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# The effect of airline service quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty in India

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## ABSTRACT

Indian Aviation Industry has been one of the world's fastest-growing aviation industries with private airlines representing more than 75 percent of the domestic aviation industry. With an 18 percent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) and 454 airports and airstrips in place in the country, 16 of which are designated as international airports, it has been stated that by 2011 the aviation sector will be witnessing a revival. In 2009, with traffic movement rising and revenues rising by nearly US\$ 21.4 million, India's Airports Authority appears expected to earn better margins in 2009–10, as indicated by the Civil Aviation Ministry's latest estimates. The most crucial step in identifying and providing high-quality service is to understand exactly what customers expect. Quality of service is one of the best models for measuring customer expectations and perceptions. A company's performance results in customer satisfaction with a product or service. Passenger satisfaction is important to customer sovereignty. Customers can be loyal without being highly satisfied and being highly satisfied and yet not being loyal. Companies are required to gain a better understanding of the online environment relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intention, and to assign online marketing strategies between satisfaction initiatives and behavioural intention programme. In addition, the findings of this research will assist airline managers to better serve their customers, track and improve quality of service and achieve the highest level of satisfaction for their passengers.

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## 1. Introduction

In a nation's economic growth, the aviation sector has become the most significant segment. It plays a vital role in moving people or goods, whether domestic or international, from one place to another, particularly when the distances involved are far. Indian government's tight rivalry and favorable policies added fuel to boost both flights and fleets. Air Deccan was the first airline offering both domestic and international destinations low tariffs and creating a new benchmark in India's aviation market.

Now every citizen can access the air service easily from their respective air terminals. Providing high quality services to customers in a highly competitive environment is the key competitive advantage for the success and sustained growth of an airline. With the air transport market becoming even more competitive in the

last decade, many airlines have switched to emphasis on airline service quality to improve customer satisfaction. Conditions of service quality affect the competitive advantage of a company by maintaining customer loyalty, and with that comes market share. Providing passengers with high-quality service is important for airline survival, so airlines need to consider what passengers want from their services. Service quality can be described as the overall impression that a customer has of the organization's relative efficiency and its services.

Based on previous studies, we present a theoretical model for identifying airline service quality factors and a survey instrument for interviews is prepared. The outcome of the passenger survey is delivered at one of the major national airline companies. They define the key in-flight food and drink service variables according to the passenger seat class and examine the relationships between efficiency, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Finally, we conclude the paper with the results implications, study limitations, and future needs for research.

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## 2. Review of literature

Mehran Nejati and Mostafa Nejati, 2008 have ranked the service quality factors in the airlines with the different approach in their analysis titled, "Ranking airlines' service quality factors using a fuzzy method: review of the Iranian society." The outcome of this paper shows that the most important airline quality factors in the eyes of Iranian customers are "Flight safety," "Excellent appearance of flight crew" and "Offering highest possible quality services to customers 24 h a day."

Passenger satisfaction has become critically important in airline operations. R. Archana and Dr. M.V. Subha [1] analysed factors which have a positive effect on the quality of service and which have the least significant impact on the quality of service in international air travel.

In the study entitled "Satisfaction with Airline Service Quality: Familiarity Breeds Contempt," [5] examined the frequency-of-flight problems and the disparities between the level of satisfaction of frequent and non-frequent flyers and the value assigned to the overall quality of airline service and select attributes. The results indicate that the more passengers travel, the degree of satisfaction with the overall airline efficiency and select attributes decreases.

[2], in their research titled, "Customer service in the aviation industry" An exploratory analysis of UAE airports", have analyzed the ways to improve the customer satisfaction with regard to the aviation industry in the country.

In his research entitled "The impact of airline service quality on passenger satisfaction and loyalty," [6] focused on how customer satisfaction is affected by the airport's pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight quality experience. The findings suggested that airline should develop strategies to improve the quality of service, such as achieving the optimal level of service for passengers, improving the quality of in-flight meals, efficiently addressing service problems, creating flexible reservation and ticketing systems, making convenient passenger schedules and reducing them.

David Mc. In its analysis entitled "Quality of service and customer satisfaction in the airline industry: a comparison between legacy airlines and low-cost airlines," A Baker, 2013 conducted this study to compare customer satisfaction and quality of service with respect to the quality dimensions of airlines and also to assess the relationship between the quality of service dimensions and passenger quality.

Hyeon-Cheol Kim, Bee-Lia Chua, Sanghyeop Lee, Huey-Chern Boo & Heesup Han, 2015, in their research titled "Understanding Airline Travelers' Perceptions of Well-Being: The Role of Cognition, Emotion, and Sensory Experiences in Airline Lounges" investigated the relationships among cognition, emotion, sensory, well-being perception, satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and intention to revisit airline lounges. Results of the structural analysis revealed that travelers' overall perceptions of well-being were more dependent on the cognitive and sensory dimensions of the lounge experience, and cognitive evaluation was more influential than sensory evaluation in enhancing this perception of well-being.

Ana Filipa Luís Fialho [3] has stated the influence of in-flight ambience, space and personnel on quality of relationships. Among the three flight characteristics considered in the model (ambient in-flight, space / function and staff), ambience in flights has no significant effect on interaction for both low cost and daily businesses.

In their research entitled "Factors That Affect Customer Satisfaction in Airline Industry in Malaysia," Matiullah Saadat, Tahani Rashed Tahbet and Mohammad Asif Mannan, 2018 reported the effect of the service strategy on customer satisfaction in AirAsia Malaysia. Food service and ground staff influence customer satisfaction as a result of the report, but the analysis also shows that

measurable features, flight attendance and online service do not affect customer satisfaction.

Dr. R. Bhuvaneshwaran, Dr. R. Venkatasamy and Prof. R. Ramarajan, 2018, in their research titled, "Service Quality towards Customer Satisfaction in Low Cost Airline Industries" have done this research to determine the relationship between service quality customer satisfaction and service environment, employee approaches, efficiency of the services.

Komal Chopra and Ruby Chanda, 2019 examined the value of consumer experience for an airline industry and concluded that trust in the brand is the most important factor in consumer experience and has a positive relationship with loyalty and advocacy, whereas factors such as dynamic pricing can have a negative effect on loyalty and unique services can have a negative effect.

Nathalie Martel and Prianka N Seneviratne, in their research titled, "Analysis of Factors Influencing Quality of Service in Passenger Terminal Buildings" have focused on many different factors to be considered other than space or time when it comes to evaluating Quality of Services from the passengers' point of view. In the conclusion it is shown that 53 percent of the respondents believed that information is the most important factor. Similarly, for the waiting areas the most important factor was the availability of seats and for the processing elements it was the waiting time.

HakJun Song, Wenjia Ruan and Yunmi Park [4], in their research titled, "Effects of Service Quality, Corporate Image, and Customer Trust on the Corporate Reputation of Airlines" have stated the causal relationships among the perceived service quality, corporate image, customer trust, and corporate reputation of Asiana Airline in South Korea using SERVQUAL measures. The results showed the responsiveness and reliability of service quality significantly affect corporate image and customer trust, whereas tangibles, empathy, and assurance of service quality are not significant antecedents of corporate image and customer trust.

## 3. Conceptual framework

Fig. 1 shows the Total Conceptual Framework.

## 4. Research methodology

This study is conducted with two objectives. These are:

- The main objective of this study is to examine the satisfaction of passengers on service quality of different airlines.
- To explore the level of passengers' satisfaction with the service quality on Indian airlines in terms of three dimensions of service quality instrument i.e., in-flight ambient conditions, relationship quality of the crew and other services.

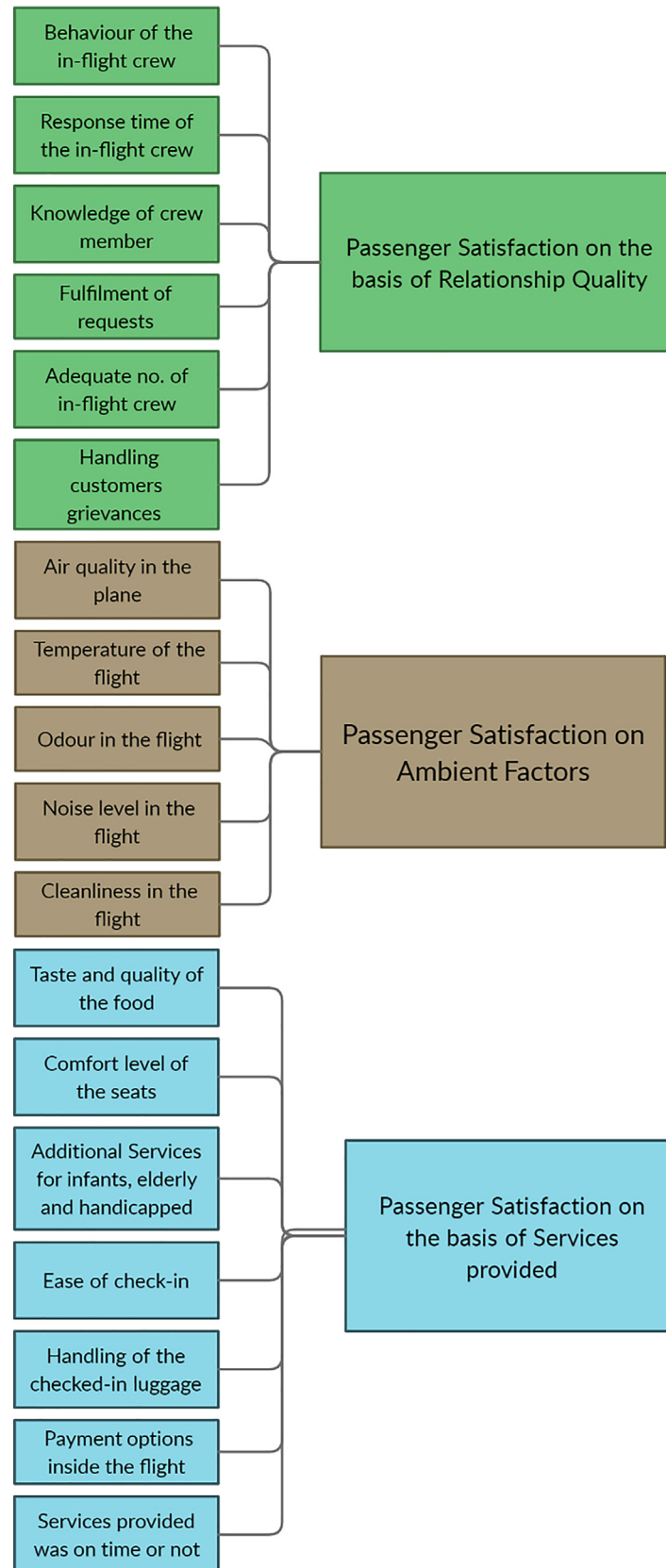
### 4.1. Data collection

The study was carried out by collecting primary data for the survey. Primary data was collected from the Flight travellers in India. The data was selected with the help of a self-administered questionnaire which was designed with the help of institutional mentor.

### 4.2. Types of sampling

Simple Random Sampling: Random sampling is a procedure for sampling from a population in which the selection of a sample unit is based on chance and every element of the population has a known, non-zero probability of being selected.

Number of samples used: 148 responses.



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual framework.

4.3. Tool used

- SPSS has been used to analyze the data.
- Hypothesis
- H<sub>0</sub> – Null Hypothesis
- H<sub>1</sub> – Alternate Hypothesis

  1. H<sub>1a</sub>: There is no significant association between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction
  2. H<sub>1b</sub>: There is a significant association between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction
  3. H<sub>2a</sub>: There is no significant association between Ambient Conditions and Customer Satisfaction
  4. H<sub>2b</sub>: There is a significant association between Ambient Conditions and Customer Satisfaction
  5. H<sub>3a</sub>: There is no significant association between Relationship Quality and Customer Satisfaction
  6. H<sub>3b</sub>: There is a significant association between Relationship Quality and Customer Satisfaction

4.4. Statistical tool

In this study Regression Analysis used helps to analyse the association between three different factors. This study covers a sample of 148 respondents and the survey was conducted nation wise during Nov-Jan 2020. Sampling was done by sending a google form to the respondents randomly. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section reveals the demographic profile of the respondents and second, third and fourth sections were designed to evaluate the overall experiences they receive from the airlines and the last section reveals whether the respondents would travel using the same airlines again or not. The questions were phrased in the form of statements scored on a 5-point Likert type scale, ranking from 1 to 5. The Statistical Tool Questionnaire is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Statistical tool questionnaire.

Measures	Variables	Scale
Passenger Satisfaction on Ambient Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air quality in the plane</li> <li>• Temperature of the flight</li> <li>• Odour in the flight</li> <li>• Noise level in the flight</li> <li>• Cleanliness in the flight</li> </ul>	5 Point Likert scale
Passenger Satisfaction on the basis of Relationship Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour of the in-flight crew</li> <li>• Response time of the in-flight crew</li> <li>• Knowledge of crew member</li> <li>• Fulfilment of requests</li> <li>• Adequate no. of in-flight crew</li> <li>• Handling customers grievances</li> </ul>	5 Point Likert scale
Passenger Satisfaction on the basis of Services provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taste and quality of the food</li> <li>• Comfort level of the seats</li> <li>• Additional Services for infants, elderly and handicapped</li> <li>• Ease of check-in</li> <li>• Handling of the checked-in luggage</li> <li>• Payment options inside the flight</li> <li>• Services provided was on time or not</li> </ul>	5 Point Likert scale

Gender

148 responses

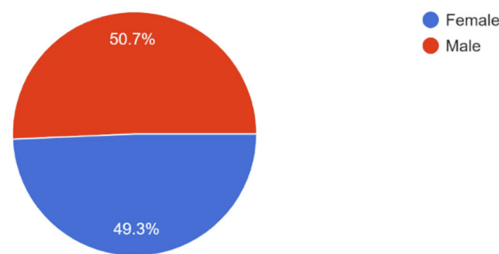


Fig. 2. Gender chart.

The above Fig. 2 shows Gender chart shows that of the 148 respondents 50.7% were male and 49.3% were female respondents.

The above Fig. 3 Age in Years chart shows that of the 148 respondents 41.9% were of the age group 15–23, 39.2% were of the age group 24–30, 12.8% were of the age group 31–40 and rest were from the age group 41–50 and above 50.

The above Fig. 4 Highest Qualification chart shows that of the 148 respondents 47.3% were Post-Graduates, 36.5% were Graduates, 9.5% were Secondary School pass out and rest had completed their diplomas and doctorates.

The above Fig. 5 Employment Status chart shows that of the 148 respondents 50% were students, 20.9% were employed, 16.2% were self-employed, and the rest were either home-makers or not employed.

The above Fig. 6 Average Income chart shows that of the 148 respondents 58.8% earned less than 5 lakhs per annum, 16.2% earned between 5 and 10 lakhs per annum, 13.5% earned more than 20 lakhs and 11.5% earned between 10 and 20 lakhs.

5. Descriptive statistics

The Table 2 Gender sample from which data was collected comprised of 73 Female and 75 Male participants who took part in the surveying process.

The Table 3 Age in Years sample from which data was collected comprised of 62 individuals from the age category 15–23 years, 58 individuals from the age category 24–30 years, 19 individuals from the age category 31–40 years, 5 individuals from the age category 41–50 years and 4 individuals from the age category above 50 years.

The Table 4 Highest Qualification shows Majority of the individuals who took part in the survey had completed their post-

Age in Years

148 responses

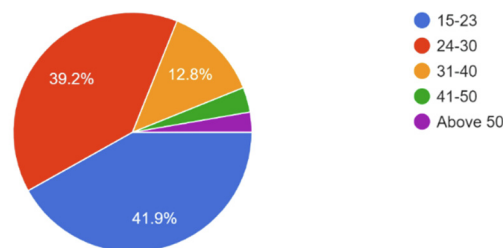


Fig. 3. Age in Years chart.

Highest Qualification

148 responses

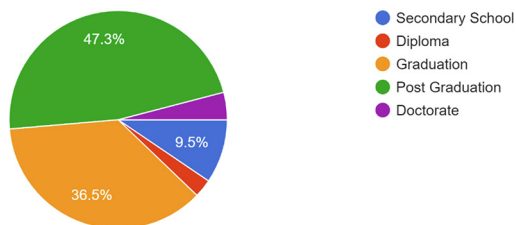


Fig. 4. Highest qualification chart.

What is your current employment status?

148 responses

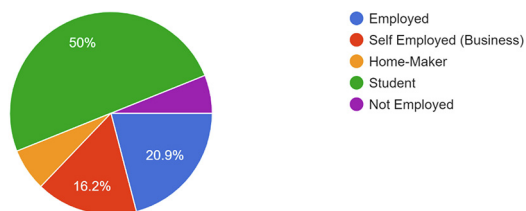


Fig. 5. Employment status chart.

Average Income per annum

148 responses

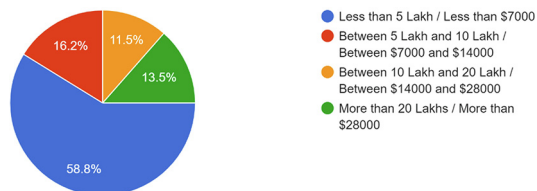


Fig. 6. Average income chart.

graduation, followed by Graduation, secondary school, doctorate and diploma.

The Table 5 Current Employment Status shows Majority of the individuals who took part in the survey were students, followed

by respondents who are employed, respondents who are self-employed, home-makers and not employed.

The Table 6 Average Income per annum, Of the 148 respondents, 87 have and income of less than 5 lakhs per annum, 24 have an income between 5 lakhs and 10 lakhs, 17 have an income between 10 lakhs and 20 lakhs and 20 have an income of more than 20 lakhs.

Table 7 shows Purpose of Travelling, Of the 148 respondents, 93 had travelled for a Holiday, 29 for education, 19 for Business and 7 for pilgrimage.

The Table 8 KMO and Bartlett's Test shows the KMO Statistic of 0.683 is large (greater than 0.5). Hence Regression is considered to be an appropriate technique for further analysis of the data.

Table 9 Reliability Statistics shows the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for a total of 21 items is measured to be 0.837, indicating that the measures have acceptable internal consistency. Table 10 Communalities shows the Initial and Extracted values.

5.1. Communalities

The table of communalities shows how much of the variance (i.e. the communality value which should be more than 0.5 is to be considered for the analysis, further. The variables are not to be considered from further steps for factor analysis if they are less than 0.5) in the variables has been accounted for by the extracted factors.

5.2. Regression analysis

Dependent Variables: Customer Satisfaction

Independent Variables: Service Quality, Ambient Conditions, Relationship Quality

Table 11 shows the Model Summary with the data.

From Table 12 ANOVA table, null hypothesis is examined, i.e. there is no impact of the independent variables on the dependent variables against the alternate hypothesis. i.e. the factors like, Service Quality, Ambient Conditions, Relationship Quality have an impact on Customer Satisfaction.

P-value from the ANOVA Table is 0.000 which is lesser than the significance 5% and this leads to rejection of Null Hypothesis and say that there exists a significant impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

The adjusted R-Square value is 0.527 this means that the regression analysis can explain 52.7% of the data.

The Model Summary shows a Durbin-Watson value of 1.958 which is very close to 2. This helps in analysing whether the resid-

Table 2

Gender.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	73	49.3	49.3	49.3
	Male	75	50.7	50.7	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

Age in years.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15-23	62	41.9	41.9	41.9
	24-30	58	39.2	39.2	81.1
	31-40	19	12.8	12.8	93.9
	41-50	5	3.4	3.4	97.3
	Above 50	4	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4**  
Highest qualification.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Secondary School	14	9.5	9.5	9.5
	Diploma	4	2.7	2.7	12.2
	Graduation	54	36.5	36.5	48.6
	Post-Graduation	70	47.3	47.3	95.9
	Doctorate	6	4.1	4.1	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5**  
Current employment status.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Employed	31	20.9	20.9	20.9
	Self Employed	24	16.2	16.2	37.2
	Home-Maker	10	6.8	6.8	43.9
	Student	74	50.0	50.0	93.9
	Not Employed	9	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6**  
Average income per annum.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 5 Lakhs	87	58.8	58.8	58.8
	Between 5 Lakhs & 10 Lakhs	24	16.2	16.2	75.0
	Between 10 Lakhs & 20 Lakhs	17	11.5	11.5	86.5
	More than 20 Lakhs	20	13.5	13.5	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

**Table 7**  
Purpose of travelling.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Business	19	12.8	12.8	12.8
	Holiday/Leisure	93	62.8	62.8	75.7
	Education	29	19.6	19.6	95.3
	Pilgrimage	7	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

**Table 8**  
KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		683
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2090.874
	Df	153
	Sig.	0.000

**Table 9**  
Reliability statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.837	21

uals are correlated or not. Here the residuals are not correlated. In the [Table 13](#) Coefficients<sup>a</sup> is explained.

## 6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect on passenger comfort of the in-flight quality of service. This research suggests that airline marketing managers have to develop different approaches to provide customers with assured quality services. Dimensions of airline operation have been shown to have important and positive influence on the airline identity and the loyalty

wishes of the travellers. In this report, travellers are satisfied with the service that airline companies provide and the total services that they provide. The passengers are satisfied with the quality of services provided in in-flight service, remote in-flight service and back office operations. The passengers are highly rated to 9 W airlines from three styles of journey class options. While analysing passenger demographic profile, more often use flights are used by educated and high-income passengers. Failure to provide passengers with quality services can damage the airline's image and cause negative effects on the behavioural intentions of passengers. Such results suggest that in-flight service quality of airline companies relies on the different delivery methods that have been implemented.

## 7. Limitations and suggestions for future research

As with all studies, there were certain limitations to the present research. Second, the measurements of the physical surroundings of passengers that vary depending on the location of their seats (e.g. a seat in the centre of the plane, a seat at the back of the plane) aspect not carefully examined in this analysis. Of eg, airplane air in the front / back of the plane appears to be worse than middle air during a trip. Locating or choosing a seat can be critical factors in the assessment and decision-making process of passengers upon booking. Future research should consider the impact of seat location on the behaviours of passengers buying and taking decisions.

**Table 10**  
Communalities.

	Initial	Extraction
Rate the airlines on the following ambient conditions The air	1.000	0.779
Rate the airlines on the following ambient conditions The temp	1.000	0.723
Rate the airlines on the following ambient conditions The odor	1.000	0.763
Rate the airlines on the following ambient conditions The 2ise	1.000	0.656
Rate the airlines on the following ambient conditions Clean lin	1.000	0.676
Rate the airlines on the following Relationship Quality1 being	1.000	0.718
Rate the airlines on the following Relationship Quality1 being	1.000	0.775
Rate the airlines on the following Relationship Quality1 being	1.000	0.825
Rate the airlines on the following Relationship Quality1 being	1.000	0.800
Rate the airlines on the following Relationship Quality1 being	1.000	0.801
Rate the airlines on the following Relationship Quality1 being	1.000	0.796
Rate the airlines on the basis of the following Services 1 be in	1.000	0.537
Rate the airlines on the basis of the following Services 1 be in	1.000	0.693
Rate the airlines on the basis of the following Services 1 be in	1.000	0.713
Rate the airlines on the basis of the following Services 1 be in	1.000	0.769
Rate the airlines on the basis of the following Services 1 be in	1.000	0.582
Rate the airlines on the basis of the following Services 1 be in	1.000	0.612
Rate the airlines on the basis of the following Services 1 be in	1.000	0.691

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Table 11**  
Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.732 <sup>a</sup>	0.537	0.527	1.25322	1.958

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Quality, Ambient Conditions, Relationship Quality.

b. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction.

**Table 12**  
ANOVA.<sup>a</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	46.815	3	15.605	9.936	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	226.160	144	1.571		
	Total	272.975	147			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction.

**Table 13**  
Coefficients<sup>a</sup>.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.		
1	B	Std. Error	Beta			
	(Constant)	1.210	0.532	2.273	0.025	
	Ambient Conditions	0.110	0.206	0.058	0.535	0.039
	Relationship Quality	0.205	0.226	0.113	0.904	0.368
	Service Quality	0.443	0.195	0.278	2.270	0.025

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction.

Second, in order to achieve the current study goals more fully and to analyse the results more extensively, this study did not examine the effect of demographic factors on the decision formulation of passengers. Nevertheless, it may be possible that in the decision-making processes of air travellers, different demographic and socioeconomic factors are essential engines. Checking our theoretical framework would be a valuable path for future studies by considering the position of such characteristics.

Third, the empirical findings of this study were based on data for a particular airline company from international / national flights, so they cannot possibly represent the entire low-cost global airline market. A greater sampling range would improve findings' applicability and is therefore recommended for future research.

The fourth limitation concerns the adoption of only two general attributes of the physical-environment. Although ambience and service/function are considered to be critical atmospheric in-flight factors, other physical environmental factors (e.g., decoration, lighting) may also be important in a situation of in-flight service consumption. Therefore, checking the effect of other atmospheric in future studies would be most important.

Fifth, an inquiry that examines travellers from a more diverse nation pool investigating the impact of competing cultures on the decision-making of low-cost airline customers will greatly improve our overall understanding of the psychosocial factors at work in this field. Ultimately, with a view to possible avenues for study, it would also be vitally interesting to examine the potential

impact of in-flight physical surroundings on the evolving categories of passengers or destination tourists transported to destinations by low-cost airlines.

## 8. Implications

Considering the fact that 60 percent of our population are millennials and that they are highly active on the internet, companies should focus on good service quality to maintain the brand name that these carriers have achieved. From the analysis of the data that has been collected it can be clearly seen that factors like Ambient Conditions and Service Quality have a much larger impact on the satisfaction of a customer rather than Relationship Quality. Seeing the results of this survey, airline companies can focus more on the Ambient Factors and the Service Quality in-flight and also keep a brief watch on the Relationship Quality.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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