

# Online servicescape dimensions as predictors of website trust in the South African domestic airline industry

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## ABSTRACT

Increased costs, competition and a dynamic environment have led to South African domestic airlines relying more on their own websites as outlets for airline tickets. Customers' e-commerce uptake with respect to buying airline tickets online has been slow, attributed mostly to a lack of website trust. A well-designed online servicescape has been identified as an important contributor to website trust by several authors, but not yet in this particular context or industry. This study investigates the extent to which three online servicescape dimensions predict website trust in the South African domestic airline industry. A quantitative and descriptive research design was followed, and 300 responses were collected through self-administered questionnaires from domestic airline passengers who had purchased an airline e-ticket from a website. A multiple regression analysis indicates that online financial security is the best predictor of website trust, followed by layout and functionality and aesthetic appeal. Consequently, it is recommended that South African domestic airlines that wish to cultivate website trust should focus primarily on enhancing the online financial security of their websites, followed by customising the layout and functionality of their websites, and lastly improving aesthetic appeal by increasing the entertainment value of their websites.

**Key words:** aesthetic appeal, domestic airline industry, layout and functionality, online financial security, online servicescape, servicescape dimensions, website trust

## Introduction

E-commerce has increased significantly in South Africa over the last few years, but its growth is far from the expected projections (Goldstruck 2012; Mayo, Helms & Inks 2006: 271). While numerous factors play a role (such as inaccessibility and poor infrastructure), many studies consider a lack of consumer website trust as the principal contributor to consumer reluctance to engage in e-commerce (Harris & Goode 2004: 139; Kim, Ferrin & Rao 2008: 546; Palvia 2009: 213). The faceless and intangible nature of e-commerce leads to perceived risk and uncertainty amongst customers, and trust is viewed as critical in overcoming these negative emotions (Beldad, de Jong & Steehouder 2010: 857; Kim et al. 2008: 546; Lee & Wu 2011: 7766).

In an e-commerce transaction, customers are expected to provide substantial personal information (including personal contact details and credit card information) and pay for goods and services in full before the transaction is processed and delivery occurs (Beldad et al. 2010: 860; Kim et al. 2008: 546). Therefore, creating an environment in which prospective customers trust the website vendor's ability and integrity is critical to the success of e-commerce (Chen, Hsu & Lin 2010: 1007; Kim et al. 2008: 545).

Accordingly, a considerable number of studies have been undertaken to uncover website characteristics that could possibly impact on customer trust (Flavián, Guinalú & Gurrea 2006; Liao, Palvia & Lin 2006: 469; Pi, Liao & Chen 2012: 108). While these studies provide fruitful insights, authors have since called for more comprehensive research exploring the nature and effects of online physical environments on customers' trust in the website (Beldad et al. 2010; Ezeh & Harris 2007: 72; Goode & Harris 2007: 513). In response, studies have focused on extending the servicescape model initially proposed by Bitner (1992) in an online context to provide a more comprehensive framework for examining e-commerce (Harris & Goode 2010: 230).

Although online servicescapes have been found to significantly and positively impact website trust (Harris & Goode 2010: 230), no studies have investigated this link empirically in the airline industry within a South African context. With more South African organisations, specifically domestic airlines, embracing e-commerce (Harison & Boonstra 2008: 92), it is important to determine the effect of online servicescapes on customers' website trust, since marketers have the ability to control online servicescapes and in that way can possibly effect customer website trust. Therefore, this study was undertaken to determine the extent to which the dimensions of online servicescapes predict website trust, specifically in the South African domestic airline industry.

This article presents the purpose, problem statement and objectives of the study, followed by an overview of the domestic airline industry, insights into their e-commerce practices, and the literature background. Based upon the objectives formulated for the study and the literature background presented, a number of hypotheses are formulated. This is followed by the research methodology, results and discussion of results. The paper concludes by discussing the limitations and providing directions for future research.

## **Problem statement, purpose and objectives**

The South African domestic airline industry is characterised by increased competition, risk and uncertainty factors, which are prevalent in escalating fuel costs, airport charges and a weak currency (Gordon 2011; Harison & Boonstra 2008: 92; Lubbe 2007: 75; Mantshantsha 2013). These challenges have forced domestic airlines to re-evaluate their business models and subsequently adopt e-commerce as a tool to reduce costs and generate new streams of profit (Harison & Boonstra 2008: 92; Shon, Chen & Chang 2003: 326). More specifically, domestic airlines are using their own websites as cost-effective distribution channels to reach a greater number of end customers and sell airline tickets online (Campbell & Vigar-Ellis 2012: 99; Harison & Boonstra 2008: 92; Lubbe 2007: 75). Harison and Boonstra (2008: 92) explain that since e-ticketing systems electronically send tickets directly to customers, domestic airlines save on issue and distribution costs and commission fees payable to travel agents (Alamdari 2002: 339; Harison & Boonstra 2008: 92). Domestic airlines also save on lower accounting costs resulting from a fully automated online reservation system (Alamdari 2002: 339; Yoon, Yoon & Yang 2006: 2530).

South African consumers have, however, been slow to engage in e-commerce on a large scale (Goldstruck 2012). Although many reasons can be cited for the slow uptake, most consumers report a lack of website trust as the main contributing factor for opting against e-commerce (Hoffman, Novak & Peralta 1999: 80; Kim et al. 2008: 546; Lee & Wu 2011: 7767). If domestic airlines therefore wish to use their websites as more efficient distribution channels, it is important that these airlines improve customers' trust in their websites.

Studies have shown that online servicescapes play an important role in improving customers' website trust, thereby allowing more optimal distribution channel use through customer interaction and sales (Harris & Goode 2010). Since online servicescapes consist of various dimensions (Harris & Goode 2010), domestic airlines could benefit from understanding which dimensions should be present to improve website trust and focus their efforts on those dimensions specifically. Furthermore,

the ability of online servicescapes to predict website trust have never been examined within the South African domestic airline industry, although e-commerce plays an increasingly dominant role in the generation of new profit streams (allAfrica.com 2009; Harison & Boonstra 2008: 92).

The purpose of this study was therefore to determine the extent to which online servicescape dimensions predict website trust in the South African domestic airline industry. More specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- Describe the typical domestic airline passenger who took part in the study
- Establish the airline patronage habits of domestic airline passengers who took part in the study
- Gauge the perceptions of domestic airline passengers regarding the online servicescapes of the domestic airlines' websites from which they most recently purchased an airline ticket
- Measure the website trust that domestic airline passengers have in the domestic airlines' websites from which they most recently purchased an airline ticket.
- Establish the extent to which online servicescape dimensions of domestic airline websites predict domestic airlines' passengers' levels of trust in domestic airline websites.

### The South African domestic airline industry

Since the deregulation of the South African domestic airline industry in 1991, numerous competitors have entered the marketplace (Campbell & Vigar-Ellis 2012: 99). More specifically, the industry has been characterised by the entry of a number of low-cost carriers in response to increased demand for lower airfares (Irwin 2007).

Several airlines operate within the South African domestic industry, including South African Airways (SAA), South African Express, Mango Airlines, British Airways and Kulula.com (SAFlights 2013; Townsend & Bick 2011: 2). Not surprisingly, SAA, a parastatal entity, still maintains the largest market share (Oosthuizen 2012; Townsend & Bick 2011: 2).

Remaining profitable in the domestic airline industry proves to be challenging for these airlines, with the economic climate curbing consumer demand for air travel (African Economic Outlook 2013; allAfrica.com 2009). Furthermore, escalating fuel costs and local airport charges weigh heavily on the current cost structures of domestic airlines (Gordon 2011). The weakened Rand also makes the management of costs more difficult, specifically pertaining to the procurement of fuel (Mantshantsha 2013). The challenging nature of the industry is evident in the case of 1Time

Airline, which was forced to close down in 2012 after suffering severe financial losses (Wiseman 2012).

## Literature background

### Online servicescapes and their underlying dimensions

Since bank branches in the banking industry, travel agencies in the tourism industry and sales offices in the airline industry, for example, are recognised to elicit favourable customer behaviour in physical service environments, recent studies have focused on extending the servicescape concept into online service environments (Hopkins, Grove, Raymond & LaForge 2009; Koernig 2003; Van Haperen 2010). Online service environments are also referred to as online servicescapes, e-servicescapes, virtual servicescapes or cyberscapes (Vilnai-yavetz & Rafaeli 2006: 245; Williams & Dargel 2004: 311).

In essence, online servicescapes refer to all the factors included in the online environment present during service delivery (Harris & Goode 2010: 231; Hopkins et al. 2009: 25; Van Haperen 2010: 7). Visual appeal, entertainment value, design and usability of the website, information provided on the website, and the perceived security of the website are typical examples of elements present in this environment (Harris & Goode 2010: 231). Furthermore, Harris and Goode (2010: 231) propose that online servicescapes are comprised of three dimensions, namely aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality, and online financial security.

#### *Aesthetic appeal*

Aesthetic appeal refers to the degree to which customers find a particular website attractive and alluring (Harris & Goode 2010: 231, 232). Wang, Minor and Wei (2010: 47) posit that aesthetic appeal represents the overall impressiveness of the website that impacts customers' online consumption style. Aesthetic appeal specifically affects the pleasure experienced by the customer during online interaction with a website (Lavie & Tractinsky 2003: 269; Vilnai-yavetz & Rafaeli 2006: 255). Harris and Goode (2010: 232) suggest that aesthetic appeal comprises three subdimensions, namely visual appeal, originality of design and entertainment value.

Van der Heijden (2002: 544) explains that a visually appealing website is pleasing to the customer's eye and stimulates the desire to explore the site further. In other words, whether customers like the way the website looks and find the use of graphics and product display visually attractive (Harris & Goode 2010: 241). Lindgaard,

Dudek, Sen, Sumegi and Noonan (2011: 20) and Van der Heijden, (2002: 544) add that visual appeal has the ability to affect both customers' enjoyment and usage of the website. Visual appeal is reinforced by the originality of design (through prominent use of creative logos, distinctive colours, appropriate use of suitable backgrounds and consistent typography present on the website) (Fink & Laupse 2000: 52; Koo & Ju 2009: 387), as well as the entertainment value (amusing customers through the creation of an appealing, exciting and fun environment) of the website (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis 2001: 180).

### *Layout and functionality*

The layout of a website refers to its arrangement, organisation, structure and adaptability, whereas its functionality relates to the extent to which the layout facilitates customers' service goals (Harris & Goode; 2010: 232; Koo & Ju 2009: 379). Layout and functionality are important as they impact customers' selection, use and purchase behaviour online (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis 2003: 148; Richard 2005: 1638, 1639). Since a website is often the customers' only contact point with an organisation in e-commerce, organisations need to incorporate customer needs, wants and preferences into the layout, functionality and design of the website to gain a competitive advantage (Surjadjaja, Gosh & Antony 2003: 41). Harris and Goode (2010: 237, 238) and Li and Yeh (2010: 677, 678) add that for a website to successfully satisfy customers' needs, its layout and functionality must be usable, informative, customisable and interactively designed. The usability of a website refers to the ease with which the customer can learn to use, or actually use, a website efficiently and effectively (Osterbauer, Köhle, Grechenig & Tscheligi 1999). Usability is reinforced by navigational aids that are useful, logical and user-friendly as well as links that are clear in their intent and destination (Harris & Goode 2010: 242). Information (or the communicated material) present on the website should be relevant to the needs of customers (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Malhotra 2002: 450). This information should also be easy to find, and each page should clearly indicate what customers can expect to find or what they are required to do (Harris & Goode 2010: 242).

Website customisation features enable customers to tailor the website to their own needs (Grewal, Mullikin & Munger 2003: 37). Harris and Goode (2010: 242) explain that customisation could be achieved by allowing the website to make purchase recommendations based on customer needs, as well addressing customers by their correct name when they log on to the website. Lastly, websites should also be interactive, as this facilitates e-commerce between organisations and customers by

engaging customers (Bauer, Grether & Leach 2002: 157). Interactivity is achieved by allowing customers to view products in their preferred manner, providing a search tool to enable them to find what they need as well as compare selected products and prices (Harris & Goode 2010: 242).

### *Online financial security*

Online financial security refers to a customer's perception of safety in terms of payment methods and general website policies (Harris & Goode 2010: 233). Roca, Garcia and De La Vega (2009: 108) and Featherman, Miyazaki and Spratt (2010: 226) explain that the risk of fraud has deterred many consumers from using the internet for e-commerce. Consequently, organisations are forced to improve online procedures in an effort to enhance customers' perception of the website's online financial security. Harris and Goode (2010: 232) posit that the subdimensions contributing to customers' perception of online financial security include perceived security and ease of payment.

Ganguly, Dash, Cyr and Head (2010: 302) explain that customers are more favourably inclined to engage in e-commerce when they perceive the information provided during the transaction as secure. The presence of rigorous security systems and procedures in websites has a positive impact on perceived security (Harris & Goode 2010: 242). Ease of payment also contributes towards customers' perceived online financial security (Casalò, Flavián & Guinaliù 2007: 597; Harris & Goode 2010: 242). Ramayah and Ignatius (2005: 40) elucidate that poorly designed websites, characterised by long download times, contribute towards unfavourable customer perceptions, causing potential customers to lose focus, or to terminate the process completely. Therefore organisations should focus on designing user-friendly websites with efficient payment procedures (Harris & Goode 2010: 242).

### **Website trust**

Trust can be defined as customers' confidence in an organisation's reliability and integrity to refrain from opportunistic behaviour (Morgan & Hunt 1994: 20; Ranaweera & Prabhu 2003: 82). Customers who trust organisations are willing to accept vulnerability in their interactions as a result of positive expectations about organisations' intentions (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer 1998: 395). Trust in an online context refers to the customer's subjective belief that the organisation will fulfil its transactional obligations as understood by the customer (Kim et al. 2008: 545).

Based on the aforementioned definitions, website trust refers to customers' degree of positive impressions about the website as a result of their interactions with it, accompanied by a willingness to accept vulnerability (Bart, Shankar, Sultan & Urban 2005: 134). The antecedents of website trust are customer-based (individuals' experience and proficiency in internet usage and propensity to trust), organisational-based (organisational reputation, offline presence and customer experience with the organisation) and website-based (perceived ease of use, information quality, graphical characteristics, customisation and personalisation capacity, and privacy assurance and security features) (Beldad et al. 2010: 860–866). Although customer and organisational-based antecedents of trust provide an insightful understanding, an in-depth discussion thereof falls beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses specifically on the role of the dimensions of online servicescapes (in other words, web-based trust antecedents). Harris and Goode (2010: 242) add that customer website trust results from customers perceiving the organisation as more than profit driven, and offering honest claims about products and services, as well as helping customers solve problems.

There has been heightened interest amongst academics and business practitioners to improve their understanding of the role of website trust in e-commerce and its antecedents in order to improve the management thereof (Beldad et al. 2010: 857; Grabner-Kraeuter 2002: 43). While trust is essential for relational exchange, the role thereof during e-commerce is even more crucial (Palvia 2009: 213). Beldad et al. (2010: 857) explain that e-commerce may cause consumers to experience fear and anxiety associated with its intangible and faceless nature. Therefore, understanding the role of trust becomes paramount in alleviating perceived risk and ultimately, increasing customers' website trust (Beldad et al. 2010: 857; Harris & Goode 2010: 231; Hoffman et al. 1999; Kolsaker, Lee-Kelley & Choy 2004: 295).

### **The relationship between online servicescape dimensions and trust**

In an online context, an organisation's website not only facilitates e-commerce, but also replaces the physical retailer or store where exchange normally would have occurred (Chen et al. 2010: 1007; Palvia 2009: 213). This, together with the preceding discussion related to the importance of website trust, implies that organisations need to ensure that their websites represent themselves in such a way that customers trust them (Beldad et al. 2010: 860; Chen et al. 2010: 1008). Organisations need to consider the online servicescapes associated with their websites, as the dimensions thereof (aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality, and online financial security) could positively impact on website trust (Harris & Goode 2010: 236). Table 1



provides an overview of recent studies conducted to determine the relationship between online servicescape dimensions and trust.

It is evident from Table 1 that websites marketing a wide range of goods and services were considered in studying the effect of online servicescape dimensions on trust. More specifically, the websites marketed audio/visual products, computer-related products, garments, groceries, flights, holidays and books (Chen & Barnes 2007; Harris & Goode 2010; Ou & Sia 2010) and financial services (Featherman et al. 2010; Flavián et al. 2006; Pi et al. 2012). From the studies presented in Table 1, it can be seen that an array of different online servicescape dimensions were found to indeed effect website trust (Kassim & Abdullah 2010; Kim et al. 2011; Pi et al. 2012). However, with the exception of Harris and Goode (2010), the other studies listed only focused on the effect of a limited number of online servicescape dimensions on trust. To provide an enhanced understanding of the relationship between online servicescapes and website trust, this study considered the predictive capability of three online servicescape dimensions, including aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality, and online financial security on website trust. The following alternative hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- H1: Domestic airline passengers' perception of the aesthetic appeal of the online servicescape of domestic airline websites predicts their trust in the website.
- H2: Domestic airline passengers' perception of the functionality and layout of the online servicescape of domestic airline websites predicts their trust in the website.
- H3: Domestic airline passengers' perception of the online financial security of the online servicescape of domestic airline websites predicts their trust in the website.

## Research methodology

This section reports on the research design, the study population and the sampling plan of the study. The questionnaire design, method of data collection and data analysis strategy are also discussed.

### Research design, study population and sampling

A descriptive research design that is quantitative in nature was considered most suitable to achieve the objectives and test the hypotheses formulated for the study.

Table 1: Studies focusing on the relationship between online servicescape dimensions and trust

Authors	Focus area	Backdrop	Results of the study
<b>Harris &amp; Goode (2010)</b>	Online servicescapes, trust, purchase intention	Surveys with respondents who had online experience with different websites from which purchases were made (including audio/visual products, computer-related products, garments, groceries, flights/holidays)	Dimensions of the e-servicescape (aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality and financial security) effect trust
<b>Flavián et al. (2006)</b>	Perceived usability, satisfaction, trust, website loyalty	Self-administered surveys with respondents who habitually visit websites (including financial services, book and music retailers, travel or tourist services)	User trust increases as perceived usability increases
<b>Liao et al. (2006)</b>	Online habits, website quality, e-commerce trust	Mail surveys that required respondents to respond to survey questions with a particular website in mind	Content quality and website technical adequacy effect trust
<b>Chen &amp; Barnes (2007)</b>	Initial online trust, buyer behaviour	Survey where respondents were asked to visit a website of an unfamiliar bookstore and search for a particular book, gather certain details and become familiar with the website	The dimensions of perceived usefulness, security, good reputation and willingness to customise effect initial trust
<b>Featherman et al. (2010)</b>	Perceived ease of use, corporate credibility, perceived risk, e-service adoption	Survey where respondents were given an online task that consisted of pre-purchase evaluation of a little-known financial bill payment e-service	Beliefs of the e-service (easy to use, credibility and capability of service provider) reduce privacy risk and enhance adoption likelihood
<b>Ou &amp; Sia (2010)</b>	Website design, trust, distrust	E-mail survey where respondents were instructed to assume they were buying a gift for a friend abroad, and the purchased gift could be delivered by the online shop	Hygiene attributes (technical functionality, situation normality, information quality), bivalent attributes (structural assurance, ease of use, perceived usefulness) and motivating attributes (perceived enjoyment, perceived willingness to customise, knowledge and skills provided) effect trust/distrust
<b>Kassim &amp; Abdullah (2010)</b>	Perceived service quality dimensions (web characteristics) customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty, culture	Mail intercepts survey with respondents who had used e-services (e.g. e-ticketing, hotel reservation) before	Website characteristics (ease of use, website design, assurance) positively impact customer satisfaction, which in turn positively impact customer trust
<b>Cyr (2013)</b>	Website design, trust, culture	Online survey where respondents from eight countries were asked to browse the same website (SonyStyle), view the home page and navigate the website to choose a cell phone	Depending on culture, user perceptions of website design (information content, information design, navigation design, visual design) effect trust
<b>Li &amp; Yeh (2010)</b>	Design aesthetics, mobile website design, trust	Survey where respondents had to select one virtual mobile site from a provided list, imagine wanting to buy a product from the site and browse the site	Design aesthetics significantly affect website characteristics (such as customisation, perceived usefulness and ease of use), which in turn effect trust
<b>Kim, Chung &amp; Lee (2011)</b>	Perceived trust, e-commerce	Online panel survey with participants who had experienced online shopping for tourism products and services	Navigation functionality and perceived security significantly impact trust
<b>Pi et al. (2012)</b>	Factors affecting consumers' trust factors, continuous adoption of online financial services	Survey method with respondents who had prior experience with online financial services	Transaction security, navigation functionality, prior experience and awareness of website effect trust

The target population of the study included all residents of the North West province of South Africa who had bought an airline ticket on the website of a domestic airline (Kulula.com, Mango, British Airways, South African Airways or SA Express) during the past six months (November 2012 to April 2013). Since a sampling frame containing all the sampling units for the study was not available, the researchers opted for a non-probability sampling technique, specifically using convenience sampling to select respondents to take part in the study. A sample size of 300 was decided upon. This sample size is in line with a study measuring the same constructs in a different setting where 257 respondents took part in the study (Harris & Goode 2010). Fieldworkers approached prospective respondents in the North West province on the basis of convenience, and determined their eligibility and willingness to take part in the study before the questionnaire was administered. A screening question included in the questionnaire assisted fieldworkers in selecting only those respondents who had bought an airline ticket on a domestic airline's website during the specified period to take part in the study.

### Questionnaire design

Due to the nature of the research design and method of data collection used in this study, a structured questionnaire was designed to collect data from respondents. The questionnaire was self-administered, and respondents were thus required to complete the questionnaire themselves. The questionnaire commenced with a preamble explaining the completion instructions of the questionnaire, as well as the rights and obligations of respondents. Screening questions were included to ensure that respondents who took part in the study had bought an airline ticket on a domestic airline's website for themselves, a friend or relative during the six months prior to the questionnaire being completed. The questionnaire also included a demographic section that determined the demographic profile of respondents who took part in the study; a section that determined the domestic airline patronage habits of respondents; and finally a section with an unlabelled Likert-type scale that measured respondents' perceptions of the online servicescape of domestic airlines' websites as well as website trust. The items were measured on a seven-point scale where 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 7 'strongly agree'. The items were adapted from pre-developed scales from the work of Harris and Goode (2010).

## Method of data collection and analysis

Six graduate students, who had completed a marketing research module at the time of the fieldwork being undertaken, were used as fieldworkers. Fieldworkers were trained and each tasked with collecting data from 50 qualifying respondents. Fieldworkers approached prospective respondents, established their eligibility to take part in the study, and requested the prospective respondents to complete the questionnaire in full and hand it back to the fieldworker concerned. The researchers subsequently assessed the quality of the completed questionnaires for inclusion in the study.

SPSS version 21 was used to enter, clean and analyse the data. The data analysis strategy involved the calculation of frequencies (counts and percentages) to present and describe the demographic profile and airline patronage habits of respondents who took part in the study. The researchers furthermore assessed the construct validity and the internal consistency reliability of the scales used to measure online servicescape perceptions and website trust. The overall mean scores were then calculated for the subdimensions and three dimensions of online servicescape perceptions as well as the website trust construct. A standard multiple regression analysis was subsequently conducted to test the hypotheses formulated for the study.

## Findings of the study

This section presents the empirical findings of the study. In order to address the objectives formulated, the typical demographic profile of respondents and their domestic airline patronage habits are presented. Furthermore, the results of the assessment of the construct validity and internal consistency reliability of the scales measuring the constructs are reported. This is followed by a presentation of the overall mean scores calculated for the subdimensions and three dimensions of online servicescape perceptions as well as for website trust. Finally, the results of the multiple regression analysis used to test the hypotheses of the study are presented.

## Demographic profile of respondents

The study realised 300 usable responses, which were included in the data analysis phase of the study. Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the respondents who took part in the study.

**Table 2:** Demographic profile of respondents

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Highest level of education</b>		
Primary school completed	1	0.3
Some high school	4	1.3
Matric / Grade 12	72	24.0
Diploma	43	14.3
Degree	105	35.1
Postgraduate degree	75	25.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	137	45.7
Female	163	54.3
<b>Home language</b>		
Afrikaans	264	88.0
English	29	9.6
Nguni (isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiSwati, isiNdebele)	2	0.7
Sotho (Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana)	2	0.7
Tshivenda, Xitsonga	1	0.3
Other	2	0.7
<b>Population group</b>		
Caucasian	283	94.4
Coloured	6	2.0
Black	6	2.0
Indian	4	1.3
Asian	1	0.3
<b>Primary employment status</b>		
Full-time employed	146	48.7
Part-time employed	13	4.3
Self-employed	36	12.0
Student	96	32.0
Housewife or househusband	5	1.7
Retired	2	0.7
Unemployed	1	0.3
Other	1	0.3
<b>Personal gross income per month</b>		
Less than R14 000 per month	143	47.7
R14 001–R22 000 per month	57	19.0
R22 001–R30 000 per month	36	12.0
R30 001–R42 000 per month	19	6.3
R42 001–R53 000 per month	23	7.7
R53 001 and more per month	22	7.3

It is evident from Table 2 that the typical respondent who took part in the study had a degree, including those with a postgraduate degree, as highest level of education (60.1%), was female (54.3%), spoke Afrikaans as home language (88.0%), and was Caucasian (94.3%). The typical respondent was also employed full time (48.7%) or a student (32.0%), and earned less than R22 000 per month (66.7%).

### Domestic airline patronage habits of respondents

Table 3 provides insights into the domestic airline patronage habits of respondents. The table presents the results with respect to websites of airlines from which respondents bought an airline ticket most recently, how long respondents had been using a particular airline’s website to buy airline tickets, and how often they buy airline tickets from a particular airline on its website.

**Table 3:** Domestic airline patronage habits of respondents

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Airline from whose website an airline ticket was most recently purchased</b>		
Kulula.com	137	45.7
Mango	52	17.3
British Airways	35	11.7
South African Airways	58	19.3
SA Express	18	6.0
<b>Period of using the airline’s website to buy airline tickets</b>		
Less than 6 months	72	24.0
6 months or longer, but less than 1 year	33	11.0
1 year or longer, but less than 3 years	65	21.7
3 years or longer, but less than 5 years	61	20.3
5 years or longer, but less than 10 years	54	18.0
10 years or longer	15	5.0
<b>Regularity of buying airline tickets on airline’s website</b>		
Once a week or more	3	1.0
Once every two weeks	0	0.0
Once a month	6	2.0
Once every second month	13	4.3
Once every three months	32	10.7
Once every six months	64	21.3
Once a year	107	35.7
Once-off purchase	75	25.0

It is evident from Table 3 that the highest percentage of respondents indicated Kulula.com as the domestic airline from whose website they bought an airline ticket most recently (45.7%). The largest percentage of respondents had been using the airline’s website to buy airline tickets for less than six months (24%), closely followed by those who had been buying airline tickets for one year or longer but less than three years (21.7%), and those who had been buying airline tickets for three years or longer but less than five years (20.3%) from the particular website. With regard to the

regularity with which airline tickets are bought from the domestic airline's website, the majority buy tickets once a year (35.7%).

## Validity

Using LISREL version 8.0 to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis, Harris and Goode (2010: 235) found that each of the items included in the measurement scales to measure the constructs under investigation exhibits a positive and significant loading on to the subdimensions, dimensions or construct concerned, thus confirming content validity in their study (Hair, Celsi, Oritinau & Bush 2013: 167). To assess construct and discriminant validity, exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) were conducted using SPSS version 21 to determine whether the scales used to measure the constructs in this study are representative of those constructs (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson 2014: 601). Using the Maximum Likelihood Model for extraction and Varimax for rotation (Matsunaga 2010: 107; Pallant 2010: 185), a single factor was extracted for each of the constructs of the study (aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality, online financial security, and website trust), which explained between 65.036% and 76.434% of the total variance in the data in each instance. Furthermore, factor loadings for all items in each of the EFAs conducted ranged between 0.471 and 0.875. Based on the recommendation of Shiu, Hair, Bush & Ortinau (2009: 634), all online servicescape and website trust items were retained for factor analysis, as their factor loadings exceeded 0.3. Based on the findings of the EFA, the researchers therefore consider the scales used to measure the constructs in this study to be valid.

## Internal consistency reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the subdimensions and dimensions of online servicescape perceptions, as well as the website trust construct, in order to ensure that the items did in fact measure the particular aspect underlying each subdimension or construct concerned (Pallant 2013: 6). A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7 or higher indicates an acceptable level of internal consistency reliability (Pallant 2013: 6). Table 4 presents the subsequent results.

**Table 4:** Cronbach's alpha coefficients

<b>Subdimension, dimension or construct</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha coefficient</b>
Aesthetic appeal	15	0.910
Visual appeal	5	0.928
Originality of design	5	0.776
Entertainment value	5	0.782
Layout and functionality	28	0.913
Usability	11	0.878
Relevance of information	5	0.875
Customisation/personalisation	7	0.723
Interactivity	5	0.768
Online financial security	10	0.871
Ease of payment	5	0.722
Perceived security	5	0.904
Website trust	8	0.798

It is evident from Table 4 that all subdimensions and dimensions of online servicescape perceptions as well as the website trust construct can be considered reliable, since all Cronbach's alpha coefficients are above 0.7.

### Overall mean scores for online servicescape subdimensions, dimensions and website trust construct

Since the subdimensions of online servicescape perceptions as well as the website trust construct can be considered reliable, overall mean scores could be calculated. Table 5 provides the overall means and standard deviations (SD) for each subdimension and dimension used to measure online servicescape perceptions as well as for the construct used to measure website trust.

**Table 5:** Overall mean scores

<b>Item</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Aesthetic appeal	0.910	4.35
Visual appeal	1.033	5.14
Originality of design	1.012	4.50
Entertainment value	1.107	3.41
Layout and functionality	0.754	4.76
Usability	0.860	5.23
Relevance of information	0.864	5.41
Customisation/personalisation	0.940	3.79
Interactivity	1.090	4.60
Online financial security	0.833	5.37
Ease of payment	0.857	5.25
Perceived security	1.049	5.49
Website trust	0.861	4.98



Given that a seven-point scale was used to measure the constructs, it is evident from Table 4 that respondents perceived the visual appeal (mean = 5.14) and originality of design (mean = 4.50) of the domestic airlines' websites as positive, but did not perceive the entertainment value of the websites as positive (mean = 3.41). Overall, respondents perceived the aesthetic appeal of domestic airlines' websites as fairly positive (mean = 4.35).

Furthermore, respondents perceived the usability (mean = 5.23), the relevance of information (mean = 5.41) and the interactivity (mean = 4.60) of the domestic airlines' websites as positive, but did not perceive the customisation/personalisation of the websites as particularly positive (mean = 3.79). Overall, respondents perceived the layout and functionality of domestic airlines' websites as fairly positive (mean = 4.76).

Respondents perceived both the ease of payment (mean = 5.25) and perceived security (mean = 5.49) of the domestic airlines' websites as positive. Overall, respondents perceived the online financial security of domestic airlines' websites as positive (mean = 5.37). Finally, website trust realised an overall mean score of 4.98 out of a possible seven.

## Hypothesis testing

Three alternative hypotheses were formulated to hypothesise the relationships between the three dimensions of online servicescape and website trust of domestic airline passengers in the domestic airline industry. The hypothesised relationships between the dimensions and construct were tested by means of a standard multiple regression analysis. This section provides insight into the extent to which the assumptions of a multiple regression analysis were met, as well as the results obtained.

### *Meeting the assumptions of a multiple regression analysis*

Before any multiple regression analysis can be conducted, several assumptions regarding the data have to be met with respect to sample size, multicollinearity, the distribution of the data, linearity, homoscedasticity, outliers as well as the independence of residuals (Pallant 2013: 156–157). With respect to these assumptions, the following can be reported:

- The sample included 300 respondents. This is well above the minimum number of respondents recommended when three predictor variables are included in a multiple regression analysis, namely 74 respondents (Pallant 2013: 156).

- When correlated with one another, the three predictor variables, namely, aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality, as well as online financial security, realised correlation coefficients below 0.9, ruling out overly high correlation coefficients between pairs of variables (Pallant 2010: 151). With respect to the indicators of collinearity, acceptable tolerance values above 0.1 (ranging from 0.562 to 0.724), and variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 10 (ranging between 1.380 and 1.779) were realised. Multicollinearity was therefore ruled out (Pallant 2013: 157).
- From the normal P-P plot, it was evident that the data points appeared to be in a linear diagonal line, suggesting a distribution close to normal. The assumption of homoscedasticity was also met, since the data points on the scatterplot resembled a rectangle, with the majority of data points centrally located. In addition, the Mahalanobis distances were inspected and a maximum of 14.266 was uncovered for one case. This was below the suggested critical value of 16.27 for three predictor variables (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007, cited in Pallant 2013: 157). No outliers were therefore detected. Finally, a maximum Cooks distance of 0.050 was observed. Since Cooks distances should be below 1 according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007, cited in Pallant (2013: 157), no concerns with respect to cases exhibiting standardised residuals of lower than  $-/+3$  were evident.

Since the assumptions for a multiple regression analysis could be met, a standard multiple regression analysis could be performed, and the results could furthermore be presented.

### *Evaluating the regression model and predictor variables*

Table 6 shows that an R-square value of 0.624 was realised, indicating that 62.40% of the variance in website trust could be ascribed to the three dimensions of the online servicescape.

**Table 6:** Model summary<sup>b</sup>

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Standard error of the estimate</b>
1	0.790 <sup>a</sup>	0.624	0.620	0.524

a. Predictor variables: (Constant), Aesthetic appeal, Layout and functionality, Online financial security

b. Outcome variable: Website trust

It is furthermore evident from Table 6 that the regression model, which included three predictor variables (aesthetic appeal, layout and function, as well as online financial security) and an outcome variable (website trust), is significant ( $p < 0.0005$ ).

**Table 7: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-value	p-value
1	Regression	131.666	3	43.889	160.092	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	79.228	289	0.274		
	Total	210.895	292			

a. Outcome variable: Website trust

b. Predictor variables: (Constant), Aesthetic appeal, Layout and functionality, Online financial security

Table 7 indicates that the p-value for the constant is, however, not significant (p-value > 0.05).

**Table 8: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Standardised coefficient $\beta$ -value	t	p-value
1	Constant		-0.295	0.768
	Aesthetic appeal	0.180	4.409	0.000
	Layout and functionality	0.317	6.594	0.000
	Online financial security	0.461	10.887	0.000

a. Outcome variable: Website trust

Since the constant is not significant, it was subsequently excluded and another regression analysis was performed (Eiselen, Uys & Potgieter 2007: 164). Tables 8 to 10 provide the results for the regression model once the constant had been excluded. Table 8 indicates that the regression model is still significant (p < 0.0005).

**Table 9: ANOVA<sup>a,b</sup>**

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-value	p-value
1	Regression	7424.381	3	2474.794	9053.239	0.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	79.274	290	0.273		
	Total	7503.656 <sup>d</sup>	293			

a. Outcome variable: Website trust

b. Linear regression through the origin

c. Predictor variables: Aesthetic appeal, Layout and functionality, Online financial security

d. Total sum of squares when the constant is zero

Table 9 indicates that the three dimensions of online servicescape predict website trust (p-values < 0.0005) with standard coefficient  $\beta$ -values ranging between 0.147 and 0.515. Online financial security is the best predictor of website trust ( $\beta$ -value = 0.515; p-value < 0.0005), followed by layout and functionality ( $\beta$ -value =

0.336;  $p$ -value < 0.0005) and aesthetic appeal ( $\beta$ -value = 0.147;  $p$ -value < 0.0005) respectively.

**Table 10:** Coefficients<sup>a,b</sup>

Model		Standardised coefficient $\beta$ -value	t	p-value
	Aesthetic appeal	0.147	4.037	0.000
	Layout and functionality	0.336	6.860	0.000
	Online financial security	0.515	12.434	0.000

a. Outcome variable: Website trust

b. Linear regression through the origin

Based upon the results, the following findings were made regarding the three formulated hypotheses:

- H1: That domestic airline passengers’ perception of the aesthetic appeal of the online servicescape of domestic airline websites predicts their trust in the website can be accepted ( $\beta$ -value = 0.147;  $p$ -value < 0.0005).
- H2: That domestic airline passengers’ perception of the functionality and layout of the online servicescape of domestic airline websites predicts their trust in the website can be accepted ( $\beta$ -value = 0.336;  $p$ -value < 0.0005).
- H3: That domestic airline passengers’ perception of the online financial security of the online servicescape of domestic airline websites predicts their trust in the website can be accepted ( $\beta$ -value = 0.515;  $p$ -value < 0.0005).

## Discussion

This study was undertaken to determine the extent to which online servicescape dimensions predict website trust in the South African domestic airline industry. It is important for domestic airlines using their own websites to sell airline tickets online to customers to understand which dimensions of the online servicescape are the best predictors of website trust, since this could guide them in designing websites that could positively impact on website trust.

Similar to the South African study of Boshoff, Schlechter and Ward (2011: 47), who examined perceived risks associated with purchasing on a branded website, the majority of respondents who participated in this study were well educated and earned relatively high incomes. It could reasonably be assumed that these consumers had

the financial means to make use of air transportation and could therefore interact meaningfully with a domestic airline website and purchase airline tickets online.

A finding of the study that could be of concern pertains to the irregularity with which airline tickets are purchased from domestic airlines' websites. This supports the notion that South African consumers have a slow uptake of e-commerce, which could be related to various factors including perceived risk and distrust (Boshoff, Schlechter & Ward 2009: 18; Ruiz-Mafé, Sanz-Blas & Aldás-Manzano 2009: 294). The results of the study also indicate that although website trust is relatively positive, it could be improved by focusing specifically on the dimensions of the online servicescape.

Aligned with the findings of Harris and Goode (2010: 230), the results indicate that online servicescape dimensions significantly predict customers' website trust. This study reveals that online financial security is the best predictor of website trust, followed by layout and functionality, and aesthetic appeal. These findings are supported by Kim et al. (2011), Ou and Sia (2010) and Pi et al. (2012), who reiterate the importance of online financial security, and layout and functionality to increase website trust. In accordance with previous studies signifying the importance of satisfying consumers' need for security during online transactions (Casalò et al. 2007: 595; Chen & Barnes 2007; Kim et al. 2011), this study reveals that online financial security is the best predictor of website trust.

Managers responsible for the design of websites for domestic airlines should therefore consider these dimensions of the online servicescape and incorporate them in the design of domestic airlines' online strategies to build customer website trust. Harris and Goode (2010: 238) add that online servicescape dimensions provide managers with a useful checklist against which their website can be evaluated.

In terms of online financial security, domestic airlines should focus on perceived security and ease of payment to increase customers' website trust. Domestic airlines could increase perceived security by reassuring customers and incorporating fool-proof security features in the design. A domestic airline could also provide privacy guarantees against the malicious misuse of personal and financial information disclosed by customers (Wang, Lee & Wang 1999: 63). The introduction of stronger privacy policies has also been found to increase perceived website and company trustworthiness (Lauer & Deng 2007: 323). In terms of payment procedures, domestic airlines should offer efficient payment procedures that are fast and straightforward and that do not require customers to divulge too much information.

The layout and functionality of a website refers to its usability, the relevance of information, the extent to which customisation/personalisation is possible and the level of interactivity of the website (Harris & Goode 2010: 232; Li & Yeh 2010: 677,678). Respondents in this study regarded the relevance of information contained

and the usability of a domestic airline's website more positively than its interactivity and ability to be customised/personalised. This could be attributed to the fact the domestic airlines adhere to strict corporate branding policies that are reinforced in their website design, thereby offering customers little customisation opportunity. It is therefore recommended that domestic airlines ensure that their website contains relevant information that is easily accessible. Amongst others, flight times, flight schedules, availability, prices and other information should be regularly updated and ideally be available in real time. Domestic airlines should also pay attention to the navigation of their website and ensure that it is user-friendly, logical and easy to follow. Links on the website should be functional and should open at the designated places. Websites should furthermore be customised and personalised to suit customer needs by addressing customers by name when communicating via the website, as well as making purchase recommendations (e-tickets to different destinations) based on past selection.

The aesthetic appeal of websites includes visual appeal, originality of design and entertainment value (Harris & Goode 2010: 232). The findings of this study indicate that respondents regard visual appeal and originality of design more positively than entertainment value. A possible explanation could be that the type of product bought (in this case an e-ticket) does not have an entertainment component as part of the product offering, as opposed to websites selling other products such as books, music and games. It is therefore recommended that domestic airlines ensure that customers find their website design visually appealing and original through the use of both attractive and creative graphics and display of products. Although the product itself (e-tickets) is not exciting, domestic airlines could improve the entertainment value of their websites by ensuring that it creates customer enthusiasm and enjoyment when browsing the site. Domestic airlines should also pay close attention to the manner in which they visually display flight times, dates and costs, the core product offering of the website, as well as ensuring that their website design is perceived as original.

### Limitations and future research

All studies have inherent limitations. In this study, non-probability convenience sampling was used to select respondents in the absence of a sample frame, implying that the results of the study are limited to respondents who participated in the study. The study was restricted to a single service setting, namely the domestic airline industry. The results can therefore not be generalised to other service settings and industries. Lastly, this study focused on only one service construct, namely website trust, which limited the findings and contributions of the study.

Future research could focus on collaborating with industry to gain access to a sample frame (existing customer database information) to select respondents through probability sampling. The relevance of the online servicescape could be tested in different markets, as well as other online service settings marketing music, books or electronics. Future studies could also examine the influence of the online servicescape on website trust in relation to consumers' experience with e-commerce. Finally, the interrelationship of online servicescapes could be tested on a wider range of constructs to provide a more rigorous theoretical contribution, such as website commitment, service quality, customer satisfaction and purchase intention.

## Conclusion

Despite the apparent advantages that e-commerce offers (in terms of greater convenience and better access to updated information), a lack of consumer trust is one of the main deterrents to online exchange. One way in which website trust could be improved is by focusing on the online servicescape associated with the website organisations used to interact with customers. This study concludes that organisations could benefit from increased website trust by focusing on online financial security, layout and functionality, and aesthetic appeal.

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