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**EXPLORING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING AIRLINE CUSTOMER'S BUYBACK
INTENTIONS FROM A TOURISM PERSPECTIVE**

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I. ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore the factors that influence airline customer's buyback intentions. The study explores service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction of airlines based on the review of the literature. Air transport and tourism are two interlinked areas with significant interdependence. Airlines need to ensure that their customer's needs are met and satisfied, which will enhance their buyback scope so that airlines can remain consistent in business. To ascertain the customer buyback intentions, this study identifies service quality as an independent variable, perceived value as mediating variable, and customer satisfaction as a dependent variable. The proposed hypotheses indicate that service quality may have a significant relationship to customer satisfaction, and influence buyback intentions. The perceived value may have a mediating relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction towards buyback intentions.

II. INTRODUCTION

Travel is an important event in tourism. Air travel has been a boon to global tourism. Enjoying air travel, reaching long distances in a short period,

exploring new places, and revealing the travel experience as a status symbol are the main reasons why tourists support air travel. With this support, the airline sectors are interested in doing lucrative business practices and retain their passengers. The buyback is one of the most significant factors for survival and prosperity in competitive service sectors (Gustafsson et al., 2005, Hellier et al., 2003, Lin and Lu, 2010). Forming a customer's buyback intentions is a complicated process, meanwhile, understanding important factors such as perceived value, service quality, and customer satisfaction is essential for air service providers (Adeola, Mukarramah & Adebisi, Sulaimon, 2014). Service providers are constantly allocating large resources to identify many factors that predict buyback intentions, especially service quality and customer satisfaction (Gonzalez, 2015, Hellier et al., 2003, Zeithaml, 1988). This study seeks to identify various factors that influence the airline customer's buyback intentions. Because they want to use resources effectively to attract and retain customers. This will enable marketing managers to develop strategies and prevent customers from switching to competitors.

Customers assess their experience with airlines based on their travel experience, satisfaction level, and decide whether to use the same airline. Bitner et al. (1990) stated that effective service recovery policies have a positive effect on customer's buyback intentions. Cronin and Taylor (1992) proposed that customer satisfaction is related to buyback intentions. Some researchers argue that attitude being a facet of individual buyback intention (Zeithaml, VA, Berry LL, Parasuraman A. 1996). Whereas the customer's satisfaction with the overall service quality affects the buyback intention, and future behavior of the trip (Tian, 1998). Bou-Llusae Et al. (2001) mentioned that quality perception has a direct impact on customer buyback intentions. Hellier et al (2003) defined that, the intention to buy back is that the customer will receive services from the same company. However, the perceived value is one of the factors that have the greatest impact on improving customer satisfaction (Saleem, M.A et.al 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality

The service quality term is plentiful in the business division, whereas all companies want to provide quality service to their customers. Though it is not easy, companies must be equipped to offer quality service. The service quality concept in the service industry aims to meet the needs, and requirements of customers, and to the extent that the service meets their expectations (Lewis and Booms 1983). However, to ensure and maintain service quality, the organization must first identify what creates quality for the people it serves

(Gronroos 1984). Furthermore, (Gronroos, 1984) categorized service quality into two types: one is technical quality, focusing on what consumers received from the service, the second is a functional quality focused on the service delivery process, whereas the service quality defined as customer evaluations of the overall superiority of the product (Zeithaml, 1988).

Zeithaml et al. (1996) stated that service quality has a significant impact on the customer's decision-making process, and customers must be genuinely satisfied with the service quality and value of the goods and services (Kristensen et al. 1999). However, service quality has a vital effect on business costs, business performance, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, and profitability (Seth et al., 2005). From the earliest concepts, many studies have focused on ensuring a positive level of service quality and building a modest benefit (Ladhari, 2008). Clemes et al. (2008) pointed out that to achieve a high level of satisfaction, the service provider must provide high-quality service. Service quality has become a vital part of an organization's competitiveness in improving organizational performance and customer expectations in the service sector (Evans & Lindsay, 2009). Providing the best possible service is considered one of the key requirements that businesses must meet to attract and retain customers to achieve better customer experience (Nwaogbe, et al., 2013). In support of that, Yarimoglu, E.K., (2014) says the service quality increases customer satisfaction.

Airlines recognize that customer satisfaction and service quality are the key factors influencing customer decisions when choosing an airline (Choi et al. 2015). Some researchers found a service quality is positively and directly related to buyback intention (Saleem, M.A et.al 2017). Airlines pay more attention to service quality (Chun-Mei Chen and Hsian-Ming Liu 2017). Many scholars have highlighted that service quality is a significant factor for airlines to sustain (Chen, F et al. 2005, Chou, C.C et al. 2011, Ostrowski, P.L et al. 1993, Park, J.W et al. 2004) and increase passenger's perceived value (Woo, M 2019, Yang, K.C et al. 2012).

DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality is the variance between the expected level of service from consumers and the service received (Caruana, 2002). Gronroos (1984) stated that each customer has their understanding of service quality. Liou and Tzeng (2007) argue that the measurement of service quality is based on efficiency and is a proven model for the airline industry. In this study, when conceptualizing service quality, Parasuraman et al. (1988) presented the SERVQUAL model with five constructs such as assurance, empathy reliability, responsiveness, and

tangibles are deliberated as the predictors of service quality, operational definitions mentioned below.

Tangible

From the perspective of the airline industry, Yunus et al. (2013) identified that the tangible is analyzed by the real conditions during the flight trip, such as the comfort of the seat, the inbuilt equipment, the facilities, the interior, the cleanliness, the comforts, the entertainment, the appearance of the cabin crew, food, and drinks offered. The absence of these tangible dimensions makes the customer feel dissatisfied with the service quality of the airline service (Aghdaie and Faghani, 2012).

Reliability

According to Kim, Y., & Lee, H. (2011) Reliability is the airline staff's ability and the system to execute and maintain functions in normal and unforeseen situations, such as check-in efficiency, punctuality, correct ticketing, and convenience booking. Reliability denotes the ability of a business organization to complete the assured service properly and reliably (Rahim 2016). Reliability means the ability to deliver the necessary services on time, without any errors, and in the same order according to the required conditions and situations (Ashraf, J 2017).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness is associated with a rapid response rate every time there are customer inquiries or complaints (Leong et al., 2015). Lindstrom (2009) and Yunus et al. (2013) mentioned that responsiveness assessment also takes into account the factors of passenger guidance, such as efficiency in seating, safety warning, safety instructions, and so on. It is essential to provide the assistance and caring service by the instant response.

Assurance

The assurance dimension is related to key characteristics such as flight crew reliability, knowledge, and capability to maintain reliable services from the operational system to actual flight service and the level of etiquette amongst the flight crew (Leong et al., 2015). Studies by Clemes, Ghana, Kao, and Choong (2008), Yi, and La (2003) have found that assurance has a significant effect on service quality. In their view, competence to show courtesy and credibility will play an important role in building customer credibility.

Empathy

According to Yunus et al. (2013) empathy is determined by individual attention to customers. Empathy is a significant component of service in flight as it covers personal attention and can recognize the exact requirements of customers. Leong et al. (2015) acknowledged that operators with high empathy can recognize and understand the feelings, desires, or customer demands. Seemingly, customers will surely appreciate the services rendered by these airlines.

Operational definitions of five service quality dimensions:

Tangibles:

The presence of physical amenities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.

Reliability:

The ability to perform a promised service reliable and accurate.

Responsiveness:

The desire to assist customers and provide services quick and efficient.

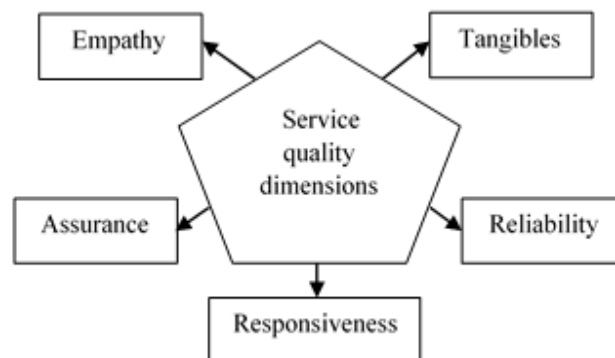
Assurance:

The knowledge and compassion of employees and their capability to build self-confidence.

Empathy:

The care and attention that a company provides to its customers.

Fig 1. Service quality dimensions



Source: Parasuraman et al (1988)

Service quality has long played an essential role in the competitive business. This study proposes five service quality dimensions, such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988) refer to figure 1. Service quality dimensions are the accessories or external services that create perceived value (Anderson and Narus, 1995).

PERCEIVED VALUE

Most studies focus on measuring the perceived value of a product and services from the consumer dimension. Perceived value is considered to be a transaction between the use of a service and the ineffectiveness of receiving and using the service (Sinden and Worrell, 1979, Ostrom and Iacobucci, 1995). Dodds and Monroe (1985) identified relationship models and stated that perceived value is an essential factor for consumers in the process of purchase decisions. The perceived value affects customer behavior and the competitive success of the entire set of products and services (Buzzell and Dale, 1987). This concept of relatively perceived value results in three probable value levels: proposing comparable quality at an equivalent price, proposing higher quality at a premium price, or proposing a non-standard quality at a promotional price. Therefore, a company can change its comparative value by changing its action.

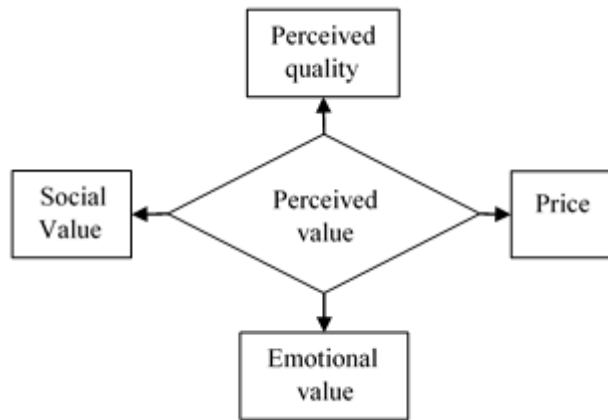
Zeithaml, V.A (1988) stated that the perceived value means a thorough assessment of customers for a service depending on their experience. In her explanation, Zeithaml (1988) defines four different value denotations as (i) the lowest price, (ii) what is needed in an item, (iii) the consumer receiving quality for the amount paid, (iv) what the consumer gets for a given price. The fourth definition of value has focused on most previous research (Bojanic, 1996, Zeithaml, 1985). The value is closer to quality, and it should compare to the price (Hallowell 1996). Developing customer value creation strategies are the key to attracting new customers, developing and maintaining good relationships, and gaining customer loyalty (Zeithaml, VA, Berry LL, Parasuraman A. 1996). Therefore, it is common to increase the trust and loyalty of the customer by creating a high customer value that achieves a buyback. Bojanic (1996) proposed that higher perceived value results in higher purchases and, ultimately, higher customer satisfaction. Hence, perceived value may precede the result of satisfaction. Satisfaction repeatedly is seen as the main result of perceived value (Cronin, Brady, and Hult, 2000) and is beneficial in predicting perceived value (Cronin et al. 2000, Parasuraman et al. 2000).

The perceived value concept has been recognized as one of the most significant processes to gain a competitive advantage (Parasuraman, 1997), and have been

argued that the perceived value is the most important indicator of buyback intentions (Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000). Sweeney and Suter (2001) provided an impetus for the design of perceived value, refer to figure 2, the four dimensions of perceived value such as perceived quality, price, emotional value, and social value, which determines the level of PERCIVAL (Perceived value).

Customers understand that the value or quality of the service received exceeds the cost of receiving that service, which will lead to higher satisfaction and may have a positive impact on loyalty (Tam 2004), which may lead to buy back intention. Perceived value is essential in expressing the customer-product relationship (Rockel & Angels, 2007). Whereas the perceived value of the customer will have a positive effect on customer satisfaction (Loy and Chen 2011). Various studies show that the perceived value of customers is a predictor of the satisfaction of customers. Boksberger, P.E., and Melsen, L. (2011) concluded in their research that the use of perceived value in the service sector is appropriate.

Fig 2. Perceived value dimensions



Source: Sweeney and Soutar (2001)

The effect of the perceived value of the customer depends on the customer segment (Zboja et al., 2016). The perceived value, regarding price, quality, and social dimension, have a positive impact on customer expectations (Fazal-e-Hasan et al., 2018). Perceived value defined as the customer’s assessment of the merits of products and services, and its capability to meet their needs and expectations, whilst comparison with its peers. Operational definitions of the four perceived value dimensions are mentioned below.

Operational definitions of four perceived value:

Perceived quality:

The overall assessment of the standard process of getting customer service

Price:

The value of the product or service that the customer wants to pay.

Emotional value:

It is characterized by the effective support of the feelings or emotional situations that derive from the services.

Social value:

It is an application derived from the ability of a product or service to improve social self-awareness

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

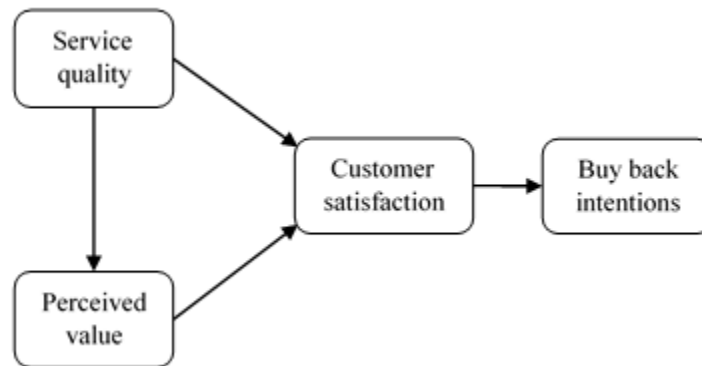
Customer satisfaction is the result of the value perceived by the customer, the value is equal to the quality of the service received compared to the value expected from the operations or relationships with competitors (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Satisfied customers create a positive word, and they often buyback (Reichheld et al., 1990). Satisfying customers is essential because it has become a critical factor in achieving the company's goals and is considered as a core standard of operation and the best standard for any organization (Gerson, 1993). The direct positive relationship between customer satisfaction and buyback intention is supported by a variety of product and service studies (Cronin, J.J. Jr, Taylor, S.A. 1992, Bolton, R.N. 1998).

Customer satisfaction is associated with the service quality offered to the customer and is one of the tools to increase the value for the customer (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). Some researchers emphasize that customer satisfaction, and service quality is the main challenge for the service industry (Hung et al., 2003). In contrast, customer satisfaction is recognized as the key to achieving goals in a service environment, which grows around meeting the needs of customers and exceeding their demands (Lam SY et al. 2004). Customer satisfaction is the buyback of products and services with an emotional tendency (Hoq and Amin 2010).

Customer satisfaction is an extensive concept that reflects an overall assessment of the experience of product or service after purchase and can vary from displeasure to satisfaction (Yang, 2017). To succeed, especially in the airline industry, management needs to focus on retaining existing customers by

implementing effective customer satisfaction strategies, as the costs of attracting new customers are higher than the costs of retaining existing ones (Dominici & Guzzo, 2010). Balakrishnan, R., and Christopher, P.B (2020) study propose that innovative airline services can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction.

Fig. 3 Conceptual model: Factors influencing airline customer’s buyback intentions



DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

The conceptual model shown in figure 3, delineates the relationship of factors such as service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction, this study proposes service quality as an independent variable, perceived value as a mediating variable, and customer satisfaction as the dependent variable.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: Service quality may have a significant relationship on customer satisfaction, and influence buyback intentions

H2: The perceived value may have a mediating relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction towards buyback intentions.

Each component in the conceptual model is defined below:

Service quality

Zeithaml, V. and Bitner, M. (2003)

Service quality is an intensive assessment of the customer's specific service dimensions that reflect their reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

Perceived value

Hellier et al. (2003)

Customers complete assessment of the net value of service, based on the benefits provided by the service and the acquisition and use of the services.

Customer satisfaction

Hellier et al. (2003)

Customer satisfaction is the total amount of pleasure or satisfaction that the client feels will satisfy the expectations, desires, and needs associated with the service as a result of the effectiveness of the service.

Buyback intentions

Hume & Winzar (2007)

Buyback intention is defined as the decision of the customer's future repurchase activities with the same service provider.

Bibliographic support for the research hypothesis

H1. Service quality may have a significant relationship on customer satisfaction, and influence buyback intentions

Baker-Prewitt (2000), Clemes et al. (2008), Gonzalez (2015), Hellier, et al., (2003), Kristensen et al. (1999), Saleem, M.A et.al (2017), Seth et al. (2005), Sivadas & Tian (1998), Yarimoglu, E.K., (2014), Zeithaml (1988)

H2. The perceived value may have a mediating relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction towards buyback intentions.

Bojanic (1996), Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000), Hellier et al. (2003), Lai and Chen (2011), Saleem, M.A et.al (2017), Parasuraman & Grewal (2000)

CONCLUSION

Tourism is closely related to air transport, they are often seen as part of the tourism system, which is responsible for taking tourists to various destinations around the globe. The airline sector, characterized by aggressive competition in their business. Competition in the service sector is more concerned than ever, and many airlines are struggling to survive with great challenges, including increased competition and service design. Many changes in the airline business environment lead to finding solutions to improve business. To provide solutions, this study has identified through a literature review that service quality and perceived value of customers may be the important factors in customer satisfaction. The conceptual model developed by this study proposes that service quality may have a significant relationship on customer satisfaction, and influence buyback intentions. The perceived value may have a mediating relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction towards buyback intentions.

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