

# INFLUENCE OF SERVICE QUALITY OF AIRLINES ON SATISFACTION OF PASSENGERS: A PERCEPTUAL STUDY

Ranjit Roy\*, Kingshuk Adhikari\*\*

**Abstract** *The service industry is a significant contributor to the Indian GDP and faces formidable competition in the era of globalisation. The aviation sector, following the liberalisation of the Indian economy, has undergone substantial transformation due to increased competition. To thrive in this industry, it has become crucial to provide high-quality services. Service quality plays a critical role in satisfying customers and fostering customer loyalty towards the organisation. It serves as a yardstick to retain existing customers as well as to attract potential ones. The main objective of the present study is to investigate how the dimensions of service quality influence passenger satisfaction. In order to carry out the study a sample of 250 respondents has been selected. Descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, correlation coefficient, and multiple regression techniques have been used to analyse the data and to arrive at the findings of the study. The study reveals that all the dimensions of service quality have positive and significant relationship with the satisfaction of passengers. Further, the study also reveals that out of seven dimensions, only four dimensions, namely, responsiveness, courtesy, empathy, and convenience, have a significant influence on the satisfaction of passengers under consideration.*

**Keywords:** *Courtesy, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, Convenience*

## INTRODUCTION

The service industry plays a significant role in the overall economy throughout the world. Understanding the customers 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; Brown & Swartz, 1989; Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Service quality can be seen as a strategic approach for managing business processes with the aim of improving customer satisfaction. It holds significant importance for the growth and progress of service sector enterprises (Adhikari & Paul, 2016). In the current landscape of intense competition, service quality emerges as a fundamental pillar for businesses striving to secure a market share. Consequently, providing high-quality service has become an indispensable requirement for survival in today's cut-throat market environment (Adhikari & Paul, 2016). In today's highly competitive and dynamic business environment, providing quality services has become essential for businesses. It is no longer just about retaining the existing market share but also about expanding it. To survive in today's competitive and dynamic environment, business organisation need to manage their capabilities to satisfy the consumer and to retain them (Sharma & Sharma,

2021). Companies that offer high-quality services will have a better chance of surviving and thriving in such a competitive marketplace (Adhikari & Paul, 2015). The Indian aviation industry is among the world's fastest growing aviation industry. This growth can be attributed to the significant changes that have taken place following the liberalisation of the aviation industry in India (Subha & Archana, 2013). The success of airline services primarily centres 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). Given the growth of the service sector, specifically in the 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). Exceptional service not only cultivates loyalty among passengers but also helps in positive word-of-mouth, enhancing the airline's reputation and setting it apart from competitors. Additionally, satisfied passengers are more inclined to recommend the airline, contributing to increased profitability and revenue. Despite extensive research in larger markets, the application of these principles in smaller towns like Silchar has received limited attention. Existing studies on service quality and passenger satisfaction predominantly focus on major urban centres, leaving a significant gap in

\* Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India. Email: ranjitroy27@gmail.com

\*\* Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India. Email: adhikari.au@gmail.com

understanding the dynamics of smaller towns environments such as Silchar. Therefore, this study aims to explore the crucial relationship between service quality and passenger satisfaction in Silchar town of Assam.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Service quality refers to an overall evaluation of the effectiveness and performance of services provided by a service provider (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The significance of quality in services and goods is increasingly acknowledged as a strategic factor for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in business operations. As the importance of quality continues to be acknowledged, efforts in the services marketing area have increased to improve the quality of services (Anderson & Zeithaml, 1984; Babakus & Boller, 1992). It is crucial because it has an immediate impact on customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and the long-term success of companies across a range of industries, including banking, retail, and aviation (Chhabra, 2018; Faria et al., 2022). Perceived service quality refers to how well a company fulfils its customers' expectations and meets their needs (Adhikari & Paul, 2016). Ensuring high service quality is crucial for organisations to gain a competitive advantage in the market and create a long-term customer relationship (Zeithaml et al., 1990; Lam et al., 2004). The competitive advantage of a company is influenced by service quality, which plays a crucial role in maintaining customer loyalty and thereby increasing market share. Ensuring the provision of quality services is imperative for the growth of the business of airlines (Agarwal, 2020). Customer satisfaction can be defined as a post-purchase evaluative judgment and overall attitude, encompassing an emotional response that arises from the difference between customers' expectations and their actual experience with a specific product or service (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996; Oliver 1999; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991; Kotler et al., 2006). Measuring customer satisfaction is an important element for the new company as it can play a significant role in its performance (Tsafarakis et al., 2018). Customers satisfaction is an important aspect of any business organisation because to thrive and generate profits, it must effectively meet the needs of its customers (Shin & Elliott, 2001). This is primarily due to the strong association between customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Customer satisfaction is a critical concept in marketing and represents the ultimate objective for service operations. It is widely believed that there is a strong association between satisfaction of customers and consumer behaviour (Park et al., 2006). Positive perception and providing high-quality service can contribute to passengers' satisfaction and loyalty while negative perception can be

detrimental for the airline company and it can hamper the business of the airline company.

Baby (2014) has classified airline service quality factors into three stages (pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight) services and findings showed that passengers have higher expectations in all those three stages of service. Ganiyu (2016) found that perceived service quality has an impact on satisfaction of passengers, and thus, loyalty to the airlines. Sanyal and Hisam (2016) observed that overall service quality is highly related to both satisfaction of passengers and preferences. Subha and Archana (2013) found that the 'assurance' dimension was most important dimension followed by empathy, responsiveness, reliability, and tangibility. Passengers placed a high level of importance on the trustworthiness of front office personnel, as they bear the crucial responsibility for ensuring the productivity and smooth operation of the entire airline process. Wickramaratne and Karunaratna (2018) found that various service quality dimensions have a positive effect on passengers' satisfaction. Dolekoglu et al. (2016) found that passengers gave more attention to employee's competence and hence they perceived that reliable and adequate staff is the most significant aspect of service quality. Thapa et al. (2020) found that the factor that influences most in the selection of airlines is the security they assure and timely flights. Suresh et al. (2017) found the majority of respondents considered responsiveness to be the most significant dimension of service quality, followed by tangibility, empathy, assurance, and reliability. Ali et al. (2015), found service quality was influenced by all five dimensions of service quality present in the AIRQUAL Model. Mohideen and Rajak (2016) found that, according to passengers' perceptions, staff uniforms and appearance, food options, promptly receiving boarding passes, and awareness and knowledge to answer travellers' questions were the key factors influencing service quality in the airline industry. Singaravelu and Amuthanayaki (2017) revealed that foods provided, comfortable seats and safety were the dominant dimensions in in-flight service quality. Additionally, online ticket booking emerges as a significant dimension in the realm of back-office operations. Gilbert and Wong (2003) found that passengers rated "assurance" as the most significant dimension of service quality. This finding suggested that passengers prioritise safety and security features when evaluating the quality of service. Khraim (2013) found airline image as the most important dimension affecting customer behavioural intentions. Geraldine and Chikwendu (2013) opined that there was a positive correlation between the quality of service and the airline image. Additionally, the airline image was found to have a positive association with passengers' repeat patronage.

The literature review highlights the significant focus on service quality by researchers in India and abroad, with

numerous studies conducted worldwide. Not a single worthy literature has been found on the service quality of domestic airlines in the Northeast India Region. The need for research arises as there is no significant study carried out on service quality of airlines in the context of Silchar town of Assam located in Northeast India. Various researchers have employed different dimensions to

assess service quality. However, it is noteworthy that the SERVQUAL Model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988 remains relevant even in the current era. In the present study, seven service quality dimensions have been used, namely Reliability, Responsiveness, Courtesy, Competence, Tangibility, Empathy and Convenience (Table 1).

**Table 1: Select Service Quality Dimensions**

Service Quality Dimensions	Author and Year
Reliability	Chen and Liu (2017); Gilbert and Wong (2003); Abdullah and et al. (2007)
Tangibility	Chikwendu and Ezenwa (2012); Thapa et al. (2020); and Nedunchezhian and Thirunavukkarasu (2018),
Responsiveness	Shanka (2012); Khraim (2013); Mahmud and et al. (2013); and Baker (2013)
Courtesy	Namukasa (2013); Yeh and Kuo 2003; Tsaaur, Chang and Yen (2002)
Competence	Selnes (1998); Singh, Kumar and Kumar (2019); Singh and Mujoo (2022)
Empathy	Lerrthairakul and Panjakajornsak (2014); Martey and Frempong (2014); Dolekoglu and et al. (2016)
Convenience	Geraldine and Chikwendu (2013); Yeh and Kuo (2003); Park, Robertson and Wu (2006)

Source: Extracted from review of literature.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH WORK

- To study the perception of passengers of Silchar town of Assam about the service quality of airlines.
- To compare the perception of passengers about the service quality of different airlines operating from Silchar, Assam.
- To analyse the influence of service quality of airlines on satisfaction level of passengers of Silchar town of Assam.

## HYPOTHESES OF THE RESEARCH WORK

- There exists no significant variation in the perception of passengers about select dimensions of service quality across different airlines.
- There exists no significant correlation between select dimensions of service quality of airlines and passengers' satisfaction.
- There exists no significant influence of select dimensions of service quality of airlines on passengers' satisfaction.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH WORK

The study considers primary data as the basis for its analysis. Data have been collected from the respondents of Silchar

town who have travelled from Silchar Airport. In order to conduct the survey various dimensions of service quality has been identified through an extensive review of literature. The current study involved a sample of 250 respondents who have been given a structured questionnaire. The field survey has been conducted from July 2023 to February 2024, which may be considered as the reference period of the survey (Table 2).

**Table 2: Airline Wise Distribution of Respondents**

Airline Company	Frequency	Percent
Air India	75	30.0
Indigo	99	39.6
SpiceJet	76	30.4

Source: Field survey.

The questionnaire consists of seven service quality dimensions, rated on a scale from 1 (=strongly disagree) to 7 (=strongly agree). Participants have been requested to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each dimension. Descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, correlation and multiple regression analysis have been used as statistical tools to analyse the data and draw conclusions from the study.

## SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH WORK

- The present study specifically targets passengers who have travelled from Silchar Airport, limiting the scope of the research to this particular group.
- The measurement of service quality in this study is based solely on seven dimensions of service quality.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH WORK

- The research is inherently constrained by the limitations typically associated with the perception based study.
- It is impossible to completely eradicate the potential for the sampling error in the study.
- The study is based on the perceptions of 250 respondents and so the result should be interpreted with great caution for making any kind of generalisation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 3 depicts the mean and standard deviation of the different service quality dimensions. Among all the seven dimensions, the competence dimension received the highest mean score with 5.01, followed by courtesy with a mean score of 4.94. These findings suggest that these dimensions play a crucial role in improving the service quality. Conversely, convenience receives the lowest average score of 4.47. However, it is important to highlight that empathy dimension exhibits the highest SD of 1.164, indicating greater variability in the responses. On the other

hand, courtesy demonstrates the lowest standard deviation of 1.058, indicating a lower level of inconsistency in the responses for this particular dimension.

**Table 3: Perception of Passengers on Select Dimensions of Service Quality**

Dimensions	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reliability	4.93	1.089
Tangibility	4.87	1.062
Responsiveness	4.87	1.148
Courtesy	4.94	1.058
Competence	5.01	1.098
Empathy	4.74	1.164
Convenience	4.47	1.130
Passengers' Satisfaction	4.92	1.110

Source: Field survey.

Table 4 illustrates the value of mean and SD of airline wise perceptions of passengers about the service quality of airlines. It has been seen that in all the dimensions, Air India has received the highest mean score, followed by Indigo and SpiceJet. One-way ANOVA has been employed to test the hypothesis if the perception of passengers on different dimensions varies across different airlines.

**Table 4: Airline Wise Perception of Passengers on Service Quality Dimensions**

Dimensions	Airline	Mean	Std. Deviation	F Value	p Value
Reliability	Air India	5.41	0.917	31.552	0.000
	Indigo	5.12	0.792		
	SpiceJet	4.21	1.219		
Tangibility	Air India	5.21	0.965	17.052	0.000
	Indigo	5.03	0.824		
	SpiceJet	4.32	1.219		
Responsiveness	Air India	5.24	1.106	13.887	0.000
	Indigo	5.00	0.893		
	SpiceJet	4.34	1.296		
Courtesy	Air India	5.31	0.983	18.881	0.000
	Indigo	5.10	0.908		
	SpiceJet	4.37	1.093		
Competence	Air India	5.32	1.136	11.457	0.000
	Indigo	5.12	0.841		
	SpiceJet	4.54	1.211		
Empathy	Air India	5.04	1.280	8.218	0.000
	Indigo	4.83	0.931		
	SpiceJet	4.32	1.211		
Convenience	Air India	4.73	1.060	11.434	0.000
	Indigo	4.65	1.000		
	SpiceJet	3.97	1.200		

Source: Field survey.

Table 4 clearly depicts that all the dimensions have a significant p value, as the p value is less than 0.05, which implies that the perception of passengers about the service quality of airlines varies significantly across different airlines.

**Table 5: Satisfaction of Passengers across Different Airlines**

Airlines	Mean	Std. Deviation	F Value	p Value
Air India	5.35	1.059	19.493	0.000
Indigo	5.05	0.860		
SpiceJet	4.33	1.208		

Source: Field survey.

Table 5 illustrates the value of the mean and SD of airline wise satisfaction level of passengers. The result shows that passengers are more satisfied with the services of Air India followed by Indigo and SpiceJet. One-way ANOVA has been employed to test whether there exists any significant difference in responses of passengers among different airlines. The result showed that satisfaction of passengers among airlines across airlines varies significantly.

**Table 7: Result of Multiple Regression Analysis**

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t Value	p Value
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.018	0.170		-.106	0.915
	Reliability	0.096	0.055	0.095	1.755	0.080
	Tangibility	0.081	0.057	0.077	1.423	0.156
	Responsiveness	0.120	0.055	0.124	2.204	0.028
	Courtesy	0.224	0.058	0.213	3.843	0.000
	Competence	0.105	0.057	0.104	1.833	0.068
	Empathy	0.268	0.049	0.281	5.505	0.000
	Convenience	0.130	0.041	0.132	3.153	0.002

R<sup>2</sup> = 0. 793; Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0. 787;  
F Value = 132.810; p Value = 0.000

Note: Dependent Variable = Passengers’ Satisfaction.

Source: Field survey.

The R<sup>2</sup> value presented in the Table 7 indicates that approximately 79.30% of the variance in passengers’ satisfaction levels can be accounted for by the explanatory variables utilised in the study. Similarly, the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value signifies that 78.7% of the variation in passengers’ satisfaction levels can be elucidated by the chosen predictors, i.e., the seven service quality dimensions. Consequently, the selected service quality dimensions exhibit a substantial capability to explain a significant portion of the variation

**Table 6: Correlation between Service Quality Dimensions and Satisfaction of Passengers**

Dimensions	Correlation Coefficient	p Value
Reliability	0.743	0.000
Tangibility	0.747	0.000
Responsiveness	0.780	0.000
Courtesy	0.798	0.000
Competence	0.784	0.000
Empathy	0.801	0.000
Convenience	0.692	0.000

Source: Field survey.

Table 6 reveals the correlation between select service quality dimensions and passenger satisfaction. Notably, all the dimensions demonstrate a positive relationship with passengers’ satisfaction. Among the dimensions, empathy exhibits the highest degree of correlation (0.801) with passenger satisfaction, followed by courtesy (0. 798), competence (0. 784), responsiveness (0.780), Tangibility (0. 747), reliability (0.743) and convenience (0.692). The p-values associated with each dimension indicate statistically significant correlations between all the dimensions and satisfaction of passengers.

observed in the satisfaction levels of passengers of Silchar. The high significance of the regression model is indicated by the F-statistic of 132.810, 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.

The data presented in the Table 7 demonstrates that each of the selected service quality dimensions has a positive impact on customer satisfaction in the studied context. This is evident from the positive b values associated with all seven predictors. Notably, the empathy dimension has the strongest influence on customer satisfaction when compared to the other dimensions, assuming the effects of the remaining dimensions are constant. Conversely, the tangibility dimension has the lowest influence on customer satisfaction among the seven predictors, as indicated by the data presented in the Table 7. Based on the corresponding t-values and p-values, it is evident that four out of the seven predictors, namely responsiveness, courtesy, empathy and convenience make a noteworthy and statistically significant contribution to the model, with a significance level of 5%.

**Table 8: Collinearity Statistics**

Dimensions	Tolerance	VIF
Reliability	0.294	3.402
Tangibility	0.289	3.459
Responsiveness	0.268	3.733
Courtesy	0.277	3.613
Competence	0.267	3.751
Empathy	0.326	3.063
Convenience	0.485	2.063

Source: Field survey.

The study aims to assess the individual impact of dimensions of service quality (independent variables) on passenger satisfaction by addressing the issue of multicollinearity. This analysis employs measures such as the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance value to assess the extent of multicollinearity. The results are presented in Table 8. It is widely recognised that a VIF value exceeding ten (10) is a common indicator of multicollinearity (Mason et al., 1989). In this study, the absence of multicollinearity is supported by the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, which range from 2.063 to 3.751. The tolerance values for the explanatory variables in the regression model range from 0.267 to 0.485, all of which exceed 0.10. This indicates the absence of multicollinearity, as recommended by research.

## SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

- The mean score of select service quality dimensions indicates that the perceptions of passengers about the service quality of airlines operating from Silchar Airport are by and large favourable. Passengers have recorded the most favourable perception with respect to the competence dimension followed by courtesy, reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, and

convenience. Least variation in passengers’ perception has been observed with respect to the courtesy dimension while the highest variation has been noticed in case of empathy dimension.

- The results of one-way ANOVA reveal that passengers’ perceptions over all the seven dimensions of service quality vary significantly across the airlines.
- All the service quality dimensions are positively correlated with passengers’ satisfaction.
- Multiple regression analysis reveals that all dimensions positively influence passenger satisfaction. Specifically, responsiveness, courtesy, empathy, and convenience are the four dimensions of service quality that have a statistically significant impact on passengers’ satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In today’s consumer landscape, customers are increasingly conscious of quality, making the need for better service quality crucial. Providing high-quality service is the key to outperforming competitors and achieving success. Therefore, service quality serves as a vital tool for businesses to sustain themselves in the long term. The present study stresses the importance of service quality, which directly impacts passengers’ satisfaction. The study reveals that out of the seven service quality dimensions, responsiveness, courtesy, empathy, and convenience, have a significant influence on passenger satisfaction. However, the dimensions of Reliability, Tangibility and Competence are found to be statistically insignificant, suggesting that these dimensions do not play a significant role in influencing passenger satisfaction. Findings of the study suggest that 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. Moreover, 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. 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

A similar study with a larger and more diverse sample could be conducted to ensure that the findings can be applied to a broader population.

In addition to those seven dimensions of service quality, more dimensions can be identified to measure the association between those dimensions and the satisfaction of the passengers.

A comparative study can be conducted to evaluate and compare the performance of different airlines. This analysis can provide valuable insights for policy-making and offer opportunities for enhancing guidelines and strategies within the industry.

In the future, researchers may also conduct similar types of studies using different statistical tools, like factor analysis or other techniques for multivariate data analysis.

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