

# Determining Employees' perception towards Customer Relationship Management practices in the Indian Aviation sector

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## Abstract

In today's highly competitive business environment, companies are unable to survive longer with the transactional attitude towards customers. With the increase in competition both at the global and international level, many organizations realize the significance of becoming customer-centric in this competitive era; every business invested heavily and adopted CRM as a core business strategy. Customer Relationship Management approach is an integration of information technology and relationship marketing which facilitates building a long-term relationship with the customers at an enterprise-wide level. The main purpose of the present study is to assess the perception of employees towards relationship practices adopted by airlines. The study is conducted on a sample group of 150 staff members employed in different airlines in the state of Punjab and Chandigarh. The findings of the study indicate that employees' have an overall positive perception towards all factors except customization services. The study also suggested that airlines should form such relationship strategies which help to build good relations with the existing customers as well as attract new customers.

**Keywords:** *Customer relationship management, Compound annual growth rate (CAGR), Customer Focus, Responsiveness, Convenience, Relationship management practices, customized services.*

## 1. Introduction

Customer relationship management (CRM) has been considered a popular marketing strategy for decades. With the growing global penetration, organizations have started understanding the

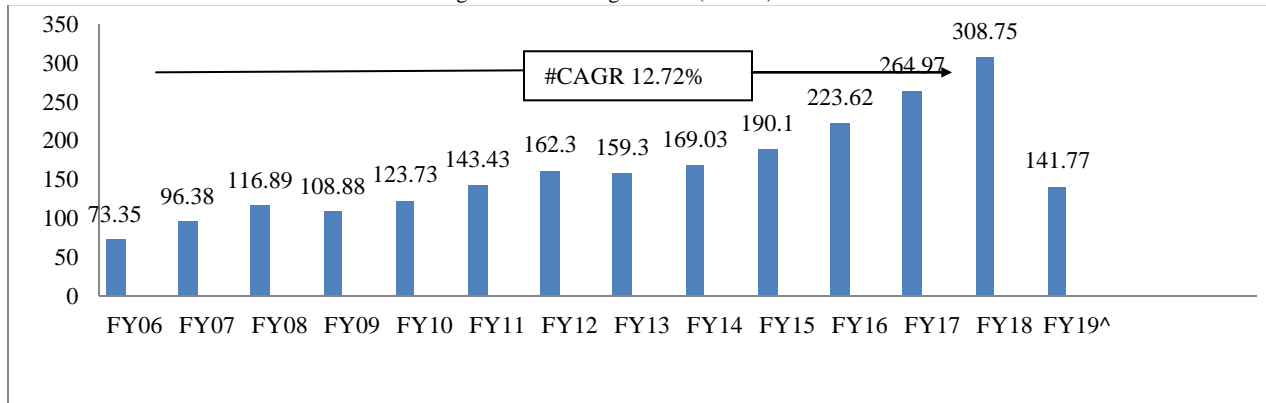
relevance of retaining active customers as they are the key component of their survival in the market. In recent times, Customer relationship management has become increasingly popular as a communication tool and a relationship-building platform. It enlightens the benefits associated with the retention of loyal customers as this loyalty emerges from the relationship "customer - organization", the longer and more intense the relationship is, the higher the benefits. Customer relationship management helps the organizations to manage the interactions with the customer more effectively in order to maintain competitiveness in the present economy. When a company enters the market it has to compete with the already existing and solid ones so it is essential to find new ways of doing and conceiving businesses for fittest of survival. Customer Relationship Management has viewed as a strategy to maintain a long-term relationship with the customers and the use of customer relationship management (CRM) systems are becoming increasingly important to improve customer lifetime value. The effective implementation of CRM process helps in increasing profits of an enterprise by acquiring new prospective customers and maintaining good relations with existing customers which will lead to increased customer satisfaction and ensure long-term profitability and sustainability of the business through customer loyalty.

In India, Aviation sector of the country is a driver of its economic and social development. Both public and private airlines largely contribute to its turnover although the private sector players have an unprecedented role in developing the aviation sector in the country. India's passenger traffic grew

at 16.52 percent year on year to reach 308.75 million in FY18. It grew at a CAGR of 12.72 FY18. It is estimated from the reports that Passengers' traffic in India during Apr-Aug 2018 was 141.77 million. Since the new millennium, growth in passenger traffic has been strong, especially with rise in the personal income and introduction of low-cost carriers in the aviation

percent during FY06- sector. It is estimated that India have 480 million flyers by the year 2036, which will be more than that of Japan (just under 225 million) and Germany (just over 200 million) combined. (Source: <https://www.ibef.org/download/Aviation-Sep-2018.pdf>)<sup>[13]</sup>

Figure no. 1 Passenger traffic (million)



**Notes:** CAGR – Compound Annual Growth Rate, FY – Indian Financial Year (April – March), \*passenger – Domestic + International, #CAGR is till FY18, ^ - Till August 2018

**Source:** Association of Private Airport Operator, Airports Authority of India

Airlines have realized that satisfied customers are an asset to the organization and thus focus on implementing customer relationship management (CRM) as a strategic tool for managing relationships with their customers. To manage the customer more effectively across all lines of service, airlines should modify their approach to CRM in a number of ways:

- Customer segmentation—Airlines need to recognize that mileage-based segmentation used by them is inadequate, whereas value-based and needs-based approaches will facilitate guide investment decisions and drive greater insight into the requirements of high-value customers.
- CRM initiative development—In order to differentiate themselves from the competition, airlines should abandon a “fast follower” approach to CRM initiative development, in favor of investment in initiatives with a high return, which responds to the needs and wants of their own customers.
- Organizational design and management—Airlines ought to instill a service mentality in their employees, empowering them with complete information of the customer and clearly articulating the employee’s role

within the CRM strategy. (Source: Boland et al, 2002<sup>[2]</sup>)

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

<sup>[10]</sup>Payne and Frow (2005) developed a conceptual framework for customer relationship management and its role in enhancing customer value. In the paper, five key cross-functional CRM processes were identified- a strategy development process, value creation process, multichannel integration process, an information management process and performance assessment process. The purpose of the study was to develop a process-oriented conceptual framework that positions CRM at a strategic level by identifying the key cross-functional processes involved in the development of a CRM strategy. The study conducted a workshop with a panel of 34 highly experienced CRM practitioners and directors of a leading research and management institute specialized in CRM and IT. The study identified key elements within each process and developed a conceptual framework.

<sup>[11]</sup>Saxena and Khandelwal (2011) in their research explore the perception towards CRM practices in banking sector. The study was based on primary data collection and the sample size consisted of 225 bank customers (75 from each location i.e. Delhi, Ghaziabad and Gurgaon). Non probability sampling approach was adopted and Judgment and

convenience sampling methods were used in selecting the subjects to ensure the heterogeneity. After collecting the data, it was analyzed by using Parametric Tests (independent samples equal variance-T Test).

<sup>[1]</sup>Bhat and Darzi (2016) CRM and customer retention have increasingly being recognized as important managerial functions especially in saturated and increasingly competitive markets. The study tries to determine the impact of employee perception towards CRM practices (customer knowledge and customer orientation) on customer retention. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) has been employed on a sample of 204 respondents who were randomly selected from the population of employees of a particular bank in the Jammu and Kashmir. Finding of the study reveals that customer knowledge and customer orientation has significantly positive impact on the customer retention.

<sup>[5]</sup>Kumudha and Bhunia (2016) conducted an empirical study on Customer relationship management and marketing practices adopted by the airline industry in India. The main objective of the study was to evaluate the expectations and perceptions of customers to gauge the effectiveness of the CRM practices adopted by airline companies. The paper also emphasized understanding the managements' perception about customer relationship management and marketing practices adopted by their airlines. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire including thirty-two statements to decipher the degree of customer relationship management practiced by the airlines. Three airlines were selected for the study: Air India, Jet Airways and Kingfisher airlines operating from Coimbatore airport providing full services to the passengers. A sample of 111 respondents has been fixed for each airline in such a manner that the total sample size has been 333. The expectations and perceptions of airline passengers were measured by considering 18 dependent variables after consulting with the airline's authorities and also by referring to the available literature. The result showed that airline companies had not been giving equal importance to different strategies i.e. Jet Airways and Air India have been giving more importance to customer loyalty strategy while Kingfisher has given prime importance to customer satisfaction strategy. It was

found that there was a significant difference in the average expectation and perception scores about the services among the respondents of the three selected airlines.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### Objective of the study

The study was conducted to assess the perceptions of the employees of the airline companies. The main objective of this study was to measure the perception of employees regarding the Customer Relationship Management practices of airline companies.

#### Scope of the study and Sampling design

The sample size consists of 150 employees from different districts of Punjab and Union Territory Chandigarh. The employees are the persons who are working in different airline companies operating in airports of Punjab and Chandigarh. Purposive sampling was used to select the employees in the aviation sector.

#### Data Collection

Primary data for the research was collected with the help of a self-administered questionnaire designed to achieve research objective of the study. Five-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses. Respondents were asked to respond to each statement on the basis of 1 to 5 scales.

Questionnaire was designed by referring the studies:

Chang & Chen (2007)<sup>[3]</sup>, Long et al. (2006)<sup>[6]</sup>, Martensen & Groenholdt (2004)<sup>[7]</sup>, Nadiri et al. (2008)<sup>[8]</sup>, Park et al. (2006)<sup>[9]</sup>, Zins (2001)<sup>[12]</sup>.

### 4. Analysis

This section covers the descriptive analysis of the 150 employees of the airlines and their perception about the CRM factors. The descriptive analysis includes the gender, age, educational qualification, monthly income, employment, and the designation of the employees of various airlines operating domestically and internationally. The perception is studied on the basis of seven CRM factors- Customer Focus, Responsiveness, Staff Assistance, Convenience, Post-flight, Customization services, and Other relationship management practices.

#### 4.1 Descriptive Profile of Respondents

This section covers the distribution of respondents according to gender, age, education, monthly income, and employment and designation profile of the employees.

Table no. 1- Gender and Age profile of the employees

Demographic Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	73	48.7
	Female	77	51.3
Age	Below 25 years	5	3.3
	25-45 years	144	96.0
	46-65 years	1	0.7
Total		150	100.0

Table no.1 exhibits the distribution of respondents according to their gender and age. It shows that out of total of 150 employees, there are 77 i.e. 51.3% of the respondents which are female and 73 (48.7%) are male employees. The table also presents the age distribution of the respondents. According to the table, the majority of the

respondents belongs to the age group between 25 – 45 yrs i.e. 144 (96.0 %) which shows that while recruiting airlines focused on both enthusiasm and experience. There are only 5 (3.3%) of employees which falls under the age category below 25 yrs which is followed by 0.7% of employees present in the 46-65 yrs category.

Table no. 2- Education and Monthly Income profile of the employees

Demographic Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Education	Graduate	74	49.3
	Post graduate	31	20.7
	professional degree	43	28.7
	Any other	2	1.3
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 80,0000	149	99.3
	Rs. 80,000 – 1,20,000	1	0.7
Total		150	100.0

Table no. 2 presents the education and monthly income distribution of the respondents. An analysis of the table provides that majority of the respondents who participate in the study i.e. 74 (49.3%) have graduated in different streams followed by 43 (28.7%) having a professional degree and respondents having Master's degree 30

(20.7%) respectively. There are only 2 (1.3 %) of respondents has educational level other than these categories. It is evident from table no. 2 , the majority of employees 149 (99.3%) have a monthly income below Rs. 80,000 while there is only 0.7 % employees who mentioned their monthly income in Rs.80,000- 1,20,000 category .

Table no. 3 Employment and designation profile of the employees

Demographic Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Term of employment	Less than 1 year	19	12.7
	1-3 years	76	50.7
	4-6 years	44	29.3
	Above 6 years	11	7.3
Designation	Ground staff	58	38.7
	Customer service	56	37.3
	Cabin crew/ flight attendant	30	20.0
	In-flight service	1	0.7
	Manager	5	3.3
Total		150	100.0

Table no. 3 reveals the term of employment of airlines' employees under the study. The information given in the table shows that the highest proportion of employees i.e. 76 (50.7%) works between 1-3 years with particular airlines while 44 (29.3%) of employees work since 4-6 years in airlines. There were also 19 (12.7%) of fresher's who have less than 1-year experience with airlines as well as employees having experience more than 6 years with particular airline company constitutes about 17.3% of the total sample. There are various designations which exist in airlines' organizational hierarchy. Among various designation levels in airlines, 58 (38.7%) of employees represents ground staff followed by 56 (37.3%) belong to the customer service category. There were also cabin crew 30 (20.0%) and in-flight services (0.7%) who attend customers during flight and study also include employees at managerial level 5(3.3%). It shows that only a

limited percentage of employees at a higher level have direct interaction with the passengers.

#### 4.2 Employees' Perception towards Customer Relationship Management practices Adopted by Airline Companies

The employees are the main force for any organization and it is these employees who decide the running of the company in many cases when it comes to productivity and achieving the goals. Without human force the organization is just nothing, the success of every organization depends on the working of its employees. The greater attraction between the buyer and the seller, the more successful transaction will be completed (Henthorne et al., 1992)<sup>[4]</sup>. So it is important to understand the perceptions of employees about the practices adopted by the company to retain its customers as it is the employees who ultimately deal with the customers.

Table no. 4 Employees perception towards Customer Focus

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
(CF1) Airlines maintains safe and friendly environment for the passengers	75	50.0	73	48.7	2	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.49
(CF2) Airlines depart and arrive at scheduled time	40	26.7	106	70.7	4	2.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.24
(CF3)The waiting lounges are clean and comfortable	108	72.0	42	28.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.72
(CF4)Airline company offers high seating comfort	43	28.7	107	71.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.29
(CF5) Airline company offers great in- flight entertainment	18	12.0	77	51.3	50	33.3	5	3.3	0	0.0	3.72
(CF6) The meals provided in the airline are tasty and fresh	4	2.7	139	92.7	7	4.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.98
(CF7) The ticket price of airlines is reasonable	10	6.7	110	73.3	27	18.0	2	1.3	1	0.7	3.84
(CF8) Airline company has a well developed privacy policy to maintain confidentiality of passengers' information	53	35.3	68	45.3	27	18.0	2	1.3	0	0.0	4.15
(CF9)The price relative to services and items like food reflected the quality of meals and services you require	39	26.0	76	50.7	32	21.3	3	2.0	0	0.0	4.01
(CF10) Services are accessible as and when passengers demand	61	40.7	83	55.3	6	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.37

As shown in the table no. 4 it is found that there is a positive attitude of employees towards all the questions under the customer focus dimension. The statement with the highest mean value under this factor is CF3 i.e. The waiting lounges are clean and comfortable having mean score value 4.72 whereas the lowest noted mean is 3.72 for statement CF5

i.e. Airline company offers great in-flight entertainment. It shows that employees of the airlines feel that airlines companies are providing good customer focus activities to maintain their relationship with the customers.

Table no. 5 presents the mean score value of employees' perception towards responsiveness

factor. There are seven statements under the factor responsiveness. The employees have a positive attitude towards all the statements, the mean value of all statements R1 (4.23), R2 (4.87), R3 (3.93), R4 (4.23), R5 (3.91), R6 (4.23) and R7 (4.41) indicates the level of agreement towards each statement. The Highest mean value is for statement R2 (4.87) "Airline company has provision of 24 hours and 7 days" which is close to 5 indicating

that employees strongly perceive that airline companies provide 24/7 provision for its customers whereas the lowest mean value is for statement R5 which says "There is rapid response to claims and suggestions by airlines" i.e. 3.91. It shows that employees of airlines perceive that airline company in which the respective respondent work is providing satisfactory 24/7 services to the passengers.

Table no. 5 Employees perception towards Responsiveness

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
(R1) Airlines company informs passengers about best deals availability through various channels	47	31.3	91	60.7	11	7.3	1	0.7	0	0.0	4.23
(R2) Airline company has provision of 24 hours and 7 days	131	87.3	19	12.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.87
(R3) When delays or cancellations occur, airlines notify passengers the exact time of flight	31	20.7	86	57.3	24	16.0	9	6.0	0	0.0	3.93
(R4) Airline company has proper complaint redressal system	42	28.0	100	66.7	8	5.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.23
(R5) There is rapid response to claims and suggestions by airlines	11	7.3	114	76.0	25	16.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.91
(R6) Airline company provides updates to privilege members through SMS	53	35.3	80	53.3	16	10.7	1	0.7	0	0.0	4.23
(R7) The communication channels used by airlines are very effective	64	42.7	83	55.3	3	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.41

Table no. 6 Employees perception towards Staff Assistance

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
(SA1) Frontline employees have adequate knowledge about the various services availability	119	79.3	31	20.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.79
(SA2) Employees of the airline company are courteous and made helpful suggestions	116	77.3	34	22.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.77
(SA3) Employees of the airline company respond to passengers' requests professionally	98	65.3	52	34.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.65
(SA4) Each passenger is paid individual attention	45	30.0	80	53.5	25	16.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.13
(SA5) The services are prompt	12	8.0	130	86.7	8	5.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.03
(SA6) Employees of the airline company used easy to understand language .	89	59.3	61	40.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.59
(SA7) Well trained staff to handle errors and complicated situations	92	61.3	56	37.3	2	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.60

From the table no. 6 it is evident from the mean values for different statements that employees have an overall positive attitude towards staff behavior.

The mean value for statement SA1 (4.79), SA2 (4.77), SA3 (4.65), SA6 (4.59) and SA7 (4.60) indicates that employees have strong agreement



towards these statements under staff assistance factor. The mean value for other statements i.e. SA4 (4.13), “Each passenger is paid individual attention by the employees” and SA5 (4.03), “The

services are prompt i.e. employees were never too busy to respond” also indicates the positive behavior but its value is less as compared to other statements.

Table no. 7 Employees perception towards Convenience

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
(C1) Airline company provides convenience of reservation and ticketing	96	64.0	54	36.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.64
(C2) If flight is delayed, airlines provide another flight immediately	12	8.0	34	22.7	61	40.7	38	25.3	5	3.3	3.07
(C3) Airlines refunds money in convenient time in case a passenger claim when flight is delayed or cancelled	22	14.7	46	30.7	60	40.0	20	13.3	2	1.3	3.44
(C4) The Boarding system of airlines is efficient	46	30.7	104	69.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.31
(C5) Airline company introduces flexible payment methods	29	19.3	75	50.0	43	28.7	2	1.3	1	0.7	3.86
(C6) Airline company provides accuracy and promptness in Baggage delivery	54	36.0	92	61.3	4	2.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.33

The mean value for statement C1 (4.64) “Airline company provides convenience of reservation and ticketing” exhibit that employees have strong perception towards airlines’ convenience of reservation whereas mean value for statement C4 (4.31) i.e. “The Boarding system of airlines is efficient”, C5 (3.86) “Airline company introduces flexible payment methods” and C6 (4.33) “Airline company provides accuracy and promptness in Baggage delivery” represents the overall positive

attitude towards boarding system of airlines, payment methods, and baggage delivery. In other words, employees agreed with the convenience being offered with the airlines. The resulting values for C2 (3.07) and C3 (3.44) implies a neutral stance to aggregate response to these two statements. It indicates that when employees were asked about the provision of immediate flight in case of delay and refund of money the majority of the employees opt for a neutral response on these two statements.

Table no. 8 Employees perception towards Post flight services

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
(PF1) Airline company wishes on important occasions to strengthen the relations	24	16.0	70	46.7	52	34.7	4	2.7	0	0.0	3.76
(PF2) Airlines seek feedback from passengers’ to ensure their satisfaction.	24	16.0	83	55.3	39	26.0	4	2.7	0	0.0	3.85
(PF3) Airlines provide high priority frequent flyer cards	27	18.0	56	37.3	15	10.0	36	24.0	16	10.7	3.28
(PF4) The company takes responsibility for lost, damaged and delayed baggage delivery.	86	57.3	54	36.0	8	5.3	2	1.3	0	0.0	4.49

Table no. 8 shows that the values of the mean for PF1, PF2 and PF4 are 3.76, 3.85 and 4.49 respectively. The resulting values for PF1, PF2, and PF4 are close to 4, indicating the agreements with three of these statements while the value for PF3 (3.28) is close to 3, implying

neutral behavior of employees towards offering high priority cards by the airlines. The combining results show that the employees express overall agreement towards the statements under post-flight services being offered by their companies.

Table no. 9 Employees perception towards other relationship practices

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
(Other 1) Airline company offers promotional schemes on special occasions like Diwali, Independence day	35	23.3	107	71.3	8	5.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.18
(Other 2) Airline company offers frequent flyer programs and redeems miles for frequent flyers	23	15.3	62	41.3	17	11.3	40	26.7	8	5.3	3.35
(Other 3) Airline company offers a wide range of fare pricing options	18	12.0	97	64.7	35	23.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.89
(Other 4) Airline company also provides facility for excess baggage	69	46.0	81	54.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.46

When the employees were questioned that Airline Company offers promotional schemes/ concessional fares on special occasions like Diwali, Independence Day, 71.3 % of respondents have agreed and 23.3% were strongly agreed at this statement. Another question under this factor concerned about promotional offers for the

frequent flyers on this 41.3% respondent agreed and 15.3% respondents were strongly agreed while 26.7% of respondents were disagreed with the facility. The overall weighted average score is 3.89 for this statement. The least mean score is for the statement Other2 which is 3.35.

Table no. 10 Employees perception towards Customization services

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
(CS1) Airlines care about passengers' needs and preferences	1	0.7	3	2.0	145	96.7	0	0.0	1	0.7	3.02
(CS2) Employees attend you promptly on arrival	2	1.3	3	2.0	145	96.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.05
(CS3) Employees focus on passengers' requirements	4	2.7	8	5.3	138	92.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.11

The above table no. 10 exhibits the values for CS1, CS2 and CS3 are 3.20, 3.05 and 3.11 respectively. It depicts that the employees, in general, have neutral perception towards these statements. In other words, most of the employees do not want to

express their clear views about these questions related to customer relationship activities by their airlines' companies, so they opt for a neutral response.

Table no. 11 Overall perception of employees regarding various Customer Relationship Management practices adopted by Airline Company

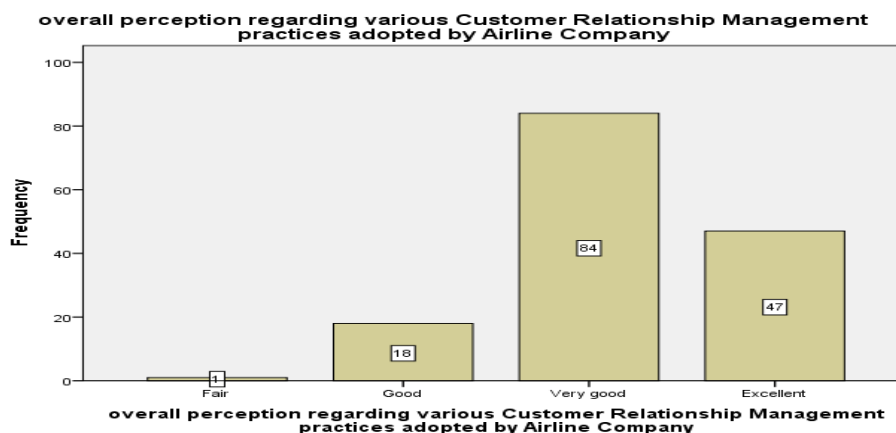
	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Fair	1	0.7	4.18
Good	18	12.0	
Very good	84	56.0	
Excellent	47	31.3	
Total	150	100.0	

The information given Table no. 11 exhibits the overall perception of employees' regarding various Customer Relationship Management practices adopted by their Airline Company. It shows that majority of respondents perceived that the companies

in which they work provide very good (4.18) customer relationship practices. The data indicates that 56.0% of employees feel that airlines provide very good services followed by 31.3 % of employees who feel that services are excellent.



Figure no . 2 Overall perception regarding various CRM practices adopted by Airline Company (Employees)



**5. Conclusion**

The results of the study represents that employees have overall positive attitude towards most of the statements except the statement “If flight is delayed, airlines provide another flight immediately” under convenience factor, “Airlines provide high priority frequent flyer cards ´under post-flight services factor, “Airline company offers frequent flyer programs and redeems miles for frequent flyers” under other relationship maintaining practices and all statements under Customization services factor where employees give neutral response. The employees feel that Airline Company should concentrate on these facilities in order to build long-lasting relations with their passengers. The overall perception of employees towards Customer relationship management practices indicate that the majority of employees feel that airlines in which they are working provide very good relationship services but there is a need to put efforts in certain areas .

**6. Implications and Directions for Future Research**

This study focuses on assessing the perception of the employees in the Indian aviation sector and the scope of the study was concentrated on Punjab state and Chandigarh. As employees are an important part of every enterprise so their behavioral study about relationship management practices helps the management to form policies that lure the passengers. However, there is a need to conduct a comparative study between the perceptions of the passengers and the employees in the future as it would give a broader view to understand the areas of improvement.

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