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## THE EFFECT OF SERVICE QUALITY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY IN TANZANIA

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The development of airlines owned or managed by private parties today shows a fairly high development so that the level of competition to get customers is increasingly difficult. One of the strategies carried out by airline management is to provide optimal service, it is expected that those who provide flight services will meet the expectations of their customers, able to win the competition which ultimately gets maximum profit.

**Purpose:** This study is intended to determine the results of service quality on the satisfaction of Airline clients in Tanzania, especially Precision Air Limited customers

**Method:** The explanatory study designed the data collected using interview method of 400 customers of Precision Air Limited, non-probability sampling procedure was used to select a sample of respondents from the target population, multiple regression analysis to answer the research objectives. Key information in the study was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Pearson correlation was carried out to assess the strength and direction of linear relationships between variables, multiple regression models at a significance level of 5% were used to determine the relationship between dimensions of service quality and customer satisfaction

**Results:** The results in this study show that the findings spread that the five spheres of facility excellence are positively related to customer satisfaction. Relying on multiple regression results, it was found that the significance value of each independent variable was tangible 0.674, reliability 0.001, assurance 0.449, and empathy 0.000

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that service quality is seen from three dimensions: dependability, receptiveness, understanding have a positive and significant effect on client satisfaction. Two dimensions: tangibility and guarantee as part of it have a positive effect but do not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction of Precision Air Limited.

### INTRODUCTION

The development of airline services from year to year has increasingly become a concern of the public because this business is one of the important donors to economic development. In adding to increasing world trade activities, the airline industry also allows

for faster and easier tourist activities by expanding recreational and tourism destinations that grow strong throughout the world. This can also be seen from the large number of airline industries involved in the business.

The market competition between airlines has become more intense and the delivery of high-quality service is essential for the airlines' survival. Thus, the issue of service quality is receiving greater attention and has become a critical antecedent of behavioral intentions than ever before (Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015). The industry plays an important role in facilitating economic growth in world trade, international investment, and tourism. It is central to the globalization taking place in many other industries in the world (Wirtz & Johnston, 2003). Judging from the size of the marketplace, the airline business is fairly tempting, every day around the world there are millions of passengers flying in the air, which is large market size. Demand for air transportation may still increase, especially during the holiday season, such as school holidays, religious holidays, or high seasons.

In Tanzania, the airline industry is a useful means of transportation in all regions of the country and plays an important role in the tourism sector, making Tanzania a tourist destination. Tourists from various regions of the world come to Tanzania by international flights and are flown to several destinations in the country by local airlines.

The multiple effects of the airline business lately in Tanzania are quite high because it stimulates the growth of new service industries such as hotels, catering and others. So, labor is needed to increase deregulated economic growth more quickly which makes licensing easier to open up new competitive opportunities in the market. In Tanzania, airlines need to make significant improvements and changes in providing better services and services to realize the increasing challenges and opportunities in the air transportation market. The efforts invested so far have not achieved the competitive quality offered by international airlines. Local airlines have great challenges and opportunities for the future when they try to expand their operations to an international level where there are several large airlines on the African continent such as South African Airways, Kenya Airways, Ethiopian Airlines and other major airlines operating.

Precision Air was incorporated in Tanzania in January 1991 as a private airline and started operations in 1993. Its initial line of business mainly entailed providing connections to tourists visiting the rich natural attractions of Serengeti National Park, Ngorongoro Crater, in northern Tanzania, the Zanzibar Island in the Indian ocean and other parts of the country from Arusha town as its base. Precision Air is currently headquartered in Dar es Salaam, the commercial city of the United Republic of Tanzania. The airline's main services include; scheduled flights, chartered and cargo air services which are growing at an impressive rate. In May 2009, Tanzania Civil Aviation Authority (TCAA) granted the company a self-handling license and ground handling operations started at the beginning of November. The airline is seeking a third-party ground handling license from TCAA. In April 2011, the airline became a public company (Xu, Pham, & Dao, 2020). Service Quality expectations in air travel are extremely important in consumer's behavior Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, (1985), as they affect their satisfaction and also lead to buying decisions (Park, Robertson, & Wu, 2004). Airline passengers understand service quality as a multi-dimensional variable ABLL Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, (1988) and satisfaction is measured by overall service experience based on various factors, including the perception

of service quality and also their mood, emotions and other social and economic factors (Tolpa, 2012).

The rapid development in the airline industry made Precision Air Limited have to work extra hard in carrying out their business. Many domestic and foreign competitors made Precision Air Limited give extra attention to satisfy their customers so they would not lose their loyal customers, Precision Air Limited tried to maintain rates by adjusting the maximum service quality, intense competition in tariffs that occur in airline services on one positive side and the other hand can be negative. The positive part, the number of airplane passengers will rise or even the interest of the public to use flight services will be more positive than when using transportation services by land. On the negative side, because the number of passengers increases, comfort and flight safety get less attention.

**Table 1 Data on the number of Precision Air Limited passengers per year 2012-2017**

Year	Total passenger
2012	825,159
2013	895,654
2014	687,981
2015	451,769
2016	374,877
2017	408,807

Source: (Precision Air Annual Report, 2012-2017)

The table above shows that the total number of passengers from 2013 to 2016 was continuing to decline. This may be caused by consumer satisfaction or increasingly high tariff competition where competitors offer increasingly competitive and affordable prices for many people.

However, from 2016 to 2017 the total number of passengers in one year had increased. This might be due to an increase in Precision Air in providing the best quality service for passengers.

The airline industry in Tanzania makes significant contributions to the economy of the country. It facilitates the efficient operation of many other economic sectors such as manufacturing, tourism and trade (Makubo, 2015). Additionally, the sector creates employment for the Tanzanians who are working in airline companies.

However, companies in this industry are facing several challenges. One of the challenges is high competition from each other. According to Fageda, Flores-Fillol, & Lin, (2020), the two main areas of competition in the airline industry are price and quality. Additionally, Loureiro & Fialho, (2017) have got that two mainly significant features for the client are little fees and high service. Out of the two to (Chou, Liu, Huang, Yih, & Han, 2011; Fageda, Jiménez, & Suárez-Alemán, (2014) claim that quality is of increasing importance in the airline market.

Hence to survive in the airline business, many companies are investing in service quality. This is because the quality creates the satisfaction of travel customers and makes companies retain and gain more customers. This is supported by researchers who found out that quality is important for business success (Afridi, Li, & Ren, 2015).

Most scholars have looked at the connection between service excellence and client fulfilment in Tanzania. Just to mention a few, Burhan & Kalinga, (2018) researched in the

hotel industry, (Shangali NajafAbadi, Mohammadzadeh, Khosravipour, & Yazdanpanah, 2015; Tarimo, 2015) in the banking sector and Nyangarika, (2016) in the shipping industry with the case in Tanzania postal services. To the finest of the researcher's literature review, it was found that no study has been found to investigate the connection between service quality and client satisfaction in the airline industry. Therefore, this study examines the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in the Tanzanian airline business, a case of Precision Air Limited. The main variable was to examine the effect of service quality attributes on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Tanzania.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopted positivism as the main philosophical position since the work used based on quantitative methods and some theories which already in existence and the main variables identified and measured based on the hypothesis formed. The study conducted with a quantitative descriptive approach and the type of case study research uses an explanatory design. In explanatory design methods, such as interviews, observation, surveys. The nature of this research was explanatory research, is research that purposes to clarify the nature of the ongoing situation at the time of the study and examine the causes of these symptoms. This study requires more descriptive information analysis to determine its nature in more detail and get more insight for producing the right information.

The kinds and bases of information used in this research were key data, in this research the information was gathered and was collected through fieldwork from airline service customers based on questionnaires, interviews, observations. The actual and up-to-date main data was obtained directly in the field.

The data analysis model that was used in this study is multiple regression analysis. This analysis is used to analyze the influence of independent variables consisting of tangibility (X1), empathy (X2), responsiveness (X3), assurance (X4), reliability (X5) on the dependent variable, customer satisfaction (Y). The following is the formulation of the equation of the multiple regression analysis model in this study:

$$Y_i = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + e$$

Whereas:

$Y_i$  = Customer Satisfaction;  $X_1$  = Tangibility;  $X_2$  = Empathy;  $X_3$  = Responsiveness;  $X_4$  = Assurance;  $X_5$  = Reliability;  $b_0$  = constants;  $b_1..b_5$  = Independent variable regression coefficient;  $e$  = estimation error.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this study, there are 400 feedbacks from the population sample. All the feedbacks were complete that is no missing data in the questionnaires. All items show strong consistency and its constructs are indicated by values of Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.70 as suggested by Hair *et al*, (1998). This suggests that items concerned adequately measure a single construct for each tested variable (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and satisfaction). Reliability measurements for each construct are shown in Table 1

**Table 2 Reliability Statistic**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Tangibility	,805	5
Reliability	,832	5
Responsiveness	,796	5
Assurance	,753	5
Empathy	,759	4
Satisfaction	,784	4

Source: SPSS Output

For construct validity in terms of the discriminate validity test, correlation analysis between the variables was performed. The result shows that correlations are low with values no higher than 0.9 as proposed by (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998). This indicates that the constructs are distinct from others and are deemed to be an acceptable level of discrimination. Consequently, content validity is also established. Table 4.7 shows the analysis of the correlation between variables.

**Table 3 Pearson Correlation**

Variables	Tangibility	Reliability	Responsive	Assurance	Empathy
Tangibility	Pearson Correlation	.772**	.744**	.675**	.652**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.772**	1	.775**	.682**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.744**	.775**	1	.754**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	400	400	400	400
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.675**	.687**	.754**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	400	400	400	400
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.652**	.682**	.734**	.752**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output

A validity test shows a measure of the level of validity or accuracy of an instrument, a valid instrument has high validity. Testing the validity of each item in this study used item analysis, which is to correlate each score of each item with the total score, which is the number of each item score. In this case, the correlation technique to determine the validity of this item until now is the most widely used. Furthermore, in providing an interpretation of the correlation coefficient, where items that have a positive correlation with the criteria (total score) and high correlation, indicate that the item has high validity as well, According to Sugiyono, (2013) the minimum requirement to be considered a valid instrument item is the validity index value  $\geq 0.3$ , then all statements that have a correlation level below 0.3 must be corrected or repeated because they are considered invalid, The higher the correlation between the criterion and the predictor indicates the greater the predictive validity (Mohajan, 2017). state if the correlation is perfect, that is 1, the

prediction is also perfect. Most of the correlations are only modest, somewhere between 0.3 and 0.6.

**Table 4 Tangible Validity Test Results**

Indicator	R-value	R-Critical	Declaration
Aircraft type	0.765	0.3	Valid
Sophisticated equipment	0.758	0.3	Valid
The facilities used by Precision Air	0.780	0.3	Valid
The neatness of the employees	0.680	0.3	Valid
The brochure material introducing	0.771	0.3	Valid

Source: SPSS Output

Table 3 above shows that the five-question instruments from tangible variables, valid because the R-value is greater than the R-Critical.

**Table 5 Reliability Validity Test Results**

Indicator	R-value	R-Critical	Declaration
The accuracy of keeping promises	0.824	0.3	Valid
Punctuality	0.808	0.3	Valid
Suitability of implementation	0.718	0.3	Valid
Concern to a problem	0.790	0.3	Valid
Sincerity in resolving customer problems	0.792	0.3	Valid

Source: SPSS Output

Based on Table 4 above shows that of the 5 measurement indicators about reliability with an R-value greater than R-Critical, the questionnaire that has been compiled is declared valid.

**Table 6 Validity Test Results**

Indicator	R-value	R-Critical	Declaration
Information clarity	0.761	0.3	Valid
Service speed	0.762	0.3	Valid
Accuracy of service	0.695	0.3	Valid
Willingness to help	0.772	0.3	Valid
Willingness to respond	0.774	0.3	Valid

Source: SPSS Output

Table 5 above shows that the five-question instruments from the responsiveness variable are valid because the R-value is greater than the R-Critical.

**Table 7 Assurance Validity Test Results**

Indicator	R-value	R-Critical	Declaration
Trust	0.782	0.3	Valid
Sense of security	0.744	0.3	Valid
Convenience	0.608	0.3	Valid
Courtesy	0.712	0.3	Valid
Insurance Certainty	0.720	0.3	Valid

Source: SPSS Output

Based on Table 6 above shows that of the 5 measurement indicators about assurance with an R-value greater than R-Critical, the questionnaire that has been compiled is declared valid.

**Table 8 Empathy Validity Test Results**

Indicator	R-value	R-Critical	Declaration
Individual attention	0.806	0.3	Valid
Convenient operating hours	0.693	0.3	Valid
Specific understanding of needs	0.792	0.3	Valid
Build interest	0.789	0.3	Valid

Source: SPSS Output

Based on Table 7 above shows that of the 5 measurement indicators about empathy with an R-value greater than R-Critical, the questionnaire that has been compiled is declared valid.

**Table 9 Customer Satisfaction Validity Test Results**

Indicator	R-value	R-Critical	Declaration
Quality of service	0.723	0.3	Valid
Ticket price	0.847	0.3	Valid
Service quality guarantee	0.786	0.3	Valid
Costs set	0.816	0.3	Valid

Source: SPSS Output

Table 8 above shows that the five-question instruments from the customer satisfaction variable are valid due to the R-value is greater than the R-Critical.

**Linear Regression Analysis**

Based on table 4.9 below, the multiple regression can be determined:  $Y = 36 X5$ . Based on the equation can show that the regression coefficient of all independent variables shows a positive value. This means that all independent variables have a positive/direct relationship to the dependent variable, of all the independent variables used which gave the most dominant influence was empathy with a regression coefficient of 0.246.

**Table 10 Multiple Regression Analysis**

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1(Constant)	3.467	.632		5.484.000	
X1 = Tangibility	.020	.048	.026	.421	.674
X2 = Reliability	.168	.051	.219	3.314.001	
X3 = Responsiveness	.191	.056	.235	3.375.001	
X4 = Assurance	.041	.054	.048	.759	.449
X5 = Empathy	.244	.060	.246	4.048.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Y

Source: SPSS Output

**Hypothesis Test and Partial Test**

There are two methods to regulate the effect of an independent variable on the outcome objective is significant or not. The first method is the result of Sig <0.05 or smaller than 5%, then the predictor variable (X) significantly influences the outcome variable (Y), the second method is to compare t arithmetic with t table. Can be said to be significant if t-values > t-distribution. The T-distribution value is 1.966. The following hypothesis was tested to determine their significance to client gratification.

The findings above in table 4.9 indicate the five-service quality dimension is definitely connected to client gratification. Based on the results of multiple regression in table 4.9, it is found that the significance worth of each predictor variable is tangible 0.674, reliability 0.001, responsiveness 0.001, assurance 0.449, and empathy 0.000. From these findings, can be decided that reliability, responsiveness, and empathy have a significant

effect on customer satisfaction because they have a significant result  $<0.05$  while tangibility and pledge variables do not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction because they have  $\text{sig} > 0.05$ .

In table 4.9 is obtained t arithmetic for five independent variables, including tangible 0.421, reliability 3.314, responsiveness 3.375, assurance 0.759, empathy 4,048. From this finding, the variables that take a significant effect on customer satisfaction are reliability, responsiveness and empathy because each of these variables has a value of t-values  $> 1.966$  while tangible and assurance do not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction because both of these variables have t-values  $< 1.966$ .

### **Coefficient of Determination**

The constant of resolve is the ability of all predictors variables to clarify the outcome variable. On table 4.10 is shown Adjusted R Square Determination Coefficient of 0.475 or 47.5% which state that the skill of objective X1, X2, X3, X4, and X5 in explaining the Y variable, is 47.5% though the residual 52.5% is clarified by other variables outside of this research variable. R of 0.694 indicates that the multiple correlations are strong.

**Table 11 Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,694 <sup>a</sup>	,482	,475	1,343

Source: SPSS Output

- a. Predictors: (Constant), X5 = Empathy, X1 = Tangible, X4 = Assurance, X2 = Reliability, X3 = Responsiveness
- b. b. Dependent Variable: Y = Customer Satisfaction

The SERVQUAL instrument has a useful diagnostic role to play in assessing and monitoring service quality in Precision Air, enabling Precision Air to identify where improvements are needed from the customer's viewpoint. From the statistical result, it was confirmed that the service quality and customer satisfaction scale was reliable and valid instruments for measuring the relationship in this study and also the research result gives several managerial implications.

### **The Effect of Tangibility on Customer Satisfaction**

Tangibility is the first dimension of service quality in the SERVQUAL model that this study has used. According to Anantharanthan Parasuraman et al., (1985), tangibility: includes physical aspects connected with services such as instruments and equipment, persons, physical facilities like buildings and nice decoration and other observable service facilities. Physical aspects of Precision Air aircraft can be seen from the types of aircraft, sophistication, facilities, neatness of employees and the brochure material they have. Based on the descriptive analysis in Table 4.5 that some respondents argue that the tangibility variable offered by Precision Air has a poor rating with a minimum value of one to two. The study has found that tangibility has a positive but has no significant effect on customer satisfaction. Tangibles variable is the ability of a company to show its existence to external parties. The physical appearance of the Precision Air aircraft can be seen from the type of sophisticated aircraft, facilities, neatness of its employees and brochure materials, Hossain (2012) whereas tangibility represents a non-significant effect on customer satisfaction although it also has a positive correlation with customer satisfaction the findings in this research found that tangibility has a positive but not significant relationship, this proves that this variable does not seem to be paid much attention in Tanzania and pay more attention to other variables and also It can be explained there is a altering tendency and participants no longer treat tangibility as an important measure in Tanzania because

customers prioritize flight time availability and other factors. However, by showing that tangibility has a confident result on customer satisfaction the airline industry players would not disregard this measurement in their processes.

#### **The Effect of Reliability on Customer Satisfaction**

Reliability is the second dimension of service quality in the SERVQUAL model that this study has used. According to Anantharanthan Parasuraman et al., (1985), the ability of Precision Air Limited, in this case, can be seen from the following aspects: accuracy of keeping promises, timeliness, suitability of implementation, care and sincerity. Relied on the evocative analysis in table 4.5 that the more dominant respondents consider that the reliability variable offered by Precision Air Limited has a good rating with a minimum value of three. The study has found that reliability has an optimistic and important result on customer satisfaction.

#### **The Effect of Responsiveness on Customer Satisfaction**

Receptiveness is the third measurement of service quality in the SERVQUAL model that this study has used. According to Anantharanthan Parasuraman et al., (1985) the propensity and readiness of facility workers to assistance customers and please their needs, directly answer to their studies and resolve their difficulties as rapidly as likely by delivering clear information such as clarity of information, speed of service, the accuracy of service, willingness to help, willingness to respond to deliver services as promised accurately and reliably such as accuracy of keeping promises, timeliness, implementation suitability, care and sincerity. Based on table 4.5 that the more dominant respondents agree that the responsiveness variable offered by Precision Air Limited has a good rating with a minimum value of three. The study has found that responsiveness has a optimistic and important effect on customer satisfaction.

#### **The Effect of Assurance on Customer Satisfaction**

Assurance is the fourth dimension of service quality in the SERVQUAL model that this study has used. Based on table 4.5 that the more dominant respondents agree that the assurance variable offered by Precision Air Limited has a good rating with a minimum value of three. The study has found that assurance has a positive effect but not a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

This finding was supported in a study by Famiyeh, Asante-Darko, & Kwarteng, (2018) where assurance has a positive relationship with Customer Satisfaction but without significant effect. Assurance is a means of being safe, the responses state that the customers do not feel assurance is being important as part of the service quality that should be included. There are two possibilities; firstly, the customers feel that the airlines have provided enough safety and confidence in their service. Most customers started to take it for granted that there is no safety problem in dealing with any airline. Secondly, the customers have given up since all the airlines are not able to provide the level of safety expected. The customers are hopeless. According to the facts found that there have been several incidents on precision air-limited flights, including the Precision AT72 flight near Kilimanjaro on 10 Jul 2014 acting flight PW-415 from Mwanza to Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) with 40 people on board, was en route near Kilimanjaro (Tanzania) the engine suddenly stopped to the right, so the crew had to divert to Kilimanjaro. The plane landed on the runway, there were no casualties, and the second incident Precision AT72 at Zanzibar on Jun 16th, 2016, rejected takeoff due to engine fire, and the aircraft stopped on the runway and was evacuated. These events do not reduce the interest of people in Tanzania, whether Tanzanians themselves or even foreigners, to local domestic flights on

business or tourism trips instead of using buses or ferries which take longer or even international flights, this indicates that some incidents can be anticipated excellent so as not to cause casualties, in Tanzania assurance is mandatory and granted by the airline so that there are no security problems in dealing with the problem. This variable has no significance due to this variable is a component of the safety assurance offered by the airline on a mandatory basis and does not seem to be of much concern in Tanzania because of trust in the airline. In this manner, Precision Air should improve the assurance in their services. This is a way to retain the customers, and even it can be a selling point to Precision Air if they can provide better security compare to others.

### **The Effect of Empathy on Customer Satisfaction**

Empathy is the fourth dimension of service quality in the SERVQUAL model that this study has used. Based on table 4.5 that the more dominant respondents agree that the empathy variable offered by Precision Air Limited has a good rating with a minimum value of three. The study has found that empathy has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction.

Data analysis result stresses the most significant effect of Empathy on Customer satisfaction. That means Precision Air can considerably increase their customer satisfaction level if they may better perform their empathy. This result was supported by the research in my research in the Vietnamese hotel industry of Minh, Ha, Anh, & Matsui, (2015) which applied the SERVQUAL scale to measure service quality and examine the impact of these service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction. This research result stressed Empathy with the strongest impact on customer satisfaction.

## **CONCLUSION**

Issues facing airline business participants in Tanzania is high market competition among operating companies. It was observed that price and quality are areas of competition where quality is the most important one (Fageda Jiménez and Suárez-Alemán, 2012 and Chou et al, 2011). Hence, companies invest more in quality competition. This is because; quality creates customer satisfaction and creates loyal clients.

The research examined the effect of facility excellence on client fulfilment in the airline business using a SERVQUAL typical advanced by (Parasuraman et al., 1985). According to this model, service quality is measured in five dimensions, namely, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Specifically, the study examined the effect of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy on customer satisfaction.

This research used a sample of 400 passengers of the Precision Airline to collect the information by through the questionnaire method. Factor study and multiple regression analysis methods were employed to analyze the information of the study to answer the research objectives. In general, the study found three dimensions of service quality to have a positive and important result on client fulfilment. The following are the study's main conclusions.

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