

Investigating structural relationships between service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions for air passengers: Evidence from Taiwan

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationships between service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions for air passengers through a structural equation model (SEM). The main study's results are as follows. Service expectation has a significantly positive effect on perceived performance, but not on perceived value and satisfaction. Perceived performance has a significantly positive effect on perceived value, but not on satisfaction. Perceived value has a significantly positive effect on satisfaction. Both perceived value and satisfaction have significantly positive effects on behavioral intentions. In addition, perceived performance reveals the indirect effect on satisfaction moderated by perceived value. Finally, perceived value reveals a larger effect than overall satisfaction on behavioral intentions. Specific theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

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Keywords: Airline; Service quality; Perceived value; Satisfaction; Behavioral intention; Structural equation model (SEM)

1. Introduction

In a highly competitive circumstance the provision of high quality service satisfied by passengers is the core competitive advantage for an airline's profitability and sustained development. Theory suggests that increasing customer retention is a major key to the ability of a service provider to generate profits (Zeithaml et al., 1996). It is an important issue to better understand the determinants affecting a customer's loyalty and the relationships between determinants. It is commonly believed that higher service quality can lead to a customer's higher overall satisfaction and subsequently to positive behavioral intentions. The variables 'intention to repurchase the same airline service' and 'willingness to recommend it' have been used as indicators of post-purchase behavior in other fields. (Bigne et al., 2001; Boulding et al., 1993; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). However, some studies have suggested that the measurement of consumer satisfaction should be used in

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conjunction with the measurement of perceived value, and perceived value may be a better predictor of repurchase intentions than either satisfaction or quality. Hence, service quality, perceived value, and satisfaction all seem to have good predictors of repurchase intentions while the relationship between them still remains unclear.

This purpose of the study is mainly to examine the relationships between service quality, perceived value, overall satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in an airline service context.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis

When modeling passengers' decision-making process, the key variables normally considered include service expectation, perceived performance, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions (Park et al., 2004). In this section the definitions of these variables are discussed first, and subsequently the relationships between variables in the current study are hypothesized.

2.1. Service quality

The concept of service quality as a comparison between customers' expectations and actual services performed has obtained wide acceptance following the studies of Parasuraman et al. (1991, 1994). The extent to which expectations and service performance are similar or different influences the extent to which customers are satisfied or dissatisfied. The extensively used measure of service quality is SERVQUAL (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Oh, 1999), and according to the disconfirmation of expectations model (Oliver, 1980), whenever the performance exceeds the expectations, the expectation is confirmed. Despite criticism from other researchers, SERVQUAL remains the most commonly used diagnostic model for evaluating service quality and the development of service quality strategies. For example, Cronin and Taylor (1992) find that performance only based measures such as SERVPERF may better reflect customers' service quality assessments. However, Zeithaml et al. (1996) maintain that the performance–expectations difference measure is appropriate if the primary purpose is to accurately diagnose service shortfalls. Additionally, it has been noted that disconfirmation may explain the perceived variance in service quality more than mere performance (Parasuraman et al., 1994).

The SERVQUAL battery has been adapted not only to other specific industries, products, and target markets, but also to airline service studies (Aksoy et al., 2003; Park et al., 2004; Chen and Chang, 2005). In the current paper the expectation and perceived performance measurements based upon the SERVQUAL battery are adopted, but the service attributes are modified based on the features of airline services.

2.2. Perceived value

The perceived value is defined as “the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product (or service) based on perceptions of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml, 1988). More specific, perceived value can be summarized as a trade-off between perceived benefits and perceived costs (Lovell, 2000). Recent research studies have suggested that perceived value may be a better predictor of repurchase intentions than either satisfaction or quality (Cronin et al., 2000; Oh, 2000). Perceived value can be analyzed with a unidimensional measure (Gale, 1994) or a multidimensional scale (Sheth et al., 1991; Petrick and Backman, 2002). The problem with the former is mainly concerned with its lack of validity. The latter can be operationalized, for example, as a five-dimensional construct consisting of social, emotional, functional, epistemic, and conditional responses (Sheth et al., 1991). Service value has been identified as an antecedent to satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Dodds et al., 1991; McDougall and Levesque, 2000). In addition, many studies have concluded that service quality positively affects perceived value (Cronin et al., 2000).

2.3. Satisfaction

Satisfaction is an overall affective response to a perceived discrepancy between prior expectation and perceived performance after consumption (Oliver, 1980; Engel et al., 1990). It can be defined as the degree to

which one believes that an experience evokes positive feelings (Rust and Oliver, 1994). In practice, service quality and satisfaction are often used interchangeably, because both are evaluation variables relating to consumers' perceptions about a given product or service. However, some authors have made an effort to suggest a set of differences between service quality and customer satisfaction. For example, Oliver (1997) suggests that service quality judgments are more specific while customer satisfaction judgments are more holistic. In addition, service quality is related to cognitive judgments and customer satisfaction is related to affective judgments. To imply holistic evaluation after a purchase, the concept of overall satisfaction is made to distinguish from satisfaction with individual attributes (Bitner and Hubert, 1994; Fornell, 1992). Overall satisfaction refers to the customer's overall subjective post-consumption evaluation judgment based on all encounters and experiences with a particular organization. We adopt the concept of overall satisfaction in this study.

Past research studies have suggested that perceptions of service quality affect feelings of satisfaction, which then affect loyalty and post-purchase behaviors (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Fornell, 1992; Oliver, 1980; Choi and Chu, 2001; Petrick and Backman, 2002; Tam, 2000).

2.4. Relationships between the variables

Research studies have established the antecedent, mediating, and consequent relationships among customer perceptions of service quality, customer satisfaction, value, and post-purchase behavioral intentions. (Rust and Oliver, 1994; Athanassopoulos, 2000; Baker and Crompton, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000; Oh, 1999; Petrick and Backman, 2002; Zeithaml et al., 1996). More specifically in the context of airline service, the importance of the relationships between all these variables has been examined by some studies (Ostrowski et al., 1993; Sultan and Simpson, 2000; Park et al., 2004).

Past studies have suggested that service quality directly and significantly influences satisfaction (Caruana et al., 2000; Baker and Crompton, 2000) or perceived value (Petrick and Backman, 2002; Zeithaml, 1988). Since perceived service quality reflects the difference between customers' expectations and the actual performance, the lower expectation or the higher perceived performance is more likely to lead to a better perceived service quality. Hence, it is reasonable to hypothesize that expectations directly and negatively influence both satisfaction and perceived value while perceived performances directly and positively influence both satisfaction and perceived value. In addition, the relationship of perceived value on customer overall satisfaction has been supported by many research studies (Woodruff, 1997; Gronroos, 1997; Cronin et al., 2000; Petrick and Backman, 2002). Both satisfaction and perceived value are direct antecedents of behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Petrick and Backman, 2002; Tam, 2000; McDougall and Levesque, 2000; Dodds et al., 1991). Note that the behavioral intention consists of two items – as repurchase intention and recommendation intention – in the current study.

Based on the review of the aforementioned past studies, the conceptual model (Fig. 1) is proposed by the current study. The hypotheses to be tested empirically are stated in Table 1.

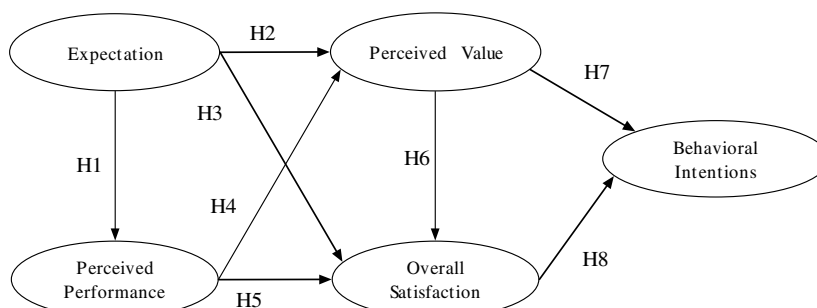


Fig. 1. Proposed hypothetical model.

Table 1
The hypotheses of relationships between model variables

H1: Service expectation has a positive influence on perceived performance
H2: Service expectation has a negative influence on perceived value
H3: Service expectation has a negative influence on satisfaction
H4: Perceived performance has a positive influence on perceived value
H5: Perceived performance has a positive influence on satisfaction
H6: Perceived value has a positive influence on satisfaction
H7: Perceived value has a positive influence on behavioral intentions
H8: Satisfaction has a positive influence on behavioral intentions

Table 2
Operationalisation of perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions

Measures	Items
Perceived value	Considering the ticket price I pay for the airline, I believe that the airline offers sufficient services The ticket price of this airline is reasonable
Overall satisfaction	Overall, how satisfied are you with the airline's service?
Behavioral intentions	The likelihood that you will fly this airline again in the future The likelihood that you would recommend this airline to other people

3. Research method

We conducted a questionnaire survey in order to collect empirical data from international airline passengers for use in the current study. The questions in the questionnaire are based on a review of the literature and specific airline service contexts, and the questionnaire was pre-tested and revised. The content validity of the questionnaire was deemed adequate. Part 1 of the questionnaire deals with the measurement of service quality with 30 attributes. Respondents are asked to indicate the perceived importance of each attribute via a five-point Likert scale from 'least important (=1)' to 'most important (=5)'. Similarly, the perceived performance for each attribute is also rated using a five-point Likert scale, but from 'strongly disagree (=1)' to 'strongly agree (=5)'. Part 2 deals with the measurement of perceived value with two items through a seven-point Likert scale from 'extremely disagree (=1)' to 'extremely agree (=7)'. Part 3 deals with the measurement of single-item overall satisfaction and two item behavioral intentions through a seven-point Likert scale from "1 = extremely disagree (unlikely)" to "7 = extremely agree (likely)". The questions for Part 2 and Part 3 are listed in Table 2. Part 4 presents respondents' demographic information with six items, such as sex, age, education, occupation, monthly income, and travel purpose.

4. Results

The questionnaires were distributed and collected at Koashiung International Airport in Taiwan during the month of December 2004. Due to limited time and manpower, a convenient sampling method was adopted. Passengers flying international routes were asked to complete the questionnaire. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed and 245 useable samples were obtained, i.e. an 81.6% response rate.

4.1. Underling dimensions of service quality

To extract the dimensions of service quality, the exploratory factor analysis is employed by using the survey data of 30 items of service expectation. Using the method of principal component extraction with VARIMAX rotation, four factors are identified and named on the basis of the attributed covered (see Table 3). Only variables with a factor loading greater than 0.5 are chosen according to Hair et al. (1998). Two items with a factor loading less than 0.5 have been deleted – namely, 'staff is knowledgeable' and 'clean and comfort seats'. The four factors explain 60% of total variance.

Table 3
Exploratory factor analysis of service expectation

	Factor loadings	Eigen value	Cronbach α	Variance explained (%)	Cumulated variance explained (%)
<i>Factor 1: Employees/facilities</i>		5.382	0.9130	19.22	19.22
Willingness to help from staff	.721				
Courtesy of staff	.699				
Prompt and correct service	.651				
Cleanliness of staff	.641				
Baggage loss and damage handling	.640				
Efficient booking queuing line	.633				
Sufficient checking-in and baggage handling service	.605				
Interior cleanliness	.588				
Good safety image of airline	.569				
<i>Factor 2: Product</i>		4.742	0.8832	16.94	36.16
Internet, e-mail, fax and telecom service on flight	.731				
Up-to-date entertainment on flight	.709				
Frequent flier program	.649				
Prompt food and beverage service	.601				
Sufficient food and beverage on flight	.594				
Provision of preferred seat option	.565				
Up-to-date aircraft and facilities	.553				
Global air alliance service	.545				
Tax-free commodities	.516				
Individual care from staff	.504				
<i>Factor 3: Transaction</i>		3.490	0.8690	12.46	48.62
Sufficient information on website	.749				
Booking function on website	.745				
Correct reservation service	.687				
Provision of flight information	.614				
Convenient reservation service	.593				
<i>Factor 4: Reliability</i>		3.271	0.8124	11.68	60.30
Doing things right the first time	.761				
Punctuality	.732				
Convenient schedule	.716				
Confidence in the staff	.561				

Factor 1 (Employees/facilities) comprises nine items – namely, willingness to help from staff, courtesy of staff, prompt and correct service, cleanliness of staff, baggage loss and damage handling, efficient booking queue line, sufficient checking-in and baggage handling service, interior cleanliness; and good safety image of the airline. This factor accounts for 19.22% of the total variance.

Factor 2 (Product) comprises ten items – namely, internet, e-mail, fax and telecom service on the flight, up-to-date entertainment on flight, frequent flier program, prompt food and beverage service, sufficient food and beverage on the flight, provision of preferred seat option, up-to-date aircraft and facilities, global air alliance service, tax-free commodities, and individual care from staff. This factor accounts for 16.94% of the total variance.

Factor 3 (Transaction) comprises five items – namely, sufficient information on the website, booking function on the website, correct reservation service, provision of flight information, and convenient reservation service. This factor accounts for 12.46% of the total variance.

Factor 4 (Reliability) comprises four items – namely, doing things right the first time, punctuality, convenient schedule, and confidence in the staff. This factor accounts for 11.68% of the total variance.

A reliability test based on Cronbach α statistic is used to test whether these factors are consistent and reliable. Cronbach α values for each factor are shown in Table 3. The reliability value of each factor is well above a value of 0.8, considered adequate for a satisfactory level of reliability in basic research (Hair et al., 1998).

4.2. SEM analysis

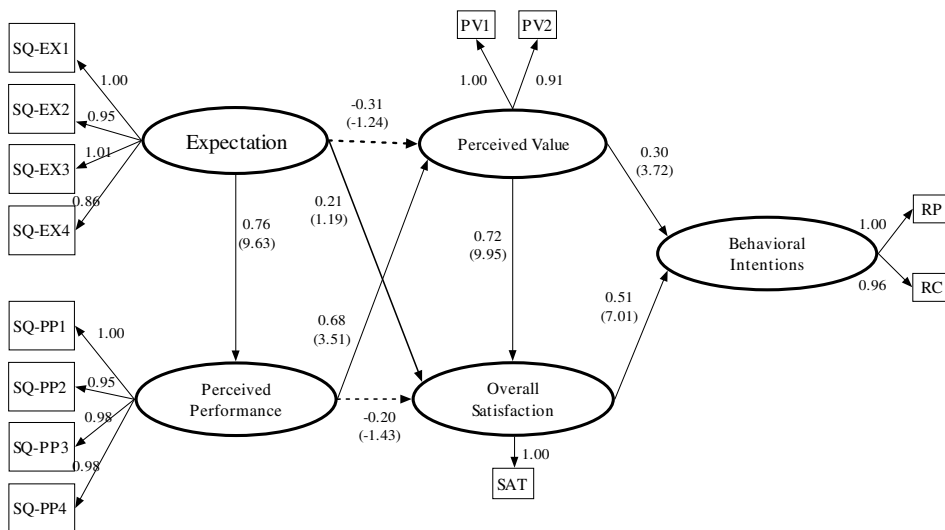
The proposed model and hypothesized paths are tested on the survey data collected. The measurement and structural models are tested using the LISREL 8 structural equation analysis package (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1989). The maximum likelihood method of estimation is utilized to analyze the data.

Overall fit of the structural model is checked initially by examining the χ^2 statistics. A significant χ^2 statistic indicates an inadequate fit, but this statistic is sensitive to sample size and model complexity. Therefore, rejection of a model on the basis of this evidence alone is inappropriate. Other measures of fit compensating for sample size are also applied. They include goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normalized fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The recommended acceptance of a good fit to a model requires that the obtained GFI and AGFI, NFI, CFI values should be greater than or equal to .90. In addition to that, an acceptable value of RMSEA should range from .05 to .08 (Hair et al., 1998).

The postulated structural model in Fig. 2 is tested by using the five constructs of interest. By using a correlation matrix among 13 measurement variables, SEM analysis is performed against the proposed conceptual model of Fig. 2. SEM results depicted in Fig. 2 are $\chi^2 = 238.5$ ($p = 0.0$), $df = 58$, $\chi^2/df = 4.10$, $GFI = 0.88$, $AGFI = 0.86$, $NFI = 0.93$, $RMR = 0.02$, and $RMSEA = 0.07$. The results indicate a good fit for the proposed structural model.

As shown in Table 4, convergent validity of the measurement model’s results should be supported by item reliability, construct (composite) reliability, and average variance extracted (Hair et al., 1998). Item reliability denotes the amount of variance in an item due to the underlying construct, and t -values associated with each of the standardized loadings are found significant ($p < 0.01$), assuring item reliability. Hair et al. (1998) propose construct reliability estimates as being greater than 0.7. In this study the construct reliability of all constructs exceeds the recommended level. The average variance extracted, which should be above 0.50, measures the amount of variance explained by the construct (Hair et al., 1998). In this study the average variance extracted of all constructs exceeds 0.50. These results indicate that the measurement items have high reliability and validity.

Table 5 summarizes the results of testing the hypotheses. Three hypotheses are found to be rejected – namely, the relationships between service expectation and perceived value (H2), between service expectation and overall satisfaction (H3), and between perceived performance and overall satisfaction (H5), respectively.



$\chi^2 = 238$ ($P = 0.0$) $df = 58$ $GFI = 0.88$ $AGFI = 0.86$ $NFI = 0.93$ $RMR = 0.02$ $RMSEA = 0.07$

Note: dashed line denotes $p > 0.01$

Fig. 2. Results of testing the hypothetical model.

Table 4
Convergent validity of the measurement model

Constructs	Items	Item reliability				Construct reliability	Average variance extracted
		Factor loading	Standard errors	Standardized loading	<i>t</i> -value		
Expectation	SQ-EX1	1.00	–	0.91	17.55**	0.88	0.65
	SQ-EX2	0.95	0.06	0.79	14.21**		
	SQ-EX3	1.01	0.07	0.79	14.16**		
	SQ-EX4	0.86	0.06	0.74	12.93**		
Perceived performance	SQ-PP1	1.00	–	0.94	–	0.93	0.78
	SQ-PP2	0.95	0.04	0.87	22.29**		
	SQ-PP3	0.98	0.05	0.85	20.66**		
	SQ-PP4	0.98	0.04	0.87	22.07**		
Perceived value	PV1	1.00	–	0.79	–	0.76	0.61
	PV2	0.91	0.09	0.77	10.59**		
Satisfaction	SAT	1.00	–	1.00	–	–	–
Behavioral intentions	RP	1.00	–	0.94	–	0.89	0.80
	RC	0.96	0.06	0.84	16.98**		

Note: ** denotes $P < 0.01$.

Table 5
Test results of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Causal path	Estimates	Standard error	<i>t</i> -value	Test results
H1	Expectation → perceived performance	0.76	0.08	9.63**	Accepted
H2	Expectation → perceived value	–0.31	0.25	–1.24	Rejected
H3	Expectation → overall satisfaction	0.21	0.18	1.19	Rejected
H4	Perceived performance → perceived value	0.68	0.19	3.51**	Accepted
H5	Perceived performance → overall satisfaction	–0.20	0.14	–1.43	Rejected
H6	Perceived value → overall satisfaction	0.72	0.08	9.95**	Accepted
H7	Perceived value → behavioral intentions	0.30	0.08	3.72**	Accepted
H8	Overall satisfaction → behavioral intentions	0.51	0.07	7.01**	Accepted

Note: ** denotes $P < 0.01$.

The others are found to be supported. As hypothesized, service expectation is found to have a significantly positive influence on perceived performance as identified by (Park et al., 2004), but is not found to have a significant influence on both perceived value and overall satisfaction. Perceived performance is found to have a significantly positive effect on perceived value, but not on overall satisfaction. Furthermore, perceived value is found to have a significantly positive effect on overall satisfaction. In other words, instead of a direct effect, perceived performance has an indirect effect on overall satisfaction moderated by perceived value. Hence, without taking perceived value into account, the predictive power of service quality on overall satisfaction is questionable. Note that this evidence supports the argument of the importance of the measurement of perceived value in conjunction with the measurement of satisfaction by Oh (2000) and Woodruff (1997). Finally, both perceived value and overall satisfaction reveal significant positive effects on behavioral intentions.

Table 6 reports the direct and indirect effects of independent variables on passengers' behavioral intentions. The results show that perceived value and overall satisfaction have direct effects on behavioral intentions, while service expectation and perceived performance have indirect effects on behavioral intentions.

The total effect of perceived value on behavioral intentions, which is the sum of direct and indirect effects through perceived value's effect on overall satisfaction, is found to be 0.67. However, the total effect, i.e. direct effect, of overall satisfaction on behavioral intentions is found to be 0.51. Perceived value reveals a larger effect than overall satisfaction on behavioral intentions. This indicates that the most important factor for behavioral intentions is perceived value.

Table 6
Estimates of the direct and indirect effect on behavioral intentions

Causal path		Estimates
Expectation → behavioral intentions	Indirect effect	0.17
Perceived performance → behavioral intentions	Indirect effect	0.35
Perceived value → behavioral intentions	Indirect effect	0.37
	Direct effect	0.51
	Total effect	0.67
Overall satisfaction → behavioral intentions	Direct effect	0.51

5. Conclusions

This paper has presented a relationship model between service quality, perceived value, overall satisfaction, and behavioral intentions for international airlines. From the evidence in Taiwan, the analysis shows that both perceived value and overall satisfaction are found to have direct influences on passengers' behavioral intentions, and perceived performance is found to have an indirect rather than a direct effect on overall satisfaction as moderated by perceived value. Unless it leads to an increase in perceived value, service quality is not guaranteed to lead to a customer's overall satisfaction. In turn, the benefit brought about by positive behavioral intentions or loyalty is also uncertain. This suggests that perceived value plays an important role in affecting a customer's satisfaction and future behavioral intentions in the airline service context.

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