Original Article

Service Quality and Repurchase Intentions with Mediating Role of Customer Brand Experience in Airline Sector of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between airline service quality and customer satisfaction, focusing on the mediating role of customer brand experience in Pakistan's airline industry. Grounded in the Stimuli–Organism–Response framework, the research empirically examines how perceived service quality influences customer repurchase intentions through the mediating mechanism of customer experience. Secondary data were collected from passengers of leading domestic airlines-Pakistan International Airlines, Airblue, SereneAir, and AirSial using a structured questionnaire based on validated scales. Statistical analyses, including reliability, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis, were conducted using SPSS version 23.0 through PROCESS Macro Hayes. Findings confirm a positive and significant relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, with customer experience partially mediating this association. The study contributes to marketing literature by highlighting how service quality dimensions strengthen long-term customer loyalty. It also provides managerial implications for airline executives to enhance service strategies, improve perceived value, and foster customer retention in Pakistan's competitive aviation sector.

Keywords: Customer brand experience, Customer satisfaction, Pakistan Airlines, Repurchase intention, Service quality, SOR theory.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's airline industry, business dynamics have changed drastically, as customers have more airline alternatives, which has resulted in a rising expectation of customers. Businesses operating in a highly competitive environment require a lot of effort to retain customers and develop repurchase behaviour, especially in the aviation sector (Jusoh, Qasim & Abro, 2021). Airlines heavily invest in promotions, entertainment, or loyalty programs to retain their customers and develop strategies that enhance their customer experience (Ali, 2019). The airline industry is highly competitive, and it offers different price categories, cabin classes, and passenger segments to create a valuable relationship with its customers by offering value for money, premium services, and enhancing their experience by resolving their problems (Akram et al., 2020).

Air transportation plays a crucial role in the economic development of any country, providing a means of transportation for customers (Koo, Lim, & Dobruszkes, 2017). In the context of Pakistan, there is a huge market of domestic and international air travelers, which is growing at the rate of 3.7 percent annually (JCRVIS, 2013). In Pakistan, the Aviation sector creates 247,000 jobs directly and 500,000 jobs indirectly from tourism, restaurants, importing and exporting goods, etc. The air transport industry is estimated to support US$3.3 billion in Pakistan's GDP (IATA economic report, 2019). Many international airlines are now operating in Pakistan on international routes, which are taking the profit from regional airlines (Zhang et al., 2017). Domestic air travelers face multiple challenges, which create a negative customer perception, like poor strategies, a bad corporate image, and inconsistent service standards. International airlines capitalize on these shortcomings and offer excellent services, ambiance, travel experience, and competitive fares, such as fly Dubai, Thai air, or Qatar airways (Salem, Zahra & Yaseen, 2017).

Foreign airlines focus on providing services that attract Pakistani air travelers; however recent air crash of PIA has decreased the confidence of air travelers. Therefore, Pakistani Airlines suffers from a huge loss of revenue, and the whole profit was taken by other international airlines like Qatar, Emirates, Fly Dubai, Singapore Airlines, and Air China (Salem, Zahra & Yaseen, 2017). Retaining customers is the greatest challenge faced by various airline firms, and it implies lesser costs (as compared to attracting new ones), especially in times of economic downturn when markets are becoming increasingly competitive. Undoubtedly, a good flying experience (quality of services) has a bigger effect on consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Chang & Hung, 2013).

Notably, Pakistan's aviation industry has gained significant importance; researchers found that many local airlines are unable to provide quality services and competitive prices that customers are demanding (Zhang et al., 2017). Airline profit is based on passengers' satisfaction and their frequent flying behavior; managers make strategies that keep customers retained (Mikulić & Prebežac, 2011). In the airline sector, service quality is widely considered a critical issue since it allows a company to make profits while also satisfying and retaining customers. Delivering high-quality service that sets it apart from competitors can give a company a highly competitive advantage. (Buttle, 1996). Zeithaml and Parasuraman (2003) found that service quality has become more important, and service quality is measured in terms of its dimensions and processes (Chang & Hung, 2013). Customers who were satisfied with the services of the airline are willing to have repurchase intention because they had a good image of the airline, which will help them in their decision-making. To make a passenger a frequent flyer, an airline provides superior services to its customers (Chinomona & Dubihlela, 2014). In Pakistan, the number of air travelers is continuously decreasing, which reveals that customers are not satisfied with the airline's services (Mahalingam, Jain & Sahay, 2016). Retention of customers is very crucial for any airline to create long-term growth and revenue (Chang & Hung, 2013). The repurchase intention of the customer is based on customer experience regarding services and products.

In this study, we investigated the impact of airline service quality on the repurchase intention of Pakistani air travelers and customer experience as a mediating variable. The present study discusses the factors that impact the repurchase intention of the customer, as very limited research has been done on the customer experience in the context of Pakistani Airlines (Ali, Perumal & Shaari, 2020). So, this research fills the gap in the literature and analyzes customer experience as a mediating variable.

The concept of repurchase intention was introduced by Hellier et al. (2003), who later defined it by many researchers (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Repurchase intention reflects the behavioral intention of a person to choose a specific product or service with which they get unintentionally connected based on some psychological factors. Therefore, an airline makes its product unique from its competitors and provides sustained high-quality service; this will create a positive perception among customers to reuse the services. If the repurchase intention of customers develops, it leads to developing brand loyalty (Hanaysha, 2016). Cheng and Chang (2008) also stated that airline services have a

significant impact on customer repurchase intention.

Salem, Zahra, and Yaseen (2017) examined the repurchase intentions of Pakistani air travelers and found a positive relationship between service quality and customer repurchase intention, with the influence of word of mouth. The Stimuli-Organism-Response theory was employed for this research, which was initially used by Mehrabian and Russel. This theory is important to study human behavioral responses, such as acceptance or avoidance behavior, that are induced by feelings based on external factors. In this theory, stimuli refer to the environmental factors that affect the consumer's internal emotional state and consciousness, which ultimately lead to behavioral response (Song et al., 2020).

Service quality can be commonly defined as the gap between customer expectations and their perceived services from an airline (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). SQ is defined in several studies of the marketing discipline, along with many sub-dimensions (Trischler & Lohmann, 2018). Customers compare their expectations with actual services to form a perspective (Tsoukatos & Mastrojianni, 2010). Service quality refers to the gap between what consumers anticipate from a service and what they receive (Zeithaml & Parasuraman, 2003). The key issue is that service quality has become critical for passengers to stay competitive in the marketplace. Customers will eventually abandon an airline that fails to meet their requirements and expectations. There are different approaches to measuring service quality; however, no strategy is preferable to the others since service quality depends on industry features (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2003). Researchers have found that service quality affects the repurchase intention of the customer; it means satisfied customers are more profitable for airlines (Hassan et al., 2020).

Service quality also creates a competitive advantage, which is profitable for the airline business (Gupta & Singh, 2017). Nicole and Fernando (2015) analyze that customer satisfaction is the most important factor of airline service quality that impacts perception. The service attributes relevant to the service quality SERVQUAL framework are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. In addition, despite the significant amount of research that has been conducted on airline quality, it seems that airlines do not have a complete understanding of how consumers evaluate their services and what they anticipate receiving from them (Waguespack & Rhoades, 2008). When evaluating a service, it is impossible to do so without taking into consideration both the quality of the service and the level of satisfaction experienced by the consumer as a result of receiving that service. It is impossible to overstate how crucial it is to conduct quality assessments of the services provided by airlines (Wen & Yeh, 2010).

Customer experience is defined as the overall impression customers develop when they interact with the people, process, environment, or services that create a specific perspective through their emotions, sensorial interaction, and behavioral responses (Bagdare & Jain, 2013). According to Bonaiuto et al. (2016), psychological interaction takes place between a brand and a customer, which fully involves the customer and creates an intrinsic interest in them. Customer experience is the set of feelings based on the interaction that takes place between brand and customer during service delivery, marketing campaign, or purchasing process (Saari & Makinen, 2017). According to Collins (2011), experience is a particular feeling that is aroused by some actions or environment in the mind of the customer. Gentile, Spiller, and Noci (2007) stated that customer experience is a response of a customer to the set of provided services, items purchased, staff behavior, and quality of product. These feelings can be aroused through the physical, psychological, or sensorial engagement of the customer with the product or services of an airline.

The literature revealed that customer experience strongly influences the repurchase behavior of customers (Merrilees, 2016). Brand experience can foster the long-term behavior of customers with a particular brand (Westhuizen, 2018). Adhikari and Bhattacharya (2016) analyzed that the customer experience during travel is based on engagement and interaction with the services provided. They found that brand experience is the psychological or internal feeling of a customer, which is a basic component to co-create the perspective. They also analyzed the customer experience from the airline services depending on the characteristics or past experiences with the airline. The National Aviation Policy (2015) urged the traditional management of the Pakistan aviation sector to enhance its service quality, so that repurchase intention can be increased in Pakistani air travelers. For this purpose, the research is intended to analyze the impact of airline services on the repurchase intention of air travelers by creating a positive customer experience.

Stimuli-Organism-Response (SOR) theory is employed for this research, which was initially used by Mehrabian and Russel. This theory is applicable as human behavioral responses, such as acceptance or avoidance, are induced by the feeling that is caused by external factors. In theory, Stimuli (S) refer to environmental factors that affect the consumer consciousness or internal state (Song et al., 2020). Likewise, our study uses service quality as a stimulus for an airline in the context of its environment and consumer experience as an organism. Likewise, it creates a relationship between

environmental stimuli (external factors) such as airline services, which then induce a feeling or emotion in customers for that particular airline, which is called an organism. These feelings create a behavioral response among customers that influences their repurchase intentions (Kim & Lennon, 2013). Due to its wider implementation, many researchers use this theory for their purposes to study human responses (Kim, Lee, & Jung, 2020). This theory states that a stimulus creates a behavior of a respondent based on environmental evaluation, interaction, or any activity that arouses a feeling in the respondent's consciousness (Ming et al., 2021).

In the theory, (O) is Organism, which refers to the human cognition or feelings that mediate the influence of stimuli on individual behavior (Wu & Li, 2018). This state can be defined as the feeling of the consumer while interacting with the environmental stimuli or services (Sun & Zhang, 2015). Cognition and feelings are associated with a mental process or state of an individual due to facing a stimulus (Fu, 2018). Our study uses the customer as an organism that plays a mediating role to define the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention. According to the theory, R is Response, which refers to an individual final decision or behavior created based on the Stimuli and Organism (Shearman et al., 1997). There are three main types of responses, which are purchase intention, unplanned purchase intention, and repurchase intention (Kaufaris, 2002). This study focuses only on the repurchase intention of the customer. According to the above literature, this research uses the SOR theory according to its variables, which are established by past studies and literature. Where service quality is a stimulus, and customer experience is an aspect of the customer that causes a consumer to change their response. SQ has a direct relationship with RI, and Customer Experience has a mediating impact on the model.

The main objective of this research is to analyze the association between airline service quality and the repurchase intention of Pakistani air travelers, the impact of airline service quality on developing customer experience, and the impact of repurchase intention on developing customer experience.

METHODOLOGY

To study the relationship between variables, the research comprises primary data directly from customers, and a quantitative approach has been used for data collection. The time horizon for this study is cross-sectional. To test the hypothesis of the research, statistical tools are employed in the research. First of all, the research data is tested through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to check the reliability of the measuring scale, which is represented by the Cronbach's Alpha value (Waller, 2008). Then, a Correlation analysis is run to check the strength and direction of association between variables (Schober, Boer & Schwarte, 2018). Regression analysis is run to test the relationship between service quality, customer experience, and repurchase intention. Whereas the Process Macro Hayes is run to test the mediation between variables. Direct and indirect effects between variables under 5000 bootstraps and a Confidence level of 95% for each variable (Hayes, 2017).

The research data is comprised of data directly obtained from air travelers of Pakistani Airlines (Alvi, 2016). The sampling of data includes those air travelers who fly international or domestic from Serene Air, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Airsial, and Airblue, which are the main sources of data collection. The sample size of data consists of 200, of which a total of 180 questionnaires were distributed to the different airline passengers, and only 102 were obtained from the passengers. So, only 102 are filled, which are used to study the data, and 2 are partially filled, which are not included in the analysis. The sample size is undefined and unknown, so a non-probability sampling technique, convenience sampling method, is employed for the study (Stratton, 2021).

For data collection of research, the questionnaire of the study is adapted from past research (Joshi, Kale & Chandel, 2015. To measure the items of variables, the Likert scale is used with 5 degrees of expression, where items are expressed as the value of 1 representing strongly disagree to 5, which represents strongly agree (Nemoto & Beglar,

Figure 1: S-O-R Theory

Stimuli → Organism → Response

- Service Quality
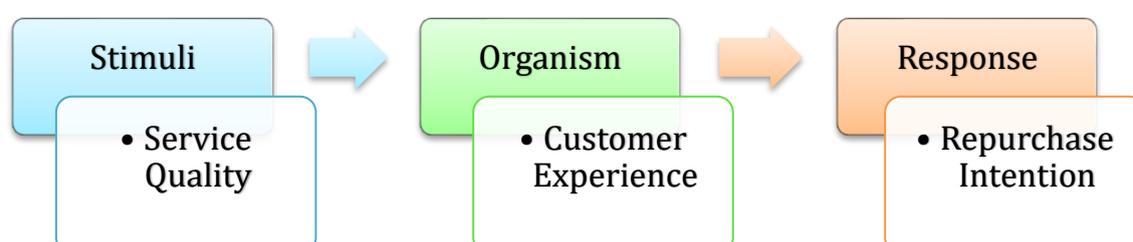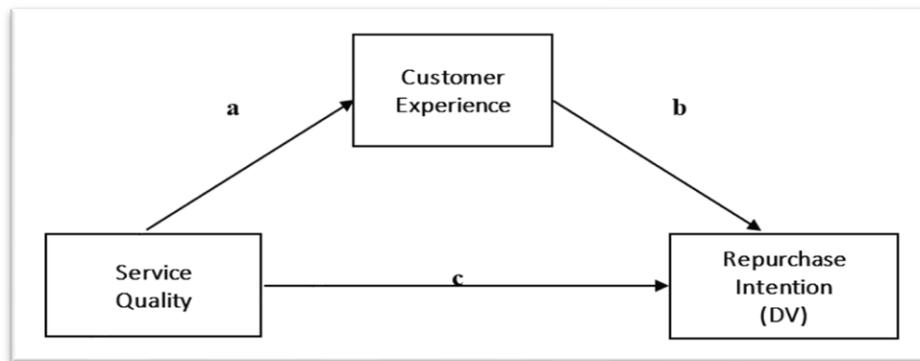- Customer Experience
- Repurchase Intention

Figure 2: Theoretical Model

2014). This study includes three variables, in which one is independent (Service Quality), the other is a mediating variable (Customer experience), and the dependent variable is the repurchase intention of customers (Cheng & Chang, 2008). The reliability analysis is run to check the quality of the scales that are used for data collection. In reliability analysis, Cronbach's Alpha value is strong when it is above 0.7 for the scale; this means the scale is reliable to use for data collection (Waller, 2008). The Items of Service quality are adopted from Raditha (2017). The Items of Customer Experience are adopted from Li and Liu (2019). The Items of Repurchase intention are adopted from Teye and Leclerc (1998).

The results are obtained from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. First of all, the demographic analysis of the study is provided, in which details of respondents who participated in this study are provided (Benjamin, 2021). Then reliability analysis is conducted to check the reliability of the measuring scale, which is represented by Cronbach's Alpha (Waller, 2008). Regression analysis is run to test the relationship between service quality, customer experience, and repurchase intention. Whereas the Process macro by Hayes is run to test the mediation between variables. Direct and indirect effects between variables under 5000 bootstraps and a Confidence level of 95% for each variable (Hayes, 2017).

Demographic data provides information regarding respondents who participated in this study (Benjamin, 2021). The study represents the demographic variables that are used in the research. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed amongst the different Pakistani airline passengers. The percentage of frequency of travel of each respondent with respect to their education and age bracket. The highest percentage is 52.9% for monthly travelers, and the lowest amongst all is for travelers who fly once a week, which is 2.9%. The results show that 52.9% traveled from Pakistan International Airlines, 28.4% from Airblue, Airsial is 8.8%., and 7.8% from Serene Air, which is the lowest among all of the percentages.

Reliability analysis is the measurement of the quality of the scale that is used for data collection. Cronbach's Alpha is an important value of reliability. Pavot, Diener, and Sandvik (1991) concluded that when the Cronbach alpha value is above 0.6, the items of each scale are reliable and consistent. The current study has a 0.797 overall Cronbach's Alpha, which is above the minimum. The results of Cronbach's Alpha Value for this research are SQ 0.861, CE 0.825, RI 0.712, and the overall model 0.797.

A correlation table 2 represents the direction and strength between variables, and when the data of the research is normally distributed, then it represents that there is a linear relationship between two continuous variables exposed.

Table 1: Reliability statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Service Quality	0.861
Customer Experience	0.825
Repurchase Intention	0.712
Overall Scale	0.797

expressed through Pearson correlation (Schober, Boer & Schwarte, 2018). The relationship between SQ and RI is moderately positive (r=0.589, p<0.000), and they have a 99% confidence level at a 0.01 level (2-tailed). There is a (r=0.549, p<0.000) moderate positive relationship between CE and RI connection. There is a moderate positive relationship between SQ and CE (r=0.597, p<0.00), and they have a 99% confidence level at a 0.01 level (2-tailed). N represents the number of observations in the study.

Table 2: Correlation

		RI	SQ	CE
RI	Pearson Correlation	**1**	.589**	.549**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	100	100	100
SQ	Pearson Correlation	.589**	**1**	.597**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	100	100	100
CE	Pearson Correlation	.549**	.597**	**1**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	100	100	100
	**** shows that Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**			

To analyze the relationship between a dependent variable and independent variables, this study employs the regression analysis technique. First of all, the relationship between SQ and RI is analyzed, which indicates that there is a direct relationship between the variables. Then the relation between SQ and CE is examined, and at the end relationship between 2 IVs, SQ and CE, with RI without the effect of a mediator. Table 3 shows the model summary of predictor SQ and output RI. As a result, the value of R represents the coefficient of regression, which expresses the overall fitness of the model, which is .589, and the R-squared represents the variance of output with the change in a predictor, which is .347, showing 34% variation in SQ due to RI. The model is statistically highly significant at (p=0.000), and the value of F is 52.033, which represents the fitness value of the model (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). The result of Durbin Watson is between 1.5 and 2.5, which is 1.92, which represents that the data is not autocorrelated.

Table 3: Model Summary

	R	R square	Adjusted R-Square	F	Sig.	Durbin Watson
1	.589	.347	.340	52.033	.0000	1.925
	a. Predictors: (Constant), SQ					
	b. Dependent Variable: CE					

The coefficient table 4 shows that the beta value is 0.626, which indicates that a one percent change in the service quality will cause a change of 62% in Repurchase Intention. The relationship is statistically highly significant at .000, and the T value is more than 2. The collinearity statistic represents correlation among the variables in multiple regression. The value of VIF and Tolerance in this research is 1, which shows there is no collinearity amongst variables (García et al., 2014).

Table 4: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.365	.355	3.845	.000		
	SQ	.626	.087	7.213	.000	1.000	1.000
	a. Dependent Variable: RI						

To study the mediation of variables, this study employs the PROCESS Macro test in SPSS 23.0, which was created by Hayes. Preacher et al. (2007) studied the effects of variables under 5000 bootstrap and a Confidence level of 95% for

each variable. In the PROCESS Macro model, we assume the relationship between predictor X (SQ) with outcome Y (RI) and a third mediating variable M (CS) is added to know the causal relationship (Hayes, 2017). There are two ways X influences Y: the first is the direct effect, which is shown through linear regression, and the second is the indirect effect, which will be analyzed by adding a new variable in the regression model (Preacher et al., 2007). The linear regression is first obtained to run the mediation analysis between variables (Sun et al., 2022). Now, Process Macro-Hayes is analyzing the directional effect on variables. Three tables given below represent the Direct effect of SQ with RI, then the Indirect effect, which found the relationship between SQ and RI through repurchase Intention (Agartha & Hayes, 2021). Table 5 shows that airline service quality is directly associated with repurchase intention and has a positive relationship. The direct effect of IV on DV is .4310, and the relationship is significant at a .0001 P-value, whereas the t-value is greater than 2. Moreover, this relation is supported by Bootstrap CI, which did not contain any 0 between LLCI and ULCI (LLCI: .2255, ULCI: .6365).

Table 5: Direct Effect

Effect	Standard error	T-Value	P-Value	LLCI	ULCI
.4310	.1035	4.1632	.0001	.2255	.6365

Table 6 represents the indirect effect between variables, which is .1949. Moreover, this relation is supported by Bootstrap, which did not contain any 0 between LLCI and ULCI (LLCI: .1530, ULCI: .2328).

Table 6: Indirect Effect

Predictor (X)	Mediator (M)	Outcome (Y)	Effect	Bootse	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
SQ	CE	RI	.1949	.0869	.1530	.2328

Table 7 represents the total effect, which is .6260, and the relationship is highly significant at a p= .0000, whereas the t-value is greater than 2. Moreover, this relation is supported by Bootstrap CI, which did not contain any 0 between LLCI and ULCI (LLCI: .7982, ULCI: .5889).

Table 7: Total Effect

Effect	Standard error	T-Value	P-Value	LLCI	ULCI
.6260	.0868	7.2134	.6260	.7982	.5889

DICUSSION

This study examined the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention under the mediating role of customer experience in the context of Pakistani airlines. The study concluded that the relationship between all variables is significant, and the research data were tested through SPSS. Software. The results indicate that SQ and RI have a positive relationship with each other, and they are all significant. There is a strong positive relationship between service quality and customer experience. To study the direct and indirect effects between variables, Process Macro Hayes runs under 5000 bootstrap and a Confidence level of 95% for each variable (Hayes, 2017). According to the results, airline service quality has a significant impact on the repurchase intention of air travelers. This means hypotheses were supported by the results.

Moreover, the present study revealed that service quality has a positive association with repurchase intention. This behavior will engage the customers to travel more with the airlines. Likewise, the indirect relation between service quality and customer experience is significant. Finally, this research revealed that the moderating role of customer

experience has a significant effect on the repurchase intention of air travelers. For any economy, aviation plays a vital role and provides a huge amount of revenue in the form of GDP. In Pakistan, the Aviation sector creates thousands of jobs directly and indirectly from tourism, restaurants, importing and exporting goods, etc. The air transport industry is estimated to support US$3.3 billion in Pakistan's GDP. The aviation sector is drastically changing due to its boom, petrol prices, and the competitive nature of the market. So, airlines have a better understanding of their customers to retain them. Nowadays, customers have multiple options, like in the Pakistan Aviation sector. So, Airlines need to heavily invest in promotions, entertainment, or loyalty programs to retain their customers and market reputation.

CONCLUSION

This study fills the knowledge gap in the context of the repurchase intention of Pakistani Air travelers and also tests the Stimuli-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, which plays an important role in studying human behavior. Data has been gathered from Pakistani air travelers who do not fly domestically or internationally. Airlines should develop high service quality to generate a positive influence on the customer repurchase intention. The objective of our study is to test if there is a significant relationship between airline service quality and the repurchase intention of Pakistani air travelers in the context of Pakistan's airlines. Secondly, customer experience is influenced as a mediator between service quality and repurchase intentions. The results revealed that there is a significant relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, and customer experience partially mediates the relationship.

The study has limitations because data is only collected from air travelers of Pakistani airlines. So, future studies can consider the comparison between Pakistan and International airlines to study the repurchase intention of customers, or the study can be conducted on international airlines. Secondly, this study uses a small sample size, which affects the results and the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future studies can include a large sample size or general categories of air travelers. Finally, our research is conducted on a single mediator; future research can add more variables such as ticket price, customer loyalty, and trust in service quality.

DECLARATIONS

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

AM: Concept and design of study, critical intellectual input.
AM: Acquisition and analysis of data, drafting of the manuscript, and critical intellectual input.
AM: Acquisition of data, drafting of the manuscript.
The author had read and approved the final manuscript.

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