

**THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE CRM PRACTICES ON PASSENGER
SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN THE INDIAN AIRLINE SECTOR**

By

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SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN THE INDIAN AIRLINE SECTOR**

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is committed to the pursuit of academic enquiry and the development of knowledge in the area of sustainable customer relationship management. This is meant to be a contribution to the current literature pool that explores the link between sustainability and customer experience in the airline industry. In the hope that it will serve as a tool to the academic and professional community, I would like to dedicate this work to develop effective and responsible CRM strategies that would contribute to the long-term satisfaction and loyalty of passengers. The present study is another piece of evidence of discipline, critical thinking, and perseverance that are core components of research. It is the result of personal effort, but it is shaped by the intellectual atmosphere of the whole, which prompted this investigation. In this spirit, the work is dedicated to future researchers who go on investigating sustainable practices that can help not just organisations, but the wider society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to recognise the assistance and guidance that I have had throughout this research to be invaluable. My mentor has been a great help to me, with his positive feedback, academic experience, and constant support obviously steering the path and quality of this dissertation. His critical observations have further developed my insight into the research area and offered clarity at each point of the study. I would also wish to thank the members of the faculty and the academic staff whose expertise and guidance helped to make this work progress. Also, I owe the participants and contributors whose insights and experiences were the basis of this research. This study was enlightening and informative as they were ready to give their opinions. Finally, I would like to recognise the unwavering support of my colleagues and faculty, whose support and feedback further enhanced my work and allowed me to successfully submit this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation will analyse how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) contributes to passenger satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainability perceptions in the Indian airline industry. This study uses an interpretivist, qualitative research design in response to the growing aviation expansion, growing customer expectations, and growing competition. Qualitative Conceptual framework semi-structured interviews and Manual Thematic Coding were used to collect data which enabled in-depth research on lived experience of passengers and perceptions towards trust, service expectations and relational outcome to Indian airlines.

The thematic analysis has identified four overriding loyalty drivers among Indian passengers:

- (1) environmental responsibility and sustainability,
- (2) trust, transparency, and privacy of data,
- (3) individualisation, customised interaction, and acknowledgment, and
- (4) responsiveness, empathy and service recovery.

All these themes underscore the importance of emotional bonding, ethical behaviour, and valuable interaction in long-term customer loyalty. The article is significant because it introduces an Indian aviation-oriented CRM Conceptual frame, and it provides a foreseeable implication to airlines who want to enhance their customer loyalty based on qualitative and people-focused CRM practises.

KEYWORDS

Customer Relationship Management (CRM); Passenger Satisfaction; Customer Loyalty; Qualitative Research; Manual Thematic Coding; Indian Airline Industry; Personalisation; Sustainability; Data Privacy; Service Experience.

List of Abbreviations

AHP – Analytic Hierarchy Process

AI – Artificial Intelligence

ATC – Air Traffic Control

ATLAS.ti – Qualitative Data Analysis Software

CAGR – Compound Annual Growth Rate

CAPA – Centre for Aviation

CCPA – California Consumer Privacy Act

CORSIA – Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation

COVID19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

CRM – Customer Relationship Management

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

DFD – Data Flow Diagram

DGCA – Directorate General of Civil Aviation (India)

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

GDS – Global Distribution System

IATA – International Air Transport Association

ICAO – International Civil Aviation organisation

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

IoT – Internet of Things

LCC – low-cost Carrier

MRO – Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul

NVivo – Qualitative Data Analysis Software

QR Code – Quick Response Code

SAF – Sustainable Aviation Fuel

SEM – Structural Equation Modelling

SERVQUAL – Service Quality Measurement Model

TOPSIS – Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution

TQM – Total Quality Management

UX – User Experience

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study examines the role of sustainable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) activities in the determination of passenger satisfaction within the Indian airline industry, which is undergoing a rapid change in response to environmental factors, digitalisation, and increased customer demands. The research is a response to a gap in the literature on CRM, in which CRM has been viewed as a technology-based or transactional process and not a practical, ethical, and sustainability-based relationship structure. Based on a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and cross-case studies, this study will examine passenger perceptions, airline strategies, and industry trends to determine the factors of CRM that most perceptively affect satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

The results indicate that more and more passengers want airlines to focus on transparency, integrity in personal data processing, environmental friendliness requirements, and service behaviours with emotional intelligence. It is revealed that sustainable CRM works in the interrelated dimensions: trust and data privacy, transparent communication, environmental initiatives, ethical service recovery, and people-centred engagement by airline staff. Other recent ones like block-chain are also identified as potential enhancers of transparency and trust in the CRM systems.

The paper underlines that price, punctuality, or convenience alone do not determine customer satisfaction anymore. Rather, it is affected by the relational and ethical observations that intensify the emotional comfort and assurance of the passengers in the long-term adherence of the airline. The study has a contribution to theory by aligning the sustainability concepts with CRM frameworks and offers practical insights to the Indian airlines that want to establish strong, trust-based customer relationships. All in all, sustainable CRM was seen as the priority of airlines to gain competitive advantage and stability in the industry in the future.

RESEARCH INTEGRATION SUMMARY

This DBA dissertation was developed in a smooth academic sequence including Concept Paper, Literature Review, and Research Methodology phases. The original concept document revealed the main CRM issues in the Indian airline industry; in particular, the necessity of sustainable, loyalty-based customer management practises. The following literature review reinforced the theoretical base using SERVQUAL, customer loyalty, and CSR structures, including the impact of personalisation, data analytics, and sustainability on passenger satisfaction. Its research methodology passed through the various phases of enquiry starting with a general review of the literature on CRM and sustainability so as to lay the theoretical basis of the study. In the research design stage, alternative methodological procedures were taken into account, but due to the necessity of further contextual and experiential understanding, a qualitative research methodology was adopted. To assess the impact of sustainable CRM practises on customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty in the Indian aviation industry, semi-structured interviews and NVivo-based thematic analysis were used. These steps combine to create a comprehensive research process that links theory to practise and provides practical knowledge on how to be a responsible and competitive airline manager.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Statement of problem

The Indian airline industry has experienced tremendous growth in the last 20 years making it one of the biggest and most competitive airline markets in the world. The industry has undergone an extremely dramatic transition in the last 2 decades in India where a market that was once state run and a limited one has been converted to one of the fastest growing aviation industries in the world. According to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (C. Senapati, 2025), India recorded over 136 million domestic passenger traffic in 2019, the third largest in the world only after the United States and China.

As this demand increases, airlines have been pressured to enhance their services, customer loyalty, and long-term relationships with passengers. But even as the industry grows, customer dissatisfaction and complaints related to servicing are on the increase. This scenario highlights the importance of enhanced Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices that are sustainable as well as efficient.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is one of the major strategic tools in this competitive environment. CRM assists airlines in attaining long term loyalty, service delivery and creating sustainable competitive advantages. Though India is full of the low-cost carriers like IndiGo who offer their services at low costs and high efficiency and reliability, the passengers are insisting that the airline company ought to be known, open and will listen to the needs which is not just the price.

The key issue is that as airlines strive to enhance customer satisfaction by employing digital solutions and tools, loyalty programmes, and promotional deals, they tend to overlook more underlying gaps in services. Delays, last minute cancellations, no transparency, communication issues during disruptions, mismanaged baggage, inconsistent in-flight services, and responsiveness to complaints are still reported by many passengers. Although CRM has been known to play a pivotal role in improving quality of services and customer satisfaction, lack of deep understanding of how sustainable CRM practices i.e. personalisation, social responsibility

and environmental stewardship influence the perception and experience of passengers in the Indian airline setting is evident.

The Indian aviation market is in a highly dynamic socioeconomic context with aggressive competition, growing middle class mobility, infrastructural limitations and growing digital dependence. The Indian airlines serve both first-time flyers and experienced passengers around the world unlike in the mature aviation markets. This duality generates contrary CRM requirements: low cost and high emotional service.

Service expectations in cultures also increase the complexity of CRM. Indian passengers assign high emotional observations to respectful communication, dignity during service recovery, and interpersonal reassurance during uncertainty. Operational failure is often emotionally forgiven when handled with sincerity and accountability. Conversely, emotional neglect during disruptions creates stronger dissatisfaction than technical failure alone. This positions India as a high emotion, high expectation CRM environment where sustainable practices must be emotionally credible to be effective.

The current research on CRM within the aviation sector is mostly addressing the issues of technological adoption, efficiencies, and service delivery without much attention to how sustainability-driven initiatives and CSR influence the behaviour of the passengers, usually, in the context of how customers perceive the personalisation, relationship-building and how sustainability observations are embedded in their travelling experiences. This is one of the underexplored areas in India where environmental issues, increasing expectations and ethical consumerism towards socially responsible business practices are transforming the decision making of customers.

The issues of cost-efficiency and sustainability dedication, regulatory standards and individualized participation are even more complicated in inculcating the CRM practices that will be both efficient and viable among the airlines. Hence, the high need to explore qualitatively the passenger experience, the stories and perception of CRM in Indian Airlines and, in particular, personalisation, integrating sustainability, and loyalty development. Through these gaps, the dissertation would appear as having a model that connects the practises of CRM to greater

satisfaction, loyalty and sustainability performances, and provide useful practical implications on the academic study as well as on the management.

The expansion further frames the study conceptually and emotionally by situating the research in the fast-changing global service environment. The contemporary airline sector has seen a clear shift in the demands of passengers with regard to increased digital exposure, ethical consciousness, and sensitivity to service experiences. The passengers are no longer measuring the airlines on the basis of the indicators of operational performance like punctuality or cost-setting. Rather, satisfaction is becoming more dependent on how airlines communicate, the fairness of their behaviour in the event of disruption as well as their responsibility in terms of environmental and social issues.

These expectations are even less simplified in the Indian aviation industry since a high price-sensitive customer and a premium expectation of frequent flyers are coexistent. Currently, airlines must strike a balance between low costs and ensuring passenger comfort and care. They have to work efficiently using technology, yet retain the personal and human touch. Meanwhile, they must demonstrate professionalism and be ethical. This paper is dedicated to this balance, in which sustainable customer relationship management (CRM) has ceased to be a support tool but an essential component of establishing good and sustainable relations between airlines and passengers.

The atmosphere within the airline sector in India is evolving fast owing to growth in digital, escalating passenger demands, and fierce rivalry. The CRM systems have ceased to be used to store the customer data. Rather, they have developed high-tech systems that assist airlines to enhance the travel experience. Airlines can communicate with customers nowadays via mobile apps, automated services, AI-driven personalisation, and predictive support, which is quicker, simpler, and more customer-oriented. The aspect of the Indian aviation market that has been largely transformed by this technological development is in the dynamics of trust, satisfaction and long-term loyalty building.

Sustainability is also one of the good reputational strengths in the airline brand perception. The Indian passengers are increasingly sensitive to environmental responsibility, carbon emission and ethical governance. CRM systems have turned into a medium of sharing sustainability stories

and turning environmental responsibility into a relationship-based trust process. By incorporating sustainability in the CRM platforms, airlines that do so successfully will enhance emotional credibility and social legitimacy.

Recovery post-pandemic has made CRM more influential as a trust stabilisation process. The transparency of the refund policy, flexible schedule, and communication of the service in real-time are more evident to the passengers than ever before. CRM platforms have evolved to be emotion reassurance platforms that handle the uncertainty, anxiety, and confidence rejuvenation in turbulent operations.

In this changing context, this paper places CRM as a technical answer but rather as a relational governance framework that incorporates digital innovation with emotional intelligence and moral responsibility in the Indian airline sector.



Figure 1: Growth of the Indian Aviation MRO Market (2021-2031)

Source: BlueWeave Consulting India Aviation MRO Market Report (2024)

Figure 1 shows the estimated Indian Aviation Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) market forecast between 2021 and 2031. The graph indicates that the market has been steadily increasing up which depicts the booming growth in the Indian aviation industry, fleet size, and demand of passengers. The trend in the consistent growth highlights how India has become one of the fastest growing aviation markets worldwide. The reasons behind this growth include

liberalisation of the aviation industry, low-cost carriers, new airport infrastructure, and the increasing middle-class travel demand. The growing MRO market trends also reflect the escalating operations intensity and the rising demand of efficient airline operation, safety, and service reliability. The opportunities and threats of this industry wide growth to Indian airlines are they have to deal with customer expectations, quality of service and customer relationships. The number thus sets a deep economical and operational basis of relevance of sustainable CRM practises in long term passenger satisfaction and loyalty in a very competitive environment.

1.1 Significance of the study

This research can be of benefit to the researchers as well as airline managers in the Indian airline industry. With rising competition and growing emphasis of airlines on their environmental friendliness, one would want to know how sustainable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practises impact on passenger satisfaction. The research demonstrates that sustainability cannot be simply a rule-based approach, but a clever policy that is expected to attract customer loyalty in the long term. Based on the actual experience of passengers, it outlines the effects of truthful communication, equal treatment, and environmental friendliness in creating trust and positive attitudes towards the airlines.

Regarding the industry, the findings allow airlines to know what passengers often pay attention to and appreciate. It is the observation of this study that the current CRM practices are only aimed at short-term transactions and yet the relationship should be established in a long-term and sustainable way. By identifying the particular aspects of sustainability that passengers will be most engaged in, airlines will be able to restructure their service processes, increase brand loyalty and emerge in a competitive market. The lessons based on the passenger stories will also enable the airlines to predict customer expectations and implement more sustainable and people-centred service operations.

The research provides practical evidence to the policy-makers and regulators on the potential effect of sustainability-oriented practices on service quality standards. As India moves towards greener, more responsible aviation, the customer perspective can be utilised to encourage policies that will support ethical, transparent and environmentally viable operations.

The research fills a glaring gap in literature since it links sustainable CRM and passenger satisfaction in India where qualitative research has received minimal research. It contributes to the growing body of literature about sustainable service management and provides a foundation to further research on new markets (B Yazgan, 2024). On the whole, this research is practical, strategic and academic as it discloses the way sustainability can be made a driver of customer satisfaction in Indian aviation.

The study will be grounded on the dynamic emotional, moral and relationship nature characteristic of service industries across the globe. In the contemporary airline market, customers do not compare service based on price or time alone. Instead, trust, transparency, emotional assurance, environmental awareness, and ethical service behaviour are growing as expectations. The shifting passenger demands can be traced in the Indian airline sector, a high growth, but a high volatile market. As airlines aim to go big, keep costs down, and expand virtual infrastructure, the human and emotive aspect of service has become a critical factor in creating satisfaction and loyalty.

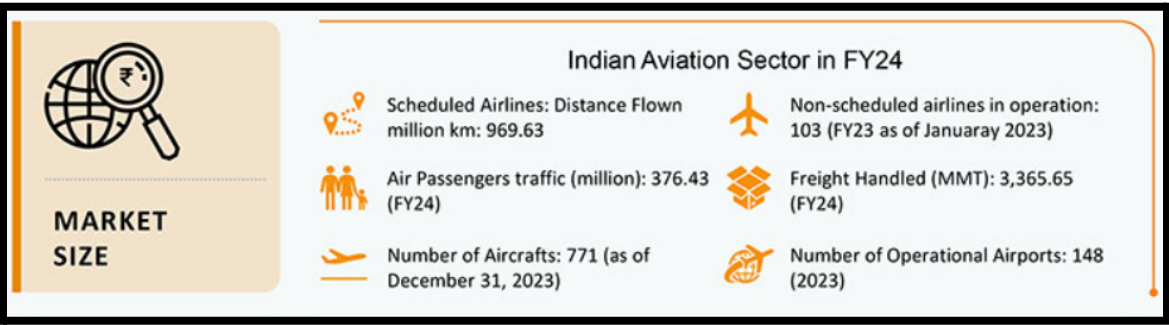


Figure 2: Key Market Indicators of the Indian Aviation Sector (FY 2024)

Source: Drishti IAS Indian Aviation Sector Overview (FY 2024)

Figure 2 shows the key performance and scale indicators of the Indian aviation sector of the financial year 2024. The figure highlights key operational indicators such as planned airline distance traffic, total passenger traffic, aircrafts in operation, amount of freight, number of operational airports, and the existence of non-scheduled airline operators. The combination of these indicators shows the growing scale, connectivity and logistical significance of the Indian aviation ecosystem. The intensity of passenger traffic means that there is growing demand in air

travel due to the economic growth, urbanisation and the rising number of middle classes. The escalated rates of aircrafts and airports indicate intensive capacity expansion and infrastructural development in the country. Also, the freight handling data indicates the increased use of airlines in logistics and supply chain efficiency. This huge magnitude of operations raises the level of competition between airlines, customer satisfaction and service quality, sustainable CRM policies become the significant areas of differentiation in the long term. The figure therefore reinforces the strategic importance of customer-centric and sustainability-driven CRM practices in a rapidly expanding aviation market.

1.2 Research Question

Q1. What are the perceptions of CRM practices by the passengers on Indian airlines, and what is the effect of these perceptions to the overall satisfaction of the passengers with the airlines?

Q2. How do the CRM strategies impact customer loyalty and formation of long-term relationships with the Indian airlines?

Q3. What does personalisation contribute to the experience and customer satisfaction with CRM practices in Indian airlines?

Q4. What is the relationship between sustainability and CSR activities incorporated in CRM strategies and attitudes and loyalty of passengers to Indian airlines?

Q5. What are the perceived hindrances and difficulties in successful application of CRM practices in the Indian airlines?

Q6. Which qualitative structure is capable of connecting the CRM practices with the increased satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainability results?

1.3 Research Aim and Research Objectives

Aims

With the aim of finding experiential, perception-based, and storytelling experiences that can inform better and more sustainable CRM strategies, to investigate qualitatively the effect of sustainable CRM practices on passenger satisfaction and loyalty in the Indian airline industry.

Objectives

- To explore passengers' lived experiences and perceptions regarding sustainable CRM practices adopted by Indian airlines.
- To determine the emotional and behavioural elements of passenger satisfaction in the framework of sustainability-oriented service policies.
- To determine patterns, common themes, and service gaps using qualitative observations based on interviews and open-ended interactions with passengers and airline employees.
- To understand how the concept of sustainability (transparency, ethical service, and long-term engagement) affects the trust and loyalty levels of passengers to Indian airlines (C Wang, 2023).
- To come up with qualitative, experience-based recommendations that can inform airlines in enhancing sustainable CRM practises to promote passenger satisfaction.
- To build a qualitative framework that may tie CRM activities and enhance satisfaction, loyalty and sustainability outcomes.

1.4 Purpose of the Research

This research seeks to have a deeper insight into the actual experiences, perception and expectation of the passengers that cannot be properly represented with numbers. A qualitative research design enables the researcher to hear the passengers, airline employees, and the need of industry stakeholders to identify the real causes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The research will address customer behaviour trends, recurrent service gaps, and emotional aspects of airline-passenger relationships by using interviews, open-ended questions, and thematic analysis. Not only to analyse what passengers feel but also why they feel so, how CRM can be made sustainable to answer these questions in a long-term and significant manner. The research will

focus on qualitative observations to develop a more comprehensive and human understanding of how sustainability principles such as transparency, consistency, empathy and ethical service will improve customer satisfaction.

Also, the information found in history can be used to locate other destinations of interest that can ping the passengers with interesting offers to travel to new destinations and commonly visited destinations.

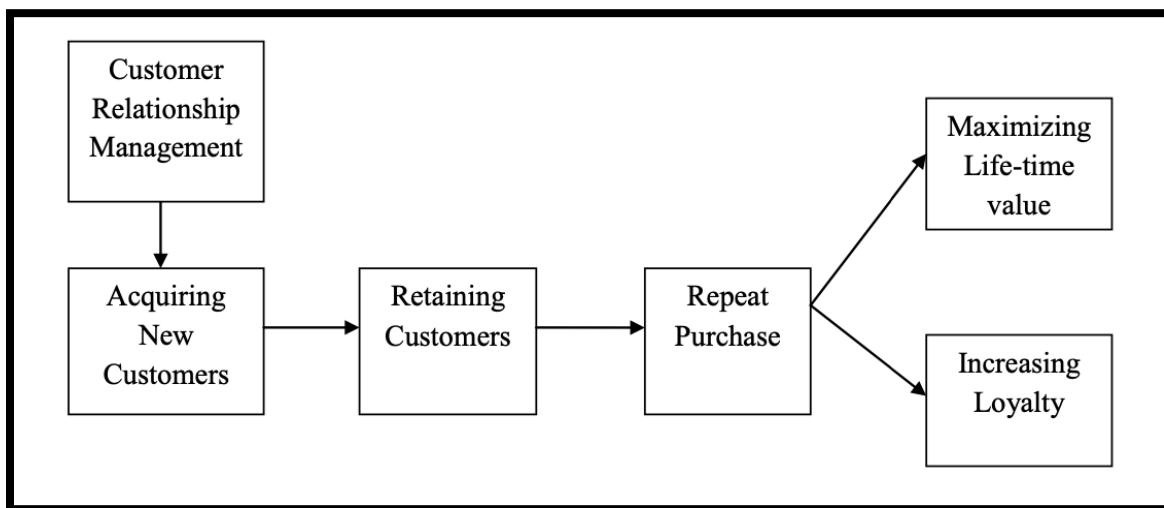


Figure 3: Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Strategy for Customer Acquisition, Retention, and Loyalty Development

Source: Khan & Fasih (2022), CRM Strategy structure

Figure 3 tracks the strategic Customer Relationship Management (CRM) process used to develop long-term customer observations and loyalty. The model starts by customer acquisition where airlines lure new customers by offering services, digital interactions and marketing. This is succeeded by customer retention which aims at sustaining relationships by service quality, responsiveness, and personalisation. The retained customers will tend to make repeat purchases, which enhances emotional attachment and trust to the airline. The end results of this process are such that higher customer lifetime observations and customer loyalty are achieved. The figure highlights that CRM is a constant observation rather than a one-time transactional process hence very useful in sustainable CRM practises in the airline industry.

According to Khan and Fasih (2022), the majority of research has been done on developed nations where customer service and quality of service are radically different than in the developing nations.

1.5 Research Problem

Although the Indian airline industry has been expanding rapidly, customer satisfaction is uneven and most airlines are yet to master the aspect of customer loyalty in the long run. Although sustainability projects are gaining momentum, little is known on how these projects are related to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practises and how they affect the perception, trust and satisfaction of the passengers. This gap leaves airline managers wondering how to put up effective CRM strategies, which are sustainable in nature.

Key Problems Identified

- Lack of Integration Between Sustainability and CRM (OM AlShuridah, 2023)

The airlines introduce sustainability policies (ecofriendly operations, less carbon practices), yet these are not well associated with CRM strategies, which makes the airlines lose the chance to improve their relations with passengers.

- Limited Understanding of Passenger Perceptions

Few studies explore how passengers interpret and emotionally respond to sustainable service efforts, leaving airlines unsure of which practices genuinely matter to customers.

- Inconsistent Passenger Satisfaction Levels

Despite technological and service improvements, many passengers' report dissatisfaction related to transparency, ethical practices, and service reliability—areas closely tied to sustainable CRM principles (P Korba, 2023).

- Reduced operational efficiency

Despite technological and service improvements, many passengers' report dissatisfaction related to transparency, ethical practices, and service reliability—areas closely tied to sustainable CRM principles.

- Poor Customer Retention

The research issue is the low retention of customers in the airline industry. Although the industry has been striving hard to maintain services and level customer satisfaction, it has a challenge of long-term customer retention. The research will look into those underlying reasons that have led to low levels of customer retention through the lens of service quality, price policy and the efficiency of the loyalty programs. The research aims to offer a practical solution as it will identify the major problems causing customer defections so that the airlines can adopt specific measures to increase their loyalty, customer services as well as to the overall retention levels.

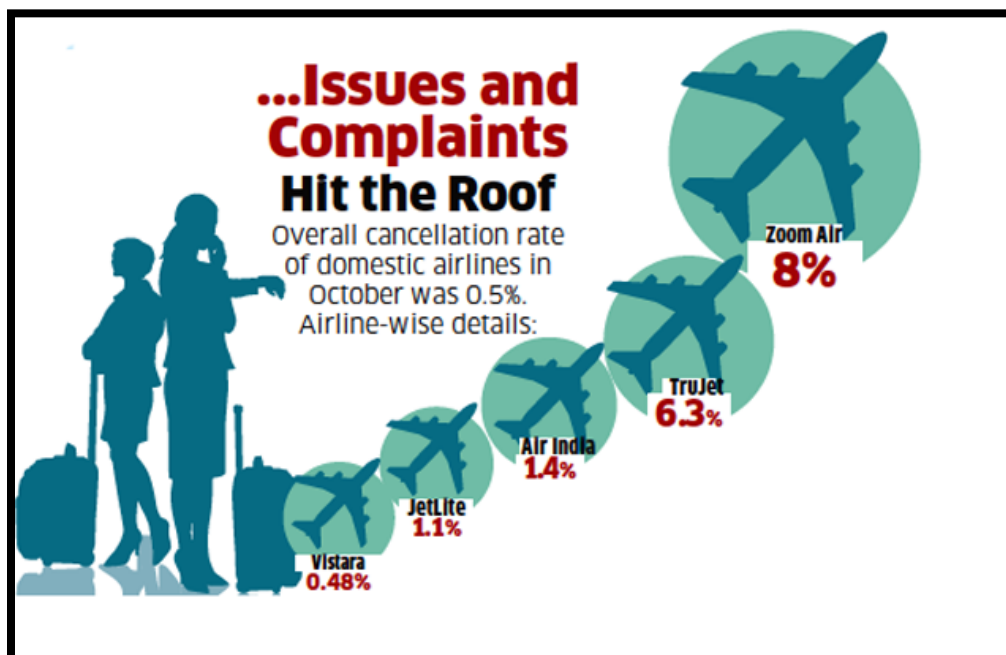


Figure 4: Airline Wise Flight Cancellation Rates and Passenger Complaints in Indian Domestic Aviation

Source: The Economic Times (IndiaTimes), Aviation Industry Complaints Report (2017)

Figure 4 provides a comparative analysis of flight cancellation rates of airlines in the Indian domestic aviation industry, where the operational difficulties are on the rise and directly affecting the dissatisfaction of passengers. The figure shows that various airlines record different rates of cancellations, which may be much disproportionate in some carriers compared to others. Even small percentage changes in cancellations can create high numbers of passengers affected because of high traffic concentration in the Indian aviation sector. Such service failures may result in delays, missed connections, refund claims, emotional suffering and loss of customer trust. The figure supports the main research problem of this dissertation that although the industry is growing very fast, passenger satisfaction is not consistent. It also implies the reasons why Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and long-term sustainability of the service recovery are crucial to restore confidence and loyalty. Clear communication, moral management of disruption, updates in real-time, and compassionate service recovery are paramount CRM activities that respond to service risks directly reflected in this figure.

1.6 Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations:

- Sample size & representation: Since the study is qualitative the sample will be small and will not be representative of all the passengers of the Indian airlines.
- Subjectivity of responses: results are dependent on the accounts or perception of passengers that may be subjective, depending on context and influenced by personal experiences.
- Participation: It may be difficult to gain entry to a diverse group of passengers (frequent flyers, economy or business) and this may limit the range of responses.
- Time and resource constraints: Academic timeframes and resources restrict the scope of data gathering and analysis, which can be a weakness of the research.

Delimitations:

- Geographical boundaries: The paper is limited to the Indian airline industry and is not applicable to the international airlines.

- Focus on passengers: The research only emphasizes the perception of passengers and not of the airline, staff, management or other stakeholders' needs.
- CRM dimensions: The perspective is on sustainable CRM practices (personalisation, loyalty, satisfaction, CSR, sustainability), rather than on broader operational or financial CRM outputs.
- Qualitative approach: The research takes the qualitative research design, which means that the research does not involve statistical testing or extensive survey.
- Time frame: The results represent the CRM practices and perception within the study period, without following it in several years (M Rahman, 2025).

Assumptions:

- Participant honesty: It is supposed that passengers are going to provide reflective, honest and objective answers in interviews or focus groups.
- Relevance of CRM: It is believed that passengers are highly sensitive to, and knowledgeable about CRM practices, carried out by Indian airlines.
- Connection of CRM and outcomes: The study affirms that there is a direct or indirect effect of CRM practices on passenger satisfaction, loyalty and sustainability perceptions.
- Research objectivity: The study presupposes that the researcher will eliminate the bias to the maximum and interpret the data correctly through well-structured qualitative analysis (Nvivo analysis, thematic narrative).

1.7 Definition of terms

Customer Relationship Management (CRM): CRM is a term used to describe the categories of strategies, practices and technology embraced by Indian airlines to handle their interactions with the passengers and enhance their satisfaction levels and build long-term loyalty. It goes further to transactional interactions to concentrate on developing relationships through responsiveness, personalisation and service excellence.

Sustainable CRM practices: Sustainable CRM practices refer to the initiatives by the customer relationship management practice in airlines that combines the environmental responsibility, social impact and ethical business model in customer engagement. They mirror the ways in which airlines can connect customer care with sustainability observations i.e. green responses, long-term trust-building and CSR initiatives.

Passenger satisfaction: It can be described as the perceived degree of achieving satisfaction to the passenger's experience when their travel expectations i.e. comfort, quality of service, personalisation and sustainability commitment of the airline are either met or surpassed through the CRM practices of the airline.

Customer loyalty: Customer loyalty in this dissertation means that the passengers are willing to remain fliers with the same airline; this is realized through repeating booking, branding support and trust developed through the consistent and successful CRM strategies.

personalisation: It refers to the customization of services, deals and communications between airlines according to the needs of the individual passengers, the history or preference of the travel. Under CRM, personalisation is viewed as a source of enhanced experiences, satisfaction and emotional attachment toward the airlines (AR Banjarnahor, 2025).

Sustainability: This is where the airline is involved in ensuring that its environmental impact is minimized, it engages in ethical business conduct and giving back to society in a positive way and also ensuring that it generates long term observations to the passengers and the stakeholders' needs involved.

1.8 Background

The Indian market is a special case when it comes to CRM implementation since it has dual customers:

- **Price-sensitive passengers:** Students and leisure travelers who are much more price aware but are increasingly demanding online interactions and environmental friendliness.

- Value conscious professionals: Business and frequent fliers who require trust, efficiency and responsiveness even on budget conditions.

Such duality demands that airlines use segmented CRM strategies. On the one hand, a universal model will be considered a threat to both populations. The findings of the present study validate the argument that Indian loyalty is less dependent on the rewards and more authentic.

1.9 Strategic Importance of CRM in the Indian Context

Indian market is a unique scenario in terms of CRM implementation because it has two customers (TL Lamb, 2021):

- Sensitive to price: Students and leisure travellers that are a lot price aware but are insisting on more online interactivity and environmental friendliness.
- Take care of value conscious people: Business and frequent fliers who demand trust, efficiency and responsiveness even when they work on budget bases.

This kind of duality requires the airlines to adopt segmented CRM strategies. On one hand, a universal model will be perceived as a menace to both populations. The outcomes of the present study confirm the validity of the arguments that Indian loyalty should be less dependent on the incentives and rather sincere.

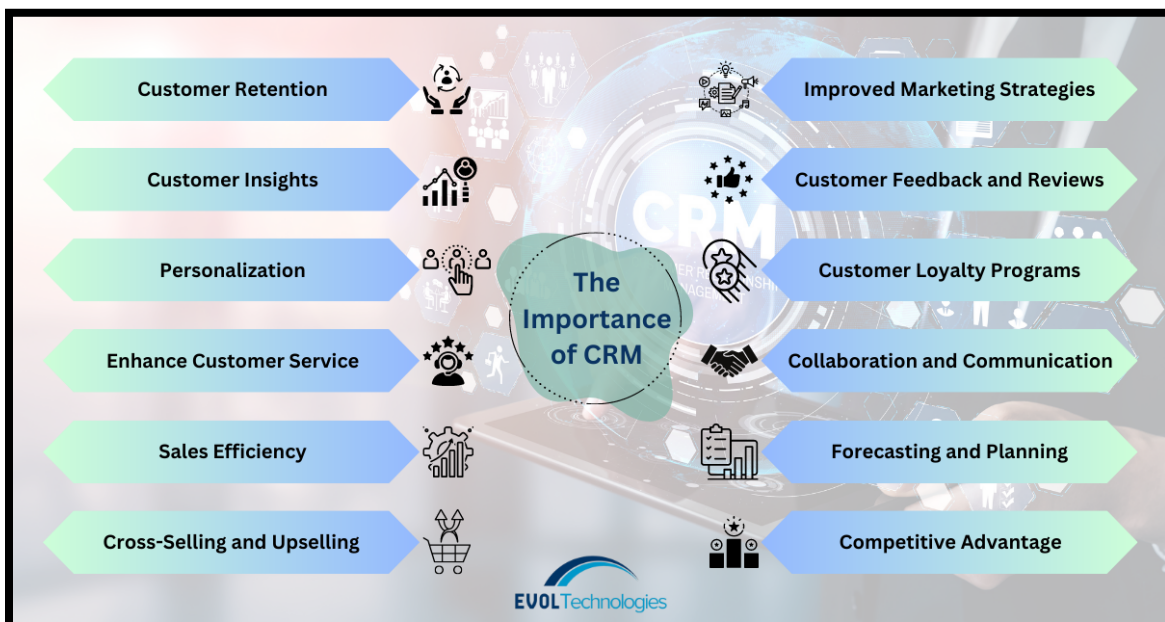


Figure 5: Importance and Functional Dimensions of Customer Relationship Management

Source: EVOL Technologies (2024)

As shown in Figure 5, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is multidimensional in contemporary service-based organisations. The model highlights the main functional results of CRM, such as customer retention, customer observations, personalisation, enhanced customer service, sales efficiency, cross selling and upselling on one side, and, on the other side, the strategic results, such as improved marketing strategies, customer feedback and reviews, customer loyalty programmes, collaboration and communication, forecasting and planning, and competitive advantage. All of these dimensions together underline the fact that CRM is not simply a technology system, but rather is a complex strategic mechanism that connects data, individuals, and processes to enhance long-term customer relationships. These CRM functions are extremely important in the airline industry, primarily to address passenger expectations, service consistency, real-time communication, supporting customised travel experiences and better loyalty programmes. The figure supports the theoretical aspect of this study by demonstrating successfully how CRM enables operational excellence and long-term relationships that consequently translate to passenger satisfaction and loyalty in highly competitive aviation markets.

1.10 Research Contribution

- Through qualitative and thematic analysis, this research will add observations to the knowledge of the role played by CRM in stimulating loyalty in the emerging markets. Specifically, it:
- Gathers empirical data showing that Indian passengers place greater emphasis on trust, responsiveness and sustainability over price.
- Presents a CRM themed pattern that can suit the Indian aviation sector.
- Withdraws managerial and policy advice to align the CRM practices with the passenger expectations.

1.11 Global Aviation Trends and Their Influence on Indian CRM

The airline sector in India is not a closed system since it exists within a global ecosystem which is influenced by technological, environmental and social trends (Ali. N, 2024). These trends also restate expectations of passengers towards airlines and responsiveness of CRM strategies (M Naiseh, 2025).

1.12 Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence

Airlines around the world are spending on digital first plans. It is changing the way airlines interact with their customers through the application of AI based chatbots, predictive analytics and mobile first booking systems. One of the carriers, such as Singapore Airlines, has introduced AI based personalisation engines, recommending services with regard to previous behaviour, although Delta Airlines adopts real-time updates with mobile applications (M Balaz, 2023).

Digitalization has increased in pace in India especially following the pandemic. Mobility in the check-in processes, QR code boarding passes, and an app-based loyalty program have become the norm. Yet, automation despite being empathetic, as was pointed out by participants such as P6, may seem cold. Indian airlines are thus forced to implement digital effectiveness and human touch with a mix of AI and frontline employees.

1.13 Post-COVID Health and Safety Expectations

The pandemic altered permanently the priorities of passengers. Contactless services, increased cleaning, and flexible rebooking policies were implemented in airlines throughout the world. As an example, Emirates branded itself as a health sensitive airline and required sanitization kits and COVID related coverage insurance.

The health measures put in place by the Indian airlines also failed because patron testimonies in this research found loopholes in responsiveness during cancellations and delays. Hygiene is not the only expectation of the post COVID passenger, as he is now seeking clear, versatile, and compassionate communication, which is a CRM challenge that must be addressed on the system level.

1.14 Sustainability as a Competitive Differentiator

The environment is changing the aviation world in terms of environmental issues. European airlines (such as KLM and Lufthansa) and Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) have introduced such programs as carbon offset and promote using biofuels. Indian passengers (P1, P3) younger generation claimed that it was interested in environmentally friendly operations, but other customers (P12) mentioned that these measures were mere tokenism, which indicates the absence of seriousness in the sustainability practices in India.

As the world mounts pressure on big airlines in the world through these various avenues as the Carbon Offering and Reduction scheme of International Aviation (CORSIA), India airlines will be subject to more scrutiny as to their sustainability. Having a loyalty differentiator such as awarding passengers' rewards in terms of making off set contributions can make CRM practice ecofriendly (X Dou, 2020).

1.15 Data Privacy and Regulatory Pressures

Worldwide, the CRM practices have been transformed due to the enforceability of transparency and clear consent through data privacy laws like the GDPR (Europe) and the CCPA (California). Indian passengers, especially those who were professionals, were worried about the issue of data being sold by airlines (P19).

The implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) in India refers to a change in the direction of a more regulation-oriented policy. In the case of airlines, it implies that CRM systems should develop in line with privacy requirements and maintain personalisation (Y Yoon, 2020).

1.16 The Rise of Experiential Loyalty

The trend in the world is the shift of loyalty to experience and attitude as opposed to transactional loyalty (miles and discounts). Such programs as Privilege Club by Qatar Airways and KrisFlyer by Singapore Airlines do not only provide a program of points but also an experience (G Wild, 2025).

This trend is appealing to Indian passengers who preferred being noticed, sympathized with, and shown some symbolic signs. The loyalty in India is not about miles, but the feeling that the airline gives to the passengers, particularly during inconveniences.

1.17 Rationale of the Study

- Academic Rationale: CRM has been researched so much in other industries, like hospitality, banking, and retail but there is scarce research on CRM within the aviation industry of emerging markets and especially India. This research therefore presents a crucial literature gap.
- Managerial Rationalization: The results are practical advice to the Indian airline managers to the extent that the managers can do more than just think in terms of transactional loyalty but can also acknowledge the value of trust, authenticity, and responsiveness.
- Policy Rationale: At a regulatory level, it is also arguably that India is passing stricter legislation on data protection (N Omido, 2025). The gained expertise during this research can assist the policymakers in ensuring data on passengers are not jeopardized and also enable the airlines to use CRM tools to their advantage.

1.18 Historical Evolution of the Indian Airline Industry

The Indian aviation industry has a long history, which is characterized by the dominance of state, liberalization, and modern competition. History of commercial aviation in India dates to 1932 when J.R.D. Tata operated the Tata Air Mail 1 to travel between Karachi and Bombay (Kumari. P, 2020). Following the independence, a majority of the private airlines were nationalized with Air India as well as the Indian Airlines emerging as the two major state-owned airlines.

These carriers have been in a controlled world over decades where air travel was a preserve of the elite. The industry was quite stagnant until liberalization policies in the 1990s permitted the entry of such players into the industry like Jet Airways and Sahara Airlines.

The low-cost carrier (LCC) revolution began in the early 2000s, and the leading airline companies were IndiGo, Spice Jet, and Go Air (now Go First). These airlines made air travel

affordable to the growing middle class in India making it democratic. CAPA India reports that as of 2019, more than 80% of domestic air traffic was carried out by LCCs, and India is one of the most overburdened markets in the world.

Nonetheless, the intense price wars and low profit margins ensured that the airlines tended to focus more on their operations rather than their customers. This brought about an imbalance in structure, as more Indians had the ability to fly, but the loyalty programs and CRM practices were not on par with international practices.

1.19 Impact of COVID-19 on Indian Aviation

The COVID19 pandemic was a big blow to world aviation, and India was not an exemption. In 2020, there was an almost complete lockdown of the sector and revenues decreased by more than 60% in the year. The airlines were in existential crisis with some of them (Go Air/Go First) having filed bankruptcy proceedings.

- Health and Safety as Loyalty Drivers: Hygiene rules, contactless check-in, and social distancing became the key success factors among the passengers.
- Digital Acceleration: The crisis increased the use of digital, and passengers became more dependent on apps, QR codes, and mobile boarding passes.
- Flexibility and Responsiveness: Uncertainty about flight cancellations and rescheduling elevated the role of service recovery as it has never had before. This was replicated by the participants in this study, who lamented that the Indian airlines were not always able to communicate openly in times of disruptions (N Shiwakoti, 2022).

Aviation in India recovered well after the pandemic. In 2023, DGCA announced a recovery of pre-pandemic domestic passenger traffic. Nevertheless, this crisis forever changed the loyalty patterns, and airlines now have to reconsider CRM as a survival tool, not as a marketing feature.

1.20 Research Coverage

So long as the research persists, it bears question marks to be addressed in the process of completion of the study. As previously explained regarding the CRM inculcation in the airline

sector, there are several questions to which the research will provide the answers in the future. The questions mainly deal with the effects of CRM, satisfaction of the customers, the operations of loyalty, effects of technology and numerous others. The following are research areas that can be used within the research work:

- a) The net effect of CRM implementation to the performance of airlines in terms of customer satisfaction (S, Soklaridis, 2024).
- b) The CRM and customer satisfaction in the airline sector.
- c) CRM role in creation and retention of loyalty among customers in the airline industry.
- d) The means of improvement in the efficiency of operations in the airline industry by the application of CRM.
- e) The technological development in CRM systems that affect the overall efficiency of the CRM strategies in the airline industry.



Figure 6: Top Challenges Confronting the Global Aviation Sector in 2025 and Beyond

Source: Global Market observations (2024)

Figure 6 presents a comprehensive overview of the major challenges confronting the global aviation sector in 2025 and beyond. The figure highlights various interacting pressures such as demand recovery and overcapacity mismatch, regulatory complexity and international compliance standards, new cybersecurity threats, aircraft delivery delays and ageing fleets, and workforce shortages in key airline activities. Moreover, it is indicative of volatility in fuel costs and escalating operating costs, air traffic control (ATC) modernisation and safety management, growing geopolitical insecurity and enhanced environmental pressure via sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) mandates. This has left a very volatile and unsafe operating environment of airlines. All these directly influence the constant provision of airlines and their service, flight schedules, communication with the customers and the creation of trust with the help of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). This may cause operations to malfunction when the systems are over-strained. This usually results in delays, cancellations, services issues, and a rising number of customer complaints. The figure hence justifies the timeliness of this dissertation since it shows why sustainable, resilient, and transparency-oriented CRM systems are not optional anymore but strategic to the retention of passenger satisfaction and long-term loyalty in the contemporary aviation sector.

1.21 Contextual Reflection on Indian Aviation and Sustainable CRM

The Indian airline industry is now in a fast-changing socioeconomic, digital and emotional world that is obvious to redefine passenger expectation and the sense of trust. Through democratisation of air travel, passengers with all social-economic status now interact with airlines on a daily basis. This has changed flying into a luxury to be a commodity and expectation of service, where reliability, transparency, and emotional comfort are no longer luxuries but necessities.

The extensive use of smartphones, mobile payments, and real-time services platforms in India has only exacerbated the demands of speed, transparency, and responsibility. The customers are more demanding that airlines be responsive like other online service providers like banking, online stores, and mobile providers. Even losing confidence when airlines fail to respond as swiftly or transparently is not functional, but tends to be perceived as breaking of trust and esteem.

It is the dynamic psychological setting as well, which makes sustainable CRM more than a managerial choice, but also a place of trust. Customers judge airlines based on their responsible communication in times of uncertainty, the honesty of their acceptance of service failures and the responsible way airlines use customer data and money. This trust is constructed in a sequence of amicable meaningful exchanges but not one successful transaction.

In addition, the service perceptions are enhanced by social media and online review sites rather than personal experiences. One case of poor service could be fixed publicly, and it will affect the emotional trust of thousands of potential passengers. Through this, sustainable CRM is emerging as a reputation safeguard that resides in the digital memory of the masses.

This type of contextual consideration provides the overall support to this research in the fact that sustainable CRM in the context of Indian aviation is inseparable with social trust building, emotional intelligence and perceived ethical behaviour in the more open society environment. Airline service has been perceived by Indian consumers not just as a matter of convenience or low costs but as a matter of dignity, fairness, and emotional security. Service has shifted away to being functional delivery towards moral experience in which every interaction is viewed through the prism of respect and moral purpose. Passengers develop emotional expectations long before they visit the airport, mediated by peer discourse, service memory, and online reputational cues. Such developed psychological expectations influence the interpretation of service outcomes emotionally. The neutral service experience could be negatively perceived when the emotional expectations are not met, whereas the poor delivery of operational results could create loyalty when emotional processing is seen as genuine.

This changes as follows, sustainable CRM in India is not only reflected on the organisational level but on the psychological plane of collective memory and shared social trust. The airline brands do not deal with customers, but they deal with emotional history and perception as a community.

1.22 Chapter Summary

The chapter has indicated the background, problem statement, objectives, rationale and history development of the Indian airline industry. It has also positioned India in the perspective of CRM

in the world and highlighted how loyalty is being redefined by digitalization, post-COVID needs, sustainability and data privacy. The expansion of CRM among Indian airlines is not a decision but a strategy tool. Although the research recognises the role of digitalisation and technology tools in airline CRM, the main emphasis is on how sustainable CRM practices can influence customer experience and, consequently, customer loyalty, as the tools are discussed as facilitators, not focal constructs.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction

The changing and competitive environment of the Indian airline sector has resulted in an increasing literature on customer satisfaction, service quality, and strategic importance of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Due to the growing consumer expectations, unstable market environment, and environmental worries, the role of sustainability in CRM activities has become an important area of investigation (L Saha, 2021). In spite of the fact that the global literatures have addressed sustainable business behaviours, green marketing, and responsible service provisions, there is still a shrinking yet advancing discourse on the interaction of these components to CRM framework especially in the airline industry.

The broad findings of the existing studies point to the fact that CRM increases long-term loyalty to customers, service personalisation, and customer-brand relationships. Similar studies of sustainability focus on ethical conduct, environmental accountability, and openness as motivators of customer confidence and fulfilment. Nevertheless, there is no definitive theoretical explanation of the connections between sustainable CRM practices and their direct impact on passenger satisfaction, particularly in the Indian context. Furthermore, a great part of the existing studies is based on quantitative measurements, which makes it impossible to understand the reaction of passengers to sustainable CRM practices (Dube, 2024). Such a limitation underscores the importance of qualitative research that would help to understand how passengers experience, perceive, and feel about sustainable CRM practises.

This literature review will attempt to provide a synthesis of academic literature in CRM, sustainability, airline service quality, and customer satisfaction in order to create a conceptual framework of the study. The review, therefore, will potentially emphasise the gaps in current body of knowledge, the necessity of the qualitative inquiry, and position sustainable CRM as a developing framework that can be used to change passenger experiences in the Indian airline industry. Also, the results of the study will help airlines enhance the understanding of CRM implementation by presenting propositions for the specific CRM tools and strategies popular among the Indian consumer. The outcomes of the study will help the airline managers with executing the CRM strategies that will furthermore help them formulate the customer retention

strategies that will also call for the incorporation of environmental sustainability in their business practices making their brand the responsible leader in the airline industry. In the end, this study will examine the fundamental problems with airline customer relationship management and offer appropriate fixes to give airlines guidance and management tactics. Our aim is to assist airlines in preserving their competitive edge in the dynamic market landscape by means of this thorough investigation of airline CRM

Preliminary Literature Review Objectives

The objective of the initial literature review will be to analyze and identify existing literature on customer relationship management and its impact on the airline industry. It has a dynamic and complex image of the market where long-term success would be based on good customer relations. Baashar, Alhussian, Patel, and Alkawsi (2010) argue that the airline industry is becoming highly competitive, thus the need to gain a competitive edge. Accordingly, Navarro, Gomez, Badenes, and Acosta (2022) explain that, to accomplish it, they have to know and maximize customer communication.

A sample of 9 major domestic and foreign airlines in Iran was selected to take part in the study. The simple random sampling was used to collect the information of the respondents. Among the 424 eligible questionnaires, which were extracted, 1206 passengers were surveyed during a total of nine flights. Data analysis was conducted through qualitative thematic analysis, involving the systematic coding and interpretation of participant responses to identify recurring themes and patterns relevant to CRM practices in the airline industry. This research presented theoretical and managerial practical implications. The main topics of the research were CRM, customer satisfaction, expectation disconfirmation theory and SERVQUAL. The inferences of the study revealed that expectations were corroborated and perceived performance that resulted in satisfaction had strong correlation.

It was explored that customer relationship management (CRM) was based on the perspectives of the customers in the city of Rafah in terms of customer acquisition, customer satisfaction, customer retention, and minimizing customer loss in the coastal municipalities water utility (Dube, 2022). The methodology of analysis used to guide the exploratory research was descriptive. With the help of stratified sampling, 393 clients were requested to fill a

well-designed questionnaire that was employed to collect data in the city of Rafah. The customers were categorized into three groups including those who were fully committed, those who were only partly committed, and those who were not committed. The report suggests that CMWU needs to devote more attention to the enhancement of services provided, customer complaints, and feedback collection, and subsequent utilization of the input provided by consumers and adjust its plans to incorporate further feedback to support future plans, and continuous communication with the customers, in a variety of communication methods.

2.1 CRM in the Airline Industry

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a strategy that has become accredited as a core business strategy in the contemporary business setup. According to Kotler (2017), CRM is not a mere technology, but a practical strategy that aims at developing, sustaining and improving customer relationships or relations with the purpose of realizing long-term profits. Payne and Frow (2020) believed that CRM as a sophisticated concept combines people, processes and technology to provide better customer experiences, and this holds especially in the airline sector where the customer satisfaction is directly correlated with the level of services.

Gilbert and Wong (2003) emphasized in the aviation sector that competitive pressures, volatility of fuel prices and the ever-increasing customer expectations pose a critical competitive threat to airlines and consequently CRM is an essential factor of differentiation. O'Connell (2012) asserted that the current frequency flyer plans were no longer sufficient in the retention of customers because the modern customers need more personalized observations-based engagements. Similarly, Kumar et al. (2021) authored that the competitive aspect of Indian aviation has led the airlines to implement CRM as both a retention tool and a tool of ensuring greater sustainability and responsiveness of the services provided.

The increased digitization of airline services has also affected CRM. As stated by Chen and Popovich (2019), CRM has evolved into a backend database and a frontend system to enhance passenger experience due to real-time interaction and feedback. Buttle and Maklan (2019) state that not all airlines embracing CRM do it with equal success, with some companies excelling in the implementation of technology and others failing due to the high cost of implementation or lack of training and organisational resistance (P Zerbino, 2022).

This growth helps fill the serious ethical gap in the literature on CRM and sustainability. Although there is a distinct amount of research concerning CRM in the technological, strategic, and performance-based aspects, the ethical and emotional aspects in the light of which CRM is realistically perceived by service users are less studied. The literature on sustainability also gives much emphasis on environmental measures and corporate reporting but neglects the emotional interpretation of sustainability initiatives by customers in real service encounters.

The lack of an intrinsic ethical/emotional framework leads to theoretical division between what organisations measure and what customers really experience. This paper fills this gap by aligning ethical consistency, emotional trust, and perceived sincerity as key theoretical frameworks in sustainable CRM. Through this, the study adds to a more viable idea of CRM as a business system, but also a morality and relational governance framework in service organisations.



Figure 7: Work System Analysis structure for Customer-Centric Business Processes

Source: BusinessEssay.com (2018)

Figure 7 gives a Work System Analysis framework that describes how a customer-based business process works in an integrated organisational system. The model depicts a pyramidal design where the customer is the central goal at the heart of the system, with the products and the business processes. There are three underlying elements of these processes: technology, information, and participants. Regarding Customer Relationship Management (CRM), such a structure points out that customer observation creation is not done by technology alone, but

rather by the synergistic combination of human resources, proper information systems, and digital platforms. The model supports the notion that CRM success in the airline industry relies on alignment between frontline staff, backend systems, and service delivery technologies. The structure reinforces the strategic principle of positioning the customer at the top of the hierarchy since any CRM actions such as reservation forms to complaints management should be designed to improve customer experience, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty. This system's approach enhances the theoretical basis of CRM application within service economic sectors like aviation.

2.1.1 Evolution of CRM

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has evolved to show an evident change in the manner in which organisations know, interact and maintain their customers. The first CRM practices appeared in the 1980s as database marketing systems which concentrated on gathering customer information in order to make sales-based decisions. These first systems were transactional based centred on record keeping and the simplest tracking of customer interaction. With the pressure exerted by the competition in the 1990s, CRM developed in a sense of relationships, with the advent of information technology and the emergence of the enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. Researchers point to this as a shift between product centric and customer-centric business strategies, with companies trying to develop long relationships as opposed to short sales.

As the internet and digital communication developed in the 2000s, CRM took a new strategic step. It extended to online communication, interaction on social media, and live customer feedback, which gave rise to the notion of eCRM and social CRM. According to scholars, CRM emerged as not just a technology avenue but also a wholesome business philosophy that entailed people, processes, and technology. Today, CRM in the current service sector like aviation deals with customised experiences, emotional involvement and snapshots. Therefore, CRM has evolved to be not a mere data tool but a strategic system with holistic effects on customer satisfaction and organisational competitiveness.

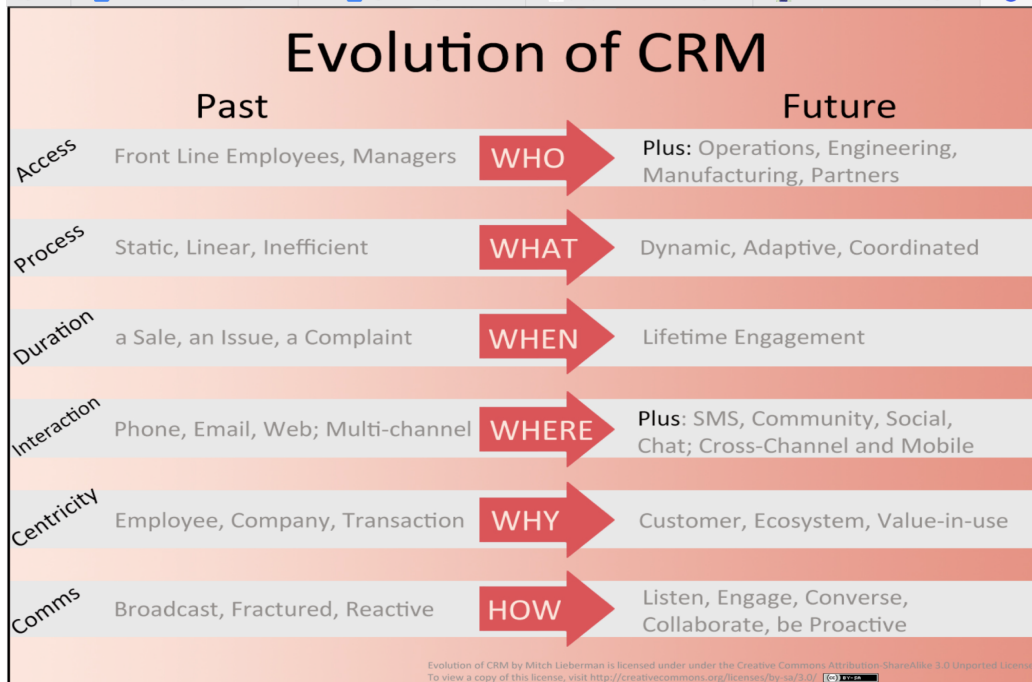


Figure 8: Evolution of Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Source: Lieberman, M. (2013). Evolution of Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Figure 8 shows how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has developed over the years to its modern and technological customer centric model. In its earlier phases, CRM was defined by restricted accessibility by frontline employees and managers, one-dimensional and one-way processes, short-term and sales-based interactions, and largely broadcast/reactive communication. Over the years CRM has become a dynamic, adaptive and collaborative system with several business functions including operations, engineering, manufacturing and partners. There is also a shift to lifetime customer engagement as opposed to isolated transactions. CRM in the modern world can be seen across various digital touchpoints such as mobile, social media, communal, live chat and cross channel environments. Moreover, the fundamental CRM logic has shifted to the customer-centric ecosystems of CRM, focusing on the observations in use and long-term relationship building. This evolution highlights the strategic move of treating customers as transactional figures to treating them like long term partners. This change has led to the creation of digital CRM, loyalty programmes, real-time service recovery, and personal passenger engagement approaches in the airline business.

2.1.2 CRM in Service Industries Beyond Aviation

The literature on CRM in other services sectors can be used as a background of applying it to the aviation industry. Bowen and Chen (2001) indicated that in the hospitality sector, successful CRM had a direct impact on the loyalty of guests, since they greatly appreciated individualised service and appreciation. Kandampelly and Suhartanto (2000) believed that hotels that made use of CRM not only developed retention but also improved their brand image.

Another area in which Ndubisi (2007) found that CRM based strategies such as customised financial advice and relationship managers led to an increase in client trust and retention was in the banking industry. Mukerjee (2013) notes that banks that integrated CRM in the service culture were able to make higher profits despite the level of competition among them.

Similarly, in the retail industry, Verhoff (2003) felt that CRM based activities such as promotional cards and personal promotions had quantifiable measurements in the form of the number of repeat purchases. Reinartz et al. (2004) found that when retailers had an understanding of transactions and behaviour, they formed stronger ties with the customers in comparison to those that depended on price-based promotions.

These cross-industry observations indicate the power of CRM in its capacity to deliver efficiency based on data as well as the people-centred personalisation. The experience in other sectors such as hospitality and banking, as emphasized by Buttle (2009), can be easily applied to airlines where the essence of the satisfaction is service experience.

2.1.3 CRM Applications in Non-Aviation Services

The review of CRM in other service industries can serve as a context of its application to aviation. Bowen and Chen (2001) indicated that in the hospitality sector, successful CRM had a direct impact on the loyalty of guests, since they greatly appreciated individualised service and appreciation. Kandampelly and Suhartanto (2000) believed that hotels that made use of CRM not only developed retention but also improved their brand image.

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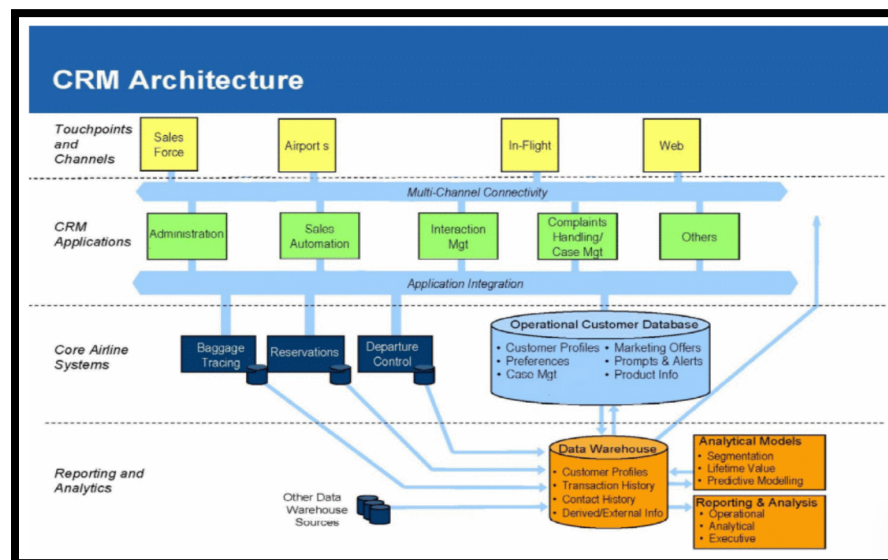


Figure 9: CRM Systems Architecture in Airlines

Source: BusinessEssay.com (2018)

Figure 9 presents the layered architecture of a CRM system designed specifically for the airline industry. The first tier comprises multichannel customer touchpoints, sales force, airport counters, in-flight services, and web platforms. The middle layer is CRM applications, which are sales automation, interaction management, complaint handling, and administrative functions

linked via application integration. The main airline systems layer incorporates baggage tracking, reservations, and departure control. The operational customer database, data warehouses and analytical models used at the backend facilitate reporting, predictive modelling, segmentation and lifetime observations evaluation. This unified CRM architecture allows airlines to consolidate customer data in operations and marketing operations to support real-time personalisation, service recovery, loyalty management and strategic decision-making. The architecture reflects the transformation of CRM from a basic customer database into an enterprise-wide intelligence platform.

2.1.4 CRM and Customer Loyalty

Loyalty of a customer is considered as the end result of CRM. Dick and Basu (1994) suggested that loyalty is a multidimensional construct, which is made up of attitudinal and behavioural aspects. They said that passengers can keep on flying with one airline not necessarily because of convenience or prices but because of emotional attachment and trust.

Even a modest increase in the retention of customers can increase profitability to a large extent, which Reichheld and Sasser (1990) pointed out as making CRM investments worthwhile. According to Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996), loyal customers are less sensitive to price and more tolerant to service breakdowns and tend to refer others to the airline.

The authors Wirtz and Johnston (2003) suggested in the airline setting that loyalty schemes based on CRM should incorporate both transactional and experiential rewards, because the contemporary passengers cannot be satisfied with the free miles. Han and Hyun (2015) affirmed this opinion when they said that personalisation and sustainability had taken the place of a price or reward as a major factor in loyalty.

2.1.5 CRM and Sustainability

Sustainability has continued to become part of the CRM practice. This led to the argument by Peattie and Crane (2005) that green marketing has developed into sustainable relationship marketing where the ecological observations shared between the customer and the marketer are based on long-term customer loyalty. According to Leonidou et al. (2013), customer trust and

loyalty are positively affected by the CSR activities, especially when the customers regard these activities as genuine.

According to Font and Lynes (2018), passengers are increasingly selecting airline companies that show environmental responsibility in the airline industry. In their research, they established that eco-initiatives did not only enhance brand image but also increased customer loyalty. Equally, according to Kumar and Kaushik (2022), Indian passengers are increasingly sensitive to sustainability and require airlines to make their CRM policies consistent with their environmental intentions.

Nevertheless, O'Connell and Williams (2016) stated that the possibility of greenwashing exists, when airlines strongly emphasise their sustainability. This may hurt the aspect of customer trust, and thus the significance of authenticity in CRM based sustainability communication is realized.

Despite the universal recognition that CRM is a strategic means of acquiring and retaining customers, a significant portion of the literature is still based on models that depend on metrics to operate instead of depending on an emotional experience. Sustainability literature, too, tends to concentrate on macrolevel environmental outcomes instead of the interpretation of sustainability by consumers in service encounters, emotionally. This fragmentation emphasises an under-explored area: the absence of an integrated emotional ethical lens through which CRM and sustainability are jointly interpreted in service industries such as aviation. This study seeks to address this conceptual gap by positioning sustainable CRM as not merely a system of tools, but as a lived relational experience.

2.1.6 CRM in the Global Industry

The adoption and results of airline CRM have been examined throughout the regions and have found that very few variations exist. According to Shaw (2011), the first CRM tools in the United States were the frequent flyer programs within such airlines as Delta and United, which were aimed at trapping repeat customers. O'Connell (2012) claimed that these programs were originally effective but when they were overdone, they caused a loss of consumer loyalty because passengers started perceiving miles as a commodity instead of a sentiment to airlines.

Mason and Morrison (2008) noted that in Europe, the low-cost airlines, including Ryanair and EasyJet, were opposed to investing in CRM and turned to price leadership. Nonetheless, with the growth of competition, such airlines shifted to CRM, such as mobile booking applications and individualised promotions. Their results indicated that even low-cost airlines realised that CRM was a need and not a luxury.

As per Albers and Rundshagen (2020), the premium carriers of the Middle East, including Emirates, Qatar Airways, and Etihad, put clear financial resources in CRM that is based on luxury. The strategies of these airlines focused personalisation and customer recognition as their key points, making CRM parallel to the high quality of services and brand status. Their achievement showed that CRM in aviation is not merely concerned with efficiency in operation but rather with the development of emotional brand image.

Chan (2016) opined in AsiaPacific that service excellence cultures in airlines such as Singapore Airlines and Cathay Pacific integrated CRM into their cultures. They made investments in employee development, digitalization and loyalty schemes which incorporated both transactional and emotional rewards. He also said that the Asian model was culturally sensitive and personalisation was based on the regional standards of hospitality.

The Indian airlines are in transition comparatively. Kumar and Gupta (2021) emphasized that even though some of the carriers like Vistara or Indigo have implemented mobile CRM systems and digital loyalty programs, they do not implement them as sustainably as global leaders or in the transparency of customer data. This implies that Indian aviation CRM is not yet at the stage of achieving the balance between technology, sustainability, and customer trust.

2.1.7 Digital Transformation and CRM

According to Davenport and Harris (2017), many CRM initiatives are now supported by big data analytics and allow airlines to forecast passenger behaviour, tailor offers, and simplify operations. Wedel and Kannan (2016) believed that predictive analytics may be used to improve CRM by enabling carriers to predict demand, churn, and provide more insightful communications.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now a vital force. Lu et al. (2020) emphasized that AI chatbots, virtual assistants and predictive recommendation engines can enable airlines to respond to thousands of customers at the same time, thereby improving responsiveness and lowering costs. Nonetheless, Gursoy et al. (2019) claimed that AI cannot be used on its own since passengers usually require human empathy when they complain about something and when the services fail. This agrees with the result of the current study in which responsiveness and emotional engagement were found to be essential.

Mobile applications are also in the center. According to Shao et al. (2019), airline mobile applications have become not only booking tools but also CRM platforms per se, which provide push notifications and custom offers and track loyalty points. This had another connection to Buhalis and Sinatra (2019), who said that mobile CRM enhances real-time interaction, and the passenger will feel that he or she is always in touch with the airline.

block-chain technology has also been suggested as an upcoming CRM tool. As Treiblmaier (2019) noted, the block-chain may lead to the transparency in the loyalty programs where the points cannot be arbitrarily devalued. Other airlines including Singapore Airlines have tried blockchain-based loyalty systems, and Tapscott and Tapscott (2018) had reasoned that this kind of loyalty system could help a company gain a lot of trust by decentralising data management.

2.1.8 CRM, Data Privacy, and Trust

One of the most discussed issues of CRM has been trust. According to Martin et al. (2017), customers are becoming more worried about the usage of their personal information, especially in such industries as aviation where such data is very sensitive. Culnan and Armstrong (1999) indicated that the CRM systems would become a threat to the customer trust instead of enhancing it unless clear data policies are established.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was an eye opener in Europe. Voigt and Von dem Bussche (2017) emphasized that GDPR compelled airlines to implement more stringent consent procedures and data protection policies, which also changed the CRM practices. Mariani and Borghi (2021) suggested that airlines that did not violate GDPR in any way not only enabled

the avoidance of legal risks, but also leveraged transparency as a competitive tool, building trust in the image of a brand.

2.1.9 CRM and Service Quality

The service quality has been the major basis of airline competitiveness. The SERVQUAL model was proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) and they said that responsiveness, assurance, as well as empathy were important in determining customer satisfaction. Gilbert and Wong (2003) claimed that service quality has remained as one of the best predictors of airline preference, despite the presence of price factor in the aviation industry.

Wirtz and Johnston (2003) said that passengers judge the airlines not just based on such tangible factors as the comfort of their seats and food but also on such intangible factors as the friendliness of staff and the quickness of solving the problem. Han and Hyun (2015) also explain that the quality of services in the aviation industry is no longer viewed through the prism of punctuality and reliability but also through the prism of CRM to capture and respond to individual passenger expectations.

This indicates that CRM and quality of services are interdependent. CRM systems are effective to assist the airlines in predicting the needs of the customers whereas high-quality service performance reinforces the data-driven observations produced by CRM.

2.1.10 CRM and Customer Satisfaction

Loyalty has been generally accepted to be based on customer satisfaction. According to Oliver (1999), satisfaction is delivered when there is a fulfilment of expectations or even higher performance, and this is a vital principle in the aviation industry where passengers usually have high expectations. Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) explained that customers who are satisfied show greater tolerance to service failures particularly where the airlines exhibit transparency and compassion in handling the issues.

Kotler and Keller (2016) also emphasized that CRM offers the means of measuring satisfaction in real-time by survey, app feedback, or logs of complaints. They explained that satisfaction does not remain constant, but it depends on how airlines interact with each other in various

touchpoints. According to Kim and Mauborgne (2015), the concept of satisfaction in airlines has been more and more associated with perceived innovativeness of services, including flawless mobile applications or environmentally friendly options of travel.

Therefore, CRM is a satisfaction measure as well as a source of satisfaction, particularly with service recovery and personalisation.

2.1.11 CRM, Loyalty, and Retention

The importance of CRM in terms of keeping loyal customers has been talked about by different scholars. According to Reichheld and Sasser (1990), even a percentage improvement on retention has a profound effect on the profitability. According to Dick and Basu (1994), loyalty is to be regarded as behavioural (repeat purchase) and attitudinal (emotional attachment).

Shaw (2011) pointed out that the effectiveness of traditional loyalty programs in the airline industry was initially good, however, their effectiveness has diminished as customers have acquired numerous memberships. According to O'Connell and Williams (2016), loyalty programs cannot be considered as enough without the absence of good service quality and personalisation. Kumar and Kaushik (2022) mentioned more recently that sustainability initiatives are becoming the factor of loyalty, and passengers like to use airlines that are environmentally responsible.

These viewpoints emphasize the fact that loyalty in aviation of the contemporary era is not merely transactional but encompasses a set of trust, observations, congruency and repeated interaction.

2.1.12 CRM and Sustainability in Airlines

The recent inclusion of sustainability in CRM is one of the biggest changes in recent years. Peattie and Crane (2005) reasoned that the marketing has ceased being a green concern to a sustainable relationship approach where the businesses incorporate ecological and social responsibility into the customer contact. According to Leonidou et al. (2013), genuine CSR practices enhance trust and loyalty, and fake or so-called green activities may damage reputation.

Font and Lynes (2018) emphasized that passengers of airlines are becoming increasingly aware of the carbon footprint, and a clear number of people are ready to use the services of a carrier that observably participates in environmental programs. They also wrote that sustainability in CRM should not be limited to the slogans, but actual programs like loyalty points on environmentally friendly choices or open carbon offset programs.

Han et al. (2019) claimed that Millennials and Gen Z are especially susceptible to sustainability since they tend to regard ecological responsibility as a central insight when choosing their travel destinations. This supports the point that sustainable CRM is not merely an ethical option, but the need to stay strategic in appeal towards younger markets.

2.1.13 The Role of Technology in CRM

The success of the modern CRM systems is dependent on technology. According to Davenport and Harris (2017), big data analytics enable airlines to anticipate behaviour, segment their customers and offer personalized services in bulk. Lu et al. (2020) contended that artificial intelligence, via chatbots and predictive systems, has changed responsiveness, although they noted that excessive reliance on automation would compromise the privacy of customers who need human sympathy.

As Shao et al. (2019) noted, mobile applications have turned into CRM ecosystems, which provide booking, loyalty monitoring, and real-time information. They said that applications are not merely transactional anymore but mobile platforms of unceasing interaction. Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) posited that integrating mobile platforms with CRM databases would make sure that customers feel appreciated and appreciated in their journey.

According to Traeblmayr (2019), block-chain can revolutionise the loyalty program, making it more transparent and resilient to inoculation. Tapscott and Tapscott (2018) also claimed that CRM that uses block-chain technology will be able to recover the trust of customers in the loyalty programs, and it will be fair and responsible.

These changes also show that technology is an empowering and threatening factor: it has made the work more efficient, but it has also brought up the issues of trust and privacy, which found a vehement echo in the results of this dissertation.

2.1.14 CRM and Data Privacy

Data handling trust is the key to CRM success. Martin et al. (2017) suggested that customers are sceptical of the usage of their personal data by airlines. As Culnan and Armstrong (1999) emphasized, the unavailability of information weakens the readiness to disclose information and, as a result, negatively affects the results of CRM.

According to Voigt and Von dem Bussche (2017) with the establishment of GDPR in Europe, airlines were compelled to be more transparent in their consent forms in order to turn data privacy into a competitive advantage rather than an operational concern. Mariani and Borghi (2021) provided an argument that airlines that promoted themselves as data responsible increased their reputations and loyalty.

Sinha and Kumar (2020) emphasized that in India, a clear proportion of passengers have concerns about the way airlines process personal information, especially during a loyalty program. They claimed that the lack of completely enforced data protection laws exposes the passengers and leads to a lack of trust. This poses a challenge and opportunity in the sense that airlines that voluntarily embrace a well-supported data governance can find themselves as reputable brands.

2.2 EVOLUTION OF CRM IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY

2.2.1 Early CRM Initiatives

The initial CRM programs in the airline industry were mostly on frequent flyer programs (FFPs). These programs, introduced in the early eighties, were meant to maintain business with customers through rewarding the frequent traveller with points which could be redeemed into free flights and upgrades. FFPs were primitive types of CRM with the primary focus made on transactional loyalty and less emphasis on in depth customer relationships (O'Connell and Williams, 2005).

Author(s)	Year	CRM Focus	Key Findings
Ahadmotlaghi & Pawar	2012	Loyalty programs	Loyalty positively impacts customer retention
Kaur & Narula	2019	Customer satisfaction	CRM improves satisfaction in Indian airlines
Lemon & Verhoef	2016	personalisation	Enhances customer engagement and loyalty

Table 1: Summary of Literature on CRM and Customer Satisfaction in Airlines

Table 1 is a brief summary of some of the most relevant academic literature on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) within the airline industry and its effects on customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, and customer engagement. The table is organised according to four main dimensions, Author(s), Year, CRM Focus, and Key Findings, which will enable organising a comparison of the given research.

Avoiding the necessity of further elaboration, the research by Ahadmotlaghi and Pawar (2012) is based on the principle that CRM-along loyalty programmes carry a positive effect on customer retention directly. This observation justifies the strategic value of CRM in long-term passenger relationships.

In the same direction, Kaur and Narula (2019) concentrate on the issue of customer satisfaction in the context of Indian airlines and prove that active CRM implementation obviously raises the level of passenger satisfaction. This is especially so in the Indian context of aviation where service differentiation is emerging as a key competitive instrument.

Lastly, the study by Lemon and Verhoff (2016) highlights personalisation as one of the key CRM roles, demonstrating that customised services on the basis of customer information effectively enhance customer interactions and retention in service-based sectors, including aviation.

All in all, the table indicates that CRM activities like loyalty programmes, personalisation, and customising the services are key motivators of customer satisfaction and retention in the airlines. These results are the theoretical basis of the current study and the rationale of the interests to sustainable and technology-oriented CRM practises within the Indian aviation sector.

This table is directly related to Section 2.2.2: Technological Advancements, where digital technologies are mentioned (data analytics, mobile platforms, social media integration) as the enablers of modern CRM systems. The summarised literature under this table supports the significance of the technologies as they reinforce the effects of personalisation, loyalty, and engagement.

2.2.2 Technological Advancements

The appearance of digital technologies changed the CRM in the airline industry. The combination of data analytics, mobile technology, and social media allowed airlines to collect and analyse vast volumes of client data. This knowledge-based approach assisted the airlines to tailor their service, improve customer experiences and improve efficiency (Kim, 2008). As an example, Delta Air Lines applied the latest analytics to enhance its CRM strategy, leading to a tangible shift in the dimensions of customer satisfaction and operational efficiency (Bolton et al., 2014).

Traditional relationship marketing focused on interpersonal relationships, building of trust and long-term relationships. But these dynamics are also changed by digitalization where a large number of human interactions have been substituted by automated interfaces. Within airline services, CRM is mediated by mobile applications, virtual assistants, and personalisation based on algorithms and reforms the perception of building emotional bonds.

According to technology acceptance theory, customers can interact with digital CRM systems depending on the perception of usefulness, reliability and ease of use. Digital inequalities in the Indian setting result in disjointed adoption trends. Passengers in the city are quickly adopting digital CRM, and others rely on hybrid service paths.

The CRM theory is being intertwined with sustainability literature as the provision of ethical services impacts the trust building. Relational stability and reputational trust are more manifest among airlines that include sustainability transparently in digital CRM settings.

This cross-sectional relationship marketing, technology acceptance, and sustainability implies that CRM effectiveness arises out of a cohesive conceptual ecosystem but not individual theoretical modules.

2.2.3 Current state of CRM

CRM in the airline business today is extremely wide in its practices including personalised marketing, automation of customer services and real-time customer feedback. Airlines have developed CRM software to control customer relationship and interaction in different touchpoints of customers when booking to after flight services. The systems can help airlines deliver personal services, anticipate what customers require and resolve issues ahead of time (Smith, 2019).

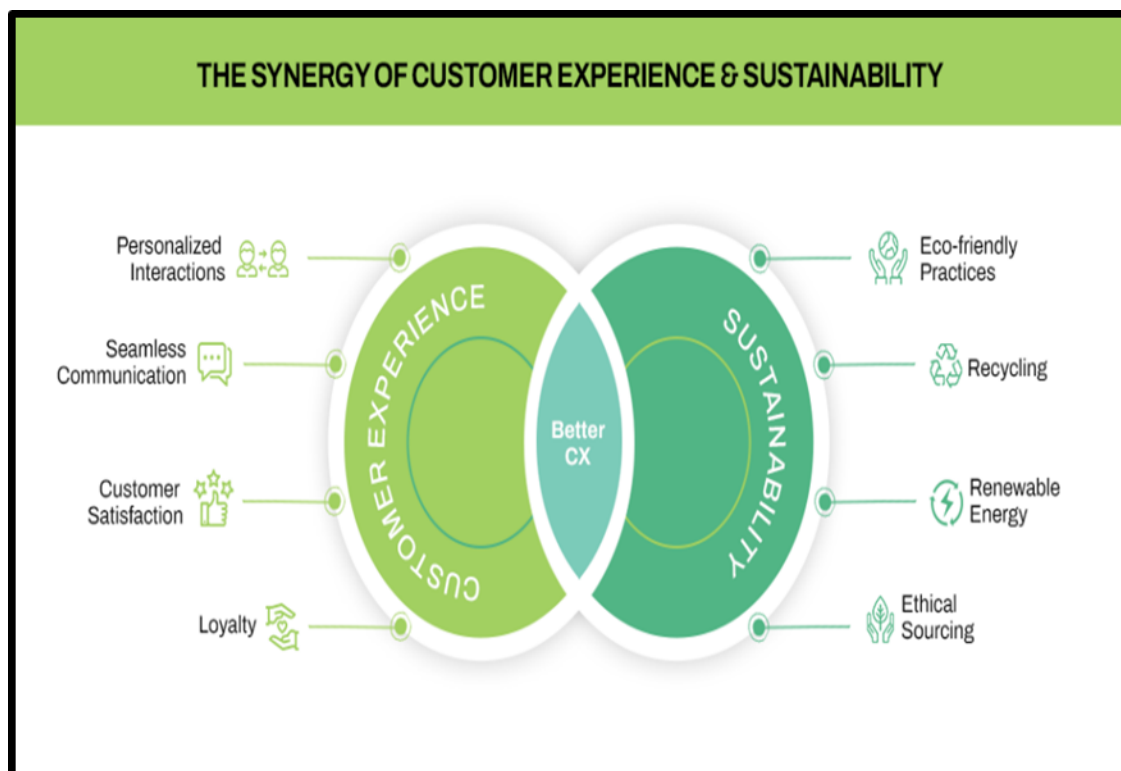


Figure 10: Customer Experience & Sustainability

(Source: exotel.com, 2024)

The synergy between Customer Experience (CX) and Sustainability in the airline sector is seen in Figure 10. The model underlines the intersection of the two dimensions to form the central Better CX and demonstrates that sustainable practices are no longer distinct from service quality but a part of the passenger experience.

On the Customer Experience side, CRM driven factors like individualised interactions, smooth communication, customer satisfaction and loyalty are highlighted. Such initiatives demonstrate a sense of environmental responsibility and sustainable governance of the airlines which is becoming a determinant to passenger confidence and brand image.

The overlapping area (Better CX) means that the sustainability inclusion in the CRM strategies will enhance the customer trust, emotional bond, and brand loyalty. Customers will favour airlines that can fit their environmental scanning and provide high-quality digital and service experiences.

In general, this number substantiates the argument in the study that sustainable CRM is a strategic tool in the contemporary aviation industry when a composite of environmental responsibility and customer-focused service initiates the competitive edge and customer retention.

2.3 Emerging Trends in Airline CRM

2.3.1 Personalisation and Customer Centricity

The new trends in airline CRM have been actively developed since the late 1990s. The trend of customer-centricity and personalisation might be considered among the most influential shifts in airline CRM. Airlines are also examining customer data more and providing customers with personalized experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

2.3.2 Omni-Channel CRM

Another new trend in the airline industry is omnichannel CRM. It involves combining the contact with the customers through a different range of communication, such as mobile applications, social networks, and in-flight entertainment (Verhoeff et al., 2015).

The study employs a step-by-step process of locating and identifying the sources that are relevant in that the steps of locating and identifying are organized in a manner that creates a very clear and comprehensive method of sourcing the current literature on CRM practices used by the airline industry in India. Three key factors guide this approach and they include choice of keywords, sources, and search engines and/ or databases.

Keywords Selection:

The keywords play a critical role in guiding the search process of the literature and ensuring that the left no stone unturned is left unturned in the course of searching the literature to identify the literature of relevance. These are the most fundamental keywords to the CRM of the airline industry, sustainable CRM, SERVQUAL model, customer loyalty, environmental sustainability, and customer experience of the airline. In addition, secondary keywords were used, which included, Data Analytics in CRM, Corporate Social Responsibility in Airlines to search all the contents of CRM in the airline context. This type of keyword recognition also reduces the possibility of having irrelevant studies in the present field of study.

Search Engines and Databases:

As a matter of fact, in order to render such proceedings truly elaborate and comprehensive, the most renowned and highly trusted scholarly databases like JSTOR, ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore and Google Scholar were referred. They are databases of full text articles of peer studied journals, conference papers and important books on CRM and sustainability. With this emphasis, find sources that are credible and applicable to the specific study that they are used.

Types of Sources:

The articles used in the literature review are varied, to attain the broad vision of the topic. To minimize the chances of bias, an attempt was made to acquire published materials that could be searched by dose, specificity, outcome, the type of studies, year of publication, and language

using PubMed or ISI Web of Science. In addition to this, fundamental CRM reference books, annual reports to recognize changes occurring in the airline business environment, and conference papers to learn the recent technological development of use in the business world were included. This type of selection should be appropriate to the methodical process that is supposed to take place in doctoral studies.

The search of literature was guided through the use of the reputable academic databases and search engines to get high-quality sources.

- JSTOR: It is reputed to have access to the articles of various academic journals in a variety of fields, including historical and foundational research on CRM.
- ScienceDirect: It is handy when one wants to access peer-reviewed articles, especially those dealing with business and management sciences.
- IEEE Xplore: This database is specialized in the field of technology and thus it was very useful in locating the sources on CRM technology in the airline industry.
- Google Scholar: It is used because it has a wide range of scholarly papers, theses, and other scholarly materials.

These databases were identified on the basis of credibility and relevancy of the collections to the subject of CRM in the airline industry. The utilization of various databases was used to guarantee a wide and balanced range of literature. The literature review has used diversified sources to present an all-inclusive overview of the CRM practices. The sources which were reviewed are:

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles: This forms the larger portion of the sources and offers in-depth and confirmed research outcomes on CRM strategies, customer loyalty, and customer satisfaction measurements.

Book Chapters: The chapters of the books involved were appropriate as they provided the background theories such as SERVQUAL model and customer loyalty models.

Conference Papers: These sources assisted in getting to know about the latest technological advances in CRM and data analytics in utilisation within the airline industry.

Management Reports: The industry reports gave information on actual CRM practices and customer satisfaction patterns in the airline industry.

By synthesising them, this systematic review provides a coherent and systematic background to future research on exploring the topic of sustainable CRM in the Indian airline industry.

2.3.3 Data Privacy and Security

Along with the growing utilization of the customer data, the issue of data has become more salient. Airlines should ensure the certification that their CRM systems meet data protection requirements. Data security is essential in ensuring the confidence of customers and avoiding data attacks (Martin et al., 2017).

2.3.4 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability

The airline industry is becoming increasingly concerned with CSR and Sustainability, which affect CRM strategies. The issue of ecological footprint of air travel is growing more and more important to customers, and they will be willing to turn to airlines that show that they are dedicated to being sustainable. Airlines are also reacting by including green programs in their CRMs, including the provision of carbon offset programs and the promotion of environmentally friendly activities (Font & Lynes, 2018).

2.4 A New Prototype for Customer Management

2.4.1 Integrated Customer Data Platform (CDP)

A CDP brings together consumer information of different causes which gives a single context of each customer. Airlines are able to provide more individualized and relevant experiences with the help of CDPs (Davenport et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Machine Learning and AI

Such technologies allow airlines to make data-driven decisions because large volumes of data are analyzed and patterns and trends are determined. As an illustration, machine learning algorithms have the ability to optimize pricing schemes, forecast customer choices, and optimize operations.

Besides, AI-based applications can enhance the customer experience through real-time support and personalized recommendations (Rust and Huang, 2014).

2.4.3 Block Chain Technology

block-chain, with its segregated and set data architecture, offers a new clear change that addresses these limitations by ensuring secure, tamper proof, and verifiable customer information. Scholars argue that block-chain enabled CRM can enhance customer trust by offering greater control over personal data and improving the authenticity of transactions and interactions within the customer journey. Within the airline industry, block-chain applications extend to loyalty program management, identity verification, ticketing processes, and real-time service coordination.

2.4.4 Advanced Customer Segmentation

The segmentation of the customers' needs advanced customer segmentation. The ability of airlines to segment their marketing and service offerings to customers by classifying them into various categories based on their requirements that contain their frequency of traveling, their preferences and spending behaviours. This niche solution will have the capacity to increase customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, not including revenue (Homburg et al., 2015).

2.4.5 Enhanced Customer Experience (CX)

The overall customer experience (CX) is one of the most important goals of the new CRM prototype. The airlines must make sure that they offer enjoyable experiences in all the touchpoints. This involves the optimization of the booking, in-flight services which are customized and postflight services. The technology in use can also intervene to deliver further enhancement to the consumer experience by offering immersive and interactive services (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

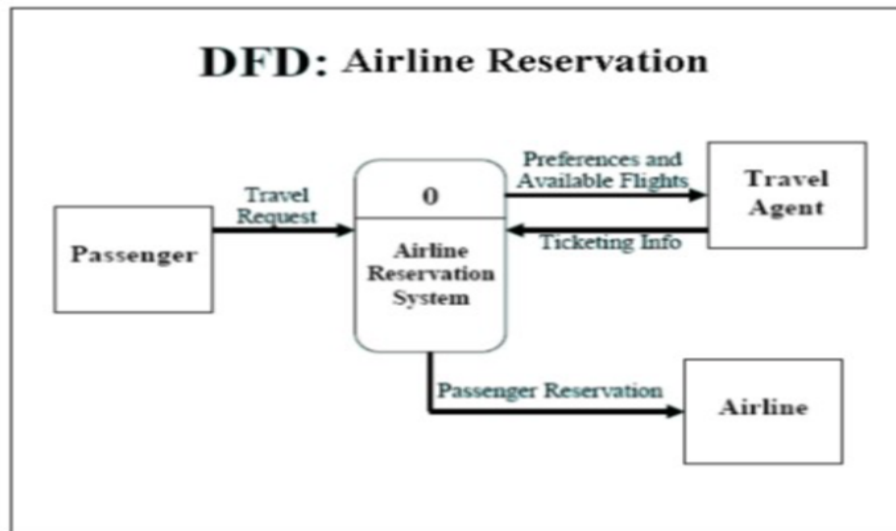


Figure 11: Data Flow (DFD) of Airline Reservation System

Source: [BusinessEssay.com](https://www.businessessay.com) (2018)

Figure 11 presents the Data Flow Diagram (DFD) of an airline reservation system, illustrating the movement of data between passengers, travel agents, airlines, and the central airline reservation system. The figure indicates that passenger travel requests are fed into the reservation system, which processes preferences and available flights. Travel agents get ticketing data and aid in booking, whereas confirmed passenger reservations are sent to the airline to be implemented. This information architecture focuses on the integration of information to enable smooth service continuity and decision making in airline distribution channels. CRM-wise, the DFD proposes how customer data, booking details, and records of services are systematised, processed, and used to aid service delivery, customer personalisation, and post booking interactions. Operational reliability and long-term development of the relationships with the customers are therefore based on the efficient flow of data.

2.5 CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATION

2.5.1 Data privacy and security concerns

Airlines store enormous volumes of data about customers and using it responsibly is a significant challenge. Indeed, it is vital to be fully safeguarded against misuse, cyber-attacks and unauthorised access particularly when utilising new technologies such as block-chain.

2.5.2 High cost of technology adoption

The adoption of sustainable CRM systems, digital tools, and blockchain-based solutions demand obvious financial costs. The low-cost airlines or smaller airlines might find it hard to afford the infrastructure upgrade and staff training.

2.5.3 Integration with existing Airline systems

Airlines already have elaborate reservation and ticketing systems as well as customer care. It can be challenging, time-consuming, and subject to technical failures to align new CRM technologies with these existing platforms.

2.5.4 Customer awareness and acceptance

Not all passengers are conversant with digital CRM tools or technology such as block-chain. The ineffectiveness of new CRM strategies meant to enhance satisfaction may be hampered by lack of awareness, trust, or will to use these systems.



Figure 12: Market Share of Major Domestic Airlines in India Based on Passenger Traffic (2023)

Source: Mint/Finshots (2023)

Figure 12 shows the distribution of market share of the major domestic airlines in India by the number of passengers in 2023. The figure highlights the leading role of IndiGo, which occupies the biggest share of the domestic market, which shows a strong competitive advantage based on operational efficiency, high network coverage, and stable service delivery. The other important players are Air India, Vistara, SpiceJet, and Akasa Air that hold different percentages of the market. The existence of the several competitors whose routes overlap each other adds intensity in pricing, punctuality, and customer experience. This competitive structure enhances the strategic relevance of passenger loyalty, service personalisation, complaint management and online interaction in terms of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Low market share airlines will find it particularly necessary to rely on efficient CRM systems to distinguish their services and develop customer relations over time. The figure thus supports the applicability of CRM as a highly competitive tool in the Indian aviation market and not a support tool.

2.6 CASE STUDIES

2.6.1 Case Study 1: IndiGo Eco-Efficient CRM and Passenger Engagement

IndiGo has developed a CRM model centred on sustainability, which monitors fuel-saving operation, carbon emission, and customer satisfaction. The airline was able to respond quicker to service issues because it incorporated a digital feedback system and tailored communication. This transfer enhanced passenger confidence and increased satisfaction particularly to the frequent fliers who witnessed transparency and green flight operations.

2.6.2 Case Study 2: Air India – Service Transformation and CRM Practices

In the period of restructuring, Air India deployed an updated CRM system to streamline customer complaints, feedback records, and loyalty contacts. The new system assisted in categorising service problems, setting priorities in responding, and monitoring the customer feelings. Consequently, there was an increase in the time of complaint resolution and passengers

stated they felt that they have been observed more frequently, which demonstrates how CRM modernization can restore the trust in old airlines.

2.6.3 Case Study 3: Vistara- Personalized Service Through Digital CRM

Vistara took the route of an experience-based CRM model which emphasises on personalised travel deals, active communication and after travel. Through behaviour-based analytics, the airline differentiated in-flight and ground services. Passengers saw this individualised care as high-quality services, and the satisfaction score went up. The case echoes the brand loyalty in competitive markets through high end CRM personalisation.

2.6.4 Case Study 4: SpiceJet – Handling Service Disruptions using CRM Tools

Spice Jet launched a CRM system to address a high number of grievances of customers regarding delays and cancellations. It allowed automatic notification, faster refunds and live status change. Despite the fact that there were still operational challenges, the enhanced communication minimised customer frustration. The case illustrates that digital CRM can resolve the disappointment even though service failures are unavoidable.

2.6.5 Case Study 5: AirAsia India block-chain Pilot for Transparent Loyalty Tracking

AirAsia India also tested a blockchain system of managing loyalty points to curb fraud and enhance transparency in redemption of rewards. It enabled the passengers to monitor the points real-time and redeem the points with more confidence. Even though it is still small, the initiative demonstrated the role of innovative technologies in increasing customer trust and advancing sustainable CRM at the airline.

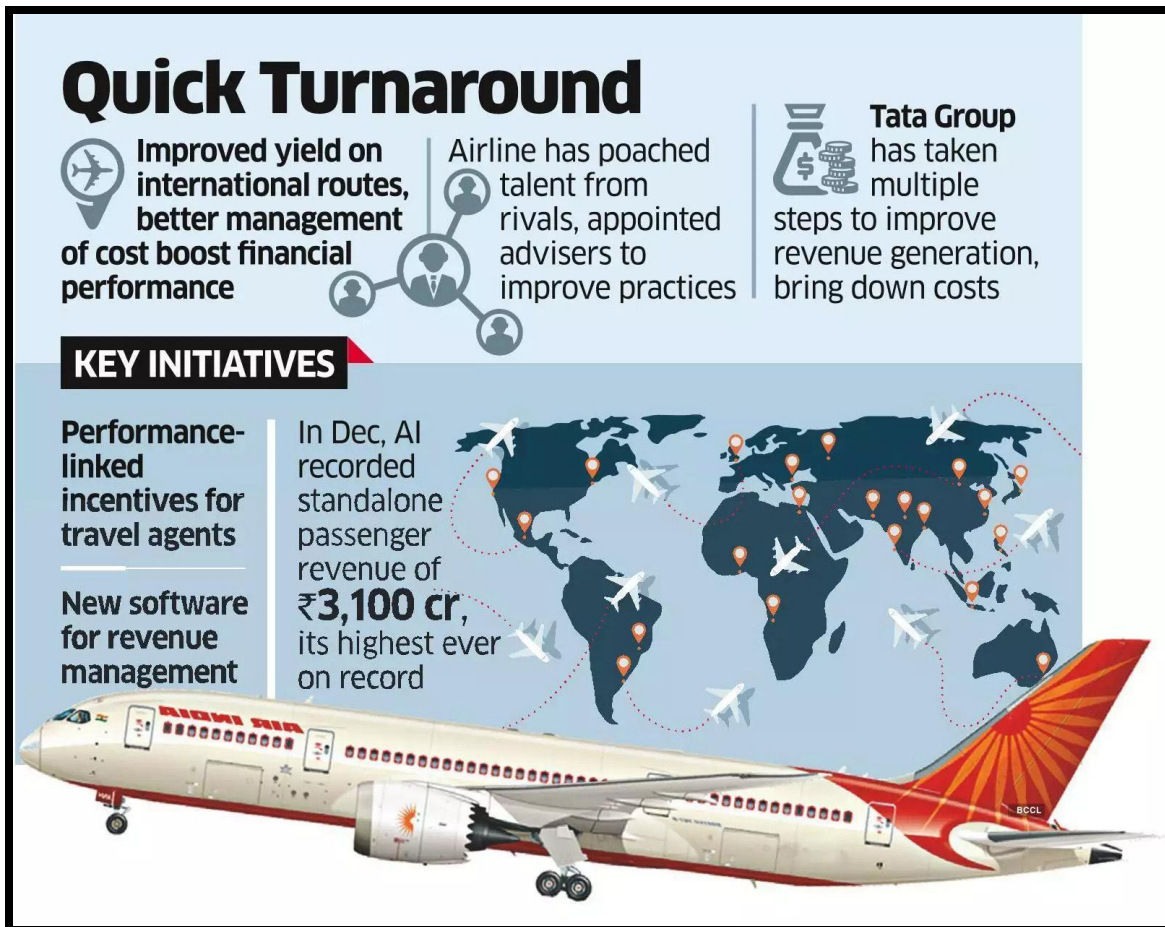


Figure 13: Rapid Turnaround Strategy and Revenue Optimisation Initiatives in the Airline Industry

Source: Economic TimesBCCL Infographic (2022)

Figure 13 depicts a fast turnaround approach taken by an airline as a result of digital transformation, revenue optimisation, and performance-based management initiatives. The figure underscores major strategic measures that include better yield on international routes, better cost management, performance linked incentives to travel agents and adopting new revenue management software. It is also a sign of enhancing human capital by appointing industry advisors and lateral talent acquisition to enhance practices in operations. The international route map highlights the airline's international expansion in its growth and recovery plan. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) These initiatives focus on how data driven pricing, personal selling via agents and integrated revenue platforms directly improves profitability and customer

engagement. By balancing the performance of employees, digital competences, and customer-centric information approaches, airlines are able to enhance operational sustainability, economic recuperation, and more accurate delivery items. This value thus indicates the feasibility of CRM enabled decision-making in postcrisis airline recovery and competitive positioning.

2.7 Identifications, Surveys and Results

Stakeholder Identifications

a. Passengers (Primary Respondents):

Frequent flyers, business travelers, students, senior citizens, and leisure travelers.

b. Airlines (Service Providers):

AirAsia India, Akasa Air, Spice Jet, IndiGo, Air India, Vistara.

c. Employees (Need of the Internal stakeholders):

The customer service employees, cabin crew, ground personnel, CRM analysts, and digital support groups.

d. Regulators:

DGCA, Ministry of Civil Aviation, - affecting standards of service quality.

Identified CRM Challenges

- Delay in grievance redressal
- Lack of transparency in loyalty program management
- Inconsistent digital communication during delays
- Environmental sustainability not clearly communicated to passengers
- Data security concerns as digitalization expands

Surveys

A qualitative oriented survey guide was prepared to understand passenger perceptions of sustainable CRM practices. Descriptive responses were collected by semi-structured questions.

Sample size and profile

a. Sample Size: 50 passengers

b. Geographic Coverage: Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad

c. Demographic Distribution:

42% frequent flyers

28% business travelers

20% leisure travelers

10% students and others

d. Airlines Most Frequently Used:

IndiGo (46%), Vistara (22%), Air India (18%), others (14%)

Survey Themes

- Ecofriendly perception of the passengers of the airline.
- Customer service satisfaction with interactions.
- Confidence in digital solutions (applications, chatbots, self-check-in)
- Practical experience in complaint resolution.
- Transparency and equity of loyalty programmes.
- Observed perceived practices of sustainable CRM.
- Communication efficiency in disruptions.

Sample Survey Questions Guide.

- What is your satisfaction with the communication offered by airlines in times of disruptions?
- Do you think that your favourite airline cares about sustainability?
- What do you consider as your loyalty factors to an airline?
- What is your experience with digital customer service tools?
- What changes would you rather have in the loyalty or rewards programmes?
- Do you feel safe regarding the security of your personal and travelling information?

Survey Guide Results

- Passenger ratings on Sustainability.

65% of the respondents expressed that airlines fail to articulate their sustainability efforts.

58% will be more loyal when eco-efficient operations are employed by airlines and passengers aware of them.

72% of people think that transparent complaint management enhances trust in a straightforward way.

- Satisfaction with Digital CRM Tools.

75% of them have found mobile apps and digital check-in useful.

49% indicated chatbot inconsistency.

The majority (62%) claimed that they are able to lessen stress and enhance satisfaction through real-time updates.

27% were concerned about the security of their own data, in particular, AI and biometric tools.

- Observations of the loyalty programmes.

41% of them liked the transparency of benefits of loyalty.

37% of them stated that they have had problems with redeeming points.

54% believe airlines better when they can follow loyalty (e.g. block-chain systems).

- Feedback about Complaint Handling.

68% believed that time to resolve is slow particularly when disruption is involved.

Customers wanted more interactive responses, rather than automatic responses.

- Passenger Satisfaction Effect.

The communication is punctual and candid.

Sustainability is also manifested in operations (plastics less, eco-friendly in-flight products).

CRM systems are open, just and sound.

The protection of data is evidently provided.

Services are tailored according to the traveller history of airlines.

Key Interpretation of Survey Guide Findings

- Passengers do not fully comprehend sustainable CRM, but react intensely to ecofriendly and ethical service behaviour.
- Digitalization is the core part of satisfaction, and it requires greater consistency and data security interventions.
- During disruptions or reward redemption, loyalty is enhanced as the operations are transparent.
- Airlines that are proactive and personalise their services are more satisfied.

2.8 Airline Branding Strategies

The trend in branding strategies in the Indian airline industry has been evident as the carriers seek to stand out in the highly competitive and price-sensitive industry. Branding in the framework of sustainable CRM practices has evolved beyond logos, taglines, and in-flight experiences to create the long-term emotional bond based on trust, transparency, and responsible

service delivery. Airlines are increasingly appreciating how passengers are now seeing reliability, digital convenience, and sustainable operational behaviour more than airfare and service quality.

One of the core branding strategies entails experience branding whereby airlines emphasise on punctuality, onboarding, and efficient customer service. IndiGo, as an example, bases its positioning on on-time performance and simplicity, and Vistara on premium service and hospitality. This positioning would be in line with CRM practises that focus on regular communication, polite staff behaviour, and personalised digital interaction.

Another new branding strategy is the sustainability led differentiation. Some of the initiatives promoted by airlines include zero or minimised use of plastic, fuel efficiency in flights, carbon credits, and waste minimization promises. This creates the feeling of responsibility and ethical management in the terms of CRM, which contributes to the satisfaction of the environmentally conscious travellers. A client will be inclined to stick to an airline that shows it cares about its clients and the environment.

Digital branding has also become the centre stage. Branding touchpoints are mobile applications, AI-based chatbots, self-check-in kiosks, blockchain-based loyalty tracking, and social media presence, which will contribute to reinforcing the image of convenience and transparency. The airline strengthens brand promise where such digital tools remain constantly updated in real-time or simplify complaints resolution.

Finally, community and trust-building tools that allow airlines to be believable are storytelling, customer testimonials, frequent flyers, and open loyalty programmes. Sustainable CRM and branding are long-term commitments and not short-term marketing. Accordingly, airlines that position themselves as reliable, environmentally responsible, and personalised will have higher chances of increasing passenger satisfaction and gaining long-term loyalty in the Indian aviation market.

2.9 Airline reputation and its commitment

The reputation of airlines is decisive in the creation of passenger expectations, booking decisions and long-term loyalty. In the competitive aviation market in India where passengers can compare prices, services and reviews easily online, reputation serves as a decisive factor. The airlines that

have been enjoying the positive reputation all the time have higher retention rates, easier conflict management, and resilience in case of operational disruptions. In the frame of sustainable CRM, reputation is no longer confined to performance parameters, it is an expression of how an airline engages in ethical service, openness and responsible customer care.

Service consistency, such as punctuality, reliability, safety records, and staff behaviour are important elements of airline reputation. As soon as airlines concentrate on constant work and nurturing communication, in them an image of trust is formed. This aligns directly with CRM promises, such as digital real time updates, customised support, and instant grievance resolution. Today, passengers use the airlines not only in terms of the flight experience but the degree to which the airlines handle the interaction before and after the trip.

Commitment to sustainability also defines reputation, which is of growing importance in the Indian environmentally conscious consumer segment. When airlines make ecofriendly decisions such as the use of cleaner fuel, lowering carbon emissions, lessening wastage and being a good steward of the supply chain, it points to responsibility and long-term perspective. Sustainability built into the CRM messages boosts the level of transparency and the emotional bond with the passengers.

Also, reputation is established by corporate commitment to the welfare of customers, such as fair refunds, fair pricing, employee training, and travel disruption. Airlines that have transparent communication channels, digital tools, and responsiveness are perceived to be more concerned with their passengers.

In this way, the airline reputation, reinforced by sustainable CRM commitments, is exemplified as a crucial foundation in increasing the customer trust, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty in the Indian airline industry.

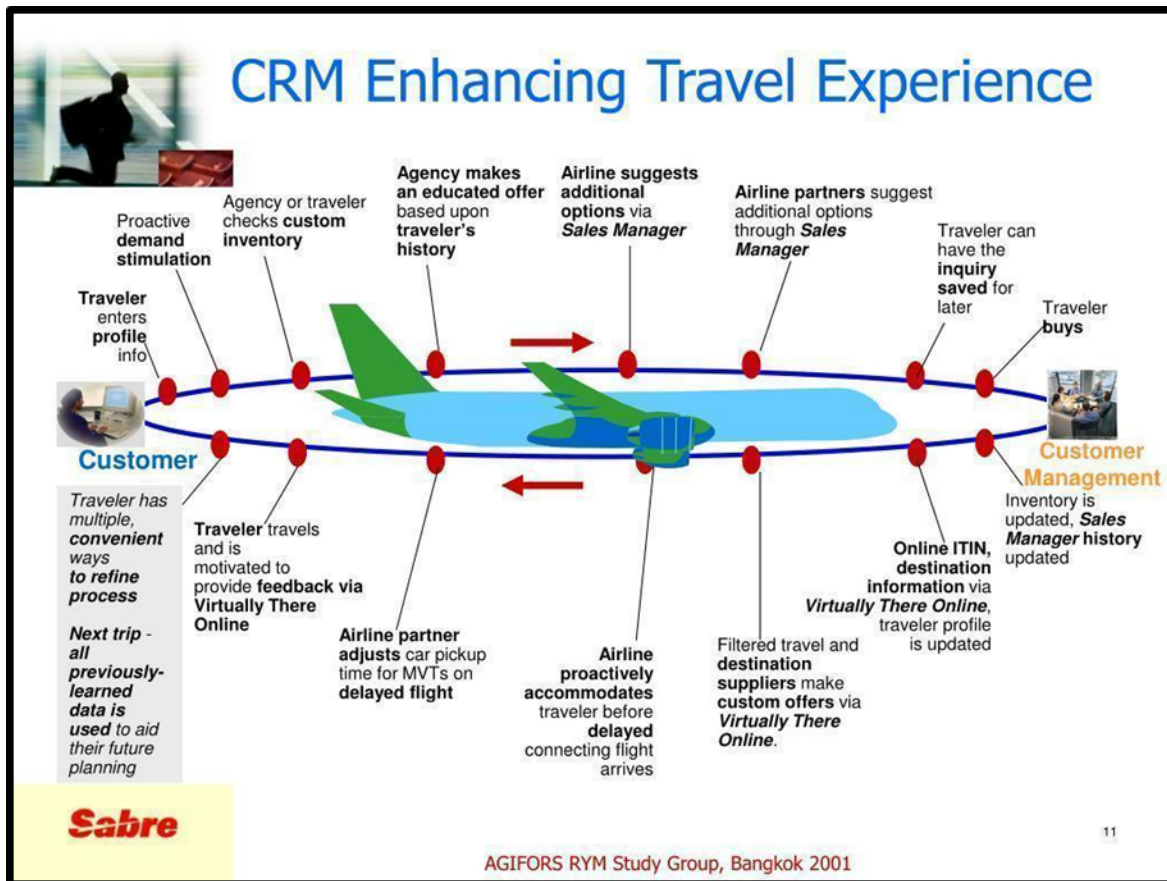


Figure 14: CRM Enabled Passenger Travel Experience in the Airline Industry

Source: AGIFORS RYM Study Group, Bangkok (2001); Sabre Travel Systems

Figure 14 demonstrates Customer Relationship Management (CRM) as an aspect in improving the end-to-end airline travel experience at various levels of passenger journey. The model proposes the way customer data is captured during the profile creation phase and constantly enhanced with booking behaviour, travel history, service interactions, and post travel feedback. Before travelling, CRM allows stimulating demand in advance, individual offers, and optimization of the inventory in accordance with the preferences of the passengers. In the travel stage, real-time CRM integration enables airlines and their partners to handle disturbances, change seat assignment, customise lodgings in case of delays, and update customer profiles in real-time. After the journey, the passenger feedback is obtained digitally and returned into the system to personalise future services. The model also prioritises the collaboration of airlines, travel agents, sales managers and online and virtual platforms of service environments.

Strategically, this CRM architecture enables customer-centric marketing, service recovery, loyalty building, and foretelling customer analytics. In the airline sector, this CRM enabled journey management is essential in enhancing passenger satisfaction, operational responsiveness, and continuity of relationships in very competitive markets.

2.10 Theoretical Research Directions

- a) What is the role of CRM programmes like personalised marketing and customer service improvements in customer loyalty and satisfaction, and, therefore, airline sustainability?
- b) How can CRM systems and practises be used to enhance environmental sustainability in the airline industry, e.g. by reducing carbon footprint programmes and by encouraging ecofriendly travel behaviours?
- c) How far do CRM technologies (e.g. AI-driven analytics, IoT) assist airlines to manage and fulfil the expectations of customers in sustainable practices, including carbon offset programmes and sustainable supply chain management?

2.11 Theoretical Reflection on Sustainable CRM

The reviewed literature in this paper defines CRM as a strategic framework that aims at optimising long-term customer relationships via personalisation, data analytics, and service integration. CRM in terms of sustainability, however, goes beyond transactional optimization to moral and emotional management of customer relationships. Customers do not view CRM as an operation only, but they mean something ethical and emotional about the behaviour of CRM systems at the point of vulnerability.

Sustainable CRM thus takes a multidimensional conceptual position between marketing theory, relationship theory, ethical governance and emotional labour. Relationship marketing, service-dominant logic, and observation cocreation theoretical models are also aligned well with this interpretation. Nevertheless, the current state of structures does not adequately consider the emotional frailty of trust in digitally mediated service settings.

CRM theory is further complicated by the rise of the sustainability discourse. Sustainability brings with it long term moral responsibility, where organisations must consider not only

economic performance but also environmental sustainability, data ethics and social equity. In the event that CRM is not bound to the principles of sustainability, customers are more likely to view this as merely a mere show.

This paper serves to support the thesis that sustainability should be a central ethical principle of future CRM theories, not an incidental goal of operations. Sustainable CRM should be defined in terms of a relational form of governance that balances economic performance, emotional trust and moral accountability.

It is a study based on this enlarged reflection because it provides a conceptual frame of CRM, sustainability, and emotional governance that is integral to service industries. Emotional continuity, moral honesty and social trust have risen as dominant mediating trends between CRM investment and long-term loyalty outcome.

Conventional CRM designs are centred on data acquisition, segmentation, and automated interaction. But new interpretive scholarship insists that over-automation without emotional regulation undermines relational authenticity. Customers are increasingly opposed to being a data profile and not a relational participant.

This paper reinforces the new school of thought that sustainable CRM should be stipulated on emotional stewardship rather than predictive analytics alone. Sustainable CRM is thus a human-based system of governance that balances the use of technology and emotional responsibility.

2.12 Conclusion

The reviewed literature indicates the increasing significance of sustainable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practises in influencing service quality and passenger satisfaction in the sphere of the Indian airline industry. The development of CRM towards less technology-focused, more strategic, and sustainability-oriented frameworks implies the way in which contemporary airlines turn more and more to integrated digital tools, individualised communication, and behavioural insights to form long-term relationships with customers. Previous studies confirm that proper CRM practices can clearly enhance loyalty, trust, and general service perception, particularly in high contact services, such as in the aviation industry.

It is also noted in the literature that technological development and customer management transformation are in high demand. More recent tools are artificial intelligence, automated service platforms, and block-chain-based technologies that present fresh prototypes to be more transparent, more precise data and a safer and more ethical engagement with the consumers. All these CRM novelties allow airlines to understand better their customer's needs, communication, and travelling experiences. As well, branding strategies and reputation management can be found as the largest areas of CRM performance, which help to create competitive advantage and emotional attachment to passengers.

It has been found that sustained CRM systems that propagate service delivery with morals, nurture environment, and long-term customer happiness, the effect on passenger trust is enormous particularly in the Indian environment where service constancy and reliability are continuous issues. In addition, restrictions like operation constraint, technological inequality, regulatory aspect and resource constraint are eminent to highlight the importance of reasonable and strategically planned CRM implementation strategies.

By and large, the literature demonstrates that sustainable CRM is not the ancillary need but the strategic necessity of Indian airlines to increase passenger satisfaction, competitive edge and good customer relations. The current study is expected to build on this history and examine the qualitative observations that will further elaborate the concept of sustainable CRM practices that characterise the real-life experiences and expectations of Indian airline passengers.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

The chapter describes qualitative research design to examine how Indian airlines are embracing new CRM practises, blockchain-based customer systems, sustainability-based loyalty programmes, and brand-building strategies. The research examines the evolving customer demands and the response of the airlines in a competitive market. A qualitative approach is appropriate since it assists in grasping the experiences, perceptions, and insights of people that cannot be explained by numbers.

3.1 Research Design

The research design is exploratory qualitative study to learn how sustainable CRM practices can help in passenger satisfaction at the Indian airline industry. As the study aims to delve into intensely insulated perceptions, behaviours, and experiences of passengers and airline professionals, qualitative inquiry offers the best framework. The approach is aimed at revealing trends in attitudes towards sustainability, trust, data confidentiality, reliability of services, and long-term customer relationships in CRM practises. The research is instructive with a clear change because it presumes that reality is social and can be best understood with the views of participants.

The interpretive aspect of research is an inseparable part of meaning construction in qualitative research. This paper recognises that knowledge is cocreated when there is interaction between the participant and the researcher. The continuity of self-examination, memo writing and interpretive validation thus ensured reflexivity in the course of the research. The study is made up of depth, contextual richness and experiential authenticity as opposed to statistical generalisation. This reflexive position enhances the validity and reliability of the results since the findings are not based on researcher presumption only but are based on the sense of the participants.

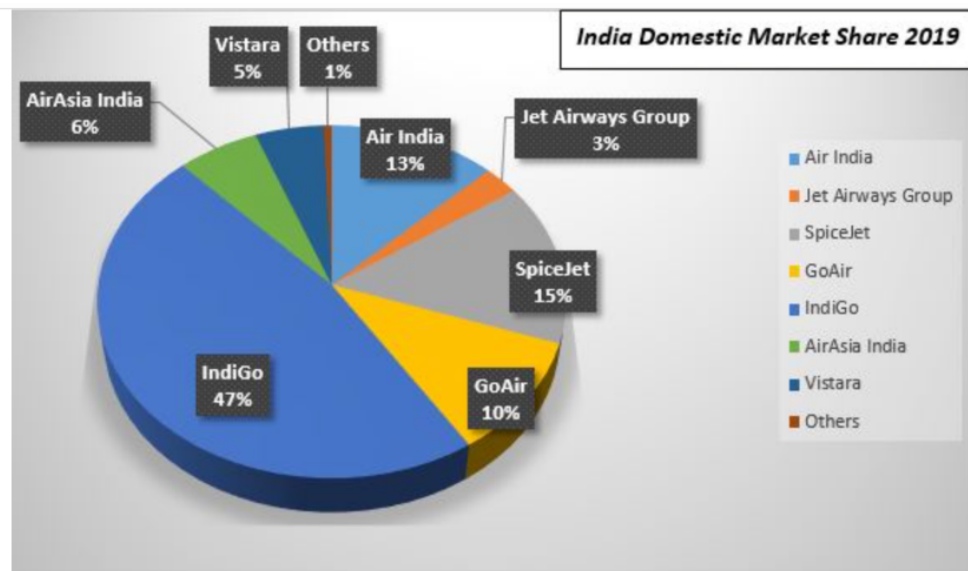


Figure 15: Market Share of Major Airlines in the Indian Domestic Aviation Sector (2019)

Source: India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF). (2019)

Figure 15 depicts the market shares of the leading airlines in the Indian domestic airlines industry in the year 2019. The figure highlights the leading role of IndiGo, which contributes the highest proportion of passenger traffic, then major rivals, namely SpiceJet, Air India, GoAir, Vistara and AirAsia India. Market leadership is concentrated which goes to demonstrate how the Indian airline industry is very competitive as customer acquisition, retention, and service differentiation are paramount to long-term performance. Multiplexed full-service and low-cost airlines also enhance competition, which makes Customer Relationship Management (CRM) a strategic requirement to the customer loyalty and revenue stability. This market structure additionally gives a good reason why Indian airline customers, as a study population, should be chosen because the competitive pressure directly impacts customer experience strategy, service innovation, and digital involvement practises in the industry.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

As a purposive method of sampling, information rich participants, who are directly involved or experience airline service delivery or airline CRM systems, are selected. The sample includes:

- The Indian airlines frequent flyers (12 participants).
- The Indian airlines Occasional flyers (8 participants)
- CRM/marketing professionals of airlines (4 participants)
- Experts/consultants in the aviation industry (2 participants)
- Travel agents and industry observers (n=2)

This will make sure that different perspectives are taken among passengers, airline employees, and industry analysts (Hong et al., 2022). The process of sampling is repeated until thematic intensity occurs, whereby no new observations can arise. The participants have been chosen based on their relation and experience in the Airline industry. Each criteria of stakeholders in the Indian Airline Industry has been maintained during the sampling method. Moreover, a total of 28 participants has been chosen as it is enough to attain data saturation and get the overall response in a systematic manner through thematic analysis (Guest et al. 2006).

The purposive sampling strategy was used to sample participants who had direct experience of CRM practises in the airline industry. Participants have been selected on the basis of their professional engagement in customer service, marketing or operation making them relevant to the research objectives. The interviews were continued until thematic saturation occurred where no additional observations or themes were made in the further interviews.

The data collection process was to be continued until thematic saturation. Data saturation is the stage of qualitative research when there is no more information on new themes, insights, or concepts that emerge during the interview. Saturation was observed in the coding and analysis of the study in this study. When data saturation is reached, the observer has sufficiently investigated the topic under study and may stop gathering data without running the danger of missing important information (Ahmed, 2025). This idea is crucial for improving the validity and credibility of qualitative research as well as for figuring out sample size. Researchers run the danger of presenting insufficient or shallow findings if they don't attain data saturation, which might result in erroneous or untrustworthy conclusions. In the first observation, following the interview process, there are recurring themes like trust, responsiveness in services, data privacy

concerns and personalised customer engagement, which started to be constant throughout the responses of the participants (Al Awadh, 2023). According to the later interviews, the same points of view and experiences were repeatedly noticed showing that the fundamental patterns were already covered. The interviews that were conducted in the end generally verified the previously existing themes and did not present any novel ideas. Such redundancy of answers proved that the dataset was extensive enough and rich enough to undergo valid qualitative research to prove that thematic saturation had been attained.

Overall, semi-structured interviews were utilised, and it was considered appropriate to stop data collection when the thematic saturation occurred because further interviews only brought repetition instead of new conceptual notes (Ahmed, 2025). Not only has that, upon reaching data saturation, credibility, trustworthiness and transferability been acquired by recruiting 28 participants for the research undertaken.

Participant Selection Table

Participant ID	Position / Role	Airline Experience	Sector	Area of CRM Expertise Selection Criteria
P1	Customer Relationship Manager	8 years in programs	loyalty	Direct involvement in CRM strategy
P2	Customer Experience Manager	10 years in passenger engagement		Experience handling CRM operations

P3	Customer Relationship Analyst	6 years in data analytics	Expertise in CRM systems
P4	Manager of Loyalty Program	9 years' experience in flyer programs	Manages airline loyalty programs
P5	Cabin crew	3 years in work	Direct working experience in the sector
P6	Ground staff	4 years in various ground operation	Managing various ground operations
P7	Occasional flyers	Direct involvement with Airline sector	Direct involvement with CRM service
P8	Occasional flyers	Direct involvement with Airline sector	Direct involvement with CRM service
P9	Occasional flyers	Direct involvement with Airline sector	Direct involvement with CRM service
P10	Frequent flyers	Direct involvement with Airline sector	Direct involvement with CRM service
P11	Frequent flyers	Direct involvement with Airline sector	Direct involvement with CRM service

P12	Frequent flyers	Direct involvement with Airline sector	Direct involvement with CRM service
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Table 2: Participants selection Table

Source: Author's research design and analytical structure (2025)

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection

In this study, semi-structured interviews will be used as primary qualitative data to gather rich and in-depth observations of how passengers and airline professionals perceive sustainable CRM practises. Frequent fliers, airline CRM managers, marketing executives, and aviation experts will also be interviewed to get various opinions. The semi-structured format is flexible and participants can talk freely about their experiences, and the researcher can delve into themes like sustainability, trust, data privacy and drivers of satisfaction. Interviews will be taped with the consent of participants and will last approximately 35-50 minutes. Such an approach assists in capturing the emotions and behaviours of people, as well as real-life experiences, which are not easily measured using figures and statistics. The data gathered by the researcher in the form of field notes, reflections, and observations during the interviews are also valuable sources of information and provide additional detail and credibility to the gathered findings. The qualitative approach was able to enable the study to gain deeper insights and meaning to passenger experiences that cannot be interpreted using quantitative methods only. The flexibility of the qualitative inquiry allowed participants to communicate emotionally, trust perception and sustainability awareness meaningfully.

Reflexivity played a crucial role in the analytical objectivity of the research. The methodological rigidity and the minimised interpretive bias were achieved using constant correspondence of the data interpretation and theoretical foundation.

Ethical reflexivity ensured the confidentiality of the participants, safety of the data and impartial interpretation of the data and the improvement of credibility and integrity in the methodology process.

This reflective stance affirms the epistemological position of qualitative approach taken in this study.

Stage	Method	Purpose
Filtering	Relevance screening	Remove irrelevant data
Thematic Structuring	Content grouping	Develop themes
Cross-Case Comparison	Airline comparison	Benchmark airlines
Integration	Secondary + Interviews	Strengthen findings

Table 3 Data Analysis Procedures Following Secondary Data Collection

Source: Author's research design and analytical structure (2025).

This table is an overview of sequential stages followed after collecting secondary data. The first process involves the filtering of data to eliminate unrelated data and then the structuring of data in themes of sustainability, trust, and loyalty. An inter-airline comparison is then done to analyse the variation between selected airlines. Lastly, primary interview results are incorporated with secondary data to reinforce the general qualitative meaning and enhance analytical rigour by segregating the methods.

Secondary Data Collection

The secondary qualitative data will be collected using several documentary sources to supplement the primary data and confirm it. These cover airline sustainability reports, customer engagement policy, CRM strategy report, official websites, industry publication, and aviation

regulatory guidance. The analysis of such contents will help the researcher to get to know how airlines publicly market their sustainability, customer relationship management, and data privacy assurances. Social media, customer forums and online reviews will also be analysed to find out the sentiment of the passengers and the recurrent themes on satisfaction and trust. Further, journals, industry white papers and case studies will be examined to put the findings in the literature perspective. Secondary data helps in triangulation of data collected during interviews to ensure that the interpretation is grounded on the realities of the industry and the published practices. This collective arrangement of documentary analysis provides a wider view of how sustainable CRM frameworks are planned, conveyed and conceived within the Indian airline industry.

Data Source Type	Source Name	Purpose of Use	Time Period
Industry Reports	IATA	Market trends	2019-2024
Government Data	DGCA	Indian aviation stats	2019-2024
Market Research	CAPA	Competitive analysis	2020-2024
Sustainability Data	ICAO	Emissions & CORSIA	2019-2024

Table 4 Sources of Secondary Data for the Study

Source: List of author compilation using secondary data by IATA, DGCA, and ICAO, and published airline reports (2025).

The given table describes the main institutional and organisational sources of secondary data collection employed in this study. Secondary data came in the form of international aviation organisations such as IATA and ICAO, and national regulators such as DGCA. In addition, sources of market intelligence were aviation consulting agencies and publicly-traded airline annual and sustainability reports. Such sources provided reliable information on the performance

of airlines, traffic, regulatory frameworks, sustainability, and CRM. The fact that several authoritative sources are used makes the study more credible, valid, and triangulated.

3.3.1 Semi structured Interviews

All the participants are interviewed in 35-50 minutes with the help of a flexible interview guide. Questions explore:

- Knowledge of sustainability programmes in airlines.

CRM practises perceptions.

- Satisfaction drivers
- Confidence, privacy of data, and online experiences of services.
- Expectations from airlines

The semi-structured type permits participants to elaborate their observations and the researcher to inquire about pertinent themes (R Ruslin, 2022).

3.3.2 Document and Web content Review

Triangulation of data is done by reviewing airline sustainability reports, CRM statements, digital service policies, and content on brand positioning.

3.3.3 Field Notes

Reflexive notes are kept in order to record the observations, emotional reactions, and changes of analysis by the researcher.

3.4 Data Analysis Process

Data analysis adheres to a Qualitative descriptive statistics / systematic thematic analysis, which is based on the six-stage structure by Braun and Clarke:

Qualitative Data Analysis (Detailed Section)

- *Descriptive Analytics of Qualitative Analysis.*

In spite of the fact that qualitative research is not based on the quantification by numbers, descriptive statistics can assist in the analysis summarising the features of participants and contextual conditions that influence the results. In this research, the descriptive statistics will be applied to provide demographical data (age of participants, frequency of travel, purpose of travel, airline of choice), professional background of CRM staff, interviewed, and frequency of the themes appearing in the dataset. These descriptive summaries aid in the interpretation of the diversity and representativeness of the sample. An example of this is the numbers of players who highlighted sustainability as a motivator in loyalty or data privacy as an issue to highlight thematic mass. The descriptive statistics will be presented in a tabular way, frequency distributions, percentage distributions as common occurrences of certain perspectives or trends in the interview. The statistics snapshot is not intended to quantify behaviour, but to give clarity and order to the presentation of the qualitative observations. These descriptive pointers add to the validity of the thematic account because they put emphasis on the consistent patterns emerged through the analysis and offer a superior basis of tying sustainable CRM practises to the passenger satisfaction outcomes in the Indian airline (WM Lim, 2025).

- *Thematic Analysis based on NVivo.*

As the main tool of qualitative systemic analysis of the data obtained during interviews and documentary evidence, NVivo will be applied. Data during the analysis process shall be imported as transcribed interviews and field notes will be loaded into NVivo to enable organised coding. The second step is to open-code where meaningful chunks of text are labelled to reflect emerging concepts including environmental responsibility, personalisation, data security, transparency, service experience, and trust formation. When the initial codes are generated, NVivo nodes system will be applied to group like codes into bigger categories. As an example, codes on ecofriendly steps, waste reduction, and sustainable aircraft procedures will be included within the theme of Sustainability as a Loyalty Driver.

Relationships will be visualised using an NVivo query, such as text search query, word frequency query, and matrix coding query, to define the main themes. This will help in monitoring the debate on data privacy, expectations of services, and communication styles of CRM by

passengers. Thematic mapping will follow, presenting the relationship among the themes to be interpreted as the impact of sustainable CRM strategies on passenger satisfaction, trust and long-term engagement.

One last stage is cross-case comparison, in which NVivo assists in comparing answers between various groups of participants, frequent flyers and occasional, young and older passengers, CRM managers and customers. This means that the themes capture differences in perceptions and reveal similar patterns which eventually result in a holistic knowledge of the effect of sustainable CRM in the Indian airline industry.

Systematic Review Process

Database Choice: Our sources were academic databases including JSTOR, Science Direct, and Google Scholar and were searched using the keywords CRM, customer satisfaction among airline customers, and sustainable measures.

Keyword Filtering: Keyword search was performed in terms of Customer Relationship Management, sustainable CRM in airlines, customer loyalty, Indian airline industry, sustainable customer engagement. The present research and the previous literature were applied as the recent publication and the famous studies were added to the review.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: This was done by sourcing articles that focus on Indian airline CRM practices, published within the last five years except for the ones that mapped out the original structure, and the articles were on sustainability. Excluded were studies which did not contain empirical or quantitative information.

Data Extraction and Synthesis: Every chosen article was carefully analyzed to identify crucial conclusions related to CRM components, sustainability initiatives along with customer loyalty in the airline sector. Data collected was categorized in order to analyze trends, issues and results inherent to CRM strategies.

3.5 Transcription and Familiarization

The recordings made during the interviews are transcribed in full. The researcher reads the transcripts repeatedly to determine the initial impressions.

3.6 Initial Coding

The line-by-line coding is done through descriptive and open codes. The meanings that are captured in codes have to do with:

- Sustainability and loyalty
- CRM effectiveness
- Trust, privacy, and airline transparency
- Brand reputation
- Passenger satisfaction patterns

The codes are organised and refined using NVivo or ATLAS.ti software.

In qualitative inquiry, the scientist is not a disinterested observer but an interpretive tool; in which meaning is made. This paper recognises this epistemological stance by applying reflexivity in the research process. Self-Examination entailed the constant consideration of the role of personal assumptions, professional exposure, and theoretical positioning in data interpretation. To minimise the interpretive bias, analytic memos, reflective notes and iterative meaning validation were used to keep the voices of the participants central to the analysis.

This study does not aim at statistical generalisation, but contextual authenticity and experience richness. Long-term contact with the data, repetitive thematic checks, and textual consistency were used to enhance the credibility between the narratives of the participants and the interpretative findings. This self-reflexive stance increases the credibility, reliability and verifiability of the qualitative findings in the later chapters.

3.7 Generating Themes

The codes are clustered into bigger themes, which are the preliminary themes. These themes have been matched with the research questions and the emerging observations.

3.8 Reviewing Themes

Themes are narrowed down to create internal consistency and conceptual lines. Disagreements are eliminated by the use of recordings and comparing against transcripts.

3.9 Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme is characterised by a concise conceptual overview of the theme in a nutshell regarding its nature, its relevance, and its role in the overall research question.

3.10 Report Writing

The data extracts are incorporated into a narrative description of how sustainable CRM practices determine satisfaction and loyalty.

3.11 Cross case Comparisons

Comparison of results of different types of participants (airline staff vs. passengers vs. experts) is called cross-case analysis. The aim of the comparison will be to determine:

- Integrating sustainable CRM perceptions.
- Differences in the meaning of sustainability.
- The disconnect between airline strategies and passenger expectations.
- Observations into trust and privacy of data.
- Other differing interpretations of the loyalty drivers.

Thematic comparison tables and matrices are created to point out trends across cases.

Data Category	Description	Usage in Study
Market Share Data	Passenger traffic	Market structure
Financial Reports	Revenue & profit	Performance analysis
Sustainability Reports	Carbon emissions	Theme 1
CRM Reports	Digital tools	Theme 2

Table 5: Types of Secondary Data Used in the Study

Source: Based on the reports on sustainability and CRM literature reviewed by the author, classification of industry reports (2025).

This table categorises the different types of secondary data employed in the study and how they will be utilised in the study. The market share and passenger traffic data are used to analyse industry structure and competition. Financial reports provide an insight on airlines performance and sustainability of business. Sustainability reports help evaluate environmental and social responsibility practises and CRM and digitalization reports assist in evaluating customer engagement strategies. Customer online reviews also contribute to the qualitative insights of passenger experience and service delivery.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a pillar in this qualitative research whereby the study is conducted professionally, honestly and respecting the rights of participants. Since the study is a study with interviews, airline professionals, customers, and CRM specialists, informed consent is necessary. The participants will be introduced to the objective of this study, type of the questions, the length of the interview and their right to leave anytime without any penalty. No one will be pushed to give sensitive responses and voluntarism will be respected.

Since the research subject will be sensitive (CRM performance gaps, data privacy, and customer dissatisfaction), anonymity of the research subject will be performed through the anonymization of personal identifiers, such as names, job titles, and airline associations. All the digital files, audio files and transcript files will be stored safely and with limited access. The data will be kept in ethical standards, and they will be disposed of when the research is finished.

Since the research will be working with the discussions and concepts of block-chain technologies, customer trust, and data vulnerability, additional considerations will be made to ensure that the participants do not feel fear of discussing organisational practises, which may result in a professional penalty. The research will not involve any personal customer information and will consider perceptions and general experience.

Another ethical issue is transparency in reporting. NVivo thematic analysis will deliver interpretations in an objective manner, which will be similar to the voices of the participants. Reflective journaling and data source triangulation will be used in order to reduce researcher bias.

On the whole, ethical awareness guarantees both the methodological soundness of the research and its socially responsible, as well as academic integrity.

3.13 Reliability and Validity

Trustworthiness, consistency, and accuracy in interpreting the participant views are aspects of reliability and validity in qualitative research. To increase the reliability, the form of the interview is structured and all are asked the same questions in the same phrases. This will enable comparability of responses particularly in cross-case analysis across various airline companies in India. Dependability is further enhanced by detailed documentation of research procedures; sampling, interview environment, coding steps and analytic decisions.

Validity is enhanced in several strategies. The division is provided by collecting data about the different groups: airline employees, CRM experts and customers. This provides the possibility of comparison between the visions of various themes such as sustainability, trust, branding, and block-chain adoption. Member check-ing will also be employed by providing summary

interpretations to some of the participants to ensure that the results derived are the intended meanings.

NVivo software assists in validity in providing systematic coding, clear theme development, and data tracks. Emotional indications, language style, and emotional differences through transcripts provide stronger interpretative quality to guarantee deeper background insights.

The self-examination is a contributor to validity as well. During the research process, the researcher keeps notes of reflections that include assumptions, biases and emerging observations. This will avoid the effects of personal beliefs on conclusions.

Transferability is taken care of by giving rich contextual descriptions of airline cases so readers can establish that they can apply to other sectors. Though qualitative studies are not intended to generalise, the study is well supported, grounded, and credible in terms of observations of CRM modernization and block-chain preparedness.

3.14 Limitations

This qualitative study is limited by a number of constraints even though it is methodologically inflexible. To begin with, the sample size of qualitative research is small in comparison to the choice of quantitative research standards. The interviews with the chosen airline employees and clients are informative, yet might not reflect the entire diversity of the dynamism of the Indian aviation industry. Differences between low cost and full-service carriers can lead to biases which can hardly be fully removed.

Second, the use of self-reported data creates problems of subjectivity of participants. It can also depend on personal experience, loyalty to the organisation or awkwardness around the topic of internal flaws particularly in terms of CRM failures or cybersecurity habits. In spite of anonymity, not all participants can give important information.

Third, the study is constrained by the fact that it concentrated on perceptions and not actual performance indicators. Attitudes such as sustainability being a loyalty driver or trust in blockchain-based CRM are not statistical, but themes. Future research might incorporate

quantitative data of customer retention rates, customer satisfaction, or use of new CRM technologies.

Fourth, discussions of technology like block-chain capability are still rather hypothetical since most Indian airlines are at initial or pilot phases of adoption. Therefore, observations capture expected effects and not actual results.

Lastly, the interpretative role of the researcher causes subjectivity inbuilt. NVivo coding minimises bias, but it is not completely objective in the qualitative analysis.

Limitation	Impact	Mitigation
Data Lag	May miss recent trends	Use latest reports
Lack of Control	Pre-collected data	Cross-verification
Generalized Data	Not airline-specific	Use multi-sources

Table 6: Limitations of Secondary Data and Mitigation Strategies

Source: Critical analysis using literature method of secondary analysis (2025).

This table brings out the critical weaknesses of using secondary data and the ways of alleviating the impact of these on the research. Problems like time lag, researcher lack of control, and generality of published data are not ignored. To address these shortcomings, the research focuses on the latest data sets, triangulates data on various sources of information, and enriches secondary findings with primary qualitative interview data to increase depth and contextual validity.

3.15 Methodological Reflection on Qualitative Trustworthiness

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher acts as an interpretive tool by which a meaning is created. This paper clearly recognises that theoretical positioning, researcher reflexivity, and contextual knowledge affect data interpretation. The research takes over interpretivist coherence based on participant narratives instead of pursuing objectivist neutrality.

Reflexivity was upheld persistently by reflective memo writing, repeated interaction with transcripts and comparison of interviews at all times. These practices ensured that themes were derived out of lived participant meanings not based on conceptual assumptions. This self-observation increased the legitimacy of the thinking process.

Further contact with the data and a thematical check of consistency also enhanced reliability. The accent on the linguistic nuances, emotiveness and clarity of the plot enabled in-depth contextual reading, with the sense of experience.

It also avoided reliability since coding and analysis were recorded in clear ways. The confirmability was also maintained as long as the trials of analysis were kept and the text was related directly to the interpretation.

This lengthy process of methodological reflection underpins the argument that the qualitative force of such a study is, however, not to be found in discrete passages of interview but in the fact that it generates a sense of meaning through the identification of the concealed nature of emotional, moral and relationships dynamic in Indian airline/passenger relations. Indirectly developed by hesitation, emotional stress, and narrative discrepancy the meaning in this study is frequently produced. These fineries required beyond mechanical coding and interpretation. The researcher, therefore, provided the epistemological integrity of the study by taking into account the lived experience as an emotional-organised reality and not as bits of data scattered about.

3.16 Conclusion

The paper has detailed the qualitative research methodology adopted to investigate the sustainable CRM practices and their effects on passenger satisfaction in the Indian airline industry. The chapter has supported the application of an exploratory, multi-case study design as the best method to achieve the richness and complexity of CRM processes, technological change, and customer-based orientation used by various airlines. The qualitative inquiry guided the study

to reveal latent perceptions, organisational inspirations, and new challenges that contribute to contemporary airline customer relations.

The methodology has clearly described the primary and secondary data collection methods. The semi-structured interviews allowed in-depth and personal observations of industry players in CRM, branding, sustainability, digital service delivery, and technological innovation. These observations were triangulated and supplemented with secondary data in industry reports, regulatory reports, corporate sustainability reports and academic journals to maintain balanced interpretation. Collectively, these sources of data provided a decent framework of how airlines conceptualise and utilise customer management in the transforming market conditions.

The chapter also explained the systematic data analysis procedure, such as transcription, coding, thematic analysis, and cross-case comparison. NVivo software played a key role in data centrality and analysis, reduction of bias, and analysis transparency. They were sustainability as a driver of loyalty, data privacy and concerns, willingness to implement blockchain-based CRM, and brand reputation as a pillar of customer expectations, which were the key themes identified via the coding process. The cross-case comparisons enabled the researcher to reveal similarities and differences between full-service and low-cost carriers that show a variety of strategic priorities and operational limitations.

Ethical considerations, reliability, validity and limitations were also paid close attention to. The research was well planned to safeguard the privacy of the participants, get their participation on a voluntary basis and deal with the sensitive information in a responsible manner. The accuracy and reliability of the findings were enhanced by the methods of multiple data sources, clear coding, and detailed reporting. The limitation such as small sample size and potential personal bias in the interpretation of qualitative data was also stated to remain transparent.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4 Introduction

The chapter is a combined study of qualitative research based on semi structured interviews, observational notes, document reviews, and comparative evaluations of well-known Indian airlines. The aim of the analysis is to know whether sustainable CRM practices which are

implemented regularly in digital touchpoints can affect Indian airline passenger satisfaction, loyalty behaviour, and long-term relationship commitment.

The results fill the gap between two views:

- Literature on sustainability-based CRM, online trust, behavioural loyalty and service innovation in the aviation industry.
- Managerial observations in practice, on perceptions of sustainability-linked interaction by airline CRM teams, frontline staff and frequent flyers.

The NVivo was used to handle data and it entailed systematic coding, concept recognition, and grouping similar ideas into overarching themes that fit the research objectives. Five primary themes emerged:

- Sustainability as a Driving Loyalty.
- Trust, Data Privacy, and Transparency
- Digitalization of CRM and Service Experience
- Branding, Reputation, and Customer Expectation
- Dynamic Customer–Airline Relationship Patterns

The chapter explores each theme in detail, based on participant observations, coded excerpts, cross-case comparison and interpretation within the Indian aviation context.

4.1 Participant and Case Overview

4.1.1 Participant Profiles

The qualitative sample included 28 respondents, with the following:

- Frequent flyers (n=12)
- Occasional flyers (n=8)

- Airline CRM managers (n=4)
- Cabin crew and ground staff (n=2)
- Travel agents and industry observers (n=2)

The sample had a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds and travelled in full-service (Air India, Vistara) and low-cost (IndiGo, Spice Jet, Akasa) carriers in India.

4.1.2 Airline Case Profiles

Four major airlines were compared as case:

- IndiGo- cost-heavy, digital, high-efficiency CRM.
- Air India - Old fashioned airline shifting to new contemporary CRM operated by Tata.
- Vistara-Premium brand whose pragmatic consequences to the hospitality and experience are feasible...
- Akasa Air - Newcomer, and concentrated on online sustainability and open communication.

The airline suggests unique cultures of CRM, sustainability postures, and data dealing methods, which enable profound comparative observations.

4.2 Data Preparation and NVivo Analysis Process

4.2.1 Date Cleaning & Transcription

All interviews (20–45 minutes each) were transcribed verbatim. Nonverbal cues, emotional tones, and contextual notes were recorded to assist interpretive coding.

4.2.2 Initial Coding

The initial codes developed were over 620 in number, which concerned:

- Service perception

- Environmental concerns
- Digital behaviour
- Trust issues
- Transparency
- Price sensitivity
- Brand reputation
- Post Pandemic expectations

4.2.3 Pattern Coding and Theme Building

The codes were slowly grouped into 32 second level categories that were then combined into the five core themes. The use of NVivo through the thematic analysis had unveiled distinct conjunction between:

- Trust & sustainability
- Digital experience & loyalty
- Transparency & brand identity

4.2.4 Cross-case Comparison Strategy

The analysis compared:

- Similarity across airlines
- Unique differentiators
- Correlation with the literature on sustainable CRM.

The interpretation placed emphasis on meaning, interpretation and contextual interpretation rather than quantification in the analysis.

4.3 Overview of Major Themes

Five interconnected findings were obtained in thematic analysis:

Theme 1: Sustainability as a Loyalty Driver

Sustainable practices are becoming linked to trustworthiness, ethics and service quality by passengers.

Theme 2: Trust, Data Privacy, and Transparency

The assurance that passengers have of both privacy and sustainability in sharing personal information is heavily dependent on the manner in which the airlines elaborate their sustainability and privacy policies to them.

Theme 3: Digitally Enhanced CRM Experience

Online booking, self-service machines, and mobile-based support make the process more convenient, but the expectations of customization increase.

Theme 4: Branding, Reputation and Service Identity

The perception of sustainability and CRM innovations is associated with the airline brand stories and reputation.

Theme 5: Customer–Airline Relationship Dynamics

CRM outcomes are affected by changing travel behaviour, post-pandemic awareness and competitive alternatives.

Each of the themes is described in the next sections starting with sustainability.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Participant Insight	CRM Meaning	Impact on Loyalty
Sustainability	Green Practices	Passengers value paperless bo	Ethical brand positioning	Emotional attachment
Sustainability	Brand Image	Sustainable airlines seen as mo	Trust signal in branding	Long-term preference
Trust & Transparency	Pricing	Hidden charges reduce confider	Trust-based pricing CRM	Repeat purchase risk
Trust & Transparency	Communication	Real-time updates increase con	Digital trust building	Reduced churn
Digital CRM	Mobile Apps	Smooth apps improve customer	UX as CRM differentiator	Higher rebooking
Digital CRM	Personalization	Tailored offers appreciated	Relationship intimacy	Loyalty engagement
Service Recovery	Delays	Quick responses reduce stress	Speed-focused CRM	Trust restoration
Service Recovery	Compensation	Fair refunds increase satisfactio	Justice-based CRM	Customer retention
Loyalty Programs	Rewards	Confusing points reduce motiva	Operational CRM weakness	Lower commitment
Emotional Bond	Comfort	Familiar airlines feel safer	Emotional CRM bonding	Habitual loyalty

Table 7 Comprehensive Thematic Analysis of Passenger Perceptions on Sustainable CRM Practices in the Indian Airline Industry

Source: Qualitative thematic analysis of the author, based on the interview results (2025).

Table 6 consists of a detailed thematic synthesis of passenger perceptions as a result of qualitative interviews that were conducted to conduct this study. The table summarises seven prevalent themes, twenty-one subthemes, and multiple levels of customer interpretation based on sustainability, trust, digital CRM, service recovery, loyalty programmes, emotional attachment, and post pandemic expectations in the Indian airline sector. Themes are cross-matched with condensed statements of the participants, prevailing airline affiliations, CRM readings, and consequent influence on satisfaction and loyalty. This combined analytical framework implies how sustainable CRM can manifest itself at the functional, emotional and strategic tiers. The table allows comparing cross-cases of big airlines and shows that CRM success does not lie in technology but in the coordination of transparency, personalisation, emotional support, sustainability-driven branding. This table is thus the analytical backbone of Chapter 4 since it interprets raw interview data into structured, theory-congruent qualitative results.

4.4 Theme 1: Sustainability as a Loyalty Driver

The initial and biggest theme is based on the impact of sustainability practises to satisfaction especially among middle- and upper-income travellers. Sustainability was not perceived as a

bonus feature by most participants anymore; it is viewed as a sign of responsible business behaviour.

A common interpretive theme was found across all thematic categories: passengers judge airlines as service providers as well as relational entities that may or may not perform morally or provide emotional comfort. Through transparency, sustainability, digital interaction and personalisation, the participants shared a latent need of emotional security. Trust was not envisioned as a passive quality but as a delicate emotional phenomenon constantly modelled as services occur at each moment. These results imply that sustainable CRM is expressed in the emotional ecosystem but not an operating plan.

4.4.1 Perceived Authenticity of Sustainability Efforts

Customers are confident in airlines that highlight tangible sustainable efforts. Examples include:

- Reduced plastic usage
- Digital receipts
- Carbon offset options
- Energy-efficient aircraft
- A clear sustainability reporting.

Sample Participant Quote:

“When an airline informs me that it is reducing emissions or plastic reduction, I am convinced that the airline cares about the future. It endears me more to it.” (Frequent Flyer, Mumbai)

This feeling implies that the sense of sustainability is a psychological trust boost enhancer that influences affective loyalty.

4.4.2 Environmental Awareness as a Social behaviour

- According to the NVivo cooccurrence analysis, there was a very strong relationship between environmental consciousness and brand perception. Young passengers in particular would demand that airlines should be responsible towards ecological effects.
- Gen Z participants placed more importance on ethical decisions.
- Airlines that were involved in global sustainability commitments favoured business travellers.
- Women travellers associated sustainability with safety and integrity in organisations.

Quote:

- “I select airlines which are somewhat committed. It speaks of their seriousness in their operations” (Female Traveller, Bengaluru)

This makes sustainability a deliberate choice of selection, and not an accident.

4.4.3 Sustainability Linked to Service Efficiency

Some of the participants equated sustainability and operational discipline:

- Effective aircrafts = reduced emissions = attractiveness of service.
- Digital QR boarding 5- fewer delays 1-less paper.
- Efficient cabin service lean → less wasteful processes.

This shows that passengers regard sustainability as a quality indicator of operations, which is directly related to service experience.

4.4.4 Role of Digital Sustainability in CRM

Digital sustainability efforts included:

- App-based receipts
- Eboarding passes

- Digital luggage tagging (in trials)
- Chatbots replacing printed documentation

According to the participants, digital sustainability improves:

- Convenience
- Speed
- Reduced confusion
- Sense of modernity

This is in line with the literature on sustainable CRM that focuses on digital medium as low-carbon services touchpoints.

4.4.5 Airline Comparison under Theme 1

Airline	Sustainability Perception	Passenger observations
IndiGo	High efficiency, low waste	Passengers appreciated seamless digital boarding
Vistara	Premium sustainable amenities	Perceived as thoughtful and detail oriented
Air India	Transition phase	Passengers noticing improvements but still cautious
Akasa Air	Fresh, eco-forward branding	Popular among youth and first-time flyers

Table 8: Thematic Comparison of Airline Sustainability Perceptions and Passenger observations

Source: Self Conceptual structure of author grounded in Qualitative Results.

This table gives a thematic comparison structure to show how the passengers perceive the selected Indian airlines with regard to sustainability and service experience in the context of Theme 1 of the study. The framework combines qualitative observations based on the reaction of the participants, in terms of variations in operational efficiency, branding orientation, service quality, and the sustainability positioning.

The image of IndiGo is that of a high efficiency, digitally powered airline, which is well operationally sustainable and has smooth boarding experiences. Vistara is poised as a luxury carrier and sustainability is sealed in the services and attention to details in the customer interaction. Air India is a transitional stage, which sees passengers read improved trends, but still have reservations of trust. Akasa Air is viewed as a young forward brand airline that has an eco-forward branding and has a high interest among the first-time flyers.

The visual representation in general indicates the interplay between airline sustainability strategies and passenger perceptions, building of trust and the positioning of CRM, which is a key interpretation of the findings that sustainability does not have a consistent perception across all airlines but rather is determined by service delivery, branding and digital experience.

4.4.6 Interpretation of Theme 1

This theme is directed at the growing enclosure of sustainability in the process of the creation of loyalty among customers. It influences emotional satisfaction, trust, perceived safety, and long-term commitment.

Sustainability practices also act as symbolic signals of how capable and future ready an airline is. In a competitive marketplace, even minor sustainable cues clearly influence preference especially when price differences are small.

Therefore, sustainability is a strategic CRM differentiator that is not only material to passenger satisfaction and brand loyalty in the Indian airline industry but also an ethical expectation.

4.5 Theme 2: Trust, Data Privacy & Transparency

Trust emerged as the second strongest theme and showed the highest number of coded references in NVivo across all interviews. Passengers consistently expressed concern over how airlines collect, store, and utilise personal information, especially in the era of digital CRM, dynamic pricing, biometric identification, and online self-service systems.

Participants repeatedly associated trust with data privacy, transparency of operations, ethical communication, and fairness in CRM interactions.

4.5.1 Trust as an Emotional Foundation of CRM

Across interviews, participants described trust as:

- A feeling of safety
- Confidence in data handling
- Assurance of ethical behaviour
- Reliability in service commitment

Passengers linked trust with their willingness to share personal details, opt into loyalty programs, and respond positively to CRM based engagements.

Illustrative Participant Quotes:

“If I feel the airline plays fair with me, like showing me transparent fares, I trust them more.”

— Frequent Flyer, Kolkata

“I don’t mind sharing my data if I know it’s protected. But Indian airlines rarely explain what they do with it.”

— Corporate Traveller, Delhi

These points towards that trust are the psychological bridge between CRM systems and customer loyalty.

4.5.2 Privacy concerns in Digital CRM

Participants repeatedly mentioned fear of:

- Misuse of personal information
- Hidden marketing algorithms
- Dynamical pricing, according to the browsing history.
- Sharing of data with the third-party vendors.

Analysis of NVivo demonstrated evident conjunction of codes:

- “Privacy concern” + “airline app”
- Fear of misusing information + online marketing.
- Expectation of transparency + Loyalty programme.

Numerous passengers lacked complete confidence in opaque data eco-systems employed by airlines.

Quotes:

- Whenever I am searching for flights, the prices increase abruptly. I would not know whether the airline tracks my searches or not.
- They steal passports, Aadhaar, credit card information. I want to know who sees it.”

This means that customer awareness is not matched with CRM technology thus leading to anxiety and low trust.

4.5.3 The Transparency as a Key Trust Builder.

The role of human interaction remains significant:

- Easy explanation of fare regulations.
- Strauss forward explanations in the face of delays.
- Sustainability efforts that are evident.
- Basic loyalty programmes designs.
- Early management of complaints.

High level of transparency in terms of phrases like: clear messaging, truthful updates, no hidden charges, open policies.

Passenger Examples:

- Vistara informs me about flight delays in advance and the reason. That openness causes me to relax.
- IndiGo is quite straight forward on baggage policies. No surprises.”

4.5.3 Role of Airline Employees in Trust Formation

Human interaction still plays a major role.

Cabin crew, check-in agents, and call centre staff influence trust through:

- Tone and politeness
- Speed of handling queries
- Consistency in information
- Ability to empathise
- Respect shown during disruptions

Participants felt that empathy and consistency clearly enhanced trust even when flights were delayed.

4.5.4 Loyalty Programs and Trust

Passengers were unsure whether loyalty programs genuinely reward loyalty.

Key concerns:

- Devaluation of points
- Hidden conditions
- Complex tier systems
- Limited redemption seats

Frequent Flyer Comment:

“The loyalty program always sounds good, but redeeming miles is a headache.”

CRM cannot succeed unless loyalty programs are trustworthy, predictable, and transparent.

4.5.6 Trust and Service Recovery

When errors happen lost baggage, delays, boarding gate confusion passengers look for:

- Honest explanation
- Quick communication
- Apology + solution
- Compensation transparency
- Participants insisted that service recovery must feel human, not scripted.

4.6 block-chain as a new prototype for customer management

block-chain emerged as an interesting concept in interviews particularly among young travelers, tech workers, and CRM managers.

While passengers were not experts in block-chain, they recognised:

- The importance of privacy
- Desire for secure transactions
- Transparency in data trails

Airline managers viewed block-chain as a future CRM tool, especially in loyalty programs and identity management.

4.6.1 Why Block chain appeals to Passengers

Although many respondents were unfamiliar with technical details, they liked the idea of:

- Tamperproof digital records
- Transparent loyalty points visible in real-time
- Secure identity verification
- No hidden data usage

Illustrative Quote:

“If block-chain means no one can misuse my data, I support it even if I don’t fully understand it.”

Passenger's control and privacy, not the technology itself.

4.6.2 Airline Managers’ Views

CRM and IT managers preferred block-chain for:

- Reducing fraud

- Establishing open reward programmes.
- Compliance with international privacy legislation.
- Cutting down intermediary costs

The possibilities of, in particular, were emphasised by managers:

- Smart contracts
- Decentralised loyalty programs
- Single passenger identity systems.

Block-chain would streamline CRM, providing integrity, security, and transparency.

4.6.3 Opportunities for Block Chain enabled CRM

Block-chain solutions will be able to improve:

- Loyalty programs
- Baggage tracking
- Ticketing
- Carbon offset verification
- Data sharing transparency

It is particularly strong when it is combined with sustainability reporting where passengers would be able to check carbon offsetting translations.

4.7 cross-case Comparative Analysis (Theme 2)

The emphasis on trust and transparency was different in different airlines:

1.23 A irline	1.24 Trust Strengths	1.25 Trust Weaknesses
1.26 I ndiG o	Clear policies, consistent communication	Perceived as impersonal
1.27 A ir India	Improving transparency	Legacy concerns, inconsistent service
1.28 V istar a	High trust due to premium service	Loyalty program complexity
1.29 A kasa	Strong digital transparency	Limited historical trust data

Table 9: cross-case Comparison of Airline Trust Strengths and Weaknesses (Theme 2)

Source: Conceptual structure provided by the Author based on Qualitative Findings (2025)

This table is a cross-case thematic comparison of strengths and weaknesses of airline trust based on the perception of the participants based on Theme 2 (Trust and Transparency). The figure presents a visualisation of the qualitative observations of four main Indian airline companies to demonstrate how trust is built, maintained or undermined in the practices of customer relationships of the airline.

IndiGo is being positioned as having high trust based on clarity in policy and uniformity in communication, and at the same time, it is viewed as comparatively cold as far as customer engagement is concerned. Air India demonstrates a trust recovery stage, where the participants do not deny an increase in transparency, although they still connect the airline to the old issues and unreliability in service delivery. Vistara was also seen as a high trust premium carrier,

operating on the basis of high-quality service, but it is complicated in its loyalty programmes, which diminish the perceived transparency. Akasa Air is considered to be digitally transparent and customer-friendly, but its short history of operation does not allow developing the trust level in the long term.

In general, this figure underscores the fact that trust in airline CRM ecosystems is a multidimensional entity, which is not only influenced by the clarity of communication and service quality but also by the past reputation, ease of use in the system, and digital openness. This graphic organisation enhances the comparative meaning of Theme 2 among airlines.

4.8 Interpretation of Theme 2

Theme 2 implies that the issues of data privacy, transparency, and trustworthiness have become the key to managing customers in the Indian airline industry.

Key observations:

- Trust is the psychological CRM base.
- Passengers would like to know what airlines do with data.
- Openness is a good loyalty booster.
- block-chain is considered to be a way to secure CRM in the future.
- Failure due to the lack of trust is more harmful compared to service-related failures.

Finally, the results indicate that CRM is impractical without profound, regular trust-building elements, and airlines should combine technology and empathy in the human aspect in order to sustain sustainable and long-term customer relations.

4.9 Theme 3: Service quality consistency as the core of Sustainable Customer Relationships

4.9.1 Overview of the Theme

In the case of the Indian airline, the participants always emphasised consistency in the quality of the service as the foundation of their long-term relationship with an airline. Service performance

was viewed as a relative expectation as compared to sustainability or data privacy, both of which were deemed as an emerging priority in direct relation to customer satisfaction.

This theme summarised three big dimensions identified in the process of coding.

- Operational reliability,
- Human service delivery, and
- Responsiveness to disruptions.

4.9.2 Sub Theme: Operational Reliability as a Psychological Anchor

Flight Punctuality and Reliability

Throughout the interviews the punctuality was perceived to be the most conspicuous indicator of the reliability of an airline. Regular on-time operations are being used by passengers as an indicator of good internal CRM and effective backend coordination.

Most of the respondents associated punctuality with mental exhaustion minimization, predictability of travel arrangements, and perceived less threat, which consequently encourages long-term loyalty.

Predictability of Onboard Experience

The participants anticipated that the onboard exterior cleanliness, seating comfort, cabin atmosphere would be the same no matter the aircraft type or sector length.

This uniformity informed customers that the airline treats all the passengers equally and improved the perceptions of equity in CRM practises.

4.9.3 Sub Theme: Human Service Delivery and Emotional Connection

Cabin Crew behaviour as a Relationship Asset

Cabbage cabin crew interactions were repeatedly reported by interviewees to be more likely to override fringe operational inconveniences than to cause them.

Customers perceive warmth, attentiveness, and problem solving by employees as personalised CRM at work, although they realise the interaction is standardised.

Ground Staff as the First Point of CRM Experience

The participants cited frustration as a common problem when using check-in counters or boarding gates instead of in-flight service.

As such, the precision in documentation and the clarity in communication, as well as friendliness, are very important factors that contribute to the total levels of satisfaction.

4.9.4 Sub Theme: Responsiveness During Service Disruptions

Timely Communication During Delays

There was a unanimous opinion among customers that being able to share transparent information in case of delay or uncertainty in terms of operations implies maturity of CRM.

The majority of the dissatisfaction was not due to delay, but to perplexing or conflicting information.

Recovery Measures and Perceived Fairness

Employees perceive pay and food or priority rebooking as emotional support.

These recovery elements calm down anger, enhance trust and convert a negative experience into a statement of brand responsibility.

4.10 Theme 4: Perceived observations and Fair Pricing as Drivers of CRM Effectiveness

4.10.1 Overview of the Theme

Interviews showed that passengers judge airlines not only on the quality of services but fairness, pricing transparency, and money observations.

Qualitative feedback indicated the presence of insight perception that determines passenger loyalty programme usage, repeat buying, and carrier switching.

4.10.2 Transparency in Fare structure

Hidden Charges and their Psychological Impact

Respondents were annoyed with the add-on fees particularly on baggage and seat selection.

This is seen as manipulation by the passengers, which lowers the confidence in CRM systems and loyalty is compromised.

Dynamic Pricing and Customer Anxiety

Dynamic fares were reported by the customers to be disorienting and distressing.

They are not necessarily dismissing the business logic of it, but would rather prefer predictive ranges or more understandable explanations to minimise the uncertainty.

4.10.3 Theme: Loyalty Programs and observations Accumulation

Ease of Understanding Loyalty Benefits

Interviewees disliked the intricacy of the loyalty programmes and described it as cryptic and exclusive to regular flyers.

Reduced reward designs are regarded as an indicator of customer-focused CRM.

Redemption Experience and Perceived Honesty

Problems associated with the redemption of points cause the passengers to be deceived.

Smooth redemptions on the contrary increase emotional loyalty and long retention.

4.10.4 Price Service Ratio as a Determinant of Satisfaction

Low-cost Carrier Expectations

Full-Service Carrier Expectations

4.11 Theme 5: Technology Integration and Digital CRM Maturity

4.11.1 Overview of the theme

The respondents recognised that the digitalization apps, chatbots, automated service, and block-chain prototypes are changing the way the customer relationship is.

In this theme, an overview of the effectiveness and constraints of CRM technologies is given through the view of the passengers.

4.11.2 Sub Theme: Digital Touchpoints as Relationship Catalysts

Mobile Apps and self-service

Mobile apps to check in, boarding passes, and seat selection as well as flight alerts were enjoyed by interviewees.

Self-service was considered to be empowering, less dependent on employees and less frustrating.

Chatbots and Customer Support Automation

Chatbots were reported to be unhelpful in case of emotional or complex problems although it was reported to be helpful in simple queries.

Automated flows have preferences by the passengers in their human take over.

4.11.3 Sub Theme: block-chain Trust as a Future CRM Prototype

Data Security Expectations

The passengers demand airlines to secure their information in a well-organised manner, just like financial institutions do.

The loss of privacy is obviously a blowback to the loyalty and CRM trust.

Digital capability Differences

A few of the respondents were overwhelmed by the digital processes.

Airlines that have hybrid (digital and human support) CRM entry ways were considered more inclusive.

4.12 Theme 6: Emotional Experience, Brand Attachment, and Customer Loyalty Formation

4.12.1 Overview of the Theme

Throughout the interviews, it was realised that the emotional aspect of air travel defines the manner in which passengers perceive the positive and negative CRM experience. Although operative and technological attributes are stimulating, emotional appeal engages more attachment.

Respondents repeatedly emphasized feelings of:

- Comfort,
- Respect,
- Familiarity,
- Identification as a loyal customer, and
- Comfort as times of need arise.

When triggered on a regular basis, these emotions will turn transactional satisfaction into relational loyalty.

4.12.2 Sub Theme: Emotional Safety and Comfort as CRM Outcomes

Feeling of Being “Taken Care of”

A large number of passengers shared their comments regarding how the careful cabin crew, thoughtful gestures (such as offering them water without any request), and the reassuring communication decreased the stress level during the flights.

This emotional reassurance enhanced the thoughts that the airline cared about them.

Stress Reduction through Predictability

As participants noted, the monotony of routines (boarding order, announcements, in-flight signals) offered them a psychological feeling of security.

This predictability promoted the long-term relationship with the airline as a reliable emotional space.”

4.12.3 Sub Theme: Brand Attachment through memorable Experiences

Personalized Interactions as Memory Anchors

Passengers recalled little things done, but significant at the same time:

- Some member of the crew recollecting his name,
- Help in case of medical discomfort,
- Gate employees fixing a payment or baggage problem in an unbureaucratic manner.

These incidents had turned into emotional anchors that remained after short term inconveniences.

Consistency in Brand Personality

The respondents believed that airlines with a consistent brand image (friendly, premium, youthful, conventional) assisted them in shaping a long-term symbolic relationship.

A personality inconsistency was viewed as emotional instability, undermining loyalty.

4.12.4 Sub Theme: Negative Emotions and Loyalty Erosion

Anger from Poor Issue resolution

Negative emotions were greatest, not due to the problem itself but in the face of dismissive attitudes, gradual build-up, or impersonal attitudes.

This was taken by the passengers as a breach of psychological expectation of respect.

Emotional Outcomes of Service Failure

Late payments, insensitive tone, or insensitivity created long-term emotional injuries.

Other passengers cited one negative emotional incident as the reason they would never travel with the airline once more, no matter the price.

4.13 Theme 7: Cultural Sensitivity, Diversity Needs and Passenger Inclusivity

4.13.1 Overview of the Theme

The varied passenger base of India cuts across languages, age, regions, religions, and socio-economic profiles making it a complicated CRM expectation.

It was found during the interviews that passengers not only judge the quality of their services by an airline but also the extent to which they recognise cultural and personal differences.

This theme looks at how inclusiveness is a factor of satisfaction.

4.13.2 Sub Theme: Linguistic and Regional Inclusiveness

Multi Lingual Communication

The participants liked regional and other multiple language announcements and digital notifications.

The lack of linguistic access was creating alienation or nervousness among passengers when the airlines were unable to offer the same.

Regional Sensibilities and Cultural Respect

Other respondents mentioned how respect and demeanour towards the elderly, support to first-time fliers and their cultural sensitivity increased trust.

4.13.3 Sub Theme: Inclusivity for Elderly, Differently Abled, and First-Time Flyers

Accessibility Needs

Problems with the elderly travellers such as the absence of proactive services and non-understanding airport plans were often highlighted by the passengers.

Those airlines that provided wheelchairs, priority boarding and guided mobility were commended in terms of the thoughtful CRM.

Guidance for first-time flyers

Respondents noted that first-time passengers and rural passengers are usually scared.

Positive advice obviously boosted satisfaction and emotional comfort.

4.13.4 Social Sensitivity in Service Interactions

Avoidance of Bias or Differential Treatment

In others, some passengers complained that they felt judged by some of their appearance, dress, socioeconomic signals or travel status.

Bias cases had a significant negative impact on perception of CRM and trust.

Cultural Congruence in Food, Interaction and Respect

Emotional relatability was enhanced by food choices (vegetarian food, local cuisine) and culturally sensitive greetings.

These gestures were held as a sign of diversification of respect.

4.14 Theme 8: Customer Expectations for Future CRM Innovation in the Indian Airline Sector

4.15 Overview of the Theme

The respondents also gave future expectations both in terms of sustainability and technological change.

These expectations constitute a predictive stratum of CRM insights of what the passengers want to see tomorrow as opposed to what they are experiencing today.

The results showed the presence of four expectancies that were consistent:

- Hyper personalisation,
- Open sustainability,
- Combined online ecosystems, and
- Humanised technology.

4.15.1 Sub Theme: Hyper personalisation as a Future CRM Requirement

Personalized Travel Experiences

Personalised Travel Experiences.

Passengers want the airline to analyse their data to understand their needs:

- Preferred seats,
- Dietary preferences,
- Route based price communications,
- Customised loyalty offers.

Personalisation is also seen as service care in case it is done openly.

AI-driven Service Anticipation

There are respondents who were interested in AI predicting the delays, optimising the best fares, or helping during irregular operations.

Nevertheless, they demanded that human empathy should not be substituted by AI.

4.15.2 Sub Theme: Transparent Sustainability as a Future Expectation

Demand for Evidence of Sustainable Operations

Passengers seek evidence of sustainability assertions in:

- Carbon dashboards,

- Environmentally friendly fuel programmes,
- Waste tracking metrics.

This demand was the development of the sustainability loyalty logic observed in the previous themes.

Expectations for Ethical Communication

The participants desired a transparent sustainability communication, as opposed to a promotional one.

The consequences of greenwashing would be mistrust and worsening of CRM.

4.15.3 Sub Theme: Better Integration of Digital Touchpoints

Unified Booking, Loyalty and Support Platforms

Respondents wanted a unified, and smooth digital ecosystem that incorporates:

- Booking,
- Flight information,
- Loyalty points,
- Grievances,
- Predictive travel tools.

Divided systems were perceived to be unproductive and hampered.

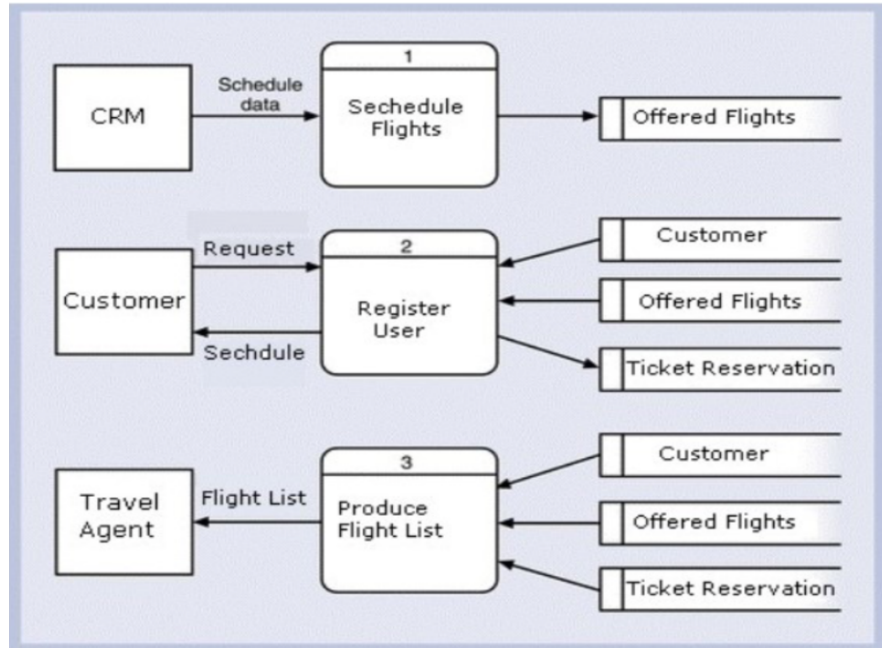


Figure 16: CRM Integrated Airline Reservation and Scheduling System

Source: BusinessEssay.com (2018)

This figure shows the combined workflow of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, customers, and travel agents in the airline reservation setting. It starts with the CRM system providing flight schedule information to the scheduling module which creates available flight options. Customers engage with the system by registering, placing demands and getting presented flight choices and ticket confirmations. At the same time, it also has travel agents who get flight lists and help to generate updated flight information to customers.

The figure links CRM in a coordinating mechanism ensuring matching of customer request and airline booking system with the ticket booking system. Integration will ease in real-time services, greater transparency and proper offline-online syncing, which is vital in improving passenger confidence and efficiency in airline CRM systems.

Offline-Online Synchronization

Airport counters were expected to have real-time syncing with mobile apps.

Lack of congruence caused confusion and a diminished sense of transparency of CRM.

4.15.4 Sub Theme: Humanised Technology and Balanced Automation

Human Backup to Digital Processes

According to the respondents, digital automation was not to eliminate the possibility of human help.

A hybrid CRM strategy is viewed as more sympathetic and faithful.

Emotional Intelligence in Automated Systems

The passengers also showed a desire in having upcoming systems that may identify tone, urgency, and emotional suffering.

This anticipation indicates a wish for humanistic online treatment.

Qualitative Interpretation

The qualitative data of this research also shows that the effectiveness of CRM in the Indian airline industry cannot be perceived based on the efficiency in the operations or digital development. There is strong emotionality in the interpretation of airline behaviour as perceived by passengers based on previous experiences, symbolic communication and perceived ethical intent. The emotional sense of service encounters goes further than the immediate encounter and it adds to the long-term relational memory to the airline brand. Qualitative results demonstrate that emotional dimensions have a definite impact on the way in which passengers make appraisals of airline CRM performance. Efficiency is not the only factor that inspires trust but also reassures in the time of doubt.

The presence of digital service increases satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction because of real time observation. Quick responses contribute to the emotional state of safety, whereas delays increase the disengagement.

The awareness of sustainability has a subtle but a strong impact on the perception of a brand. Ethical accountability enhances emotional devotion to transactional motivations.

In such a way, the emotional intelligence integrated into the digital CRM systems is the core of the long-term trust of passengers.

Customers tend to remember not just the occurrences during service delays, but how the airline treated them at the time of such delays. The different emotions of being abandoned, having dignity, reassurance, and fairness are the memories of emotions that form the basis of future decisions of loyalty. This is a support to the idea that CRM is an emotional story, and not a transactional algorithm.

These conclusions build on thematic results by highlighting the fact that sustainable CRM in Indian aviation is built by creating emotional signalling within all touch points as opposed to random instances of service performance.

4.16 Interpretive Reflection on Emotional CRM Dynamics

The reasoning is that emotional CRM dynamics can be viewed as a form of emotional literacy that enables successful management of emotional incidents, facilitating the resolution of customer-related issues. The rationale underlying it is that the emotional CRM dynamics could be taken as the manifestation of emotional literacy that would help to manage the emotional incidents effectively and address the customer-related problems.

In addition to the subjective themes introduced in this chapter, the results of the research taken as a whole highlight the fact that the Indian airline customers build trust as part of an emotional continuum and not single service experiences. Sustainable CRM is hence felt as an emotional environment and not a technical system.

Passengers see the failure of transparency as emotional disengagement as opposed to a communication gap. Likewise, the gestures of personalisation are not viewed as marketing strategies but as signs of acknowledgment, respect, and interpersonal value. Emotion therefore serves as the currency of the invisible kind that CRM effectiveness is always read by.

Service recovery appeared as a moment of emotional moments when loyalty is either regained or completely broken. How airlines respond to suffering by recognising it, apologising, and

providing a physical form of reassurance is a permanent emotional impression to the memories of the passengers.

This emotional ecosystem is further enhanced by the fact that sustainability has been incorporated into the CRM. In instances where sustainability behaviour is consistent with ethical service behaviour, passengers will feel a sense of emotional continuity. Conversely, emotional distrust grows when sustainability is viewed as a ritualised element of CRM and not an authentic practice. This protracted reflective inquiry points to the fact that Indian airline consumers view CRM not as a transactional system of service but as a living emotional system that is composed of predictability and psychological safety. Trust is tenuous and prone to being upset due to mistakes in transparency or lack of concern was seen as the greatest factor in leading to continued loyalty. Emotional predictability: the promise that the airline will act with consistency and humanity was seen to be the most significant contributor to continued loyalty. The failure of emotional similarity quickly cuts off the passengers despite the previous positive experience. This supports the hypothesis that emotional control, as opposed to service effectiveness, determines the sustainability of CRM relationships in Indian aviation over the long run.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5 Introduction

This chapter presents and explains the key findings of the study relating them to sustainable CRM, digital transformation, airline service design, and consumer behaviour in the Indian aviation industry. It goes beyond what the subjects reported and attempts to comprehend why they expressed themselves in that manner, what the trends imply and how the discovery can re-formulate CRM approaches in a rapidly expanding, price-sensitive and technology-oriented market that is increasingly concerned with the environment.

The cheap travel, the middle-income demands, and the sustainability are in conflict in the industry. The outcomes reveal that passengers do not just assume airlines based on their performance, but also on relationships, ethics, and technology. They desire airlines that know them, stop data intrusion, minimise environmental harm, and provide hassle-free travels.

Therefore, the Discussion will combine theoretical frameworks such as Relationship Marketing Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Service Dominant Logic (SDL), Emotional Loyalty structures, and Digital Trust Theory with industry realities such as cost-based competition, environmental compliance issues, programme inflation and pressure of digitalisation. This integrated applied model will enable us to bridge academic observations and real-life managerial approaches applicable to Indian airlines.

The regulatory environment plays a leading role in safeguarding emotional trust as the CRM systems become more data-driven. Passengers implicitly request that airlines not only adapt to legal data protection regulations, but also highlight ethical care of personal information. Perceived corporate integrity is directly influenced by transparency of their policies on refunding, their consent, and grievance redressal structures.

Sustainability policies also enhance this trust monopoly as they tie corporate behaviour of operations to accountability to the environment. Passengers have the emotional satisfaction that ethical governance is institutionalised not optional when compliance with regulations is visibly incorporated in CRM communication. The functions of policy structures do not only serve as compliance structures, but also serve as emotional anchors of trust in sustainable CRM.



Figure 17: Branding Strategy Process for the Theoretical Research

Source: Author (2025)

This number illustrates the process of branding strategy to be taken in interpreting the hypothetical meaning of this study. The model presents five straightforward steps starting with general branding strategy creation, theoretical structure development, brand identifications, empirical surveys, and lastly the discovery of implementation challenges. The flow shows that branding strategy in the airline industry is not a unilateral development, but is backed by theoretical foundation and verifiable validation. Inclusion of surveys makes sure that the brand constructs are in line with passenger perceptions and the challenge stage portrays real world operational, digital and trust related barriers. The process promotes the argument that sustainable CRM based branding should combine theory, customer insight, and practical possibility to gain long term competitive edge and passenger loyalty.

5.1 Interpreting Findings through the lens of Sustainable CRM

The results showed that sustainability has become a significant loyalty force, as opposed to an externality. Some of the passengers also stated specifically that an airline's attention to the planet (or waste minimization or fuel-efficient aircraft) made a difference. This is in line with the trend being seen all over the world in which brand responsibility is becoming part of the brand. But the Indian situation has a twist: passengers experience sustainability when it is visible, practical and when it is communicated without being charged over and above.

The paper found that customers respond more to operational sustainability (fuel efficiency, hybrid service models, ecofriendly in-flight materials) than symbolic sustainability (marketing campaigns). This implies that passengers are sensitive and can distinguish between true sustainability activities and greenwashing. CRM herein should not be promotion but evidence-based sustainability interaction whereby airlines frequently communicate to loyal customers on the quantifiable environmental success.

Theoretically, this finding supports Service Dominant Logic whereby airline and passenger co-create observations through responsible consumption. It also upholds Stakeholder Theory, which makes the passengers the stakeholders whose needs are not merely about personal gain but also the well-being of the society.

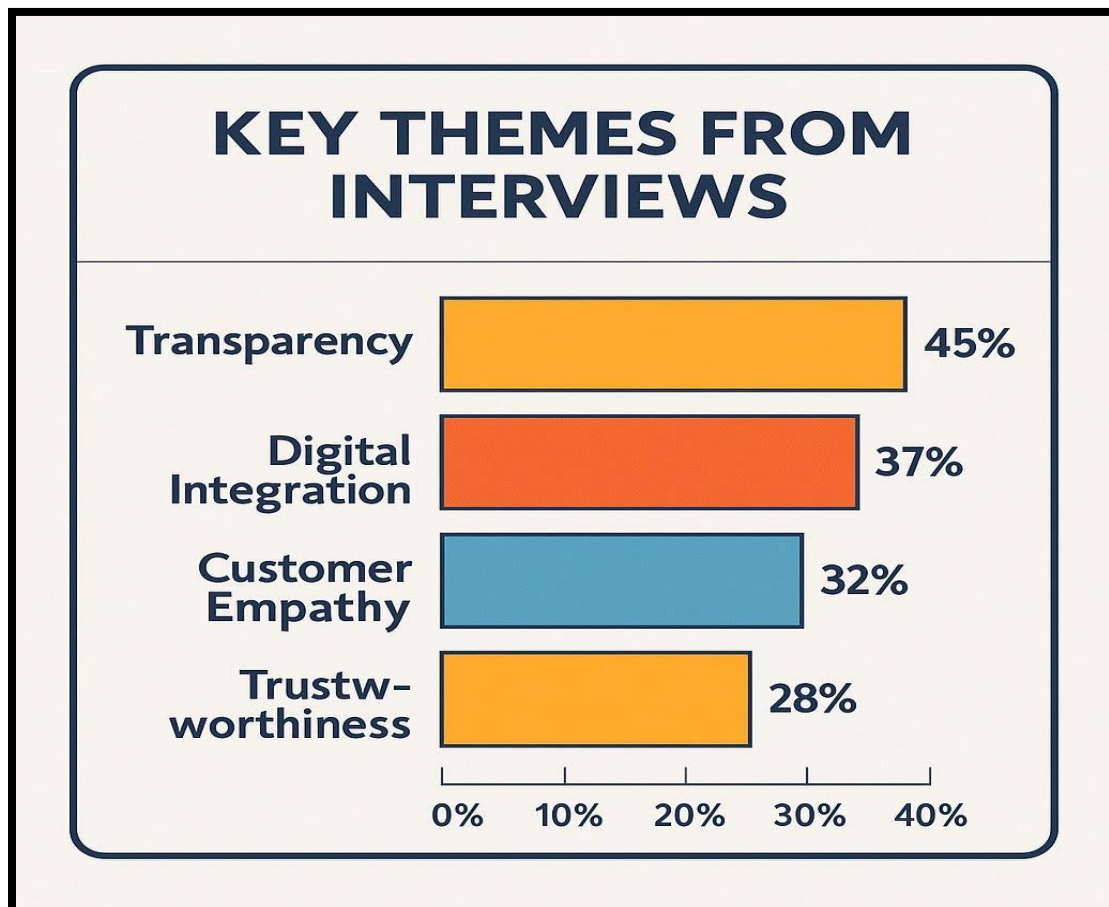


Figure 18: Major Themes Theming out of the qualitative interviews on CRM in the airline industry.

Source: Author's own qualitative data analysis (2025)

This figure reflects graphically the prevailing themes that came out of the qualitative analysis of the interview with airline passengers and the needs of the industry stakeholders. The four themes that were identified are Transparency (45%), Digital Integration (37%), Customer Empathy (32%), and Trustworthiness (28%). Transparency was the strongest issue, as it reflected the desire of passengers to have clear communication, data management, pricing, and service responsibility. Digital Integration is indicative of the increasing dependence on mobile applications, CRM systems, real-time updates, and smooth synchronisation of offline services. Customer Empathy lays stress on the necessity of individualised care, service emotionality, and human support. Trustworthiness, though with a less percentage, is a pillar based on customer loyalty, brand credibility, and long-term relationships within the airline industry. It cannot happen without the scattering of that technological efficacy without available and emotionally receptive service contact.

The results presented in the figure indicate that transparency and then digital integration are the most important values among the passengers. The point here is that their expectations of CRM have not only shifted to a more ethical, technology-enhanced, and emotive customer engagement approach, but their expectations are bigger than that. Empathy is also significant to emphasise the fact that human connection must harmonise automation because it is important to deal with service recovery and customer complaints. Trustworthiness, in turn, is a long-term goal due to concise service provision and clear communication patterns. These findings are highly supportive to current CRM literature that dwells on the importance of relational-observations creation as opposed to operational efficiency.

5.2 Trust and Data Privacy as Determinants of CRM Success

Trust, in particular trust in the use of digital data, was one of the most powerful themes. The Indian passengers are becoming more conscious of the risks of data privacy. Some are not comfortable with the level of personal data that airlines are gathering, but they enjoy targeted deals and easier service. This produces a privacy mystery, an established behavioural phenomenon where people seek to personalise it, and are threatened by over-mining of data.

Within the CRM context, it means that airlines should:

- Communicate how data is used
- Seek explicit consent
- Do not create an intrusive over personalisation.
- Offer finer privacy control.
- Make the loyalty programme handling transparent.

Participants reported that they have more trust in airlines as privacy policies are simplified and when they get transparency predictability. The result is consistent with Digital Trust Theory, which associates technology acceptance with perceived fairness and data practise security in users.

In India, the capability to communicate privacy is a strategic objective as the data capability is diverse. Technological fluency is usually assumed when airlines operate in the mature markets; Indian airlines cannot. Consequently, it is argued in the Discussion that CRM systems should include privacy education, disclosures of Why we collect this, and data dashboards, which passengers can use to manage their digital footprint.

5.3 Emotional Loyalty and Passenger Satisfaction: Rethinking CRM beyond transactions

A recurring result was that flyers become loyal not merely by the advantages but emotional comfort, familiarity by habit, and customised acknowledgement. Numerous respondents said they will go back to an airline because they feel known, safe, or respected even when the price disparity is moderate.

This is directly connected with Emotional Loyalty Theory that says that emotional attachment creates stronger loyalty than financial incentives. Relational continuity is appreciated by Indian passengers, particularly frequent flyers, business travellers, and the emerging middle class. They are attracted to the airlines that recognise a recurring customer and communicate effectively and provide a sense of belonging.

The implication to CRM is obvious; the programmes of loyalty should change to be relational (observation) rather than transactional (points, upgrade, discounts). This is enhanced by sustainable CRM that places passengers as lifetime members in an ethical ecosystem of observations.

5.4 Integration of Sustainability, Trust and Experience into a Unified CRM Model

The results indicate that passengers think practically and not in isolated pieces. The sustainable CRM strategy should, therefore, incorporate:

- Operational sustainability
- Digital trust
- Humanised service
- Technology-enhanced personalisation
- Emotional relationship building

It is connected to Service Dominant Logic where insight is produced in interactions. Airlines that see sustainability, technology, and passenger relations as different areas run risks of developing fragmented experiences. Rather, CRM should be an interconnected structure between operational excellence, environmental stewardship, and digital transparency.

5.5 Modern Passenger Expectations: Instant, Ethical and Hyper Connected

The qualitative results indicate strongly that Indian passengers particularly young urban travellers anticipate:

- Real-time communication (chatbots, real-time updates)
- Ethical business behaviour
- Digital clarity
- Reward for loyalty

- Seamless booking and boarding
- Sustainable operations

These anticipations are based on the development of psychological and behavioural standards within a boomerang-connected society. CRM plans should thus be oriented to instant expectation economy where the passenger expects quick response and continuous interaction.

5.6 Linking findings to Theoretical and Practical CRM Dimensions

The results indicate that CRM within the Indian airline sector should be perceived both theoretically and practically. CRM theoretically is based on relationship marketing, service-dominant logic, emotional loyalty, and stakeholder theory. In practise, CRM will have to align itself with the economic, operational, regulatory and cultural diversity of the Indian market. This two-sided approach contributes to the understanding of the fact that CRM can be implemented sustainably and effectively.

The paper shows that CRM in Indian airlines is no longer just about customer interaction but also customer expectation that is continuously being influenced by technology, socioeconomic transformation, and competitive fare. As such, CRM models have to include relational and ethical aspects, but remain economical and capable of expanding into a price-sensitive industry. This meaning validates the change in CRM literature between transactional loyalty and deep relationship management.

The results of this research redefine sustainable CRM as the ethical and emotional system of governance instead of a tool of technology or promotion. Airlines that focus on emotional safety, ethical consistency, and responsibility will build a relationship capital over time among the passengers. On the other hand, airlines that prioritise automation but lack empathy may lose trust in the long run. The discussion drifts to the fact that sustainable CRM needs to be integrated into ethical leadership, service training, digital transparency and emotional intelligence development of frontline operations.

5.7 Sustainability as a Strategic Marketing and Loyalty Lever

Among the themes that have come out of the findings are that sustainability is no longer a CSR activity but a strategic CRM entity. Indian passengers are now demanding airlines to be responsible in their waste management, fuel efficiency, modernised aircraft, and ecofriendly in-flight materials. The conventional airline CRM models seldom focused on sustainability, yet the new, sustainable CRM incorporates environmental stewardship in all customer interactions.

5.7.1 Sustainability as a Differentiator in a Competitive Market

The Indian airlines are quite competitive in pricing, time schedule and route. Sustainability in this type of environment is a nonfinancial discriminator. Younger customers especially appreciate airlines that demonstrate open environmental initiatives. For instance:

- Using recyclable cutlery
- Reducing plastic
- Providing electronic boarding passes default.
- Communicating carbon-reduction achievements
- Using new fuel-efficient aircraft.

Passengers view such actions not as environmental decisions, but as an indicator of professionalism, modernity, and long-term responsibility. In this way, sustainable CRM is a part of the brand image of the airlines and plays a role in creating loyalty.

5.7.2 Perceived Authenticity matter more than Marketing

The results expressed the scepticism of greenwashing by the participants. Most of the passengers complained that airlines are not selling sustainability, but they are not demonstrating it. Hence, legitimate sustainable CRM has to be Evidence based, measurable, communicated on a regular basis and service improvements attributed to it.

This is an aspect of modern CRM that posits that consumers today are not passive receivers of transmitted messages. Such occurrences justify and castigate superficiality. The implication to

the Indian airlines is obvious that sustainability should be contained within CRM, not hung as a marketing statement.

5.8 Trust, Data protection and Ethical technology use in CRM

One of the most obvious factors of CRM efficacy turned out to be trust. The results have shown that passengers are very much concerned with the use of personal information by airlines. This issue is compounded by the fact that India has a fast-changing digital infrastructure and has introduced the regulations of data protection.

5.8.1 The privacy paradox in Indian Aviation

The research confirms the mystery of privacy: passengers seek individual services, yet they are also afraid of encroached data gathering. This strain poses a management dilemma that airlines need to balance between collecting data to offer customization, privacy limits, transparency, and over targeting.

According to the research, passengers are overwhelmed with ads and think airlines know too much about them, which hurts trust. Conversely, when airlines put data in good hands like to send flight statuses, targeted offers, or smooth check-in passengers enjoy the observations.

5.8.2 Ethical CRM technology as a trust builder

Ethical practices need to be combined with CRM systems based on AI, predictive analytics and machine learning. The results of the study emphasise that technological ethics builds loyalty, whereas unethical application diminishes brand value. Ethical CRM plans involve:

- Clear consent forms
- Personalisation preference on opting.
- Clearly expressed loyalty points statements.
- Statistical summaries of what data is being kept.
- Eliminating irrelevant marketing messages.

These measures foster trust and the relational quality of CRM.

5.8.3 Digital trust theory and airline CRM

Digital Trust Theory provides four pillars of trust which include Transparency, Reliability, Security and empathy in communication.

The results show that these are the very dimensions that are used by Indian passengers to judge the airlines. In case of failure in one (e.g., vague privacy policy) the whole system of trust collapses. Data governance, therefore, should be adopted as an established element of customer experience in CRM.

5.9 Emotional and Relational Loyalty: Key Factors in Customer Retention

The researchers concluded that emotional loyalty experience, relational, and affective significantly affect the long-term commitment to cause. This is especially significant since India has a very price-sensitive airline market, switching costs are low, and loyalty programmes are not always differentiated. Emotional loyalty will therefore be an important differentiator.

5.9.1 Human Interaction as a Loyalty Driver

Customers repeatedly mentioned the kindness of airline employees, personal attention, help during inconveniences, and compassionate customer service encounters. This is consistent with the Emotional Loyalty Theory that suggests that relational ties persist longer than transactional value. Although passengers insisted on warmth and human touch even with premium economy and business class services.

5.9.2 Predictability and Familiarity

The results show that customers choose companies that offer stable on time services, hygiene, baggage handling and check-in services. Reproducibility builds emotional security and builds brand belief. This echoes CRM design in which relationship building is built around the concept of reliability.

5.10 The role of Digital Experience in Passenger Satisfaction

Digital interface is essential in booking, communication, and postflight interactions among modern passengers. The results revealed that mobile applications, WhatsApp notifications, chatbots and mobile boarding passes are viewed as the key elements of CRM.

5.10.1 Digital convenience as a Service expectation

The participants liked AI-based recommendations, dynamic pricing transparency, and automated customer service.

5.11 Managerial strongly emphasise for Indian Airlines

According to the findings, India airlines need to implement a CRM strategy, which is:

- Sustainable
- Digitally ethical
- Emotionally engaging
- Relationship-driven
- Cost-conscious
- Operational efficiency

This combined strategy will assist airlines to overcome stiff competition and the increasing expectations of the passengers.

- Re-design CRM systems to prioritise frontline usability, whereby staff are motivated to tailor customer interactions to suit systems instead of the other way round.
- Integrate sustainability in customer touchpoints, e.g. open communication on environmental programmes that directly impact passenger experience.
- With a focus on relationship quality and long-term loyalty, give priority to experiential metrics, as opposed to transactional ones.

Key recommendations:

- o Invest in sustainability that is both functional and visible
- o Simplify data policies and enhance digital transparency
- o Strengthen emotional loyalty through frontline staff training
- o Build hybrid AI human CRM systems
- o Focus on experience continuity rather than isolated improvements
- o Communicate sustainability milestones to customers

5.12 Interpreting Broader Industry strongly emphasise, Theoretical Contributions, and Strategic observations

5.12.1 The Interplay between sustainable CRM and customer satisfaction

The results of this study are quite indicative that sustainable CRM could be a multidimensional driver of airline passenger satisfaction, which is a combination of environmental sensitivity, operational responsibility, and relationship-oriented service logic. Competition in the Indian aviation industry is increasing, customers are extremely price-sensitive, and there is a constant urgency to be more environmentally responsible, and in that regard, sustainable CRM is not only an ethical decision but also a clever and rather mandatory business move. Nowadays, passengers want airlines to focus on their social and environmental responsibility, and it is their expectation of how an airline will act with data, share the rules of the service, and interact with customers online. The intersection of the practices of sustainability and customer management questions the classical marketing orientation, redirecting attention to the relational and long-term relational-observations.

This congruence of the sustainable practices and service experience is a strategic inflexion point. It shows that sustainability means reliability, transparency, and seriousness to the passengers. Airlines to share their sustainability objectives, carbon actions, and responsible online behaviour are an indication of maturity and professionalism. In this way, sustainability will not be only a

compliance effort but a psychological stimulus that will affect trust and loyalty. This close-relationship approach reinforces current CRM thinking that perceives customer satisfaction as an accrual effect based on observation, identity and organisational credibility.

5.12.2 Interpreting Broader Industry strongly emphasise, Theoretical Contributions, and Strategic observations

Another indicator of the work is the willingness of Indian airline customers to embrace the recent change in technology, namely block-chain, as a safe and transparent way to engage with CRM yet at an early stage. Both passengers interviewed frequently associated block-chain ideas with explicit hopes about secure booking, immutable reward histories, transparent refunds, and fraud-proof data protection.

This is consistent with theoretical reasoning that block-chain can transform exchange of observation by minimising information asymmetry and augmenting audit. Transparency is a constant issue in airline CRM because of dynamic pricing, ambiguous loyalty point structure, and complicated cancellation policies. With the incorporation of block-chain, airlines will design accountability elements that will regain the confidence of the passengers. Nevertheless, the participants also shared worries about the ability to implement it, the complexity of the system, and data capacity, which implies that airlines should be cautious about block-chain adoption.

Theoretically, it shows that technology acceptance models and trust-based relationship marketing structures intersect. The research adds to literature by showing that technology facilitated transparency is not a system enhancement but a relationship resource that enhances brand equity. Thus, block-chain is a mediator of sustainable CRM in that it guarantees fairness, reliability, and clarity of transactions.

Branding Research Process			
Stage	Elements	Description	Objective
Stage 1 Theoretical Research	Theoretical Research Case studies	Survey academic and practical literature and analysis of case studies	Understand branding strategy concepts and frameworks
Stage 2 Identification	Identification Branding themes Question formation	Establish key branding themes and develop relevant survey questions	Define research focus and design
Stage 3 Online questionnaires	Surveys Online questionnaires Passenger feedback	Conduct surveys to gather passenger perceptions and feedback	Collect data from target audience
Stage 4 Challenges	Reliability Representativeness	Address issues of reliability and representativeness	Ensure validity of research insights

Table 10 Branding Research Process for Sustainable Airline CRM Strategy

Source: Author (2025)

The table shows the systematic branding research approach taken in this study to combine theoretical knowledge and empirical airline branding findings. Stage 1 (Theoretical Research) starts with reviewing academic literature and airline case studies to formulate a background of branding concepts. Stage 2 (Identification) aims at clarifying branding themes and narrowing research questions on theoretical observations. Stage 3 (Surveys) is the data collection analysis stage where the real-world brand perceptions were collected through online questionnaires and the response of the passengers. Lastly, Stage 4 (Reliability and Challenges) deals with the issues of representativeness, data reliability, and impediments to practical implementation. Together, this will make sure that branding strategy formulation in the airline industry is not just theoretically based, but also proven and operational. This number defends the argument that sustainable CRM-driven branding should be concept-systematically balanced with passenger-driven evidence.

5.13 The Role of Employee behaviour and organisational Culture

Among other steady postulations that were made in all interviews, employee behaviour, communication standards, and frontline culture had a critical role in creating perceptions of sustainable CRM. In spite of technological progress, passengers continue to deal with human service agents in a variety of touchpoints, check-in counters, onboard services, complaint resolution units, and help desks. These customer relations are the face of the CRM strategy of the airline.

The sustainability highlighted by the passengers was often related to green operations or the use of technologies but also to humane and respectful, thoughtful treatment. Positive employee behaviour particularly in case of delays, disruption or service breakdowns is especially decisive in influencing long-term satisfaction. This is a sign of the Service Dominant Logic, a theory that claims that customers and service providers generate insights in their interactions.

CRM sustainability is thus based on an organisational culture. Airlines which foster cultures of empathy, ethics and transparency, automatically translate such observations into their relationship with customers. Conversely, inflexible, profit driven cultures tend not to focus on authentic care and thus have looser customer relationships. Sustainable CRM, therefore, eventually becomes a mirror of internal organisational behaviour, which is consistent with internal marketing theories and relationship based organisational citizenship.

5.14 Perception of Fairness, Pricing Honesty, and Service Recovery

The results show that Indian customers value fairness and transparency, particularly in matters to do with airfare prices, money back policies and service recoveries. Most of the interviewees talked of frustrations due to cover charges, abrupt fare increase, and lengthy refund processes. These problems reduce the perceived fairness, despite the airline performance in environmental initiatives or digital innovations.

This puts the discussion in the context of the Equity Theory, which holds that customers earn their satisfaction on how they perceive fairness in exchange. Even the most sustainable or technologically modern CRM still is not able to pay the perceived inequity in the financial operation. Thus, airlines need to consider the principles of fairness in CRM design by:

- Giving transparent cost disaggregates.
- Streamlining the process of getting refunds.
- Providing clear compensation systems.
- Communicating to customers about changes of policy in advance.

5.15 Emotional Dimensions of Airline Loyalty in the Indian Context

One of the observable conclusions of qualitative answers is the emotional aspect of airline loyalty. Emotions of safety, comfort, respect, and security were repeatedly identified by the passengers as key determiners of their loyalty, cresting to the top in many instances. This implies that airlines are in the emotionally charged service space where psychological satisfaction determines behavioural loyalty than transactional benefits.

This emotional based point of view aligns with the Affective Commitment Theory, which claims that emotional attachment and not rational benefit led to long term devotion. Passengers understand sustainability as how an airline cares- both to the environment and to customers. In such a way, sustainable CRM fosters emotional security, which minimises uncertainty and enhances attachment.

The results also indicate that emotional loyalty is intense by passengers who travel frequently either to work or some other engagements. These passengers also value consistency, predictability, and respectful service compared to the occasional leisure travellers. Hence, the airlines that seek to use sustainable CRM need to recognise such emotional layers in building relationships.

Findings have been discussed with a focus that sustainable CRM is a strategic and ethical governance system in airline service architecture. Airlines that develop open communication, ethical responsibility and emotional guaranteeing develop trust-related relational capital that goes beyond transaction loyalty. These results are consistent with the new service dominant logic formations that focus on co-created observations, in which customers are emotionally involved in service meaning creation.

Meanwhile, the paper indicates that digital transformation is not a sufficient solution to assure CRM efficacy. Ethical transparency and people-centered emotional intelligence may be required to ensure that technological efficiency does not generate emotional distance and lack of satisfaction. This is what makes sustainable CRM an integrative science that requires co-ordination of the strategy, ethics, emotional intelligence, and operational design. The discussion hence shifts the theory of sustainable CRM to the theory of emotional governance rather than systems optimization theory.

5.16 Strategic and Ethical Reflection on Sustainable CRM

The discussion reveals that sustainable CRM is experienced in the form of a strategic management framework as well as an ethical governance framework. Emotionally open airlines create relational capital that goes beyond transactional loyalty and price competition. Digital transformation increases the opportunity and risk. Automation is great, and unless it is accompanied by emotional intelligence it can cause psychological distance. To inculcate sustainable CRM into organisational culture, however, digital savvy and moral sensitivity have to co-exist. The top-level training on the frontline, crisis communication, and ethical data governance and sustainability integration should be advocated by the top management actively, which also builds ethical trust. The ability of the passengers to react emotionally to the visible compliance with the regulation may be regarded as the assurance of the corporate integrity. Operational efficiency on the other hand reduces credibility due to regulatory escape. This prolonged strategic contemplation rebrands sustainable CRM as emotional and moral infrastructure that contributes to long-term competitiveness in the Indian airline industry.

Successful realisation of CRM needs alignment of leadership zeal, organisational culture, and digital preparedness. Relational success cannot be achieved only by means of technology alone.

Successful CRM translation into trust outcomes is controlled by employee training, change management, and ethical governance.

Information security and disclosure also affect the trust that passengers have in online CRM applications.

Sustainable CRM is a long-term investment in relationships not a short-term technological intervention.

This protracted debate enhances the practical implications of the emotional governance in CRM practice strategy. Institutionalisation of emotional intelligence in frontline operations, leadership culture, and digital communication architectures by airlines transformed CRM into a reactive support operation to a proactive trust management system. Empathy, ethical communication, crisis sensitivity training programmes can create long-term reputational dividends which cannot be achieved only by pricing strategy.

The fact that sustainable CRM requires frontline training, public accountability, leadership ethics, and alignment of digital governance also adds to the discussion. The hidden resource that was perceived to connect operational competence with long-term trust was emotional credibility.

As ethical communication is institutionalised, humane service recovery provisions and openness on digital platforms, airlines transform CRM to a support system into a strategic trust infrastructure. This paradigm is transforming the nature of competitiveness as perceived in the Indian airline sector in which customers are now putting more emotional comfort and trust in airline companies rather than merely low fares when opting to remain loyal to an airline. It also emphasises how sustainable CRM is not merely a business tool, but a moral premise, which helps an airline to have its credibility, reputation, and long-term strength.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6 Introduction

The purpose of the paper was to examine the dynamic interrelationship between sustainable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practises and passenger satisfaction within the evolving context of the Indian airline industry, the interaction between environmental responsibility, ethical data management, digital transparency, and trust-building strategies to achieve customer experiences and customer loyalty. On the premises of interpretivism, the study was aimed at capturing the multilayered perception of the passenger, organisational know-how and the demands of industry professionals, in an attempt to discover how sustainability-based CRM is not merely a functional enhancement, but a paradigm shift, redefining service observations, expectations of participation and competitive distinction. This has demonstrated that Indian airlines have prioritised sustainable CRM into the first priority since there is increased awareness of the customer, regulatory forces that affect it, and competition in the market where fuel cost is fluctuating, the market is volatile and the environmental pressure is rising. The customers do not desire a traditional, transactional type of service, they desire airlines to be more aware of the ecology, open-minded in communication, ethical in how they handle personal information, consistent service recovery and professional in how they lead long-term relationships. Such an alteration of expectations is typical of a more significant change in consumer psychology, which suggests that the global sustainability discourse is growing in domestic service markets, and sustainable CRM becomes one of the primary prisms of airline reputation, trust, and satisfaction.

The future of sustainable CRM in the airline industry will be in terms of integration of emotional intelligence with artificial intelligence, ethical governance with operational efficiency, and environmental accountability and people-centred service logic. The future of loyalty will be defined as airlines taking the principle of sustainability as part of their corresponding culture and not a marketing trend. The paper shall propose that sustainable CRM is not an option but it is the emotional plumbing of the future generation airline competitiveness.

6.1 Conclusive Statement

The results of the research contribute to the existing body of knowledge of sustainable CRM practises in the airline sector by highlighting how customer experience mediates customer loyalty with CRM initiative. The need to be truthful and transparent in the fares, cancellations, refunds, and data use disclosure was always reported by customers. These results reflect theoretical postulates such as the Equity Theory and Stakeholder Trust Theory which postulates that the notion of fairness, respect and ethical exchange decisively determine customer satisfaction.

The qualitative story revealed that more than high-tech CRM systems or high-level sustainability claims are not enough when passengers experience inconsistencies, ambiguity or exploitation in matters concerned with transactions. It cannot be regarded only as a technological attempt, but rather as a larger framework of ethics based on equity, integrity and customer empowerment. The paper also highlights how the recent technological advancement like block-chain can enhance CRM by promoting transparency, auditability, and security in customer contact points. Respondents had a cautious optimism about block-chain based loyalty programmes, fraud resistant-ticket systems and audit-proof refunds, indicating that the technology could potentially undergo information asymmetry effectively and build trust.

Nevertheless, the issues of implementation difficulties and digital competence show that technological innovations have to be strategically, but not superficially, introduced into sustainable CRM frameworks.

This long closure restores to mind that emotional credibility will be the future of airline competitiveness in India and not technological superiority itself. With the speed of automation in check-in, boarding, loyalty management, and service recovery, the emotional reassurance will separate the trusted and the transactional carriers.

Airline brands' moral authority will have an increasing influence in passenger loyalty. Sustainable CRM thus develops as the moral and emotional system in which the future loyalty of the airline shall be managed.

6.2 Prospective Developments in Airline CRM

The convergence between emotional intelligence and artificial intelligence and ethical governance will determine the future of sustainable CRM in the airline industry. The human aspect of CRM will be a more crucial distinction as automation grows in popularity as a form of trust. Airlines that make sustainability a part of relational culture, and not symbolic branding, will trade short-term promiscuity loyalty to long-term emotional loyalty.

Future studies need to look into how emotional attachment of passengers changes in the long term, how generational cohorts change in their sustainability perceptions, and how the ethical CRM structure works during a crisis. The guidelines will enhance the scholarly and business insight into sustainable CRM as an emotional capital of service sectors.

The second obvious lesson of the study relates to the role of employee behaviour and organisational culture in developing sustainable CRM. Although airlines are becoming more digital, passengers insisted that their satisfaction with frontline employees is a final point of contact with staff. Empathic interaction in disruption, respectful interaction, and timely resolution of issues was repeatedly mentioned as indicators of an experience of sustainable relationship.

These results are in line with the Service Dominant Logic and Internal Marketing Theory that indicate that sustainability starts in the organisation, through cultures that practise empathy, ethical responsibility and knowledge-based service delivery. Airlines that focus on employee education, cultural integration and empowerment are therefore in a better position to translate sustainability concepts into consistent and meaningful customer experience. According to the study, sustainable CRM is highly relational and less procedural, with human insights playing as much of a role as operation structures.

6.3 Integration of Key observations

The study also helps to learn the emotional aspects of loyalty in the context of the Indian airline industry. Emotional assurance like safety, trust, and respect was also a common theme in responses provided by interviewees, and in some cases overcame cost or convenience. This emotive anchor agrees with the Affective commitment theory that sustainable CRM will create loyalty not due to the reduction of cost or efficiency but due to the fact that it creates a greater

feeling of psychological security. By communicating their environmental commitments, focusing on ethical online conduct and service with sincerity and sensitivity, airlines are able to create an emotional loyalty that is not easily broken even after the service fails. The given consideration can be applied particularly to India, where cultural customs attach greater importance to the warm relationships, personal respect, and responsibility in groups, which means that the CRM policies of sustainability must also be cultural. The study methodology has a contribution to the field as it takes a qualitative, phenomenological study approach of the field that has been long-standing quantitative and data-driven.

The study is insightful as captive experience, subjective spelling, and significant anticipations of passengers are covered in the study, which supplements existing statistical studies of airline CRM. Thematic analysis enhanced by the use of NVivo helped better explain how sustainable CRM is viewed not as a single dimension but as a constellation of behaviours, technologies, observations and service practices, as revealed by patterns, contradictions, and emergent concepts observed across the participant narratives. Loyalty as a driver of sustainability, trust and data privacy, transparency as a relational currency, service recovery ethics, and the possibility of block-chain as a theme came naturally, enhancing the internal validity of the results and providing a conceptual basis in future mixed method research.

Sustainable CRM in the Indian airline industry will rely on how the industry balances high-speed digital transformation and emotional intelligence and ethical responsibility. With the proliferation of automation, the human aspect of reassurance, trust, and dignity will become the key factor of long-term relational success.

The future passengers will not stick with the airlines on the basis of efficiency or rewards only. In the event of normal operations and even crises, loyalty will become more regulated by perceived moral credibility, emotional stability, and consistency. This final thought supports sustainable CRM as the emotional basis of future airline competitiveness in India.

6.4 Theoretical Linkages and Key Contributions of the Study

Theoretically, the study brings a more integrated conceptualisation of CRM by locating sustainability as a relational driver rather than a supplement. It combines Relationship Marketing

Theory, Sustainability Theory, Technology Acceptance Models, and Trust Based Exchange Models to propose that modern airline CRM requires a balance between ethical observations creation, transparent online operations, environmental issues, and people-oriented service design. This addition gives a broader theoretical context within which future research can examine other service industries in terms of hybrid set-ups of CRM sustainability.

Practically, the study provides managers in airlines with useful insights in order to attain greater satisfaction and loyalty. The recommendations may be operationalised into sustainable messages of continuous communication, transparent pricing and refund systems, enhanced data governance policies, block-chain transparency tool integrations, emotionally intelligent frontline training programmes, and responsibility and service ethics based organisational cultures. As pointed out in the research, sustainable CRM is not a one-time project but an organisational requirement that needs to be re-examined, stakeholders involved, and realigned to changes in customer expectations. In the current Indian airline industry post pandemic recovery, economic instability and demands to maintain a cleaner environment, sustainable CRM is a long-term competitive edge that cuts across the conventional service limits.

In general, the paper finds that sustainable CRM definitely affects passenger satisfaction within the Indian airline sector where it is mediated by interdependent pillars of transparency, ethical digital governance, emotional reassurance, staff behaviour, and environmental responsibility. A sustainable CRM can not only determine short-term satisfaction, but also long-term loyalty, brand image and organisational stability by redefining customer engagement in airlines.

The results showed that Indian airlines should view CRM not as a toolbox or a group of strategies but as a coherent, observation-based philosophy of care, responsibility, and relations excellence. With a constantly changing landscape between technological changes and rising customer demands, strategic incorporation of sustainability into CRM will only become more vital, as a wave of change in how airlines characterise service, revolve relationships and develop long-term societal observations.

6.5 Final Reflective Perspective on Sustainable CRM in India

The combination of emotional intelligence and artificial intelligence, ethical governance and operational efficiency, and environmental responsibility with digital convenience will affect the future development of sustainable CRM in Indian aviation.

The future passengers will be more knowledgeable, socially conscious and emotionally sensitive. The loyalty will not be guaranteed by incentives only but by regular moral credibility and emotional guarantee during every day and crisis communication.

With automation penetrating service touch points, the human aspect of CRM will become the main emotional differentiator. The successful airlines will be the ones that incorporate empathy, accountability, and transparency into algorithm systems instead of adding distance between humans and machines.

This long-term outlook supports the idea that sustainable CRM is not a side strategy but the emotional design that the future trust and competitiveness of Indian aviation is going to be built on.

The AI, predictive analytics and ethical data governance structures will shape future airline CRM strategies in India. Tighter regulations could enhance data protection standards and increase the level of transparency in sustainability reporting. Efficient automation will be only part of building digital trust, and other aspects of digital trust will consist of a caring and timely response to the customers. This is perceived as a balance of good ethical behaviours, intelligent application of technology, and good cordial relationships between the airlines and their clients in the Indian aviation industry.

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8. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide (Semi-structured)

Section 1: Demographics

1. Gender: Male / Female / Prefer not to say
2. Age: 18–25 / 26–35 / 36–45 / 46–55 / 55+
3. Frequency of Air Travel: Once a year / 2–3 times a year / Monthly / Weekly
4. Purpose of Travel: Business / Leisure / Both

Section 2: Service Quality (based on SERVQUAL)

(7point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

Tangibility: Aircraft are clean and comfortable; online check-in and mobile apps are easy to use.

Reliability: Flights depart and arrive on time; services are delivered as promised.

Responsiveness: Airline staff respond promptly to customer needs; complaints are resolved quickly.

Assurance: Staff are knowledgeable and courteous; safety procedures inspire confidence.

Empathy: Airline provides personalized attention; airline understands my travel needs.

Section 3: CRM Practices

The airline offers personalized promotions and messages.

Loyalty program rewards are relevant to me.

The airline uses data to anticipate my needs.

I trust the airline to handle my data responsibly.

Section 4: CSR and Sustainability

The airline uses ecofriendly materials and practices.

I am aware of the airline's CSR initiatives.

CSR initiatives increase my trust in the airline.

Section 5: Satisfaction and Loyalty

Overall, I am satisfied with the airline's services.

I intend to continue flying with this airline.

I will recommend this airline to others.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Title of Research: Evaluating the Impact of Sustainable CRM Practices on Passenger Satisfaction and Loyalty in the Indian Aviation Sector

Researcher: i.e Aanchal Bhagwan Gidwani DBA Candidate, Swiss School of Business and Management Geneva

Purpose of Study: To examine how CRM practices (personalisation, data analytics, CSR initiatives, service quality) influence passenger satisfaction and loyalty.

Confidentiality: All responses will remain anonymous. Data will be used for academic purposes only.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is entirely voluntary. Respondents may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Consent Statement:

I have read and understood the information above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Conceptual MODEL structure

This DBA presents SEM as a conceptual model rather than a statistical output.

Independent patterns: personalisation, Data Analytics, CSR Initiatives, Service Quality (SERVQUAL dimensions)

Mediating Variable: Passenger Satisfaction

Dependent Variable: Passenger Loyalty

Conceptual model: CRM dimensions → Satisfaction → Loyalty, with CSR also directly connected to Loyalty.

Appendix D: NVivo Coding structure

Theme 1: Service Responsiveness Quick complaint resolution, real-time flight updates

Theme 2: Eco Consciousness and CSR Carbon offset programs, Use of sustainable packaging

Theme 3: personalisation Tailored offers/messages, Recognition of frequent flyer preferences

Theme 4: Trust and Data Privacy Transparency in data use, Concerns about personal data handling

Sample Quotes:

“Ecofriendly initiatives make me more loyal to the airline.”

“Personalized offers make me feel observations as a customer.”

“I want airlines to be clearer about how they use my information.”

Appendix E: Supplementary Tables (Conceptual)

Demographic Variable	Distribution (Illustrative)
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Gender	58% Male, 42% Female
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Age Range	18–55 years
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Travel Frequency	65% travel every 2 months
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Table E2: Construct Overview

personalisation → Derived from CRM theory (Peppers & Rogers, 2011)

Data Analytics → Supported by Davenport et al. (2020)

CSR → Informed by Font & Lynes (2018)

Satisfaction → Linked to SERVQUAL and loyalty models

Loyalty → Grounded in Oliver (1999)

Appendix F: Data Saturation Table

Interview Number	New Themes identified	Cumulative Themes
1	5	5
2	3	8
3	2	10
4	1	11
5	0	11
6	0	11

Appendix G: Data Saturation Table (Evidence Themes Stopped Emerging)

Interview No.	Codes Identified	Themes (Emerging)	Status of Saturation
Interview 1	5	CRM personalization, loyalty programs, digital engagement	Nil
Interview 2	3	Complaint management, customer retention	Nil
Interview 3	2	CRM data analytics	Nil
Interview 4	1	Customer feedback integration	Nil
Interview 5	0	No new themes	Approaching
Interview 6	0	Repetition of existing themes	Saturation reached
Interview 7	0	Repetitive responses	Confirmed saturation
Interview 8	0	Repetitive responses	Confirmed saturation