the airlines in this context.

Objectives of the Research Work

The broad objective of the present research work is to gain insight about service quality of airlines and passenger satisfaction in the context of airlines operating from Silchar Airport of Assam. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To assess the perception of passengers with regard to service quality of airlines under consideration.
2. To analyse the association between service quality of airlines and passenger satisfaction.
3. To analyse the influence of airlines' service quality on passenger satisfaction.

Hypotheses of the Research Work

1. Service quality of airlines and passenger satisfaction are not related to each other.
2. Service quality of airlines does not have any influence on passenger Satisfaction.

Data Source and Methodology

The study deploys descriptive research design to comprehensively understand perception about passengers who have travelled from Silchar Airport. Perception of passengers about service quality and satisfaction were collected from 257 respondents. A structured questionnaire with seven-point Likert type scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" have been used for collection of primary data.

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Distribution	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	103	40.1
	Male	154	59.9
Age Group	18 to 30	88	34.2
	31 to 40	67	26.1
	41 to 50	32	12.5
	51 and above	70	27.2
Occupation	Govt Employee	54	21.0
	Private Employee	53	20.6
	Businessman	58	22.6
	Professional	35	13.6
	Pensioner	38	14.8
	Others	19	7.3
Monthly Income	Bellow 30,000	39	15.2
	30001 to 60,000	96	37.4
	60,001 to 90,000	61	23.7
	90,001 to 120,000	19	7.4
	120,001 to 150,000	42	16.3
Airline Company	Air India	70	27.2
	Indigo	106	41.2
	SpiceJet	81	31.5

Source: Field Survey

Statistical tools, namely, mean, sd, one way ANOVA, correlation and regression have been used for analysis of the data.

The dimensions of service quality have been used as independent variable in the study and passenger satisfaction has been used as dependent variable

The regression model developed for the study is shown as follows

$$PS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 REL + \beta_2 TANG + \beta_3 RES + \beta_5 COM + \beta_6 EMP + \varepsilon_i$$

Where, PS= Passenger Satisfaction

REL= Reliability

TANG= Tangibility

RES= Responsiveness

COM= Competence

EMP= Empathy

ε_i is the error term

Scope of the Research Work

1. The present study considers the passengers who have travelled from Silchar Airport only.
2. The service quality is measured through five dimensions.

Limitations of the Research Work

1. The present research is inherently constrained by the limitations typically associated with the perception-based study.
2. It is not possible to completely ignore the sampling errors in the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of various dimensions of service quality and passenger satisfaction. Passenger satisfaction has a mean score of 5.2418 with standard deviation of 1.03566.

Table3: Perception of Passengers on Select Dimensions of Service Quality

Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reliability	5.1626	1.08506
Tangibility	5.0202	0.95487
Responsiveness	5.2500	1.11344
Competence	5.3045	1.11254
Empathy	5.0204	1.26101
Passenger Satisfaction	5.2418	1.03566

Source: Field Survey

Among the service quality dimensions, competence has highest mean score of 5.3045 followed by responsiveness with mean score 5.2500 and reliability with mean score of 5.1626, implying that these are the most important dimension that contributes to the service quality of airlines and passenger satisfaction. Conversely, the dimensions like tangibility and empathy have received lowest mean score of 5.0202 and 5.0204 respectively. However, Tangibility has lowest standard deviation of 0.95487 implying more consistency in the responses of the passengers.

Table 4: Airline Wise Perception of Passengers

Dimensions	Airline	Mean	Std. Deviation	F Value	p Value
Reliability	Air India	5.4114	1.05604	15.446	.000
	Indigo	5.4000	.96491		
	SpiceJet	4.6370	1.08403		
Tangibility	Air India	5.0686	.78455	4.169	.017
	Indigo	5.1736	.99640		
	SpiceJet	4.7778	.99549		
Responsiveness	Air India	5.6536	1.08121	9.447	.000
	Indigo	5.2594	1.07234		
	SpiceJet	4.8889	1.08397		
Competence	Air India	5.6500	1.10368	14.940	.000
	Indigo	5.4741	.97829		
	SpiceJet	4.7840	1.11226		
Empathy	Air India	5.4429	1.15327	11.708	.000
	Indigo	5.1274	1.25131		
	SpiceJet	4.5154	1.20698		
Satisfaction	Air India	5.72245	.899862	23.693	.000
	Indigo	5.35445	.933812		
	SpiceJet	4.67901	1.024578		

Source: Field Survey

Table 4 depicts the airline wise value of mean and SD for perception of passengers about service quality of airlines. In case of tangibility dimension Indigo has received highest mean score followed by Air India and SpiceJet. Besides this, Air India has received highest mean score in all other dimensions. It is to be noted that, SpiceJet has received lowest mean score which means that SpiceJet has failed to provide good services in relation to other Air India and Indigo. One way ANOVA have been employed to test the hypothesis if the perception of passengers on different dimensions varies across different airlines. Table 4 shows that all the dimensions have p value less than 0.05. Which implies that perception of passengers about service quality of airlines varies significantly across different airlines.

Table 5: Correlation between Dimensions of Service Quality and Passenger Satisfaction

Dimensions	Correlation Coefficient
Reliability	.756**
Tangibility	.683**
Responsiveness	.808**
Competence	.873**
Empathy	.858**

*Significant at 5% level

Source: Field Survey

Table 5 explains the association between the dimensions of service quality and satisfaction of passengers. The computed value of correlation coefficient depicts that there exists positive and strong correlation between passenger satisfaction and all the five explanatory variables. The p value clearly depicts that the correlation between passenger satisfaction and select dimensions of service quality is statistically significant at 5% level of significance.

Table 6: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.946 ^a	.894	.892	.339810
a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Competence				
b. Dependent Variable: Passenger Satisfaction				

Source: Field Survey

The R² value in table 6 indicates that approximately 89.4% of the variation in the degree of passenger satisfaction is accounted for by the explanatory variables used in the study. The value of adjusted R² also indicates that 89.2% of the variability in the degree of passenger satisfaction is explained by chosen predictors. Thus, the dimensions of service quality selected for the study could explain a substantial amount of variation in passenger satisfaction.

Table 7: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	245.603	5	49.121	425.393	.000 ^b
	Residual	28.983	251	.115		
	Total	274.586	256			
a. Dependent Variable: Passenger Satisfaction						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Competence						

Source: Field Survey

The high significance of the regression model is indicated by the F-statistic of 425.393, along with a p-value of 0.000. The findings suggest that the data effectively demonstrate the influence of the selected service quality dimensions on the satisfaction of passengers. Hence, the overall predictability of the model is favourable, indicating its ability to provide valuable insights and explanations regarding passenger satisfaction.

Table 8: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized_Coefficients		Standardized_Coefficients	t value	p value
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.204	.123		1.661	.098
	Reliability	.091	.031	.095	2.917	.004
	Tangibility	.080	.034	.074	2.356	.019
	Responsiveness	.208	.033	.224	6.253	.000
	Competence	.291	.035	.312	8.248	.000
	Empathy	.305	.028	.372	11.096	.000

Source: Field Survey

Table 8 shows that all the five explanatory variables have positive influence on passenger satisfaction as all the predictors have positive b value. Among the independent variables empathy has the highest standardized coefficient (Beta), which implies that impact of empathy dimension is highest on passenger satisfaction if the effect of other dimensions remains unchanged. Likewise, the impact of tangibility dimension is lowest on passenger satisfaction as it has the lowest beta value. The computed value of t and its corresponding p value clearly depicts that there exists a statistically significant impact of all the five select service quality dimensions and passenger satisfaction.

Table 9: Collinearity Statistics

Dimensions	Tolerance	VIF
Reliability	.397	2.516
Tangibility	.429	2.333
Responsiveness	.328	3.047
Competence	.293	3.410
Empathy	.374	2.670

Source: Field Survey

Table 9 shows the result of multicollinearity statistics to judge the individual impact of explanatory variables on explained variable. Variation Inflation Factor (VIF) is commonly used measure for detecting multicollinearity, with a conventional threshold suggesting that of VIF exceeding 10 may indicate collinearity issue (Mason et.al., 1989). Table 9 also shows Variation Inflation Factor (VIF), which ranges between 2.333 to 3.410 and thus there is no problem of multicollinearity. Tolerance value exceeding 0.10 is considered as a yardstick for assessing the impact of explanatory variables in the model and signifies that explanatory variables are independent from each other (Kennedy, 1992). The computed tolerance value suggests that regression model is free from multicollinearity of the explanatory variables since all the tolerance values are well above this threshold, ensuring the absence of multicollinearity in the model.

Conclusion

The service industry operates in a highly competitive and consumer-driven environment, where, service quality play dominant role in shaping success and sustainability of airlines. Service quality is not an optional aspect of airline industry, but it is a critical determinant for success. The study reveals that all the dimensions of service quality have a positive and significant correlation with passenger satisfaction. Notably, the result aligns with the findings of research works done by Hasan, et al., (2019); Khuong and Uyen (2014); Jahmani (2017). The study reveals that dimensions of airline service quality selected for the study demonstrate statistically significant impact on passenger satisfaction. This aligns with the research work carried out by Murugeswari, and Kanagaraj, (2017); Shanka, (2012); Huang, et al. (2009). The consistency in results across these studies strengthens the understanding that these dimensions play significant role in impacting passenger satisfaction. Further, the measurement of service quality should be on a continuous basis to ensure the best quality. Airlines officials should take these evaluations seriously to enhance service quality, thereby increasing passenger satisfaction and confidence. The management needs to take every dimension of service quality seriously. Corrective measures can be taken in the dimensions that exhibit weaknesses in meeting customer expectations. To enhance the experience of the passengers, the airline company should provide additional training to front-line

staffs, enhancing their skills and knowledge to ensure fast and reliable service. Additionally, upgrading the physical aspects is also necessary to enhance the experience of the passengers.

Scope for Future Research Work

1. Similar type of study with a larger sample size may be conducted in other locations.
2. New components of service quality may be used to study the association between service quality and satisfaction of the passengers.
3. Service quality of different airlines may be compared which will provide valuable insights for policy-makers and management of airlines.

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