
The mediating role of customers' emotional attachment in enhancing service excellence and repurchase intentions of low-cost carrier airlines

Pawan Kumar Chand

Department of Management Studies,
Sardar Patel University,
Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, 175001, India
Email: pawanchand@spumandi.ac.in

Urvashi Tandon, Deepika Jhamb* and
Amit Mittal

Chitkara Business School,
Chitkara University,
Punjab, India
Email: urvashi.tandon@chitkara.edu.in
Email: deepika.jhamb@chitkara.edu.in
Email: amit.mittal@chitkara.edu.in
*Corresponding author

Abstract: The low-cost carriers represent the fastest growing segment of the global airlines' industry and are passing through the challenges of sustainability and customer retention. This study highlights and seeks a resolution of the contradiction of low-cost and service excellence. The present research has significantly established an interrelationship among service quality, emotional attachment, and repurchase intentions to understand the Indian air passengers' flying behaviour. The quantitative approach has been followed using a systematic sampling technique. 714 passengers using the low-cost carriers (LCC) were surveyed following questionnaire method. The mediation effect of emotional attachment between service quality and repurchase intentions of customers was tested using the structural equation modelling approach. The findings confirm the partial mediation effect of emotional attachment which will be beneficial for the airlines to comprehend their customers' behaviour towards service quality. These results can also be correlated to other service sectors such as tourism, healthcare, and hospitality.

Keywords: airlines; low-cost carriers; service quality; emotional attachment; repurchase intentions.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Chand, P.K., Tandon, U., Jhamb, D. and Mittal, A. (2024) 'The mediating role of customers' emotional attachment in enhancing service excellence and repurchase intentions of low-cost carrier airlines', *Int. J. Business Excellence*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp.66–84.

Biographical notes: Pawan Kumar Chand is an Associate Professor at the Department of Management Studies, Sardar Patel University, India. He holds a Doctorate in Organisation Behaviour from NIT-Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh.

He loves to teach human resource management, organisation behaviour and research methodology subjects. He is a PhD supervisor to research scholars in Chitkara Business School, Chitkara University, Punjab. He has versatile administration and teaching experience and sound devotion towards research oriented activities and social work.

Urvashi Tandon is an Associate Professor Chitkara University, Punjab (India). She is currently doing research on e-commerce, online shopping and supply chain practices of online retailers. Her research has been published in several journals like *Electronic Markets*, *Service Science*, *Information Development*, *Nankai Business Review International*, *Information Systems and e-Business Management*, *International Journal of e-Business*.

Deepika Jhamb is an Associate Professor at Doctoral Research Centre – Chitkara Business School, Chitkara University, Punjab, India. She holds her PhD from Thapar University, Punjab, India with specialisation in the field of retailing. She received her Post-Doctoral Fellowship from Indian Council of Social Science Research, Delhi and served as a co-investigator of UGC major research project. She has several research papers published in SSCI, Scopus and ABDC list of journals.

Amit Mittal is a Professor and Dean (Doctoral Research Centre) at Chitkara University, Punjab, India. He has over two decades of domestic and international experience in academic leadership, teaching, research, consulting and training. He launched the Doctoral Research Centre at Chitkara Business School in 2014 after a three year stint in Nairobi, Kenya. His areas of research and consulting expertise are graduate marketing innovation, leadership, emerging market studies, business research methods, higher education curriculum development and new institution building. Over ten research scholars have been awarded PhD under his mentorship. He has published in globally reputable journals such as *European Business Review* (Emerald); *Electronic Markets* (Springer); *Business Environment and Strategy* (Wiley); *Benchmarking* (Emerald); *Journal of Public Affairs* (Wiley) etc. He regularly reviews for *Benchmarking* (Emerald), *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (Wiley), *Public Health* (Elsevier) and various other reputable journals.

1 Introduction

Service organisations are going through the tough phase because of the increasing consumers' expectations (Saranga and Nagpal, 2016; Santosh and Kumar, 2019). The airline industry is one of the emerging service sectors which is struggling in gaining customer loyalty (Gupta, 2018; Tahanisaz, 2020). As per the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency, India is the third-largest and fastest-growing domestic aviation market in the world. In India, domestic passenger traffic stood at 274.50 million in the financial year 2020, growing at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.91% in comparison to the financial year 2016 (IBEF, 2020). According to the Director General of Civil Aviation (2019), Indigo has the largest domestic market share of 42.5% followed by SpiceJet (13.3%) and Air India (12.2%). Robust demand, increased tourist flow, government support, increasing investment, and growing consumers' spending power are the factors that create excitement about the low-cost Indian airline industry (Kuo et al., 2016; Agariya and Tikoria, 2017; Tahanisaz, 2020).

Contrary to this, intensive price competition, low fare charges, high operational costs, volatility in fuel prices, and tight profit margins are the major factors to challenge the low-cost airline giants (Singh, 2016; Kuo et al., 2016; Mahtani and Garg, 2018; Tran, 2019). Kingfisher Airlines is one of the players who has shut down its operations in 2012 because of the persistent losses even after gaining a lot of popularity and became a renowned brand among customers (Sharma and Gupta, 2019). In 2017–2019, Air Costa, Air Carnival, and Jet Airways had also discontinued their operations because of their inability to pay their liabilities (Shome and Verma, 2020). Most of the airlines are suffering from a high level of competition and financial pressure because of rising fuel prices and foreign exchange rates (Saranga and Nagpal, 2016; Debnath et al., 2020). The low-cost airlines are always in the contradiction with service excellence because they are not able to provide costly and personalised services due to alleging low airfare from their customers (David, 2013; Yadav and Dhingra, 2018). The only way to stay ahead in such a competitive environment is by providing the best quality services and by connecting consumers emotionally with the brand.

Service quality defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988) became classic and has been widely used in various domains. They defined service quality as “a global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service, and explicated it as involving evaluations of the outcome (i.e., what the customer receives from service) and process of service act (i.e., how service is delivered)”. Measuring service quality indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the service provider, so that appropriate measures can be taken to address the issues if any. Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed a model to measure service quality (SERVQUAL) using five dimensions namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. If the perceived service quality exceeds the consumers’ expectations then it might lead to the consumers’ repurchase intentions. Consumer experiences also help in enhancing the repurchase intentions towards a brand (Hassan et al., 2019; Tandon, 2021). Repurchase intentions are defined as “the customer’s decision to engage in future activity with a service provider and what form this activity will take” [Hume et al., (2007), p.137]. The emotional attachment with the brand further strengthens the consumers’ intentions to repurchase the product/services of that brand (Kamboj et al., 2017; Rajagopal, 2020; Nobar et al., 2020). So, it becomes imperative to study the role of emotional attachment in building the repurchase intentions other than providing excellent services to the customers. The authors also claim that the customer’s emotional attachment plays a mediating role between service quality and customer’s repurchase intentions. Thomson et al. (2005) defined customer emotional brand attachment as “an emotion-laden bond between a person and a brand characterized by deep feelings of connection, affection, and passion”. Consumer behaviour theorists have the premise that emotional brand attachment is the primary foundation of the loyal brand repurchasing (Grisaffe and Nguyen, 2011; Dwivedi et al., 2019). As the airline industry is highly perishable, intangible, and heterogeneous, so it becomes imperative to ascertain the impact of perceived service quality on customers’ repurchase intentions by looking at the mediating effect of the customer’s emotional attachment with low-cost carrier airlines in India.

Yadav and Dhingra (2018) pointed out that the airline industry is a research-oriented and global topic, but there is still no large body of literature on pure low-cost carrier airlines. Most research in the airline industry is focused on the growth, operational efficiency, financial performance, drivers and barriers (Saranga and Nagpal, 2016; Santosh and Kumar, 2019; Shome and Verma, 2020). Very few studies have attempted to

measure the service quality of low-cost carrier airlines (George et al., 2013; Singh, 2016; Jahmani, 2017; Gupta, 2018) and that is limited to customer satisfaction and loyalty only (Paek and Lee, 2018; Khudhair et al., 2019; Tahanisaz, 2020). The literature available on airline industry has claimed that the service quality has emerged as a game-changer and a significant pivot factor which effects airline choice. So it becomes imperative to study the impact of perceived service quality on customers' repurchase intentions with the mediating effect of the customer emotional attachment in the Indian low-cost carrier airlines which has not been addressed to date and becomes the motivation behind this study. The study provides theoretical and practical contributions by adding new insight to the existing literature and helps the marketers of the airline industry to strategise and improve their services based on the feedback received from the consumers which will help them in retaining customers for long and achieving service excellence (Gunasekaran, 2001; Agariya and Tikoria, 2017).

The study has integrated four theories to conceptualise the work: the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1985), Expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), Customer relationship marketing theory (Grönroos, 1995), and Theory of self-regulation (Bagozzi, 1992). The sequence of the paper is as follows: Section 2 covers theoretical framework explaining above mentioned theories. Section 3 includes hypotheses development followed by research methods in Section 4. Section 5 includes data analysis and findings. Section 6 incorporates discussions, conclusions, and implications. The last section focuses on limitations and future scope of research.

2 Theoretical framework

Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed the *SERVQUAL model*, also recognised as the *RATER model* or *gaps model*. The model is readily used in service marketing to measure the service quality of the product by assessing the customer perception, and expectations under the five sub-constructs such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. 'Reliability' shows the promising characteristics of the firm in delivering accurate and timely services to their customers. 'Assurance' is the knowledge of the customer about the services which enhances the trust and ameliorates the confidence of customers towards the product. 'Tangibles' express the physical features of the product and employees' appearance. 'Empathy' indicates the caring nature of the organisation in offering services to each individual customer. 'Responsiveness' shows the promptness of the firm to help the customer in the services. The customer or the passenger likes to measure his satisfaction level which develops the trust in service quality. The customer exchanges his/her word-of-mouth with others and shares their experiences about the service quality of the product and the performances that further leads to recurrent travelling from a particular airline.

Expectation disconfirmation theory by Oliver (1980) states that the customer's interest towards the repurchase of product/service relies on the quality and the post-purchase experiences. Disconfirmation is described under three forms. First, when performance or service quality exceeds customer expectation is called positive disconfirmation. The second form is confirmation when the service meets customer expectations. The third form is called the negative disconfirmation that shows the service performance of the product used is below the customer expectation (Collier and Bienstock, 2006). *Customer relationship marketing theory* (Grönroos, 1995) discusses

the customer relationship as the marketing approach, which further emphasised the long-term relationship between the customer and company. This can be established only when the customers' expectations are valued. Bagozzi (1992) discussed the *Theory of self-regulation* (TSR) which is drawn from the theory of planned behaviour of Ajzen (1992). The TSR theory has three phases: 'appraisal process' – in such phase customer likes to study the service quality offered, 'the emotional reaction' – highlights that an essential characteristic of a brands' success is its level of emotional attachment with the consumer, and 'coping response' – this phase shares the post-purchase experiences thereby generating the word-of-mouth (Manohar et al., 2019; Jhamb et al., 2020a).

3 Hypotheses development

Organisations honouring the values of the customer by delivering them the quality services can build long-term relationships. This in-turn develops the interest of customers in repurchase intention towards the organisations' products and improves customer satisfaction (Ali et al., 2014; Moslehi and Haeri, 2016; Park and Ha, 2016; González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Rajagopal, 2020; Rahman, 2020). In the service sector, it is imperative to provide customers with quality in services as it influences the customers' perceived expectations, which in-turn promote the trademark of the organisation and support the repurchase intention (Ojha, 2019; Bellizzi et al., 2020). Price promotion as reducing the price of the product and discount schemes are effective strategies in the service sector to draw the attention of the customers for repurchase intention and sales of the product in the bulk quantity. Further, customer also has the general attitude to compare the quality and prices of brands while buying the commodities (Rajaguru and Rajesh, 2016; Sarmah and Rahman, 2018). Deregulation has motivated the airline industry to invest in the low-cost carriers (Kim and Lee, 2011; Sehgal et al., 2017; Kisiel, 2020). The adoption of the latest technology, e-services and e-apps by the airlines assured the quality service to the customers, develops the trust, and favoured the repurchase intentions among the customers. This service excellence in air travel fosters the emotional attachment in passengers (Krämer et al., 2017; Sabbagh et al., 2017). Airlines such as Air Asia offer the premium services in their in-flight menu in serving the food and beverages to their customers which includes the hot meals, savoury snacks and gift items to the customers Liébana-Cabanillas et al. (2017). Repurchase intentions are the results of service quality, emotional attachment, future intention of customers to associate with the organisation, business achievements of the organisation and the customer satisfaction (Nikbin et al., 2011; Frooghi and Rashidi, 2019).

H1 Service quality has a significant impact on customer repurchase intention in the airlines' sector.

Customers' past experiences matter with the service excellence of the airlines referring the technical and functional operations which give the choices to the customer for the repurchase intention (Sugandini and Wendry, 2017; Agariya and Tikoria, 2017; Tandon et al., 2016). Positive word of mouth and organisational commitment influences the emotions of customers in the airline sector. The customer discusses the positive image of airlines among friends, relatives and the people in the society (Purnasari and Yuliando, 2015; Maisam and Mahsa, 2016; Tandon et al., 2016). If the customer experiences negative emotions with the airlines' then the negative word-of-mouth will travel in the

society which may result in the failure of airlines (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2014). Recovery satisfaction, trust, commitments are factors that built a good relationship between the airlines' services and emotional attachments of the customer (Shukla et al., 2016; Leninkumar, 2017). Sweis et al. (2019) emphasised that airline industry must pay keen attention on the tourist past flying history from the existing databases. This will help to understand the emotional attachment and flying habits of the customer.

H2 Service quality significantly affects the customer's emotional attachment in the airline sector.

The good brand image, emotional contagion between the air passengers and excellence in the services offered by the airlines elevate the high interest of the passenger. He/she likes to get emotionally attached to the airlines with the indelible memories and experiences (Lin and Lu, 2010; Hong and Kim, 2012; Veloutsou, 2015; Mahtani and Garg, 2020) and has a higher customer satisfaction level and a significant approach for higher repurchase intention (Jiang and Zhang, 2016). Higher customer satisfaction also develops the positive emotions in the customer, he/she shares the positive word of mouth about the airlines with the others (Al-Msallam and Alhaddad, 2016). Air travellers compare between the personal expectations and the services offered by the airlines. The passenger exhibits deep emotional attachment, trust, pride, and confidence if the maximum expectations get fulfilled by the airlines (Zeithaml et al., 2008; Hapsari et al., 2017). He/she shows more curiosity and is even ready to pay more for the services provided by the airlines (Darshini and Gomathi, 2018).

H3 Emotional attachment significantly mediates between service quality and repurchase intention in the airlines' sector.

4 Research methods

4.1 Measurements

The present study is based upon primary data. To test the proposed model, a survey instrument was designed to collect the data from the respondents. The three constructs included in the model were: perceived service quality, customers repurchase intentions and emotional brand attachment. The perceived service quality was measured using 22 items of SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988). The customers' re-purchase intention was assessed from the study of Lin and Lekhawipat (2014) using 3-item scale. Measurement items suggested by Han et al. (2020) were used to measure emotional attachment. Total 28 scale items were assessed in the survey questionnaire on the Likert scale with anchors 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'.

4.2 Procedures and participants

To ensure the face validity of the questionnaire, an experiential survey was conducted. The two criteria followed while selecting the experts were their year of experience and area of expertise (Jhamb et al., 2020b). Based on the feedback received from the experts of the airline industry and the academia, the questionnaire was improved and then used for final data collection. The data has been collected from 714 respondents of the

Delhi/NCR region. Only those respondents were chosen who had previously travelled on a flight from the last three months. The utmost attention was paid while selecting the respondents because the purpose of the study is to measure the customers' perceptions of airline service quality and considering prior experience while measuring customers' perceptions becomes important to ensure the accuracy of the data. The authors have collected the data using offline mode. The systematic probability sampling technique was used to collect the data from the respondents as every third person who was crossing the chosen area was approached to fill the questionnaire. The reason for choosing Delhi/NCR as a sample is because Delhi/NCR the best performing hospitality markets and drive strong domestic travel growth in India (Business Standard, 2019). A research conducted by Thomas Cook Ltd., a renowned Indian travelling agency has also revealed that Delhi people are bold travellers and are always keen to explore the world. The Senior Vice President of Thomas Cook Ltd. also quoted that "Delhi-NCR currently contributes a significant 15% to our overall Thomas Cook business and given the strong YoY growth and high potential, we have identified the state as a key strategic focus for our Company" (TnH Global, 2018).

4.3 Respondent's demographic profile

Out of 714 respondents surveyed, 62% were males and 38% were females. Most of the respondents were between 30–45 years of age (52%) followed by age more than 45% (31%). The majority of the respondents were post-graduates followed by graduates while the remaining 22% were undergraduates. 48% belonged to service class followed by businessmen and others. 35% were frequent travellers (took more than ten flights in three months) followed by 28% (who were moderate travellers and took 5–7 flights from the past three months).

5 Data analysis and findings

The data analysis was accomplished using a two-step analytical approach by means of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation model (SEM). SEM was favoured over other techniques as it blends many standard methods like multiple regressions and correlation into single software. Furthermore, SEM enables a comparison between the conceptual model and data. These comparisons results into fit statistics assessing the matching of the model and data (Eid et al., 2003; Lowry and Gaskin, 2014). A two-phase approach was followed to analyse the data. In the first phase, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) assessed the measurement model including reliability, validity, and fit. In the second phase, a structural equation model (SEM) estimated the structural model to test the hypotheses (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

5.1 Validating the measurement model

A CFA was conducted on all the measurement constructs to evaluate the validity and reliability of scale items. The results of CFA Factor loadings were used to assess the indicators' reliability, and 0.50 acumen was taken as a minimum threshold for the retention of measurement items (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 1, all standardised estimates were significant and above 0.50. The constructs further

demonstrated the evidence of validity (significant and high standardised loadings as well as average variance extracted > 0.50 in all occasions), composite reliability (values > 0.70 in all occasions) and discriminant validity (AVE estimate of each construct is larger than the squared correlations of this construct to any other construct (Bagozzi, 1992).

Table 1 Measurement model

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Std estimate</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Critical ratio</i>	<i>Average variance extracted</i>	<i>Composite reliability</i>
<i>Service quality</i>						
Tangibility	TAN1	0.736			0.568	0.839
Mean = 4.435	TAN2	0.800	0.052	20.294		
S.D = 0.668	TAN3	0.786	0.065	19.962		
	TAN4	0.686	0.051	17.418		
Reliability	REL1	0.632			0.559	0.863
Mean = 4.041	REL2	0.720	0.072	15.943		
S.D = 0.743	REL3	0.815	0.082	17.432		
	REL4	0.751	0.076	16.445		
	REL5	0.805	0.088	17.288		
Responsiveness	RESP1	0.746			0.547	0.828
Mean = 4.153	RESP2	0.736	0.046	18.498		
S.D = 0.740	RESP3	0.673	0.047	16.912		
	RESP4	0.799	0.048	19.941		
Empathy	EMP1	0.795			0.504	0.801
Mean = 4.243	EMP2	0.597	0.044	20.571		
S.D = 0.677	EMP3	0.694	0.065	14.36		
	EMP5	0.739	0.065	14.438		
Assurance	ASS1	0.754			0.634	0.873
Mean = 4.357	ASS2	0.915	0.055	23.691		
S.D = 0.706	ASS3	0.798	0.058	21.986		
	ASS4	0.702	0.057	17.498		
<i>Emotional attachment</i>	EMA1	0.794			0.678	0.873
Mean = 4.405	EMA2	0.823	0.04	22.602		
S.D = 0.623	EMA3	0.853	0.037	22.488		
<i>Repurchase intention</i>	REP1	0.754			0.529	0.766
Mean = 4.392	REP2	0.851	0.098	13.369		
S.D = 0.631	REP3	0.543	0.114	11.013		

Notes: CMIN/df = 3.628, GFI = 0.945, AGFI = 0.928, NFI = 0.958, RFI = 0.967, IFI = 0.898, TLI = 0.931, CFI = 0.948, RMSEA = 0.076.

Table 2
Correlation matrix

	<i>Tangibility</i>	<i>Reliability</i>	<i>Responsiveness</i>	<i>Assurance</i>	<i>Empathy</i>	<i>Repurchase intention</i>	<i>Emotional attachment</i>
<i>Tangibility</i>	0.753						
<i>Reliability</i>	.632**	0.747					
<i>Responsiveness</i>	.528**	.346**	0.739				
<i>Assurance</i>	.489**	.478**	.511**	0.796			
<i>Empathy</i>	.480**	.564**	.386**	.507**	0.709		
<i>Repurchase intention</i>	.445**	.312**	.483**	.418**	.495**	0.727	
<i>Emotional attachment</i>	.414**	.349**	.457**	.408**	.419**	.454**	0.823

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Diagonal values in bold represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) while off-diagonal values represent the raw inter-construct correlations.

5.2 Structural model and hypotheses testing

This section explains structural model and hypotheses testing. Table 3 also indicates the structural model reporting the cause and effect between constructs. The results strongly support H1, H2, and partially lend support to H3. From the results, it can be concluded that the hypothesised structural model achieved an acceptable model fit. Thereafter, the effectiveness of direct, indirect, and total effect for each path was assessed considering standardised path coefficients (β). Figure 1 shows the structural model and direct β values, and Table 3 concludes the structural model's results by reporting direct β , indirect β , total β , C.R., and significance level for the proposed claims. Overall, analysis has provided support for the acceptance of two proposed claims, and partial support for one proposed claim. The results summarised indicate that tangibility, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance are the predictors of service quality. Of all these, reliability had the highest loadings (std. loadings = 0.814) followed by responsiveness (std. loadings = 0.754) and tangibility (0.733). The next two predictors namely assurance and empathy had almost similar loadings (std. loadings = 0.632 and 0.616 respectively). Service quality had a significant direct relationship with repurchase intention (Std. loadings = 0.646) thereby confirming H1. Service quality also had a strong association with emotional attachment (std. loadings = 0.59). This confirms H2 which states that service quality significantly affects the customer's emotional attachment in the airlines.

Table 3 Structural model and path coefficients

			Path coefficient (β)	Std. error	Critical ratio	P
Empathy	←	Service quality	0.616			0.000***
Assurance	←	Service quality	0.632	0.086	13.552	0.000***
Responsiveness	←	Service quality	0.754	0.099	14.701	0.000***
Reliability	←	Service quality	0.814	0.111	14.104	0.000***
Tangibility	←	Service quality	0.733	0.086	14.849	0.000***
Repurchase intention	←	Service quality	0.646	0.08	13.344	0.000***
Emotional attachment	←	Service quality	0.590	0.075	13.468	0.000***

Notes: CMIN/df = 2.429, GFI = 0.967, AGFI = 0.975, NFI = 0.959, RFI = 0.943, IFI = 0.902, TLI = 0.921, CFI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.065.
0.000*** indicates significant at $p < 0.001$.

5.3 Mediation effect

Hypothesis 3 assumed that emotional attachment mediates the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention in the context of airlines (SQ → EM → RI). Table 4 indicates the mediating impact of emotional attachment. The parameter estimates of the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention were reduced but remained significant thereby indicating partial mediation (std. loading = 0.57, $p > 0.001$). To confirm the mediation, the Sobel test was conducted (MacKinnon et al., 2002). The value of the Sobel test statistic was 3.894 and was significant at $p < 0.001$. These results imply that emotional attachment depicts a partial mediating effect on the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention.

Table 4 Path analysis after applying mediation

			<i>Std. estimates</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>P</i>
Emotional attachment	←	Service quality	0.593	0.053	13.867	0.000***
Repurchase intention	←	Service quality	0.570	0.064	11.419	0.000***
Repurchase intention	←	Emotional attachment	0.114	0.041	2.856	0.004**

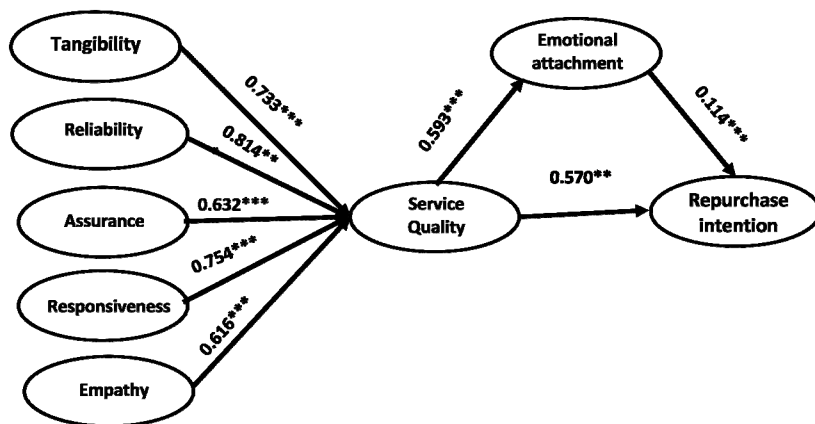
Notes: Goodness of fit statistics CMIN/df = 1.718, GFI = 0.980, AGFI = 0.948, NFI = 0.986, RFI = 0.979, IFI = 0.888, TLI = 0.991, CFI = 0.994, RMSEA = 0.037.

***Significant at 0.001 probability level.

**Significant at 0.01 probability level.

Table 5 Results of hypotheses framed

	<i>Hypotheses framed</i>	<i>Result</i>
H1	Service quality has a significant impact on customer repurchase intention in the airline sector.	Supported
H2	Service quality significantly affects the customer's emotional attachment in the airline sector.	Supported
H3	Emotional attachment mediated the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention in the airline sector	Partially supported

Figure 1 Research model

6 Discussions

This study explores and validates the dimensions of service quality, followed by their impact on repurchase intentions. The study further analysed the relationship between service quality and emotional attachment and validated emotional attachment as a mediator between service quality and repurchase intentions.

Service quality is an essential determining factor leading to the success of an airline. As low-cost and economical air carrier flights have increased in recent years, it becomes

essential to analyse the factors of air travel service quality. It is anticipated that the quality of the physical environment in low-cost airlines in the form of services provided increases the frequency of travel. Passengers wish to see empathetic and responsible staff, tangibles such as comfortable seats, good quality ACs while deciding to travel frequently with LCC airlines. These findings correlate with previous research studies (Namukasa, 2013; El Haddad, 2019). In response to understand the impact of service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction and increased frequency of travel, the study predicted vital dimensions of airline service quality. This validates the expectation disconfirmation theory by Oliver (1980) indicating a significant role of service quality in meeting the passenger's expectations.

The measurement and structural model confirmed tangibility, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance as predictors of airline service quality. This finding is also in synchronisation with the previous research studies (Namukasa, 2013; El Haddad, 2019). The results indicated that reliability, responsibility, and tangibility had the highest factor loadings thereby indicating their significance in influencing the passengers of low-cost airlines. This is in synchronisation with the findings of Jiang (2013) and El Haddad (2019). Empathy and assurance also emerged as significant predictors of service quality for LCCs as passengers' expect and value security and sympathetic attitude of staff which is also supported by the previous studies of Pakdil and Aydin (2007) and El Haddad (2019). This reinforces the credibility of the SERVQUAL model for LCC also.

Further, it was also hypothesised in the current study that service quality has a direct and considerable positive relationship with emotional attachment. Service quality is directly associated with emotional attachment thereby validating the theory of self-regulation. This finding is consistent with the previously reported research studies by Urban (2010) and Tarkang et al. (2020). This finding makes us comprehend that the websites of airlines should elicit positive emotions so that travellers may become emotionally attached to the airlines and should opt for frequent travels. Various promotional offers also lead to an increase in the emotional attachment between airlines and travellers.

The uniqueness of the study lies in the corroborating emotional attachment as a mediator between service quality and repurchase intentions. This reflects that emotional attachment explains a large proportion of the model's variance. Therefore, airlines need to formulate strategies focusing on emotional attachment to enhance service quality which in turn, can lead to repurchase intentions. The display of emotion by the employees of airlines further strengthens the trust in the efficiency of services offered by them.

7 Implications of the study

7.1 Theoretical implications

The study provides valuable theoretical implications to the academicians. After the post-liberalisation era, investors are investing in the LCC airlines' service and receiving ample support from the Indian government. But it is to mention that the aviation industry is facing challenges for its sustainability such as competition, inflation in fuel prices, cost cutting, service quality, and customer retention. There is a dire need to address such emerging issues. This research study found successful in demystifying the association

among service quality, emotional attachment, and customer repurchase intention with the valid cause and effect and provides implications for the investors and marketers.

The study has established a significant association among service quality, emotional attachment, and customer repurchase intention in the low-cost carrier airline sector in India. Such findings can also be correlated with the other service sectors such as tourism, healthcare, and hospitality in India where the work environment includes frequent customer dealings. Hence, the study will be helpful in understanding the Indian service sector.

Although the dimensions of service quality have been validated extensively but limited studies have examined the mediating effect of emotional maturity. The study, therefore, focuses on the implications of comprehending the desires and attitude of the air passengers as a foundation for developing long-term relationships. These constructs may be validated further in diverse cultures for generalisability of findings and an in-depth understanding.

7.2 Practical implications

The findings from this research provide significant implications to LCC. LCCs need to focus on service quality, emotional attachment, and customers' repurchase intentions in order to expand their operations in India. The findings of the study will be helpful for the national and international investors investing in Indian service sector as they get acquainted with the Indian environment and can better understand the customer interest. As LCC airlines sector in India is facing the challenge of cost reduction; therefore, it becomes imperative for airlines to manage service quality and customer retention. The study with its findings will be helpful to manage the customers' repurchase intention as the various causes and effects with the valid theoretical supports are discussed in the research study.

By understanding the dimensions of service quality, LCCs in India can gain insight into their strengths which will help them to overcome their weaknesses. Dimensions that emerged significantly through this study will help the LCCs to focus in the right direction leading to an improvement in their productivity. The conceptual model that emerged from the study will also provide information to the management to decide which service quality dimension needs to be given top priority while designing a competitive strategy. As each LCC needs to spend time in solving customer's inquiries, the skill set, knowledge level, and customer handling aspects of the airline staff should align with service quality standards (Namukasa, 2013; El Haddad, 2019). The airlines should ensure that the service staff needs to be well-informed about the passengers' day-to-day problems and issues so that they can be emotionally attached (Urban, 2010; Tarkang et al., 2020). This emotional attachment will make passengers travel more frequently and prefer LCC over the others.

8 Limitations and future scopes of the study

While contributing to the existing marketing theories and literature, the study has few limitations which were recognised by researchers as future research directions. The study has considered only the low-cost carriers and better results can further be generalised if the other segment of the class in society were also included in the study for the

heterogeneity. The quantitative approach has been followed. For future studies; a mix method approach can be followed. The cross-sectional design was used as it was the need of the hour but as time changes; there may be other factors besides emotional attachment which influence the repurchase intentions of the customers such as family income and flying passion, etc. Such factors can also be considered in the future scope of the research study for deeper understanding of service quality and customers repurchase intentions. Future studies could also analyse other dependent variables such as customer satisfaction and loyalty. Another fact is that the study considered online Indian passengers travelling through LCC. To obtain more indicative results about the differences between respondents from different developing countries or to compare between developing and developed countries, future research might conduct a comparative study by taking an equal sample size of both foreign and domestic (i.e., Indian) tourists to investigate their perceptions of service quality which may result in formulating more effective marketing and branding strategies. This research validated only five dimensions of service quality vis-à-vis service excellence in LCC. Few vital indicators such as safety concerns and food quality were not measured in the conceptual framework. The study included only passengers travelling through LCC but the opinion of other stakeholders (flight crew members) may provide valuable insights which may be considered for future studies. Finally, systematic literature reviews, and bibliometric analysis may further conclude the knowledge about service quality in LCC.

References

- Agariya, A.K. and Tikoria, J. (2017) 'CRM scale development for enhancing business excellence in the Indian airline sector', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp.537–557.
- Ajzen, I. (1991) 'The theory of planned behavior', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp.179–211.
- Ali, S.S., Kaur, R., Pande, M.J. and Ahmad, F. (2014) 'Service quality gap approach: a case of Indian customer's satisfaction of private banks', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp.429–453.
- Al-Msallam, S. and Alhaddad, A. (2016) 'Customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hotel industry: the mediating role of relationship marketing (PLS approach)', *Journal of Research in Business and Management*, Vol. 4, No. 5, pp.32–42.
- Bagozzi, R. (1992) 'The self-regulation of attitudes, intentions, and behavior', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, pp.178–204.
- Bellizzi, M.G., Eboli, L. and Mazzulla, G. (2020) 'An online survey for the quality assessment of airlines' services' *Research in Transportation Business & Management*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp.1–10.
- Business Standard (2019) *Delhi and Mumbai among Best Performing Hospitality Markets in the Region, Strong Domestic Travel Growth to Drive Demand in India: Colliers International India* [online] https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/delhi-and-mumbai-among-best-performing-hospitality-markets-in-the-region-strong-domestic-travel-growth-to-drive-demand-in-india-colliers-international-india-119030600657_1.html (accessed 20 January 2020).
- Cambra-Fierro, J., Melero-Polo, I. and Vázquez-Carrasco, R. (2014) 'The role of frontline employees in customer engagement', *Revista Española de Investigación de Marketing ESIC*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp.67–77.
- Collier, J.E. and Bienstock, C.C. (2006) 'How do customers judge quality in an e-tailer?', *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1, p.35.

- Darshini, J.D. and Gomathi, S. (2018) 'A study on emotional intelligence well-being and emotional baggage perspective', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp.425–444.
- David, M.A.B. (2013) 'Service quality and customer satisfaction in the airline industry: a comparison between legacy airlines and low-cost airlines', *American Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p.6777.
- Debnath, P., Shantharam, S.A., Dwarampudi, A. R. and Vidya, D.S. (2020) 'A study on the causes of financial crisis in the indian aviation industry with special reference to Kingfisher Airlines', *Journal of Management (JOM)*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp.28–41.
- Director General of Civil Aviation (2019) *SpiceJet Gets Its Highest Domestic Market Share in Close to 5 years* [online] <https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/spicejet-gets-its-highest-domestic-market-share-in-close-to-5-years/1650448/> (accessed 27 February 2020).
- Dwivedi, A., Johnson, L., Wilkie, D. and de Araujo Gil, L. (2019) 'Consumer emotional brand attachment with social media brands and social media brand equity', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 53, No. 6, pp.1176–1204.
- Eid, M., Langeheine, R. and Diener, E. (2003) 'Comparing typological structures across cultures by multigroup latent class analysis: a primer', *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp.195–210.
- El Haddad, R. (2019) 'Exploring service quality of low cost airlines', *Services Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp.301–315.
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981) 'Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error', *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.39–50.
- Frooghi, R. and Rashidi, Z. (2019) 'Does value co-creation impacts customer loyalty and repurchase intention', *IBT Journal of Business Studies (JBS)*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p.15.
- George, B.P., Henthorne, T.L. and Panko, T.R. (2013) 'ASQual: measuring tourist perceived service quality in an airport setting', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 6, No. 5, pp.526–536.
- González-Mansilla, Ó., Berenguer-Contrí, G. and Serra-Cantallops, A. (2019) 'The impact of value co-creation on hotel brand equity and customer satisfaction', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp.51–65.
- Grisaffe, D.B., and Nguyen, H.P. (2011) 'Antecedents of emotional attachment to brands', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 64, No. 10, pp.1052–1059.
- Grönroos, C. (1995) 'Relationship marketing: the strategy continuum', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp.252–254.
- Gunasekaran, A. (2001) 'Benchmarking tools and practices for twenty-first century competitiveness', *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p.1.
- Gupta, H. (2018) 'Evaluating service quality of airline industry using hybrid best worst method and VIKOR', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp.35–47.
- Han, H., Al-Ansi, A., Chi, X., Back, H. and Lee, K.S. (2020) 'Impact of environmental CSR, service quality, emotional attachment, and price perception on word-of-mouth for full-service airlines', *Sustainability*, Vol. 12, No. 10, pp.39–74.
- Hapsari, R., Clemes, M.D. and Dean, D. (2017) 'The impact of service quality, customer engagement and selected marketing constructs on airline passenger loyalty', *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.21–40.
- Hassan, H., Rahman, M.S. and Sade, A.B. (2019) 'Why do hypermarkets extend their brands to a growing number of products?', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp.290–305.
- Hong, P. and Kim, S.C. (2012) 'Business network excellence for competitive advantage: case of Korean firms', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 5, No. 5, pp.448–462.
- Hume, M., Mort, G.S. and Winzar, H. (2007) 'Exploring repurchase intention in a performing arts context: who comes? And why do they come back?', *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp.135–148.

- IBEF (2020) *Indian Aviation Industry Report* [online] <https://www.ibef.org/industry/indian-aviation.aspx> (accessed 20 May 2020).
- Jahmani, A. (2017) 'The effect of Royal Jordanian Airline service quality on passengers' satisfaction', *International Journal of Business and Society*, Vol. 18, No. S3, pp.519–530.
- Jhamb, D., Aggarwal, A., Mittal, A. and Paul, J. (2020a) 'Experience and attitude towards luxury brands consumption in an emerging market', *European Business Review*, ahead-of-print [online] <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-09-2019-0218>.
- Jhamb, D., Mittal, A. and Sharma, P. (2020b) 'The behavioural consequences of perceived service quality: a study of the Indian telecommunication industry', *Business: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp.360–372.
- Jiang, H. (2013) 'Service quality of low-cost long-haul airlines – the case of Jetstar Airways and AirAsia X', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp.20–24.
- Jiang, H. and Zhang, Y. (2016) 'An investigation of service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty in China's airline market', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 57, No. 1, pp.80–88.
- Kamboj, S., Yadav, M. and Rahman, Z. (2017) 'Bharat to India: a case of connecting IFFCO brand with generation Y', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.415–427.
- Khudhair, A., Killerby, M.E., Mulla, M.A.I., Elkheir, K.A., Ternanni, W., Bandar, Z., Weber, S., Khoury, M., Donnelly, G. and Khalafalla, A.I. (2019) 'Risk factors for MERS-CoV seropositivity among animal market and slaughterhouse workers, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 2014–2017', *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 25, No. 5, pp.927–935.
- Kim, Y.K. and Lee, H.R. (2011) 'Customer satisfaction using low cost carriers', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp.235–243.
- Kisiel, T. (2020) 'Resilience of passenger boarding strategies to priority fares offered by airlines', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 87, p.101853.
- Krämer, A., Tachilzik, T. and Bongaerts, R. (2017) 'Technology and disruption: how the new customer relationship influences the corporate strategy', *Phantom ex machina*, pp.53–70, Springer, Cham.
- Kuo, T.C., Kremer, G.E.O., Phuong, N.T. and Hsu, C. W. (2016) 'Motivations and barriers for corporate social responsibility reporting: evidence from the airline industry', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 57, No. 7, pp.184–195.
- Leninkumar, V. (2017) 'The relationship between customer satisfaction and customer trust on customer loyalty', *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp.450–465.
- Liébana-Cabanillas, F., Alonso-Dos-Santos, M., Soto-Fuentes, Y. and Valderrama-Palma, V.A. (2017) 'Unobserved heterogeneity and the importance of customer loyalty in mobile banking', *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, Vol. 29, No. 9, pp.1015–1032.
- Lin, C. and Lekhawipat, W. (2014) 'Factors affecting online repurchase intention', *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, Vol. 114, No. 4, pp.597–611.
- Lin, L.Y. and Lu, C.Y. (2010) 'The influence of corporate image, relationship marketing, and trust on purchase intention: the moderating effects of word-of-mouth', *Tourism Review*, Vol. 65, No. 3, pp.16–34.
- Lowry, P.B. and Gaskin, J. (2014) 'Partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) for building and testing behavioral causal theory: when to choose it and how to use it', *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp.123–146.
- MacKinnon, D.P., Lockwood, C.M., Hoffman, J.M., West, S.G. and Sheets, V. (2002) 'A comparison of methods to test mediation and other intervening variable effects', *Psychological Methods*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p.83.
- Mahtani, U.S. and Garg, C. P. (2020) 'An analysis of factors affecting financial distress of airline companies: case of India', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 20, No.1, pp.130–148.

- Mahtani, U.S. and Garg, C.P. (2018) 'An analysis of key factors of financial distress in airline companies in India using fuzzy AHP framework', *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, Vol. 117, No. 11, pp.87–102.
- Maisam, S. and Mahsa, R.D. (2016) 'Positive word of mouth marketing: explaining the roles of value congruity and brand love', *Journal of Competitiveness*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp.19–37.
- Manohar, S., Mittal, A. and Marwah, S. (2019) 'Service innovation, corporate reputation and word-of-mouth in the banking sector – a test on multigroup-moderated mediation effect', *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp.406–429.
- Moslehi, H. and Haeri, F.A. (2016) 'Effects of promotion on perceived quality and repurchase intention', *International Journal of Scientific Management and Development*, Vol. 4, No. 12, pp.457–461.
- Namukasa, J. (2013) 'The influence of airline service quality on passenger satisfaction and loyalty', *The TQM Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 5, pp.520–532.
- Nikbin, D., Armesh, H., Heydari, A. and Jalalkamali, M. (2011) 'The effects of perceived justice in service recovery on firm reputation and repurchase intention in airline industry', *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 5, No. 23, pp.9814–9822.
- Nobar, H.B.K., Kalejahi, H.K. and Rostamzadeh, R. (2020) 'Impact of social media marketing activities on brand equity and brand commitment in the leather industry', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp.191–204.
- Ojha, S.C. (2019) 'Technology and brand selection: the mediating effect of cognition in Indian retail', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp.21–41.
- Oliver, R.L. (1980) 'A cognitive model of the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions', *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp.460–469.
- Paek, J. and Lee, C.W. (2018) 'The effect of education and training on service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty in airline industry', *Management Review: An International Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp.49–64.
- Pakdil, F. and Aydin, O. (2007) 'Expectations and perceptions in airline services: an analysis using weighted SERVQUAL scores', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.229–237.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1985) 'A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp.41–50.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1988) 'Servqual: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perception', *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64, No. 1, p.12.
- Park, J. and Ha, S. (2016) 'Co-creation of service recovery: utilitarian and hedonic value and post-recovery responses' *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp.310–316.
- Purnasari, H. and Yuliando, H. (2015) 'How relationship quality on customer commitment influences positive e-WOM', *Agriculture and Agricultural Science Procedia*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp.149–153.
- Rahman, M. (2020) 'Dynamic marketing productivity and firm intangible value: insights from airlines industry', *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp.1–14.
- Rajagopal (2020) 'Impact of referrals on buying decisions and cognitive behaviour among aging consumers', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp.118–138.
- Rajaguru, R. and Rajesh, G. (2016) 'Value for money and service quality in customer satisfaction', *The Social Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 19, pp.4613–4616.
- Sabbagh, O., Ab Rahman, M.N., Ismail, W.R. and Wan Hussain, W.M.H. (2017) 'The moderation influence of warranty on customer satisfaction's antecedents: an empirical evidence from automotive dealerships', *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 37, Nos. 5–6, pp.381–407.
- Santosh, B. and Kumar, S.V. (2019) 'Travellers' perception towards airline industry in India', *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, Vol. 10, No. 6, pp.1269–1280.

- Saranga, H. and Nagpal, R. (2016) 'Drivers of operational efficiency and its impact on market performance in the Indian Airline industry', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 53, No. 3, pp.165–176.
- Sarmah, B. and Rahman, Z. (2018) 'Antecedents of co-creation intention and their role in developing technology-based new services via customer involvement: a conceptual analysis', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp.239–255.
- Sehgal, R., Dubey, A.M. and Tiwari, N. (2017) 'Determinants for success of public-private partnership in India: a conceptual model' *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.494–520.
- Sharma, G. and Gupta, C. (2019) *A Review on Kingfisher Airline 'Prosperity Converted into Bankruptcy'*, SSRN 3396995.
- Shome, S. and Verma, S. (2020) 'Financial distress in indian aviation industry: investigation using bankruptcy prediction models', *Eurasian Journal of Business and Economics*, Vol. 13, No. 25, pp.91–109.
- Shukla, P., Banerjee, M. and Singh, J. (2016) 'Customer commitment to luxury brands: Antecedents and consequences', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 69, No. 1, pp.323–331.
- Singh, A.K. (2016) 'Competitive service quality benchmarking in airline industry using AHP', *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp.768–791.
- Sugandini, D. and Wendry, B. (2017) 'Influence of quality relationship and satisfaction on loyalty: study on supplier in Indonesia', *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp.46–51.
- Sweis, R.J., Elhawa, N.A. and Sweis, N.J. (2019) 'Total quality management practices and their impact on performance: case study of Royal Jordanian Airlines', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.245–263.
- Tahanisaz, S. (2020) 'Evaluation of passenger satisfaction with service quality: a consecutive method applied to the airline industry', *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 83, No. 1, p.101764.
- Tandon, U. (2021) 'Predictors of online shopping in India: an empirical investigation', *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.65–79.
- Tandon, U., Kiran, R. and Sah, A.N. (2016) 'Customer satisfaction as mediator between website service quality and repurchase intention: an emerging economy case', *Service Science*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp.106–120.
- Tarkang, M.E., Alola, U.V. and Nange, R.Y. (2020) 'Investigating the factors that trigger airline industry purchase intention', *Current Psychology* [online] <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-00815>.
- Thomson, M., MacInnis, D.J. and Park, C.W. (2005) 'The ties that bind: measuring the strength of consumers emotional attachments to brands', *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.77–91.
- TnH Global (2018) *Thomas Cook Witnesses a Strong 23% Growth from Delhi-NCR Region* [online] <http://www.tnhglobal.com/thomas-cook-witnesses-a-strong-23-growth-from-delhi-ncr-region/> (accessed 20 January 2020).
- Tran, Y. (2019) *Challenges the Airline Industry Faces at Present*, Doctoral dissertation.
- Urban, W. (2010) 'Customers' experiences as a factor affecting perceived service quality', *Economics and Management*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.820–826.
- Veloutsou, C. (2015) 'Brand evaluation, satisfaction and trust as predictors of brand loyalty: the mediator-moderator effect of brand relationships' *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 32, No. 6, pp.405–421.
- Yadav, M. and Dhingra, T. (2018) 'Recent developments in 'low cost carrier' research: a review', *International Journal of Business Excellence*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp.427–453.
- Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M.J. and Gremler, D.D. (1996) *Services Marketing*, McGraw Hill, New York, USA.

Appendix

Scale items

<i>Scale item</i>	<i>Item code</i>
The appearance, attitude and uniform of employees	TAN1
In flight modern and clean facilities	TAN2
Variety and quality of in-flight meals	TAN3
Hassle free check – in and boarding	TAN4
Meet special needs of customers	REL1
Meet time commitments	REL2
Keep error records	REL3
Efficient check in progress	REL4
Transfer service and efficiency at departure airport	REL5
Prompt attention to passenger specific needs	RESP1
Capable to report to emergency situations	RESP2
Keep customers informed on-line event occurs	RESP3
Capacity to respond to delayed flights	RESP4
Care and concern for passengers	EMP1
Having a sound frequent flyer	EMP2
Having a sound mileage programme	EMP3
Having travel related partners, car rental, hotel etc	EMP4
Passengers get individual attention	EMP5
Sincerity and patience in resolving problems	ASS1
Probability of flight break downs.	ASS2
Safety performance of the airline	ASS3
Employees instil confidence in passengers	ASS4
Love this LCC	EMA1
Feel emotionally secure while travelling	EMA2
Feel connected to this airline	EMA3
Will travel frequently	REP1
Am likely to continue travel through airline	REP2
Am expecting to travel through LCC in near future	REP3