



<i>Manuscript Information</i>	<i>Reviewed</i>	<i>Accepted</i>	<i>Published</i>	<i>Paper No.</i>
<i>DOI</i>	13-04-2026	16-04-2026	23-04-2026	VBRP-11
	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19710149			

Service Quality Management: A Predictor of Customers' Delight With Special Reference To Airlines

Dr. Pooja Upadhayay, Hinduja Collage, Astha, M.P

1.1 Introduction

Indian Aviation Industry is one of the fastest growing airline industries in the world. The growth rate of the aviation sector in India is the highest in the world. The history of Indian Aviation Industry started in December 1912 with its first domestic air route between Karachi and Delhi. It was opened by the Indian Air Services in collaboration with the UK based Imperial Airways as an extension of London-Karachi flight of the Imperial Airways. Tata Sons Ltd., the first Indian airline, started a regular airmail service between Karachi and Madras three years later without any backing from the Indian government.

Preview: Indian Civil Aviation Industry

- 9th largest civil aviation market.
- 170 Million Passengers in 2016.
- 60 Million International passengers by 2017.
- 85 international airlines connecting over 40 countries.
- 3rd largest aviation market by 2020.
- 800 aircrafts by 2020.

1.1.1 Service Quality:

Service is an activity that is intangible and cannot be stored (Tolpa, 2012). An example of service is a visit to a bank, where a customer receives an information he or she needs. American Marketing Association defines service as intangible products or as activities that accompany

the sale of a product. According to Quinn et al. (1987), services are economic activities whose output is not a physical product or construction, is generally consumed at the time it is produced, and provides added value in forms that are essentially intangible concerns of its first purchaser. However, nowadays the borderline between products and services has become vague and most of the offerings of any company include some components of both. Moreover, many companies have adopted such concept as solution- a complete package that includes products, services, best practices etc. and is aimed to solve a customer's problem.

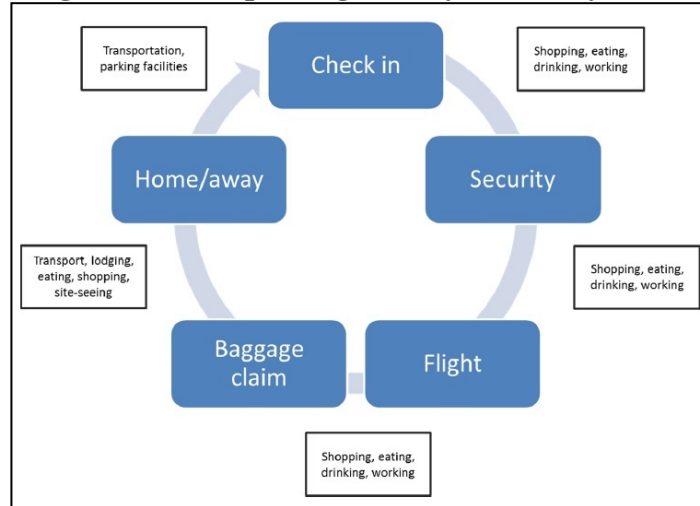
SERVQUAL is a service quality framework that takes into account the perceptions of customers of the relative importance of service attributes. This allows an organization to prioritize and use its resources to improve the most critical service attributes. It is an efficient model in helping an organization shape up its efforts in bridging the gap between perceived and expected service. The data are collected via surveys of a sample of customers. In these surveys, these customers respond to a series of questions based around a number of key service dimensions.

1.2.1 Service Quality In Airlines:

The service process steps are based on the airline passenger lifecycle suggested by

Kelley (2012) which consists of five stages (See figure 1.1). An airline has an opportunity to create value for the customer in between each stage in this lifecycle.

Fig 1.1: Airline passenger lifecycle (Kelley, 2012)

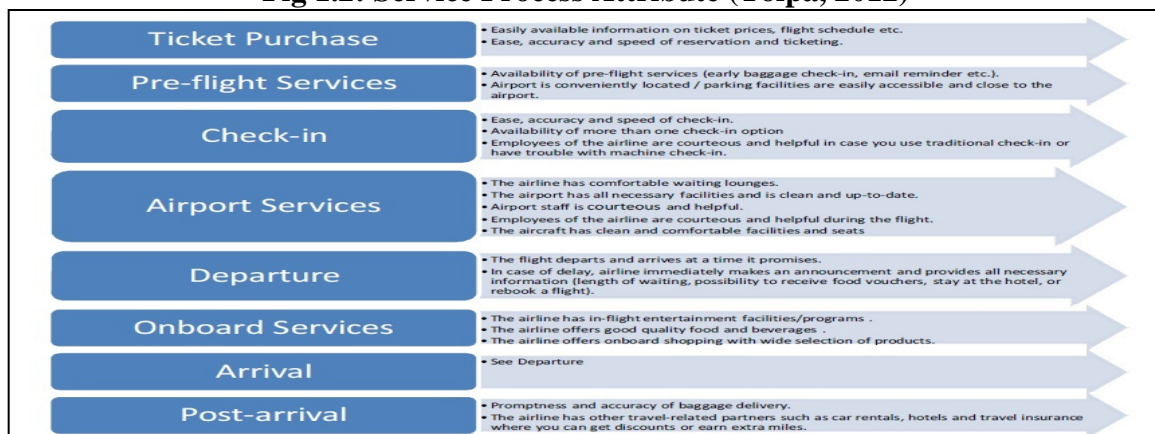


Delivering superior service quality by understanding customer expectations is a key for success and survival in very hectic and competitive environment of airline industry (Chen & Chang, 2005). One way to measure service quality is to define a number of distinctive attributes. Hence, here service process is divided into eight steps, each step representing a point where a customer may experience different types of services (which are grouped based on their location in the service process).

are provided not by only carrier itself, but also by a number of other service companies. The airline provides actual transportation as well as tickets sales and onboard services, an airport offers shopping services, check-in services as well as baggage handling services. A subcontractor chosen by the airport often provides baggage handling, catering and technical services. In this environment, so heavily relying on outsourcing the services, it is often hard for an airline to keep service quality in control.

When it comes to airline transportation, it is important to remember that the services

Fig 1.2: Service Process Attribute (Tolpa, 2012)



The process can be elaborated as follows:

Ticket Purchase

Nowadays tickets purchasing happens mostly online or through travel agencies. However, call centres still exist, and often it is possible to purchase the ticket or at least ask questions there. Ticket purchase happens without direct contact with the airline and the first contact with a carrier happens at the check-in.

Pre-flight Services

The key attributes for pre-flight services step are as follows:

- Availability of pre-flight services (early baggage check-in, email reminder etc.).
- Airport is conveniently located/ parking facilities are easily accessible and close to the airport.

Check-in

The attributes for check-in step are as follows:

- Ease, accuracy and speed of check-in.
- Availability of more than one check-in option
- Employees of the airline are courteous and helpful in case you use traditional check-in or have trouble with machine check-in.

Airport Services

The most important attributes for airport services step are:

- The airline has comfortable waiting lounges.
- The airport has all necessary facilities and is clean and up-to-date.
- Airport staff is courteous and helpful.

Departure

Punctuality is one of the most important service quality aspects. The key for success here is on-time departure/arrival. The attributes are as follows:

- The flight departs and arrives at a time it promises.
- In case of delay, airline immediately makes an announcement and provides all necessary information (length of waiting, possibility to receive food vouchers, stay at the hotel, or rebook a flight).

Onboard Services

The attributes are as follows:

- The airline has in-flight entertainment facilities/programs.
- The airline offers good quality food and beverages.
- The airline offers onboard shopping with wide selection of products.
- Employees of the airline are courteous and helpful during the flight.
- The aircraft has clean and comfortable facilities and seats.

Arrival

As mentioned before, on-time arrival is a key component of customer's perception of a good service quality. The questions at the *Departure*-step are covering the importance of timely arrival.

Post-arrival Services

Another factor at arrival stage is post-arrival services such as lost luggage services, help upon arrival. The attributes are:

- Promptness and accuracy of baggage delivery.
- The airline has other travel-related partners such as car rentals, hotels

and travel insurance where you can get discounts or earn extra miles.

2.1 Literature Review

In a study of service quality in airlines industry, Rhoades and Waguespack (2008) examined airline quality performance on key indicators such as: on-time arrival, customer complaints, denied boarding, and mishandled baggage to determine the trend in airline service performance in the US airlines industry. As a critical component of the transportation system, the ability of the airline industry to provide reliable, timely service is important. Understanding the factors that contribute to service problems can help guide airline decisions about process and government decisions about infrastructure needs.

Liou et al. (2011) applied a modified VIKOR method to establish the gaps in priorities between alternatives and aspired-levels of service quality among domestic airlines in Taiwan. The purpose was to understand the gaps between alternatives and aspired levels in practice. A large sample was used to establish a complete service quality evaluation framework for reducing the gaps to achieve the aspired-level. Passengers of four major domestic airlines in Taiwan were surveyed to obtain their perceptions on airline services. It was found that the major service dimensions ranked as per the preference of the passengers were: booking service, ticketing service, check-in, baggage handling, boarding process, cabin service, baggage claim and responsiveness. Service quality is the fundamental element needed to survive in this highly competitive domestic market.

Archana and Subha (2012) examined the underlying forces of service quality influences on passengers' satisfaction in aircraft transport in India. The study explored the dimensions which have a positive influence on service quality and which dimensions have the most and least

important impact on service quality in international air travel, as perceived by airline passengers. The dimensionality of perceived service quality in international air travel was explored and three dimensions were identified, which are in-flight service, in-flight digital service and back-office operations. The findings reveal that these dimensions are positively related to perceived service quality in international air travel personal entertainment is the most important dimension as perceived by airline passengers in In-flight digital service quality.

Baby (2014) measured the passengers' expectation levels of service quality in the domestic airline services in Tamil Nadu against their perceptions levels of the service quality. The author tried to find out the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service quality. Airlines services were classified into three stages namely pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services. Based on data collected from 400 passengers it was found that passengers' expectations of service quality in domestic airline service are high in terms of pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight services. It also shows that the customer expectation of service quality is not in line with the acceptable levels of service quality in the aviation sector. The service provided by domestic airlines may however, be perceived as at the adequate level, which is the moderate level of service.

3.1 Rationale Of Study:

Service quality is typically conceptualized as a set of fixed service dimensions, such as reliability and responsiveness. In terms of airlines, the market has become more stiff than ever. In India, there are five private players and one Government owned airline in this field. Everybody is trying to woo the customer in one way or the other. More footfalls are going towards airports. People have started moving from

train route to airways because of many reasons.

The foremost factor is time followed by cost. The airlines fares are going down and facilities are moving up along with challenges. The turbine fuel prices are getting increased since last few years. However, the service quality must not be ignored here. Looking upon this scenario, it becomes necessary to measure the quality of services against SERVQUAL (service quality) parameters in airlines sector with respect to passengers. In India, with increasing of FDI income; Globalization and various government country development plans, disposable income has also increased gradually. The youth start-ups have become more materialistic and independent than ever. Their salary packages are crossing their parents' salary. More domestic and international travelling is taking place professionally and personally who are 35 years of age and above; thanks to the travelling EMI system by various travel operators like SOTC, MAKE MY TRIP etc.

4.1 Objectives of Study:

Objectives are framed before collecting the primary and secondary data. The major objective of research was to compare service quality management in selected airlines with respect to SERVQUAL dimensions.

5.1 Research Methodology

The Universe and Sample Size:

The universe included the passengers for the purpose of study is from four places in India i.e. Delhi, Pune, Indore and Ahmadabad, who can be considered as frequent fliers. These cities are known as the business capital of northern India, Maharashtra, M.P. and Gujarat has been well connected with airways, roadways and railways. Maximum number of fliers

is located in these metros. With presence of international level multi-carriers like-Indian Airlines, Jet airways and Indigo these places plays a vital role in coming to conclusion in this research work.

For this study total 405 passengers were selected who frequently travel from aforesaid airways and out of these 135 passengers were chosen from each three airways.

Sampling Method: The sampling method applied was non-probability judgment sampling method, also known as purposive sampling.

Data Sources

Primary data is first-hand data collected freshly by the researcher. For the purpose of collecting primary data, questionnaire is a common instrument for researchers. A questionnaire consists of a set of questions (open-ended as well as closed-ended) for the purpose of collecting data from the respondents. Questionnaires are more often used in case the data are to be collected from a large population about their variables like: responsiveness, empathy, tangibility, reliability, assurance and service value.

Statistical Tools For Analysis:

With the help of SPSS 20.0, analysis was done and hypothesis testing was done accordingly. One Way ANOVA was used.

6.1 Hypothesis of The Study

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in quality of services in airlines companies in terms of SERVQUAL.

7.1 Result:

To test the significance of variance and understand inter-level difference between and within age group treatments, the data were treated with F test analysis (Table 1.1)

Table 1.1: Results of One Way ANOVA on Age Group

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.259	3	2.753	3.487	.000*
Within Groups	273.138	396	.789		
Total	281.397	399			

***significant at 5% level**

The null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant difference in the quality of services in airlines companies in terms of SERVQUAL. The calculated value of F is higher than the tabulated value at 5% level of significance.

From the analysis of hypothesis where we have analyzed significant difference in the airlines service quality with respect to tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, reliability and assurance dimensions of SERVQUAL as perceived by the three airlines: Jet airways, Indigo and Indian Airlines. The alternate hypothesis is accepted and found that there is a difference among the selected airlines in terms of dimensions of SERVQUAL.

To conclude it is said that the concept of service quality is built by the fundamental aspects of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. This structure is universally accepted and followed by many service industries. The current study is focusing to find the service quality of airline services. The airline services are completely different from other transport services due to its nature and complexity. All the five dimensions of service quality are explicitly independent but implicitly interdependent. The airline services are complex in nature due to its continuous and sequential order. It is identified that perceived satisfaction is the predominant factor which leads to decide the level of service quality. The better service quality ensures the potential passengers for the airline service providers.

8.1 Conclusion And Suggestions:

The present research focuses on service quality management in three airlines companies: Jet Airways, Indigo and Indian Airlines. In this study six parameters were measured for service quality as follows: Tangibility, Responsiveness, Empathy, Reliability, assurance and service value. The study covered opinions of passengers who travel frequently through these airlines from four different major cities, Pune, Ahmedabad, Delhi and Indore. Under six broad attributes of SERVQUAL, the response was recorded. It was found that the responses of passengers were found same on some parameters and some responses were different for the given statement. This shows the better understanding of the terms between the service quality management and passengers' expectations.

However, the service quality must not be ignored here. Looking upon this scenario, it becomes necessary to measure the quality of services against SERVQUAL (service quality) parameters in airlines sector with respect to passengers. The study found that the corporate brand of the airlines affected by the subsistence of service and customer satisfaction that support for the preferred image created by the airlines through the enhancement of service quality management. Further it was revealed that cleanliness and comfort, convenience, prompt service, safety and security and friendliness of crew members are important to suggest that satisfaction

with a service is a function of empathy quality.

9.1 Implications of The Study

- The present study has concretized that there is indeed a positively significant impact of service quality on customer satisfaction. It means that if an airline attempts to improve their quality of services (the dimensions of service quality proposed in this research), it will in return enhance the satisfaction level of their customers.
- This particular findings of the present study is imperative for the airline industry because of intensive competition. If the airline industry can focus on strengthening attitudinal loyalty of their customers, it will result in customers talking positive about that particular airline, consequently attracting and acquiring more customers.

10.1 Suggestions

- In conclusion, perceived service quality was the most important factor that had direct effect on passenger satisfaction. That means Airlines should pay more attention to the overall service quality, e.g., with items high-quality meals on board and many options of meals to choose from Airlines should improve the quality of meals served and offer more choices of meals regardless of short or long haul flights.
- As regards as service value is concerned, Jet Airways & Indigo should charge reasonable fare from their passengers. Indian Airlines & Indigo have to do some necessary changes in the

process of booking and easy accessibility.

- Airline marketers should develop strategies to improve service quality such as meeting passengers' desired service levels, improving the quality of in-flight meal, solving service problems effectively, developing convenient reservation and ticketing system, making convenient schedules for passengers, preventing service problems from occurring and so on. These strategies will enhance airline image and will result in keeping existing passengers and enticing passengers from other airlines.

References

- Tolpa, E. (2012). *Measuring Customer Expectations of Service Quality: case Airline Industry* (Master's thesis, Aalto University, Finland). Retrieved from <http://epub.lib.aalto.fi/en/theses/pdf/12898>
- Quinn, J.B., Baruch, J.J. & Paquette, P.C. (1987) Technology in services, *Scientific American*, Vol. 257 (6), pp.50-58
- Kelley, B (2012) Business Strategy Innovation - The Airline Passenger Lifecycle, available at <http://www.business-strategy-innovation.com/airlinecasestudy.pdf>, [12.3.2014]
- Chen, Fang-Yuan & Chang, Yu-Hern (2005) Examining airline service quality from a process perspective, *Journal of Air Transport Management*, vol. 11, pp. 79-87.
- Rhoades, Dawna L. and Waguespack, Blaise (2005).

Strategic imperatives and the pursuit of quality in the US airline industry. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, Vol. 15 Iss: 4, pp.344 – 356.

- Liou, James J.H., Tsai, Chieh-Yuan., Lin, Rong-Ho. and Tzeng, Gwo-Hshiung (2011). A modified VIKOR multiple-criteria decision method for improving domestic airlines service quality. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 17, pp. 57-61.
- Archana, R. and Subha, M. V. (2012). A study on service quality and passenger satisfaction on Indian airlines. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol. 2 (2), pp 50-63.
- Baby, P. (2014). Passengers' Expectation on Service Quality Dimensions in Domestic Airline Services. *Global journal for research analysis*, Vol 3 (6), pp. 1-3.