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Key issues in air transport management research in India are analyzed through bibliometric methods: Research trends and Key Contributors

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ABSTRACT

Bibliometric analysis uses computer-assisted techniques to systematically identify leading researchers, key publications, and emerging trends in a specific academic field. In this paper, we delve into the managerial and organisational dimensions of air transport research, specifically within the Indian context, providing insights into how this sector has evolved. By leveraging an analysis of existing data, this research situates Indian contributions to air transport management within a broader, more comprehensive framework of established research. The utilisation of bibliometric analysis allows for a detailed depiction of the content and thematic focus of research outputs. However, it is crucial to recognise that the subject keywords used in such analyses are often overly broad, hindering established researchers from refining their research focus effectively. Additionally, this vagueness poses challenges for early-career scholars in making informed decisions regarding research topics that could substantially enhance their professional trajectory. Moreover, while this study successfully identifies prevailing research trends within Indian air transport management, it also highlights the necessity for a more nuanced approach to uncovering potential research gaps. The results indicate that the field has experienced considerable growth, particularly in critical areas such as airport efficiency, operations of low-cost carriers, service quality, and the complexities of air cargo logistics. This growth reflects not only the growing importance of these topics in air transport but also the potential for future research to address existing gaps and deepen understanding of this dynamic industry.

Key terms: Air transport management; India; bibliometric analysis; aviation research; air cargo

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing availability of databases containing publication and citation information has driven the development of the field of bibliometrics, which refers to the quantitative evaluation of publications characterised by bibliographic variables such as the author(s), subject keywords and citations (Sallan & Lordan, 2023). This paper builds on bibliometric analysis frameworks to examine air transport management research in India. A framework of existing research structures is formed using keywords from Indian aviation publications. The main aim is to examine whether, and if so, how research on air transport management in India, which has already led to publications or is planned for the future, can be placed in the context of comprehensive research structures. In particular, it is questioned to what extent keyword analysis in bibliometric studies can help both established and young researchers orient themselves in selecting research topics (Modak et al., 2019).

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Competing sources of publication and citation data for bibliometric studies include the Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Scopus, all produced by Elsevier. When it comes to the breadth of coverage, Google Scholar has the largest, although the exact number of records is unknown. This leads to discrepancies in the citations. For example, Indian aviation research publications show varying citation counts across databases, which can be partially attributed to the limited coverage of regional conference publications in Scopus (Tanriverdi et al., 2020). The Google Scholar database does not offer advanced search options or analytical tools, whereas the Scopus database provides comprehensive coverage of Indian Research publications; therefore, this study uses Scopus for the analyses to obtain robust, analytical results.

Citation analysis in bibliometric studies identifies subject areas that receive particular attention from related scientific communities or experience a surge in citations over a specific period, referred to as a citation burst, as well as those that have experienced a decline. For example, while COVID-19 has been a major event in air transport management research globally since 2020, Indian researchers have also contributed significantly to understanding the pandemic's impacts on aviation operations (Madhavan et al., 2023; Rathore, 2020). Bibliometric analysis helps to identify the broad coverage of the most important publications. However, it may not always be sufficiently accurate to guide researchers in topic selection. Furthermore, research trends are recognised with citation analysis, but not necessarily existing gaps in research.

The Indian aviation sector has accomplished distinguished growth over the past two decades, emerging as the third-largest domestic aviation market globally (PwC India, 2022). This growth has been accompanied by increased scholarly attention, with Indian researchers contributing to various aspects of air transport management, including airport operations, airline economics, service quality, air cargo logistics, and regulatory frameworks (PHDCCI, 2023; Jayathilakan, 2024). Understanding the landscape of Indian air transport management research through bibliometric analysis can help identify key themes, influential researchers, and emerging areas that require further investigation.

This paper is structured as follows: The next section provides a brief literature review and outlines the keyword analysis of air transport management research in India. In Section 3, Indian research contributions are discussed as a case study within the derived framework of research structures. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

2. BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF AIR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT RESEARCH IN INDIA

2.1. Literature Review

To understand the dynamics of air transport management research in India, bibliometric studies enable analysis of publications on various scientific issues. With bibliometrics, key issues can be discussed, as can those that have found the most resonance among Indian researchers in terms of citations (Falcão et al., 2021; Merkert, 2022).

Indian aviation research has evolved significantly, notably since the sector was liberalised in the early 1990s. The National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) 2016 marked a watershed moment, introducing reforms aimed at regional connectivity, air cargo development, and making air travel affordable and accessible (Ministry of Civil Aviation, 2016). This policy framework has stimulated research across multiple dimensions of air transport management.

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Recent studies have examined various aspects of Indian aviation. Jayathilakan (2024) investigated the determinants of Indian airlines' revenues, providing insights into expenditure components and their impacts on financial performance. Rathore (2020) analysed the future of Indian aviation from industry perspectives, highlighting the sector's double-digit growth trajectory. Madhavan et al. (2023) conducted forecasting studies on air passenger and cargo demand using ARIMA models, demonstrating the analytical sophistication emerging in Indian aviation research.

Airport efficiency and productivity have emerged as significant research themes. Thomas et al. (2022) examined the structural efficiency of 42 Indian regional airports using a two-stage data envelopment analysis, revealing disparities in operational performance across airport categories. Chakraborty et al. (2020) evaluated the performance of 32 Indian international airports, emphasising the importance of infrastructure upgrades for maintaining a competitive advantage.

Service quality research has also gained prominence. Studies employing SERVQUAL methodology have examined passenger satisfaction across Indian airports and airlines, identifying critical service dimensions that influence customer perceptions (Mahapatra & Bellamkonda, 2023). The growing emphasis on digital transformation has prompted research on operational efficiency improvements through technology adoption at Indian airports (IJRPR, 2024).

Air cargo research has witnessed increased attention, particularly in the context of India's aspirations to become a global logistics hub. Studies have examined air cargo infrastructure, policy frameworks, and operational challenges unique to the Indian context (PHDCCI, 2023; Ascela Advisors, 2025). The government's initiatives, such as Krishi UDAN 2.0 for perishable cargo and the expansion of air cargo facilities at major airports, have provided rich empirical contexts for research.

Examples for recent bibliometric studies on specific themes in air transport research globally include analyses on airline and airport productivity, service quality, and capacity management. However, India-specific bibliometric reviews remain limited, creating an opportunity to analyse the Indian air transport management research landscape systematically.

2.2. Keyword Analysis

Intending to detect trends in air transport management research in India, this analysis retrieved articles on air transport published by Indian authors or focusing on Indian aviation between 2013 and 2024 from prominent transportation and aviation journals. The analysis includes publications from the Journal of Air Transport Management (JATM), Transportation Research series (Parts A, B, D, E), Transport Policy, and leading Indian journals publishing aviation research.

Table 1 shows the principal journals for Indian air transport management research. While JATM remains the premier global outlet, Indian researchers have also published in high-impact transportation journals and specialised regional publications that address India-specific aviation challenges.

Table 1: Principal journals for Indian air transport management research (JATM and Q1-T journals)

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Journal	ISSN	(2023). JIF
Transportation Research Part E-Logistics and Transportation Review	1366-5545	10.25
Transportation Research Part B-Methodological	0191-2615	7.85
Transportation Research Part D-Transport and Environment	1361-9209	7.48
Transportation Research Part A-Policy and Practice	0965-8564	6.78
Transport Policy	0967-070X	6.35
Journal of Air Transport Management	0969-6997	5.68

Data retrieval identified approximately 325 articles by Indian authors or on Indian aviation topics published in these journals between 2013 and 2024. Additional articles from regional conferences and Indian journals expanded the corpus to over 450 publications dealing with Indian air transport management research. Based on author keywords from these articles, after grouping similar keywords (e.g., low-cost carrier, LCC, budget airline) into a single keyword (low-cost carrier), the most frequently used keywords per time period (2013-2017, 2018-2024) were identified for further analysis. The most frequent keywords that describe the research topic of an article were then grouped into categories IT1-IT6 (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2: Research topics in Indian air transport management (2013-2024)

Topic	Keywords 2013-2017	Keywords 2018-2024
IT1: Airline Industry Analysis	Low-cost carrier, competition, airline economics, IndiGo, SpiceJet, Air India	Low-cost carrier, airline performance, market concentration, revenue management, fleet optimisation
IT2: Airport Operations and Efficiency	Airport efficiency, DEA, capacity management, privatization	Airport performance, Airports Authority of India, regional connectivity, infrastructure development
IT3: Service Quality and Passenger Experience	Service quality, passenger satisfaction, SERVQUAL, airport experience	Digital transformation, biometric systems, Digi Yatra, customer experience, contactless services
IT4: Air Cargo and Logistics	Air cargo, freight, logistics, perishables	Air cargo growth, e-commerce, Krishi UDAN, cargo infrastructure, supply chain
IT5: Policy and Regulation	NCAP 2016, UDAN scheme, bilateral agreements, slot allocation	Regional connectivity, open sky policy, MRO policy, and sustainability regulations

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IT6: COVID-19 and Aviation Recovery	-	COVID-19, pandemic recovery, traffic forecasting, financial resilience

Both time periods share topics related to airline industry analysis, airport operations, and service quality. The analysis reveals that Indian air transport management research has been written primarily from operational and managerial perspectives, addressing challenges unique to the Indian context, such as regional connectivity, infrastructure constraints, and rapid market evolution.

The assigned keywords suggest that IT1 "Airline Industry Analysis" focuses heavily on low-cost carrier operations, reflecting the dominance of budget airlines in the Indian market. IndiGo, India's largest carrier by market share, and other LCCs have been the subject of extensive research examining their business models, competitive strategies, and financial performance (Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs,2019; Seguttuvan, 2006).

IT2 "Airport Operations and Efficiency" reflects the significant infrastructure development across India, including airport privatisation, capacity expansion at major hubs, and the establishment of greenfield airports under the UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) regional connectivity scheme (Ministry of Civil Aviation, 2024). Research employing Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) and other efficiency measurement techniques has examined productivity variations across Indian airports.

IT3 "Service Quality and Passenger Experience" shows evolution from traditional SERVQUAL-based studies to research on digital transformation initiatives. The implementation of Digi Yatra (biometric-based digital processing) at major Indian airports represents a significant technological advancement that has attracted scholarly attention (Ministry of Civil Aviation, 2024a).

IT4 "Air Cargo and Logistics" emerges as a distinctive research cluster, reflecting India's ambitions to capture a larger share of global air freight markets. The government's target to increase cargo volumes from 3.4 million tonnes (2024) to 10 million tonnes per annum by 2030 has generated research interest in infrastructure requirements, operational challenges, and policy frameworks (ICRA Limited, 2024; Airports Authority of India,2024).

IT5 "Policy and Regulation" encompasses research on India's evolving regulatory landscape, including the National Civil Aviation Policy 2016, UDAN regional connectivity scheme, bilateral air services agreements, and recent reforms in maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) operations (Ministry of Civil Aviation, 2023).

IT6 "COVID-19 and Aviation Recovery" emerged as a significant research area from 2020 onwards, with Indian researchers contributing to understanding pandemic impacts, recovery trajectories, and resilience strategies specific to the Indian aviation context (Centre for Aviation, 2024).

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Table 3: Research methodologies employed in Indian air transport management studies

Research Methodology	Frequency 2013-2017	Frequency 2018-2024
Data Envelopment Analysis	High	High
Econometric Modeling	Moderate	High
Case Study Analysis	High	Moderate
Forecasting (ARIMA, etc.)	Moderate	High
Survey-based Research	High	Moderate
Qualitative Interviews	Moderate	Moderate
Simulation Modeling	Low	Moderate
Bibliometric Analysis	Low	Emerging

Table 3 presents the research methodologies employed in Indian air transport management studies. Data Envelopment Analysis remains consistently popular for airport and airline efficiency studies. Econometric modelling has gained prominence for analysing demand drivers, pricing strategies, and financial performance. Survey-based research, while still important, has been complemented by increasing use of secondary data analysis and advanced forecasting techniques. The emergence of bibliometric analysis as a methodology reflects the maturation of the research field.

3. DISCUSSION: INDIAN RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The choice of labels for research topics and the assignment of keywords in bibliometrics is to some extent subjective. The framework for Indian air transport management research presented in Section 2 provides a comprehensive view of the research landscape. This section discusses representative Indian research contributions across the identified topic categories.

Table 4: Classification of representative Indian air transport management research

Representative Study	Principal Journal	Scopus Listed	Topics	Keywords
Jayathilakan (2024)	Y	Y	IT1	Airline economics, revenue determinants, expenditure analysis, Indian carriers
Rathore (2020)	Y	Y	IT1, IT5	Aviation growth, industry perspectives, policy framework, market expansion
Thomas et al. (2022).	Y	Y	IT2	Airport efficiency, DEA, regional airports, structural performance

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Chakraborty et al. (2020).	Y	Y	IT2	Airport performance, international airports, infrastructure assessment
Mahapatra & Bellamkonda (2023).	Y	Y	IT3	Service quality, SERVQUAL, passenger satisfaction, airport experience
Digital transformation study (2023)	-	N	IT3	Digi Yatra, biometric systems, operational efficiency, digital adoption
Madhavan et al. (2023).	Y	Y	IT1, IT6	Demand forecasting, ARIMA, passenger traffic, cargo volumes
PHDCCI Report (2023)	-	N	IT4	Air cargo, logistics hub, Krishi UDAN, infrastructure development
NCAP analysis studies	-	Variable	IT5	Regional connectivity, UDAN scheme, policy implementation, and bilateral agreements
COVID impact studies (2020-2022)	Y	Y	IT6	Pandemic recovery, traffic resilience, and airline financial distress

Table 4 presents a classification of representative Indian air transport management research across the identified topic categories. The studies shown represent diverse methodological approaches and research questions addressing India-specific aviation challenges.

IT1: Airline Industry Analysis- Indian research in this area has focused extensively on the low-cost carrier phenomenon. India's domestic market is dominated by budget airlines, with IndiGo holding approximately 60% market share as of 2024 (DGCA, 2024). Research has examined competitive dynamics, business model sustainability, and the determinants of financial performance. Studies have also examined the restructuring of Air India following its privatisation in 2022, analysing its implications for market competition and service quality (Economic Times, 2023).

IT2: Airport Operations and Efficiency - This research stream addresses the massive infrastructure development underway across India. Studies employing DEA have revealed significant efficiency variations across Indian airports, with metropolitan airports generally outperforming regional facilities (Thomas et al., 2022). Research has examined the impact of privatisation on airport performance, comparing Airports Authority of India (AAI)- managed airports with privately operated facilities. The UDAN scheme's impact on regional airport viability has emerged as an important research question, with studies evaluating traffic generation, financial sustainability, and improvements in connectivity (Ministry of Civil Aviation, 2024a).

IT3: Service Quality and Passenger Experience- Traditional service quality research using SERVQUAL has been complemented by studies on technological innovations. The implementation of Digi Yatra at major Indian airports has provided opportunities to examine the impacts of digital transformation on passenger processing times, satisfaction levels, and operational efficiency. Studies report processing time reductions of 50-60% at

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airports implementing biometric systems (Business Standard, 2024). Research has also examined service quality perceptions across passenger segments, revealing differences between leisure and business travellers, and between domestic and international passengers.

IT4: Air Cargo and Logistics- This research area has gained prominence as India pursues ambitious targets for air cargo growth. Studies have examined infrastructure requirements, identifying gaps in cold chain facilities, cargo handling equipment, and dedicated freighter operations (Ascela Advisors, 2025). Research on Krishi UDAN has evaluated the scheme's effectiveness in connecting agricultural regions with consumption centres and analysed the modal shift from surface to air transport for perishable commodities. The growth of e-commerce has stimulated research on last-mile connectivity and integration of air cargo with ground distribution networks (PHDCCI, 2023).

IT5: Policy and Regulation- Indian researchers have contributed to policy analysis and evaluation. Studies have examined NCAP 2016 implementation, assessing achievements against stated objectives in areas such as regional connectivity, air cargo promotion, and ease of doing business. Research on bilateral air services agreements has analysed India's negotiating strategies and outcomes, particularly with Gulf countries and Southeast Asian nations. Recent studies have evaluated MRO policy reforms aimed at reducing India's dependence on foreign maintenance facilities (Ministry of Civil Aviation, 2023).

IT6: COVID-19 and Aviation Recovery- The pandemic generated significant research on crisis management, resilience strategies, and recovery trajectories. Indian studies examined government support measures, airline survival strategies, and changes in passenger behaviour. Forecasting studies attempted to predict recovery timelines, with most significantly underestimating the speed of India's aviation rebound. By early 2024, Indian domestic air traffic had exceeded pre-pandemic levels, defying initial pessimistic projections (DGCA, 2024; Centre for Aviation, 2024).

The above discussion shows that the framework for Indian air transport management research is comprehensive and reflects the unique characteristics of India's aviation sector. The research addresses practical challenges while also advancing theoretical understanding of air transport management in emerging markets. However, some gaps are apparent. Research on environmental sustainability and aviation decarbonization remains limited despite growing global emphasis on climate action. Similarly, research on urban air mobility, advanced air mobility, and drone logistics is emerging but underdeveloped relative to global trends.

Another observation is the limited bibliometric analysis specifically focused on Indian aviation research. While global bibliometric studies exist, India-specific reviews that could identify collaboration networks, institutional productivity, and knowledge diffusion patterns are lacking. Such studies could help strengthen research networks and identify opportunities for international collaboration.

The classification framework presented here, while comprehensive, may evolve as new technologies, business models, and policy frameworks emerge. Artificial intelligence applications in aviation, sustainable aviation fuels, and electric aircraft are emerging areas that may become future research areas. Similarly, the growing emphasis on multimodal transport integration may require expanding research frameworks beyond air transport to examine air-rail, air-road connectivity in the Indian context.

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4. CONCLUSIONS

Bibliometric studies allow the identification of publication patterns (e.g., the most productive authors and institutions, collaborative networks, principal journals, and the most cited articles) and popular research topics (e.g., keyword analysis). The present paper has analysed air transport management research in the Indian context, identifying six major research topic clusters spanning airline industry analysis, airport operations, service quality, air cargo logistics, policy and regulation, and pandemic impacts.

The analysis reveals several important findings. First, Indian air transport management research has grown significantly over the past decade, paralleling the rapid expansion of the aviation sector. Second, research topics reflect India-specific priorities, including low-cost carrier dominance, regional connectivity challenges, infrastructure development imperatives, and ambitions for air cargo growth. Third, methodological sophistication has increased, with greater use of econometric techniques, efficiency analysis, and forecasting methods. Fourth, Indian researchers are increasingly publishing in high-impact international journals, enhancing global visibility of India-focused aviation research.

However, bibliometric analysis also reveals limitations. While research content can be comprehensively described through keyword analysis, subject categories may not be defined precisely enough to provide clear guidance for topic selection for early-career researchers. Research trends are identified through citation analysis, but research gaps are not always apparent. Some emerging areas, such as aviation sustainability, advanced air mobility, and artificial intelligence applications, remain underexplored in the Indian context.

For established researchers, this bibliometric framework can help identify areas where Indian research is well developed versus those that require greater attention. For young scholars entering the field, understanding the research landscape can inform strategic topic selection. Areas showing high citation counts may indicate crowded fields where incremental contributions are challenging, while emerging topics with limited existing research may offer opportunities for impactful contributions.

From a policy perspective, the analysis highlights research-practice linkages. Many studies address practical challenges facing Indian aviation stakeholders - airlines, airports, regulators, and passengers. Strengthening these linkages through industry-academia collaboration could enhance the relevance and impact of research. Government agencies and industry associations could benefit from commissioning targeted research on specific policy questions, while researchers could gain access to proprietary data and industry insights.

The Indian aviation sector stands at an inflexion point. With projections suggesting India will become the world's third-largest aviation market by 2030, the research opportunities are immense (Boeing, 2024). Understanding passenger behaviour in a price-sensitive yet rapidly growing market, optimising infrastructure investments across diverse geographic contexts, developing sustainable aviation pathways appropriate for Indian conditions, and designing regulatory frameworks that balance safety, competition, and growth are all critical research needs.

This bibliometric analysis provides a foundation for understanding the current state of research on Indian air transport management. Future work could expand the analysis to include citation network analysis, the identification of influential papers and authors, mapping collaboration networks across institutions and countries, and examining

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knowledge diffusion patterns. Comparative bibliometric studies examining how Indian aviation research compares with that of other emerging aviation markets, such as China, Brazil, and Southeast Asian nations, could provide additional insights. (Singh, Y., & Gupta, V., 2025)

In conclusion, bibliometric analysis offers a valuable tool for mapping the intellectual landscape of air transport management research in India. While not without limitations, it provides researchers, practitioners, and policymakers with systematic insights into research trends, gaps, and opportunities (Singichetti, B., Singichetti, B., Dodd, A., Conklin, J., Lich, K., Sabounchi, N., & Naumann, R., 2022). As Indian aviation continues its growth trajectory, rigorous research will be essential to address challenges and realise the sector's full potential in contributing to national economic development.

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