

Nexus Between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty: With the Parallel Mediation of Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring high service quality is imperative for businesses to secure long-term market share and sustained competitiveness. Although previous literature has emphasized the importance of service quality (SQ), little attention has been given to comprehending how perceived service quality can be a key factor in increasing customer loyalty (CL). Acknowledging its significance, this empirical research aims to explore the influence of perceived SQ on developing CL within the Aviation industry of Pakistan and to analyze the mediating role of perceived value (PV) and customer satisfaction (CS) in fostering customer loyalty. Data was gathered via survey questionnaires administered to airline passengers in the waiting lounges of Allama Iqbal International Airport and subsequently analyzed through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Research findings have demonstrated that the quality of airlines' services greatly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. This impact is partially mediated by the perceived customer value elucidating the mechanism through which SQ helps to affiliate new and existing customers with the airline's services. Furthermore, the SQ helps to foster relationships of customers with the firm and ultimately develops customer loyalty for an extended period. Based on the Expectancy Disconfirmation theory, this study contributes to existing literature by providing a conceptual framework based on the intricate relationship between SQ and CL and the parallel mediation of customer satisfaction and perceived value. The study also offers practical strategies for airline companies to improve SQ in order to enhance customer satisfaction. The findings would assist managers and practitioners of aviation firms to satisfy the new customers and retain the existing ones for business growth.

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INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, service industry (especially airlines) has witnessed a surge in popularity leading to a situation, where companies face tremendous challenges primarily due to the proliferation of airlines and intensified competition among them (Shen & Yahya, 2021). After the pandemic crisis, airlines' survival hinges on their ability to provide exceptional services for prioritizing customer needs and demands (Faisal, 2024). In a competitive business environment, failure to recognize customer needs is a barrier to the way of providing exceptional services. In this way, it's difficult to hold existing and new customers (Akram et al., 2022).

The realm of commercial air transportation has undergone remarkable expansion in the last three decades, while the aviation industry plays a crucial role in the economic development of a country (Law et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2020). A staggering number of 2 billion individuals have been annually transported by air industry and it contributes almost US \$ 3.3 billion to Pakistan's GDP with an estimated PKR 172 billion in revenues. This growth trajectory has stimulated airlines to prioritize focusing on high service quality to stay competitive and challenging in the dynamic landscape (Murali et al., 2016). Service quality refers to encapsulating the overall impression of the organization perceived by customers through its efficient services and high-quality flight operations (Shah et al., 2020). SQ can be assessed in terms of comparing customer expectations or needs and actual service provided by the firm. A research study by Shah et al. (2020) revealed that airlines provide various services i.e. telephone, geo-mapping, financial services, videos, music channels, and computer games to make customers' travel comfortable and entertaining. The SQ of airline firms still received less substantial empirical attention and warrants further investigation, as suggested by a few researchers (Ali et al., 2015).

Service Quality has emerged as a critical consideration, offering not only a competitive edge but also a means to retain customers along with expanding market share (Faisal, 2024; Shah et al., 2020). The impact of SQ on CL is undeniable as it encompasses the essential service conduct, expertise, and competence exhibited by airline personnel when catering to consumer's needs (Samosir et al., 2024). Research has demonstrated that an important antecedent of customer behavior is the better quality of service that ultimately makes passengers satisfied and loyal (Faisal, 2024). Customer loyalty (CL) refers to the behavioral intention of repurchasing products and services from the same service providers if they meet the expectations of customers (Shen & Yahya, 2021). Extensive research also confirms that a critical determinant of customer loyalty is the exceptional superior services offered by the service industry (Izogo & Ogba, 2015). Extant research confirmed the positive link between SQ and CL (Agarwal & Gowda, 2021; Lenka et al., 2009; Rahim, 2017; Shen & Yahya, 2021), yet it is still unclear what factors influence the SQ-CL association (Fatma & Kumar, 2024).

Prior research studies have identified that customer experiences with intangible services help them to evaluate the perceived quality (PV) and value of services by consumers (Ullah, 2012). PV means the aggregate worth of having or consuming a product or service by the consumers. It refers to "consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Edward & Sahadev, 2011; Zeithaml, 1988). Previous research studies have measured customer value in terms of social, emotional, and monetary value. Another study found that if product quality is greater than the costs for services, then it will result in customer-perceived value (Edward & Sahadev, 2011). Research studies revealed that customers who gain value for spent money will become loyal to the firm as compared to customers who do not receive PV (Ashraf et al., 2018). Many previous studies have examined antecedents of customer loyalty and retention including customer trust, commitment, price fairness, perceived value, and customer satisfaction (Chen, 2008; Izogo & Ogba, 2015; Kaura et al., 2015; Samosir et al., 2024; Sitorus & Yustisia, 2018). Nonetheless, the relationship between constructs has not been examined in the prior literature yet.

Literature has identified SQ in terms of experience with the service encounter i.e. airline personnel, infrastructure, and technology service have also strong influence on the overall satisfaction of customers (Ullah, 2012). CS integrates both feelings of pleasure and discontent with service delivery which helps them to compare the product/ service with his/her expectations (Shen & Yahya, 2021; Ullah, 2012). If customer's actual outcomes exceed their expectations, they tend to be more satisfied and ultimately loyal to the firm services. Another research supported the claim that businesses try to enhance customer satisfaction with airline service, as unsatisfied customers have the likelihood of switching to other competitors which adversely affects customer loyalty (Farooq et al., 2018). Therefore, developing new customers and retaining existing ones is an imperative competitive strategy that needs to be adopted to prevent customers from switching (Law et al., 2022)

The current study has the following objectives;

- To examine the impact of perceived SQ on CL in Pakistan's airline industry
- To analyze the intervening role of PV between perceived SQ and CL
- To analyze the intervening effect of CS between perceived SQ and CL

This study is significant for a few reasons. It is based on "Expectancy disconfirmation theory", if the airline service outperforms the customer's expectation, their post-purchase loyalty will ensure, and in case of disconfirmation of belief their dissatisfaction will prevail (Shen & Yahya, 2021). Customer loyalty and retention emerge as crucial components of any sector to sustain its operational integrity and preserve competitive advantage, airlines must be committed to the delivery of exceptional customer services. The attainment of CS through the provision of exceptional services is crucial for firms seeking to thrive in the competitive marketplace (Shah et al., 2020). This research offers invaluable insights for firms in fulfilling consumer desires, thereby enhancing their services and setting them apart from rival airlines. Airlines that offer a heightened sense of comfort and safety have the potential to attract and retain the rising number of customers (Shah et al., 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to carefully assess passengers' perceptions of the service they receive, as this insight is essential for understanding customer needs and ultimately enhancing the overall quality of service. In the next session, the researcher provides a review of articles, supported theory, and conceptual framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

The concept of service quality has grabbed increasing attention in the field of service marketing and business development. SQ refers to adherence to the company's service standards to meet customer demands (Agarwal & Gowda, 2021; Shen & Yahya, 2021). The multifaceted concept compares the services expected from the customers and the actual services received by the firm (Parasuraman et al., 1988). He further presented the widely recognized SERVQUAL model for service quality which includes the following dimensions i.e. "tangibles", "reliability", "responsiveness", "assurance", and "empathy". It's been widely acknowledged that high SQ refers to intangible benefits presented by one party that not only ensure the profitability of firm but also foster customer retention across various industries (Fatma & Kumar, 2024). Numerous studies found SQ as an elusive construct and its predicted outcomes for the airline sector, recognizing it as a cornerstone for achieving market share and competitive advantage (Agarwal & Gowda, 2021; Shah et al., 2020).

Literature also underscored the importance of service quality that tangible services of aircraft, comfortable seating, cleanliness, internet service, and entertainment help to predict and influence customer behavior (Farooq et al., 2018). Perceived SQ helps to meet and exceed customer expectations with the product or service. Researchers have examined the impact of SQ drivers on maintaining CL across different industries (Namukasa, 2013; Rahim, 2017; Shen & Yahya, 2021). Park et al. (2020) found that service quality reflects what a customer obtained as an outcome of their interaction with a service provider and it will further strengthen their relationship with airlines.

Service quality helps businesses to sustain their operational integrity, and commit to the delivery of exceptional customer services to retain their customers (Akram et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2020). Agarwal and Gowda (2021) also found that in-flight airline services positively influence passengers' comfort and generate loyalty. Customer loyalty refers to attitudinal and behavioral response in which customers repeatedly purchase goods and services from the firm (Shen & Yahya, 2021). It implies a behavioral intention to be loyal to the specific firm and develop feelings and emotions with the particular brand (Kheng et al., 2010). Another study supported the argument that airline SQ and its dimensions significantly impact customer behavior in Malaysian Airlines (Farooq et al., 2018).

Customer loyalty (CL) is defined as a tendency to continue the purchase relationship with the firm for a specific period (Shen & Yahya, 2021). It is related to attitudinal and behavioral responses, when consumers develop a psychological attachment to the firm. Over the decades, the relationship between SQ and CL has been established, leaving the direction of their association unsettled. SQ directly impacts how customers affiliate with the brand and their willingness to remain loyal and continuously purchase from the same service provider. In the context of the developing country Pakistan, prior research studies examined hotel industry, logistics, hospital, and banking sector, that how SQ influences the loyalty of customers (Ashraf et al., 2018; Hafeez & Muhammad, 2012; Saleem & Raja, 2014), nevertheless, research analyzing service quality and potential customer outcomes in airline

sector lack in-depth exploration and still in infancy stage (Ali et al., 2015; Shafiq et al., 2023; Wu & Cheng, 2013). Therefore, based on aforementioned literature, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: Perceived Service Quality has a direct influence on customer loyalty.

Mediating role of Customer Satisfaction:

Kotler and Caslione (2009) defined customer satisfaction as the extent of a person's feeling of happiness and contentment that comes from comparing the customers' expectations and the actual product's performance. It helps to gauge if service providers meet and surpass the expectations of customers and make their demands fulfilled (Fatma & Kumar, 2024; Izogo & Ogba, 2015; Yilmaz & Sürmelioglu, 2024). CS is considered an effective measure for marketers to evaluate the usefulness of goods and services through favorable word of mouth by customers (Farooq et al., 2018). A research study reported that high-quality services can win the customer's confidence and help the company build a positive brand image among the target audience (Akram et al., 2022). Satisfied customers, according to Leong et al., (2015), are willing to repurchase services often and give recommendations, so they can directly improve the profitability and competitiveness of the firm.

In the previous literature, the most researched antecedent and predictor of CS is the quality of service offered by the firm (Shah et al., 2020). High service quality affects the feeling of satisfaction among customers (Ilyas & Ali, 2011; Mittal & Kaur, 2024). Supriyanto et al. (2021) investigated that service quality strongly influences customer satisfaction in the banking industry (Ilyas & Ali, 2011). Research study by Ali et al. (2015), examine the link between CS and SQ in the context of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). If the service quality does not meet the standard, it can adversely impact the company and customers will not purchase it (Munusamy et al., 2011). Kuo et al. (2009) found that service quality has a significant impact on how customers show willingness to repurchase from the firm and be satisfied with their provided services. Correspondingly, Kheng et al. (2010) and Rahim (2017) proposed that superior services will lead to improved customer satisfaction and enhanced customer loyalty. Extant literature supported the claim that SQ directly influences CS (Izogo & Ogba, 2015; Khoo et al., 2017; Saleem & Raja, 2014; Sitorus & Yustisia, 2018; Supriyanto et al., 2021), however Ali et al. (2015) highlighted that their relationship is elusive as scant studies focus on service quality impact on passenger satisfaction in the airline industry.

When the firm is dedicated to serving customers, providing competent services, interacting with them, and discussing their problems, in this way they ensure customer loyalty (Fatma & Kumar, 2024; Supriyanto et al., 2021). It is pertinent to mention that customers will remain loyal when they are satisfied with the firm and there is less likelihood that they can switch to other competitors or service providers (Yilmaz & Sürmelioglu, 2024). CS will most likely result in high customer loyalty (Hapsari et al., 2017). Jin et al. (2012) posit that CS is a crucial factor in improving SQ and retaining loyal customers. It was found in the literature that customer retention of existing customers saves more cost than developing new customers (Pfeifer, 2005). Numerous studies exist on the positive association between CS and CS (Kaura et al., 2015; Kuo et al., 2011), nevertheless, the empirical evidence of their association provides contrary findings regarding the magnitude and direction of the impact of SQ with

CL and CS and vice versa (Muhamad Yunus et al., 2013; Wattoo & Iqbal, 2022). To fill the research gap and examine this controversy, this study investigates the following hypothesized relations:

H2: Perceived service quality has a direct influence on customer satisfaction.

H3: Customer Satisfaction has a direct influence on Customer Loyalty.

H4: Customer Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty.

Mediating role of Perceived value:

Perceived value is defined as the aggregate worth of having or consuming a product or service by the consumers (Law et al., 2022). PV acts as a valuable tool that “assesses the utility of the product based on perceptions regarding what is given and what’s received” (Zeithaml, 1988). It is a most significant variable that is defined differently by different authors and it is often used as a synonym for customer satisfaction (Ashraf et al., 2018). According to Matzler et al. (2006), PV is defined in monetary terms, and value is measured based on the price paid for the products and value for money received in terms of quality. If the perceived value exceeds costs, customer value is attained, and vice versa (Ashraf et al., 2018; Cankül et al., 2024). A product or service's "customer-perceived value" is determined by how a consumer compares it to comparable ones (Hu HsinHui et al., 2009). Perceived customer value refers to the benefits associated with the performance of products and services to achieve competitiveness (Hapsari et al., 2017).

Previous research studies have examined possible antecedents of PV and measured the customer value in terms of social, emotional, and monetary value. Extant research has analyzed the antecedents of PV and found that consumer perceived value is strongly influenced by service quality of a firm (Cankül et al., 2024; Hu HsinHui et al., 2009). It is generally accepted that customers derive the perception of a brand based on the time and effort incurred and the worth of products that are received. In simple words, the level of CS with the product is directly affected by the PV and SQ. A research study has indicated that customers who perceive customer value from the firm will remain faithful and develop gratification with the brand (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Ishaq et al. (2014) elucidated that perceived value directly impacts CS and CL. However, perceived value received scant attention in relationship with CL in the prior studies (Ashraf et al., 2018). Thus, in this study, we hypothesized that:

H5: Perceived Service quality has a direct influence on Perceived value.

H6: Perceived Value has a direct influence on Customer loyalty.

H7: Perceived Value mediates the relationship between perceived Service quality and Customer loyalty.

Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory:

This study is based on the theoretical underpinning of Expectancy Disconfirmation theory (EDT) which is presented by Oliver and DeSarbo (1988) and it implies the field of marketing and consumer behavior. It stated that the expectations of consumers are derived from confirmation or disconfirmation

of beliefs (Yingfei et al., 2022). Expectations formulated based on the belief of consumers regarding products or services that they have received value more than the expectations (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). Positive confirmation is developed when they are consuming the product and have a better experience with the brand. Conversely, negative disconfirmation is when consumers are discontent with the products or services provided by the firm (Yi et al., 2021). EDT theory inferred that customers are satisfied and dissatisfied with the SQ, and it ultimately leads to commitment and loyalty toward the brand (Yingfei et al., 2022). Grounded on EDT, loyalty of customers is based on the services provided by the firm and how customers are satisfied with the value of products and services concerning their expectations.

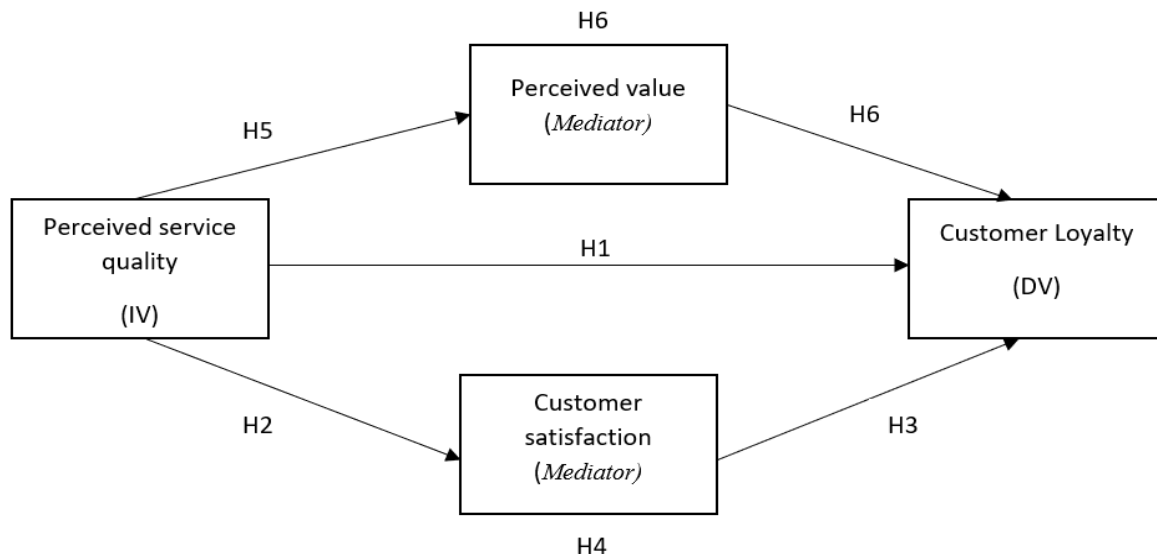
Theoretical Framework:

In the given conceptual framework in **Error! Reference source not found.**, the following relationships have been proposed by the researcher; SQ acts as an independent variable (IV) customer satisfaction (M1), perceived value (M2) is used as a mediator between DV and IV and lastly customer loyalty is the dependent variable (DV).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design and Sampling Methods:

To investigate the stated hypotheses, a quantitative approach has been adopted in which a survey was distributed among passengers at waiting lounges of Pakistan’s airlines for collecting data. The study used a cross-sectional design to gather data from airline passengers at one point. The population chosen for the research was airline passengers at Allama Iqbal International Airport who have taken international flights using five Pakistan-based airlines (Airblue, Shaheen, Pakistan



International Airline, Emirates, and Qatar Airways) over four months.

Figure I. Theoretical Framework

The reason behind that is due to difficulty in collecting data from the airline passengers due to budget and time constraints. One of the authors utilized her professional contacts in the aviation industry and also obtained data during her internship to obtain access to passengers at waiting lounges of the airport.

This study utilizes the convenience non-probability method as it is hard to gather information from airline passengers owing to time and accessibility constraints. Questionnaires were administered through a face-to-face survey at the airport and analyzed through quantitative measures. The researcher distributed almost three hundred questionnaires among airline passengers out of which we got 235 responses, which after deletion of missing responses or improperly filled forms, resulted in a total of 216 responses. The sufficient sample size was calculated for SEM as per the assumption of the "10 times rule" that the minimum responses were more than ten times the number of structural paths involving inner and outer model constructs (Hair Jr et al., 2021). As per the formula, the sample size came out to be $19 \times 10 = 190$, and for this research study, researcher collected more than 200 responses. The respondent participation was involuntary and individual responses were kept confidential.

Research Instruments:

For data collection, measurement scales of the following variables have been used; a Seven-item scale is used to evaluate the SQ constructs (Hapsari et al., 2017), Four items are used to assess the perceived value (Brodie et al., 2013) and four items of customer satisfaction are used to assess (Chen, 2008) and four items for CL were measured by (Hapsari et al., 2017). For the survey, the researcher employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Analysis techniques:

For data analysis, researcher used IBM SPSS software and the SmartPLS 4 updated version. The tests for frequency, descriptives, and reliability have been conducted through SPSS software. Further analysis was made through SmartPLS in which the researcher developed a measurement model to analyze model fit indices, confirmatory factor analysis, and reliability or validity check as shown in Table II. Later, a structural model was developed (Hair, 2009) using PLS-SEM to analyze the relationship among latent constructs and mediation analysis through the bootstrapping method to confirm hypotheses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic distribution:

To prepare data for the analysis, the researcher has employed IBM SPSS software for descriptives, frequency distribution, normality errors, outlier detection, reliability assessment, and validity tests. There were quite a few missing values identified by SPSS, which were adjusted using the recommended method of mean replacement (Hair, 2009). Reliability was assessed through the Cronbach α statistic method, which comes out to be more than 0.7, which reveals a good reliability score (Hair et al., 1998).

Further, research findings begin with the respondents' demographics, such as age, gender, qualification, and travel experience as shown in Table I. The demographics analysis reveals that gender frequency of more male respondents (58.8%) and relatively fewer female respondents (41.2%) as men usually travel more frequently for business purposes. In terms of Age distribution, the largest proportion lies inside the range of 21-30 age bracket (49.3%), followed by 30.7% of respondents who are above 30 years old, 9.9% are above 40, and the remaining 10.1% ranged from 16- 20 years. In terms of travel purposes, the majority 32.6% travel for Education, 22.8% for business-related trips, 27.3% for leisure, and the remaining 17.3% for family trips, as depicted in Table I. In the second part, the three latent variables and their relationship have been assessed through SEM analysis techniques.

Table I: Demographics table

Attributes	Distribution	Frequency %
Gender	Male	58.8%
	Female	41.2%
Age	16- 20 years	10.1%
	21-30 years	49.3%
	31-40 years	30.7%
	41- above	9.9%
Education	Graduation	39.4%
	Masters	24.8%
	Doctoral	19.6%
	Any other diploma	16.2%
Travel purpose	Business	22.8%
	Education	32.6%
	Family	17.3%
	Leisure /others	27.3%

Confirmatory factor Analysis:

CFA through (PLS-SEM) has been performed to examine the association between indicators and latent variables using Smart PLS software. In the SEM model, SQ has a direct relationship with CL, and PV and CS have an indirect effect between SQ and CL. The arrows pointed from latent constructs to indicator variables have demonstrated it as a reflective measurement model pointed from the circles to the rectangles (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

Researchers have chosen PLS-SEM for analysis attributed for a few reasons as it is most suitable for complex research models to analyze all causal relationships within a theoretically developed framework (Henseler et al., 2016). It serves as an excellent fit ensuring variance-based results and offers a practical approach to analysis. It is considered an easy-to-use interface to evaluate large data sets, in which all constructs were analyzed for their validity and reliability.

Through CFA, Goodness of Fit (GoF) has been analyzed by model-fit indices; in which R square (0.543) also indicates the explanatory power of the model, (SRMR) is 0.055 which is less than the threshold value of 0.08, chi-square (220.418), and the normed-fit index (NFI) is 0.836, which represents conceptual model represents a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998). Three main criteria estimated to validate the reflective model include internal reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Reliability and Validity measurement:

To examine the reliability of the constructs, there are two different measures; Cronbach alpha has been calculated using SPSS software, and its threshold value greater than 0.7 is acceptable (Hair, 2009). Secondly, composite reliability has been estimated using PLS-SEM software. Its value ranges from 0 to 1 and the threshold value is 0.7, above which value is considered acceptable (Cohen, 2013; Hair Jr et al., 2021). CR values for SQ, CS, PV, and CL are 0.925, 0.932, 0.924, and 0.904 respectively in Table II.

Convergent validity has been assessed by analyzing the individual item loadings and calculating the Average Variance extracted (AVE) to examine the association of latent constructs and given indicators. Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion proposes that an estimate of AVE should be higher than 0.5 showing that the latent variable clarifies the 50% variance to indicators reflecting good convergent validity. The estimated values to assess the accuracy of the results should be $AVE > 0.5$ while $CR > 0.7$ (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant validity has been calculated by comparison of the square root of AVE with the estimated correlation between latent constructs to analyze how variables are distinct from each other (Hair, 2009). Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion indicates that the AVE square root must be greater than the inter-construct correlation to reflect good discriminant validity. Discriminant validity helps to establish the vertical collinearity of the measurement model, however, to measure lateral collinearity,

variance inflation factors (VIF) have been analyzed further to check for multicollinearity using PLS-SEM. The estimate for VIF should be equal to or less than the accepted level of 5 which ascertains little risk of collinearity. Table II shows that the measurement model has satisfied the internal reliability and convergent validity. Table III depicts discriminant validity measures as shown below.

Table II: Reliability and Validity measures

<i>Variables</i>	<i>items</i>	<i>Factor loadings</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	<i>Composite reliability (CR)</i>	<i>Average variance extracted (AVE)</i>	<i>Variance Inflation factor (VIF)</i>
Service quality	SQ1	0.857	0.924	0.925	0.689	1.00
	SQ2	0.821				
	SQ3	0.839				
	SQ3	0.819				
	SQ4	0.789				
	SQ5	0.823				
	SQ6	0.861				
Perceived value	PV1	0.855	0.926	0.932	0.820	2.963
	PV2	0.925				
	PV3	0.946				
	PV4	0.894				
Customer satisfaction	CS1	0.920	0.921	0.924	0.809	2.963
	CS2	0.924				
	CS3	0.905				
	CS4	0.847				
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.885	0.894	0.904	0.759	2.442
	CL2	0.851				
	CL3	0.899				
	CL4	0.849				

Table III: Discriminant Validity

Constructs	CL	CS	PV	SQ
CL	0.871			
CS	0.776	0.899		
PV	0.727	0.799	0.906	
SQ	0.718	0.788	0.814	0.830

Structural Model

A structural model is established using bootstrapping of random 5000 samples through PLS-SEM for path correlations and hypothesis testing. In the given analyses, direct and indirect paths have been analyzed at $p < 0.05$ level. In the present research, there are three direct paths examined through significance level, R square, β -values, and t-values as shown in the Table IV. The result indicates that all the relationship has a t-value greater than the critical ratio (1.96) at the 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$) level and the R^2 value is higher than 0.10 as suggested in research studies by (Henseler et al., 2016). Airline SQ is positively associated with CL at ($\beta = 0.266$, $t = 7.57$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$) supporting hypothesis 1 as shown in Table V. Similarly, hypotheses 2 and 3 postulate that SQ has a significant influence on CS as indicated at ($\beta = 0.88$, $t = 11.3$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$) and CS positively related to CL at ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 2.113$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$) by Figure II and IV. Further, a strong relationship exists between SQ and PV at ($\beta = 0.814$, $t = 8.24$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$) and PV strongly influences CS ($\beta = 0.218$, $t = 2.24$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$) as shown in Table IV, supporting hypothesis 5, 6. Therefore, all hypotheses are accepted. The summarized results indicate that airline companies with superior service quality exhibit high levels of perceived value by customers and lead to CS presented in Table IV.

Mediation results:

Lastly, the indirect effect was analyzed by applying the bootstrapping function (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) to measure mediation results. Table V represents that the total direct effect of SQ on CL (without a mediator) is significant at ($\beta = 0.266$) at p-value (0.002). The indirect effect of CS between airline SQ and CL is also significant ($\beta = 0.325$) at a t-value of 2.112. In this study, statistics have shown that the direct path of airline SQ and CL is significant ($\beta = 0.266$), and the indirect path of SQ and CL through customer satisfaction is also significant ($\beta = 0.325$) indicating partial mediation results. However, the confidence bias-corrected interval also shows that zero does not exist between the upper and lower confidence interval which means that CS significantly mediates the relationship between Airline SQ and CL supporting hypothesis 4 of the research. These results are inconsistent with the previous research that the indirect relationship between airline services on customer loyalty is partially mediated by the passenger's satisfaction (Hapsari et al., 2017; Shen & Yahya, 2021).

Secondly, PV also partially mediates the relationship between SQ and CL ($\beta = 0.277$) at a t-value of 2.184. The findings supported the partial mediation results of hypothesis 7 at a significance value of 0.029. The total direct effect of perceived SQ on CL (without a mediator) is also significant at a p-value (0.002). These results are in line with the literature, in which PV mediates the relationship between SQ and CL (Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018). The confidence bias-corrected interval indicating that zero does not lie within upper and lower bound levels signifies the indirect effect is significant as given in Table V.

Structural Model

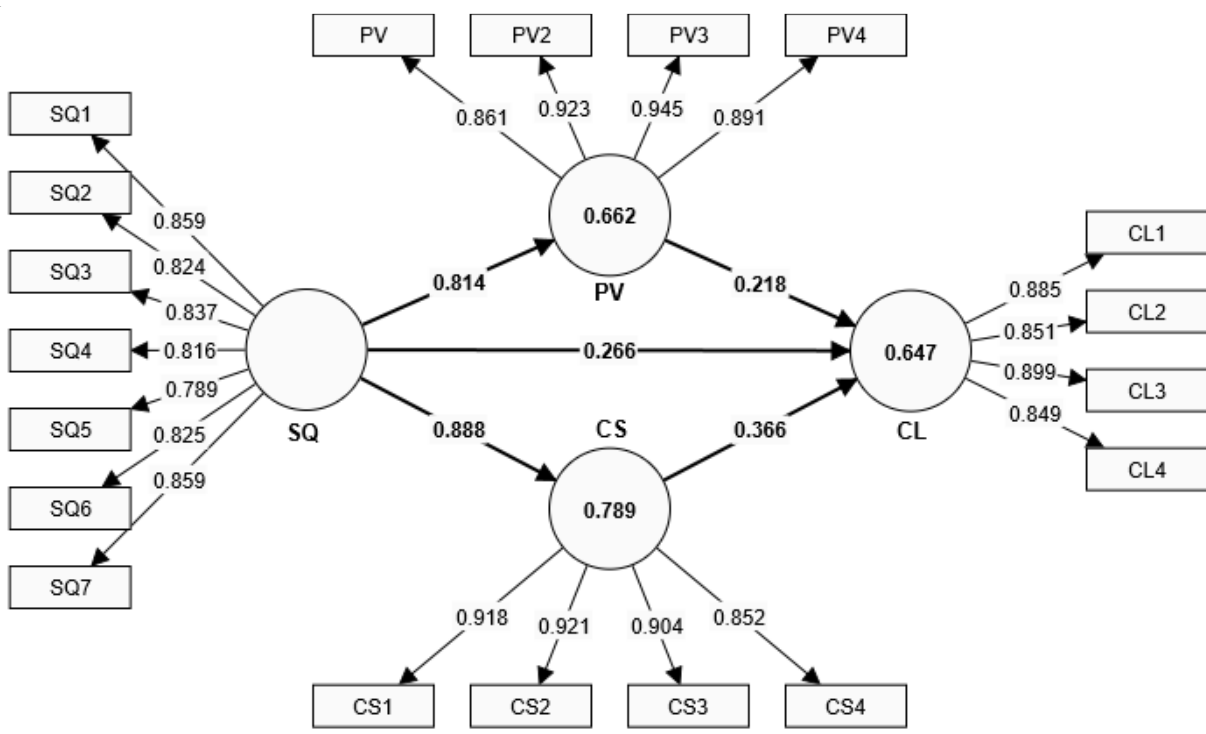


Figure II: Structural Model

Table IV: Hypothesis Testing and Path Coefficients

<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>T statistics</i>	<i>β values</i>	<i>p-values</i>	<i>Hypothesis testing</i>
PV -> CL	0.139	2.248	0.218	0.021	Accepted
SQ -> CS	0.029	11.3	0.888	0.000	Accepted
SQ -> PV	0.050	8.24	0.814	0.000	Accepted
SQ -> CL	0.055	7.57	0.266	0.002	Accepted
CS -> CL	0.173	2.113	0.366	0.035	Accepted

Table V: Mediation results

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>T statistics</i>	<i>β values</i>	<i>p-values</i>	<i>Bias-correlated Confidence Interval</i>		<i>Hypothesis testing</i>
					LCI	UCI	
SQ -> PV -> CS	0.114	2.184	0.277	0.029	0.017	0.404	Accepted with partial mediation
SQ -> CS -> CL	0.156	2.112	0.325	0.035	0.328	0.601	Accepted with partial mediation

Discussion:

Service quality is considered a critical success aspect for airlines in order to satisfy and retain their customers (Farooq et al., 2009). In the face of intense global competition, airline companies need to expand their SQ and reduce costs, not only to gain a competitive edge but also to foster CL (Agarwal & Gowda, 2021; Chen, 2008). This study endeavors to explore the potential role of SQ in developing CL within the aviation industry of Pakistan. For decades, the aviation industry grappled with challenges from economic and political turmoil, leading to customer apprehensions regarding service quality, reliable operations, ticket price, and value for customers (Forgas et al., 2012). Despite these challenges, airline companies have made concerted efforts to enhance high-quality services and streamline operations to elevate CS and CL (Ahn & Lee, 2011).

Following the conceptual model includes interrelationships among constructs, seven hypotheses were developed by researchers and further tested by exploring the direct and indirect effect of SQ on CL through PV and CS. In summary, research findings correspond to controversial arguments of previous studies and state that SQ determinants act as a potential antecedent of customer loyalty, which suggests that high-quality services provided by employees will make passengers more satisfied and loyal to the firm (Begzjav, 2018; Shen & Yahya, 2021).

The research findings supported hypothesis 1 which posits a positive association between airline SQ and CL (Coeff= 0.266, $t= 7.57$) at a significance value < 0.05 , which implies enhanced customer loyalty with Pakistan's Airlines is strongly influenced by the perceived service quality. The results are aligned with literature that service firms respond to the needs of customers by delivering valuable services, building strong relationships, and meeting customer requirements (Chen, 2008). Extant studies endorse the results that SQ has a significant impact on CL in the banking sector, hotel industry, education sector, and hospitality industry (Khoo et al., 2017; Kim, 2011; Lenka et al., 2009). A recent study further confirms that high-quality service and efficient airline operations tend to create customer satisfaction and loyalty (Agarwal & Gowda, 2021). The current study addresses the research gap identified by Farooq et al. (2017) that the airline industry remains unexplored and requires further exploration in Pakistan's context.

The empirical results indicate a direct strong relationship of SQ on CS ($t= 11.3$, $p < 0.05$) with a coefficient of 0.88. Additionally, CS has a direct influence on CL (Coeff= 0.36, $t= 2.11$, $p < 0.05$). These results corroborate other findings that SQ serves as a significant antecedent of CS (Shah et al., 2020). Another study conducted at hotels validated the association between SQ and CS (Saleem & Raja, 2014), while Supriyanto et al. (2021) underscored the necessity of SQ- CS in banking industry. Furthermore, research conducted by Ali et al. (2015) confirmed a similar notion in the Pakistani context that SQ has a significant effect on CS conducted at Pakistan International Airline (PIA). Moreover, the positive relationship between CS and CL is consistent with numerous studies, suggesting that customers are more inclined to become committed to a firm and are willing to repurchase products and services from the same providers (Hafeez & Muhammad, 2012; Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018; Supriyanto et al., 2021).

Moreover, current research findings also revealed that CS mediates the relationship between SQ and CL ($\beta=0.325$, t -value 2.112, $p=0.035$). This aligns with the proposition by Kheng et al. (2010) that SQ leads to enhanced CS and ultimately fosters high CL, evidenced in terms of repurchasing the services from the same service providers. Rahim (2017) also lends support to our research findings, emphasizing that SQ is a critical antecedent of CS and CL. Additionally, the mediating role of CS in the relationship between SQ and CL is consistent with prior studies (Ngo & Nguyen, 2016). These findings underscore the pivotal role of CS in driving CL within the context of various industries (Saleem & Raja, 2014).

Airlines with high SQ minimize customer discontent, leading to greater customer affiliation. Interestingly, the research also establishes a statistically significant correlation between SQ and PV by customers ($\beta= 0.814$, $t= 8.24$, p value < 0.05), with perceived value directly influencing customer loyalty ($\beta= 0.218$, $t= 2.24$, p value < 0.05). These findings contribute to existing literature, suggesting that higher perceived service quality leads to higher perceived value by customers, ultimately fostering loyalty. The findings are in accord with the research study of Hapsari et al. (2017), it is reasonable to assume that the PV of the customer will be higher when SQ is perceived to be higher. This will result in creating a good image that how consumers compare the value and estimated cost of utilizing a particular service (Ullah, 2012). When consumers obtain high-quality service from a company, their perception of the value they derive from the provider of the service increases, which makes them loyal to the airline (Tarn, 1999). Customers tend to pay higher prices when passengers use the value-added service at a reasonable price (Kuo et al., 2009). When the value that customers expect from the product and service is higher, it will ultimately lead to CL (Hu HsinHui et al., 2009).

Additionally, PV partially mediates the direct relation between SQ and CL (Coeff=0.277, $t=2.184$, $p=0.029$), indicating that when airlines meet customer expectations in terms of SQ, customers are more likely to become loyal and repurchase services (Kuo et al., 2009). PV plays a crucial role in attracting and satisfying customers, thereby impacting retention, this is in line with the empirical evidence by (Lenka et al., 2009). Similarly, Hu HsinHui et al. (2009) found that the significant effect of PV on SQ and CL in the hotel industry. Another research corroborates the research findings and confirms the intervening role of PV between SQ and CL (Ashraf et al., 2018). These findings contribute to the understanding of the relationship dynamics between constructs in the aviation industry, underscoring the importance of addressing these factors to enhance CL and organizational success.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Customer satisfaction and retention are the driving forces behind increasing market share, profitability, good word-of-mouth, and customer loyalty, and it is something that researchers and practitioners seek to understand and enhance. The results of this study could help airline managers learn more about the quality of the service they offer and, as a result, how to make customers happier. Since customers' expectations for service quality are met or exceeded, it's possible that consumers' views of service quality could be improved if airlines set more realistic expectations for what they

promise. Because of this, airlines should only provide services that are within their area of competence. This might be a method for the airline's management to distinguish itself apart from its rivals in terms of the level of service it gives. Airlines must have established policies and initiatives that help passengers and appropriately meet their expectations.

Practical and Theoretical Implications:

The study aims to provide insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers by offering valuable research findings. Based on the expectancy disconfirmation theory, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing a conceptual framework based on the intricate relationship between given constructs SQ and CL and the parallel mediation of CS and PV. The findings contribute to airline companies that they can provide high-quality service, fulfill customer demands, and facilitate them by efficient operations. This study assists airline companies in placing greater emphasis on service quality as a differentiation strategy for their survival and competitiveness in the global market. The study will be beneficial as it suggests policymakers and practitioners concentrate on enhancing core operations of service delivery, improving organizational culture, tangible assets, and in-flight services to attract and retain customers. As mentioned in the findings, airlines can offer customized services to customers, thereby fostering a sense of warmth and reliability, as it's difficult to retain existing customers in the airline industry. Considering the rapid growth in air traffic, companies should hire and develop their workforce to deliver personalized and superior services while placing greater emphasis on passenger' satisfaction. This entails renovating the interior and exterior appearance of aircraft, providing comprehensive training to staff, improving cargo and catering services, and maintaining aircraft to ensure the perceived value, loyalty, and retention of customers.

Limitations and Future implications:

The study has employed the following variables SQ, PV, CS, and CL, however, future research can explore other constructs i.e. customer purchase behavior, empathy, repurchase intentions, etc. In the current study, researchers have used a measurement scale of service quality developed by (Hapsari et al., 2017), but future studies can use the frequently cited SERVQUAL scale for service quality that we haven't used in our framework. Secondly, researchers have empirically analyzed the conceptual model in the aviation industry of Pakistan through a survey technique. In future studies, it has been suggested that passenger interviews or qualitative analysis can be done to analyze the consumer's perspective regarding airline services. Due to limited time and accessibility constraints, researchers have used convenience sampling and collected cross-sectional data from passengers, however, future research can conduct longitudinal studies and purposive or any other form of sampling. Lastly, the sample size used for this study was comparatively small with respect to the target population due to resource constraints, forthcoming research can conduct study on a large sample population and also perform comparative and multi-cultural studies.

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