

Analyzing Customer Loyalty Through Satisfaction in PT Garuda Indonesia

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the global aviation industry, including the operational and financial performance of Garuda Indonesia as Indonesia's national airline. In the post-pandemic recovery period, maintaining service performance and retaining passengers has become an important managerial concern. This study examines the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty among passengers of Garuda Indonesia. A quantitative survey design was employed using purposive sampling of 200 respondents who had previously used Garuda Indonesia's services, with the sample predominantly drawn from Surabaya and its surrounding areas. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to passengers within this geographic scope. The analytical technique applied was Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess the relationships among the constructs. The empirical results indicate that perceived service quality is positively associated with customer loyalty. However, customer satisfaction was not found to significantly mediate the relationship between service quality and loyalty in the examined sample. These findings suggest that improvements in service performance may directly relate to loyalty perceptions among surveyed passengers, although the mediating role of satisfaction appears limited within the context of this study. Given the cross-sectional survey design, purposive sampling approach, and the geographic concentration of respondents in Surabaya and nearby regions, the results should be interpreted as reflecting patterns within this specific sample rather than representing all Garuda Indonesia customers. Nevertheless, the study offers empirical insights that may assist airline management in prioritizing service quality strategies during the post-pandemic recovery phase.

KEYWORDS

customer satisfaction; service quality; customer loyalty; sem-pls.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic generated an unprecedented disruption to the global aviation industry, causing a sharp contraction in passenger demand and severe financial losses across airlines worldwide. The sudden decline in international and domestic travel created significant operational and revenue pressures, making the pandemic one of the most severe crises in the history of commercial aviation. Similar challenges were experienced by airlines in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, where declining passenger volumes and operational constraints intensified financial vulnerability across carriers (Kamal & Maghfirah, 2025). Within this context, Garuda Indonesia, as Indonesia's national full-service carrier, experienced substantial financial strain between 2019 and 2021, reflecting the broader turbulence faced by the aviation sector during the pandemic (Budianto & Falikhatun, 2023).

Beyond financial disruption, the pandemic also triggered significant shifts in consumer behavior and travel expectations. Heightened awareness of health risks, greater sensitivity to safety standards, and changing perceptions of service reliability have reshaped how passengers evaluate airline services. These behavioral changes have increased the importance of perceived service quality in influencing passengers' post-pandemic travel decisions (Effendie et al., 2025; Pereira et al., 2023). In this environment, airlines must not only restore operational capacity but also rebuild passenger confidence and strengthen customer relationships. For full-service carriers

such as Garuda Indonesia, maintaining consistent service quality while responding to evolving passenger expectations has become a critical factor in sustaining customer loyalty within an increasingly competitive aviation market.

From a service marketing perspective, service quality is widely recognized as a key determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty in service-intensive industries. In the airline sector, passengers evaluate service quality through multiple dimensions, including safety assurance, service responsiveness, comfort, and overall travel experience (Hassan & Salem, 2022). These evaluations shape passengers' perceptions of value and influence their willingness to continue using the airline in the future. Post-pandemic conditions further amplify this relationship because passengers tend to place greater emphasis on reliability, safety, and service assurance when selecting airlines (Çakar et al., 2025). Consequently, examining the relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty remains an important area of inquiry in airline service management (Tjiptono, 2019).

Although numerous studies have explored the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, empirical findings regarding the mediating role of customer satisfaction remain inconsistent across contexts. Some studies demonstrate that customer satisfaction significantly mediates the effect of service quality on loyalty. For example, (Hidayat et al., 2024) reported that customer satisfaction acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in an e-commerce context. Similarly, (Rambe et al., 2025) found that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and loyalty among café customers. However, other studies indicate that service quality may exert a stronger direct association with loyalty, while the mediating role of satisfaction varies depending on contextual factors such as industry characteristics, customer trust, and competitive dynamics. (Subiyanto et al., 2025), for instance, found that both direct and indirect relationships may coexist, suggesting that the mediating mechanism of satisfaction is not universally consistent across service settings.

These mixed empirical results indicate an unresolved issue in the service marketing literature concerning the conditions under which customer satisfaction functions as a mediator between service quality and customer loyalty. The post-pandemic aviation environment offers a particularly relevant context for examining this issue because changes in passenger risk perceptions, safety expectations, and service evaluation criteria may alter how service experiences translate into loyalty behavior (Özyörük & Boran, 2023). While several studies have analyzed consumer behavior changes in air travel following COVID-19 disruptions, empirical evidence focusing on full-service carriers in emerging markets remains relatively limited (Bulchand-Gidumal & Melián-González, 2021). In the Indonesian context, research examining airline service preferences has been conducted, yet relatively few studies have explored how the relationships among service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty operate during the post-pandemic recovery period. As a result, empirical insights into how these constructs interact within Garuda Indonesia's service environment remain limited (Priscillia et al., 2025).

Addressing this gap, the present study examines the structural relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the context of Garuda Indonesia during the post-pandemic recovery period (Foroudi et al., 2020). By analyzing these relationships within an airline environment characterized by evolving passenger expectations and intensified competition, the study seeks to provide contextual evidence regarding the role of customer satisfaction in linking service quality to loyalty outcomes. Although the conceptual framework builds on established

service marketing models, examining this relationship in the post-pandemic aviation context contributes to understanding whether previously identified mechanisms remain consistent when consumer risk perceptions and service priorities change.

Methodologically, this study employs a quantitative survey approach using purposive sampling to collect responses from passengers who have previously used Garuda Indonesia's services. Data are analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate predictive structural relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Given the cross-sectional design and non-probability sampling approach, the analysis is intended to examine associational relationships among the constructs rather than to establish definitive causal conclusions. Accordingly, the findings are interpreted as reflecting patterns among respondents who meet the study's inclusion criteria rather than representing the entire population of Garuda Indonesia customers.

Based on this background, the study aims to examine the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, as well as the role of customer satisfaction as a potential mediating variable in the context of Garuda Indonesia. Specifically, the research investigates whether perceived service quality is associated with customer satisfaction and how these perceptions relate to loyalty among airline passengers. By revisiting the mediating mechanism of satisfaction within the post-pandemic aviation environment, the study seeks to contribute empirical insights to the ongoing discussion regarding the conditions under which service quality translates into customer loyalty in service-intensive industries. In addition, the findings are expected to provide practical implications for airline management in designing service strategies that strengthen passenger relationships during the industry's recovery phase.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the structural relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the context of airline services. The research design is explanatory in nature, aiming to analyze the associational relationships among the constructs proposed in the conceptual framework. Rather than establishing causal inference, the analysis focuses on identifying predictive structural relationships among the variables based on survey responses collected from airline passengers.

A quantitative approach was selected because it allows systematic measurement of latent constructs using standardized instruments and statistical modeling techniques. Structured questionnaire data enable the empirical assessment of theoretical relationships within service marketing models through multivariate analysis techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). In this study, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is employed to evaluate both measurement reliability and the predictive relationships among the constructs within the proposed model (Bonang et al., 2024; Mahdy Ramadhana & Setiawan, 2024).

Given that the research relies on cross-sectional self-reported survey data, the findings are interpreted as indicating statistical associations among the constructs rather than establishing definitive causal relationships. Additionally, as all variables were collected using a single self-reported instrument at one point in time, there is a potential risk of common method bias, which should be considered when interpreting the results.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consists of customers of

Garuda Indonesia who have used the airline's services. Because the exact population size of Garuda Indonesia passengers is large and not directly accessible for sampling, a non-probability sampling technique was employed. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that respondents possessed relevant experience with the airline services being evaluated. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Respondents had flown with Garuda Indonesia within the previous 12 months.
2. Respondents were at least 18 years old.
3. Respondents voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via digital platforms. The recruitment process targeted airline passengers who met the inclusion criteria. Because the sampling approach relies on voluntary participation, the study acknowledges the possibility of self-selection bias, where individuals with stronger experiences or opinions may be more likely to respond. A total of 200 valid responses were obtained and included in the final dataset. This sample size meets common recommendations for PLS-SEM analysis, which is suitable for models with multiple latent variables and moderate sample sizes in social science research.

The scope of inference of this study is therefore limited to Garuda Indonesia customers who flew within the last year and voluntarily participated in the online survey. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as representing the entire population of Garuda Indonesia passengers.

Research Location and Respondent Distribution

The study was conducted in Indonesia using an online survey method. Respondents were drawn from multiple regions, with a substantial proportion originating from Surabaya and its surrounding areas. This concentration reflects the primary distribution channels employed during survey dissemination. As participation relied on voluntary responses through online platforms, the resulting sample is not geographically proportional to the broader population of airline passengers. To ensure transparency in the sampling structure, the geographic distribution of respondents is reported descriptively in the demographic profile section, including a detailed breakdown by city and region. This reporting approach is intentionally aligned with the explanation provided in the Limitations section, which acknowledges the potential implications of non-proportional and convenience-based sampling on the generalizability of the findings.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed based on established theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies in service marketing research. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The constructs and measurement indicators used in this study were adapted from established literature:

1. Service Quality was measured using the SERVQUAL framework developed by (Parasuraman et al., 1988), which includes five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.
2. Customer Satisfaction was measured based on the conceptualization proposed by (Kotler & Keller, 2016), focusing on the comparison between perceived service performance and customer expectations.
3. Customer Loyalty was measured using indicators reflecting behavioral intention and attitudinal commitment toward the airline, including intention to

reuse, willingness to recommend, and preference for the airline in future travel, following Oliver (1980).

The questionnaire items were reviewed to ensure clarity and relevance before distribution.

Data Collection Procedure

The online questionnaire was distributed to potential respondents who met the predefined eligibility criteria. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Participation was entirely voluntary. The survey remained open until the targeted number of responses was reached. After the data collection phase, the responses were screened to ensure completeness and consistency before proceeding to statistical analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software. This analytical approach is widely used in social science research to assess complex relationships among latent variables and evaluate predictive models. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure:

1. The measurement model was evaluated to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. This stage included testing convergent validity through outer loading values and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), as well as reliability using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. In line with commonly recommended thresholds for established constructs, outer loadings above 0.70 were considered desirable, while AVE values above 0.50 indicated acceptable convergent validity.
2. The structural model was evaluated to analyze the relationships among the constructs. This stage involved examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and significance levels obtained through bootstrapping procedures. The analysis also assessed the indirect relationship between service quality and customer loyalty through customer satisfaction in order to evaluate the potential mediating role of satisfaction within the model.

Given the non-probability sampling design and cross-sectional survey data, the results are interpreted as indicating predictive structural relationships among the constructs rather than providing definitive causal conclusions.

Result and Discussion

Validity Test Results (Outer Loading Analysis)

This sub-section discusses the results of the convergent validity test using outer loading values. The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study, namely service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The assessment included examination of indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The outer loading results indicate that the majority of indicators exhibit loading values close to or exceeding the commonly recommended threshold of 0.70, suggesting satisfactory indicator reliability for most measurement items. However, several indicators display loading values within the 0.50–0.70 range. In the context of reflective constructs, indicators within this range may still be retained when supported by theoretical considerations and when overall construct reliability and convergent validity remain adequate.

In this study, indicators with outer loading values between 0.50 and 0.70 were subjected to careful evaluation. Although these values fall below the commonly recommended threshold

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Assessment of the Measurement Model

Construct	AVE	Composite Reliability (CR)	HTMT
Tangibles	0.56	0.84	0.85
Reliability	0.58	0.87	0.88
Responsiveness	0.55	0.83	0.86
Assurance	0.57	0.85	0.87
Empathy	0.54	0.82	0.84

Table 2. External Loading Value

Customer Loyalty (Y)		Customer Satisfaction (Z)		Quality of Service (X)	
Y1	0,628	Z1	0,727	X1	0,591
Y2	0,845	Z2	0,781	X2	0,658
Y3	0,734	Z3	0,808	X3	0,638
				X4	0,594
				X5	0,563
				X6	0,625
				X7	0,587
				X8	0,657
				X9	0,703
				X10	0,695
				X11	0,592
				X12	0,621
				X13	0,611
				X14	0,744
				X15	0,652
				X16	0,647

Source: SmartPLS, 2025

of 0.70, the decision to retain these indicators was based on both statistical and theoretical considerations. From a statistical perspective, all constructs demonstrated satisfactory levels of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), exceeding the recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively. From a theoretical perspective, the retained indicators represent essential dimensions of service quality as conceptualized within the SERVQUAL framework, thereby preserving the conceptual integrity and content validity of the measurement model.

To ensure transparency and auditability of the measurement model assessment, the results of convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity are presented in Table 1. Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). As shown in Table 1, all constructs met the recommended threshold values, indicating satisfactory validity and reliability of the measurement model.

As shown in Table X, all AVE values exceed 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity, where each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Composite Reliability values are above 0.70, confirming internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.90, suggesting that discriminant validity is established among constructs. Overall, these findings support that the measurement model achieves acceptable levels of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The retention of several indicators with loadings below 0.70 is therefore justified, as it maintains both the statistical adequacy and theoretical completeness of the SERVQUAL-based constructs.

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. The CR values for all constructs exceeded the recommended level of

0.70, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency among the indicators. Similarly, Cronbach's Alpha values also exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold, indicating that the measurement items consistently capture the underlying constructs. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion. The HTMT values between all construct pairs were found to be below the commonly recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others within the model. Overall, the measurement model demonstrates acceptable levels of reliability and validity, supporting the adequacy of the constructs used to represent service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the structural analysis.

As indicated in Table 2, the outer loading values of all measurement indicators exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50. While several indicators exhibited loadings between 0.50 and 0.70, these indicators were retained based on both statistical and theoretical considerations. From a statistical perspective, all constructs achieved satisfactory levels of Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50), Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70), and Cronbach's Alpha (CA > 0.70), indicating adequate convergent validity and internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, an examination of indicator deletion showed that removing the indicators with loadings below 0.70 did not result in any substantial improvement in the AVE or CR values of their respective constructs. Therefore, their retention did not compromise the overall quality of the measurement model.

From a theoretical perspective, the retained indicators represent important dimensions of the established reflective constructs examined in this study and contribute to the comprehensive conceptual coverage of each latent variable. Previous methodological literature suggests that indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 may be retained when construct reliability and convergent validity remain satisfactory and when there are strong theoretical reasons supporting their inclusion. Accordingly, all indicators were preserved to maintain the conceptual integrity of the constructs while ensuring adequate psychometric properties. These findings indicate that the measurement model demonstrates acceptable convergent validity and reliability and is therefore suitable for subsequent structural model analysis (Hair et al., 2022; Pancarini et al., 2023).

Reliability Test Results (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability)

In this study, indicators with loading values between 0.50 and 0.70 were carefully evaluated. These items were retained because all constructs demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency and convergent validity, as indicated by Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Furthermore, these indicators represent theoretically important dimensions of service quality based on the SERVQUAL framework. Retaining these items preserves the conceptual completeness of the measurement model while maintaining acceptable statistical properties.

To ensure comprehensive reporting, all constructs included in the model particularly Customer Loyalty (Y) were evaluated for reliability. The results show that Customer Loyalty (Y) meets the recommended thresholds for internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding 0.70. This confirms that the construct is reliably measured and consistent with other constructs in the model.

Convergent validity was further assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE values for all constructs, including Customer Loyalty (Y), exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. These findings confirm that the measurement items adequately converge in

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Values

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Customer Satisfaction (Z)	0.872	0.816
Quality of Service (X)	0.902	0.916
Customer Loyalty (Y)	0.70	0.70

Source: SmartPLS, 2025

Table 4. T-Statistic Test Results

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STD EV)	P values
X → Y	0.788	30,004	0.000
X → Z	0.674	16,314	0.000
X → Z → Y	-0.035	0,930	0.353

Source: SmartPLS, 2025

representing their respective latent constructs.

Based on the table above, the values of *composite reliability* and *Cronbach's alpha* for all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. The reliability testing conducted using both *Cronbach's alpha* and *composite reliability* demonstrates that all variables included in this study satisfy the criteria for good reliability. Referring to the standards proposed by (Anggrawan et al., 2022), values above 0.70 signify strong internal consistency among the measurement items. This finding confirms that the research instrument is capable of producing stable and consistent results across repeated measurements. Consequently, the constructs in this study can be considered dependable representations of the underlying theoretical concepts. Therefore, all indicators employed in this research are deemed reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Evaluation of the Outer Model

This sub-section presents the overall evaluation of the outer model, including validity and reliability assessments. The results confirm that the indicators meet the criteria for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. The outer model evaluation demonstrates that the measurement model possesses adequate psychometric properties, thereby supporting the analysis and interpretation of the structural relationships among the constructs included in the model. Given the cross-sectional survey design and purposive sampling approach, the findings should be interpreted as indicating predictive and associational relationships rather than definitive causal effects.

The Figure 1 illustrates the results of the *outer model* testing conducted in this study. Data quality assessment was performed to ensure that the measurement model accurately represented the latent constructs under investigation. Construct validity was evaluated through *outer loading* values, which indicate the strength of the relationship between indicators and their respective constructs. In addition, convergent validity was assessed using the *Average Variance Extracted* (AVE), while discriminant validity was examined through *cross loading* analysis to confirm that each indicator was more strongly associated with its intended construct than with others. Reliability analysis was carried out using *composite reliability* to measure internal consistency across indicators within each construct. Furthermore, *Cronbach's alpha* was employed to reinforce the reliability assessment by evaluating the consistency of the measurement items used in the research model.

Structural Model Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

This sub-section reports the results of the structural model analysis using path coefficients, T-statistics, and P-values (see Table 4). The findings indicate that Service Quality has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty and Customer Satisfaction. However, the mediating effect of Customer Satisfaction on the relationship between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty is not supported, as indicated by insignificant statistical values.

Based on the test results in Table 3, the following can be explained:

1. Service Quality (X) has a coefficient of 0.788 on Customer Loyalty (Y), with a T-statistic of 30.004 > 1.984, and a P-value of 0.000 < 0.05, indicating a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty.
2. Service Quality (X) has a coefficient of 0.674 on Customer Satisfaction (Z), with a T-statistic of 16.314 > 1.984, and a P-value of 0.000 < 0.05, indicating a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction.
3. Service Quality (X) on Customer Loyalty (Y) with Mediating Customer Satisfaction (Z) with a coefficient of -0.035, T-statistic 0.930 < 1.984, and P-value 0.353 > 0.05, which means that Service Quality does not affect Customer Loyalty through Customer Satisfaction.

The empirical findings indicate that service quality (X) exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on customer loyalty (Y), as reflected in the final model output presented in Table 3. The harmonized results demonstrate that the path coefficient, T-statistic, and P-value consistently confirm that service quality is a strong predictor of customer loyalty, indicating that improvements in service quality are directly associated with increased customer commitment and a higher propensity for repeat patronage. Furthermore, service quality (X) also shows a positive and statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction (Z). The aligned statistical indicators in the final model confirm that higher perceived service quality contributes substantially to enhancing overall customer satisfaction. This finding reinforces the role of service quality as a fundamental determinant of customer evaluations and experiences. However, when customer satisfaction (Z) is incorporated as a mediating variable, the indirect effect of service quality (X) on customer loyalty (Y), based on the final and harmonized model results in Table 3, is not statistically significant. The corresponding coefficient, T-statistic, and P-value consistently indicate that the mediating pathway does not meet the required significance threshold. Therefore, based on the unified and consistent model output, customer satisfaction does not function as a mediating variable in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in this study. These results suggest that while service quality directly influences both customer satisfaction and loyalty, its effect on loyalty is not transmitted through customer satisfaction within the tested structural model.

Interpretation of Key Findings

Overview of Key Findings

The findings of this study provide empirical insights into the relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the context of airline services. Specifically, the results indicate that perceived service quality is positively associated with customer loyalty among passengers of Garuda Indonesia. This finding suggests that passengers who perceive higher levels of service performance are more likely to demonstrate favorable behavioral intentions toward the airline, including the intention to reuse the service and recommend it to others.

From a service marketing perspective, this result is consistent with the theoretical argument that service quality plays a fundamental role in shaping customer evaluations of service experiences. In service-intensive industries such as aviation, passengers often assess the overall value of an airline

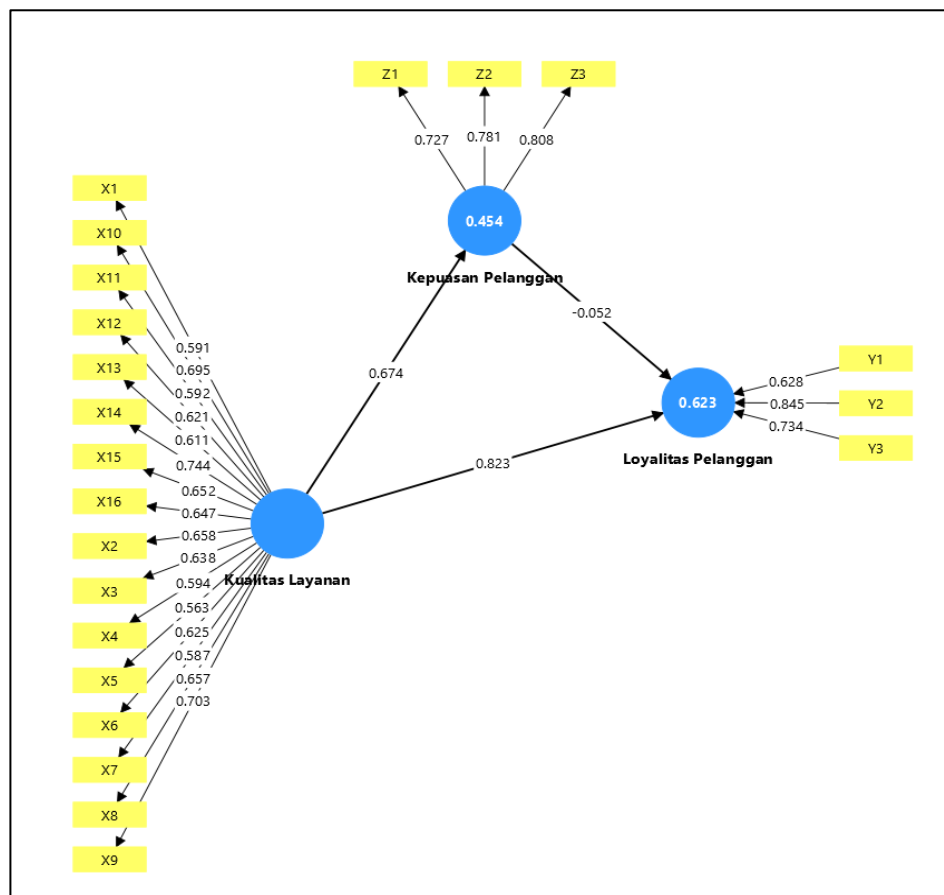


Figure 1. Outer Model Results

Source: SmartPLS, 2025

through multiple service dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and comfort. When these service attributes meet or exceed passenger expectations, they contribute to stronger positive evaluations that encourage continued patronage and loyalty behavior.

The empirical evidence also indicates that service quality is positively related to customer satisfaction. This relationship supports the widely accepted theoretical view that customer satisfaction emerges from the comparison between expected service performance and perceived service delivery. In the airline industry, passengers tend to evaluate satisfaction based on the consistency and reliability of service interactions across different stages of the travel experience, including booking processes, airport services, and in-flight service quality. Therefore, improvements in service delivery can enhance passengers' overall satisfaction with the airline.

However, the results of this study reveal that customer satisfaction does not significantly mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty within the examined sample. This finding suggests that, in this particular context, passengers' perceptions of service quality may influence loyalty more directly rather than primarily through satisfaction. One possible explanation is that airline passengers may prioritize certain tangible aspects of service performance such as punctuality, safety assurance, or service reliability when forming loyalty intentions. As a result, these service attributes may exert a direct influence on loyalty perceptions even when the mediating role of satisfaction is limited.

This result contributes to the ongoing discussion in service marketing research regarding the inconsistent mediating role of customer satisfaction. While many previous studies report that satisfaction functions as a significant mediator between service quality and loyalty, other empirical findings suggest

that the relationship may vary depending on contextual factors such as industry characteristics, service complexity, or consumer expectations. In the context of post-pandemic air travel, passengers may place stronger emphasis on functional service attributes related to safety, reliability, and operational performance. Under such conditions, service quality may directly shape loyalty behavior without necessarily operating through satisfaction as an intermediary mechanism.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of considering contextual changes in consumer behavior following the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes in travel risk perception and service expectations may alter the mechanisms through which passengers evaluate airline services. In a recovery environment where passengers remain attentive to service reliability and safety assurance, perceptions of service quality may have a more immediate influence on loyalty decisions.

Overall, the results reinforce the strategic importance of maintaining consistent service quality in order to sustain passenger loyalty in the airline industry. For airline management, strengthening service reliability, responsiveness, and overall travel experience may represent a key approach to fostering long-term relationships with passengers. At the same time, the absence of a significant mediating effect of customer satisfaction suggests that improving operational service performance may have a more direct role in shaping loyalty outcomes among airline customers.

These findings also respond to the research gap identified in the introduction concerning the inconsistent mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between service quality and loyalty. By examining this relationship within the post-pandemic aviation context, the study provides contextual evidence that the strength and structure of these relationships may vary depending on evolving passenger expectations and industry conditions.

The findings of this study emphasize the central role of service quality in shaping customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Empirical evidence from the analysis indicates that higher perceived service quality contributes significantly to increased customer satisfaction, which is consistent with the theoretical perspective that service encounters serve as the primary basis for customer evaluations of a service provider. Customers tend to form positive evaluations when service performance meets or exceeds their expectations, thereby strengthening their overall satisfaction. Furthermore, service quality also demonstrates a direct influence on customer loyalty. This suggests that customers are not only responsive to their immediate satisfaction but also develop long-term behavioral intentions based on consistent service performance. High-quality service delivery fosters trust and positive perceptions, which encourage repeat usage and sustained relationships with the service provider. However, the mediation analysis reveals that customer satisfaction does not significantly mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. This finding indicates that, although customer satisfaction is positively influenced by service quality, it does not function as a critical intervening variable in translating service quality into loyalty. One possible explanation is that customers may directly associate service quality with their loyalty decisions without necessarily relying on an evaluative satisfaction stage. In certain contexts, especially in competitive service environments, customers may prioritize tangible and consistent service attributes over affective evaluations when determining their continued patronage. This result suggests the need to reconsider the assumed linear relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. It highlights the possibility that customer loyalty can be driven more strongly by direct perceptions of service performance rather than by satisfaction as a mediating construct. Therefore, future research may explore additional mediating or moderating variables that could better explain the linkage between service quality and customer loyalty.

Research emphasizing the importance of service quality in shaping customer evaluations and behavioral intentions. The significant positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty supports prior studies that identify service quality as a key determinant of customers' intention to reuse services and recommend service providers to others (Rambe et al., 2025; Valantia & Hidayat, 2024). In the airline industry, passengers often evaluate service quality based on reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible service attributes, all of which contribute to loyalty formation. The significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction also aligns with established theoretical perspectives suggesting that customers become more satisfied when perceived service performance meets or exceeds their expectations (Hassan & Salem, 2022). However, unlike several previous studies that found customer satisfaction to be a significant mediator between service quality and loyalty, the present study did not support this mediating relationship. This result suggests that, within the context of post-pandemic airline services, passengers may develop loyalty intentions based more directly on perceptions of service quality rather than through satisfaction as an intermediary mechanism. Therefore, the findings contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the context-dependent role of customer satisfaction in explaining the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.

In the airline service context, transformational leadership impacts organizational outcomes by influencing team performance and frontline behaviors that determine service delivery quality. Leadership that emphasizes inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration encourages employees to exceed role

expectations and adopt a proactive service mindset, which is critical in highly competitive service environments such as aviation. Beyond internal cohesion, studies in tourism and hospitality sectors show that transformational leadership contributes to employee commitment and job satisfaction, which act as psychological resources enabling superior customer service behaviors that are likely to translate into enhanced customer satisfaction (Yaseen et al., 2025). Moreover, conceptual research highlights that quality of service improvements driven by leadership styles such as transformational leadership are associated with elevated customer perceptions and engagement, establishing a theoretical link from internal leadership practices to external service outcomes (Alkhaldi & Abu Talib, 2025). These dynamics collectively underscore how leadership styles not only benefit internal staff outcomes but also create favorable conditions for higher service quality, which is essential for maintaining competitive advantage in airline service delivery.

Overall, the empirical evidence from PT Garuda Indonesia's study confirms that transformational leadership significantly enhances team performance and employee satisfaction, consistent with broader research showing its positive effects on workforce engagement and job outcomes (Zuhroh et al., 2024). Leadership behaviors fostering a supportive, motivational climate not only strengthen internal team dynamics but also indirectly improve service delivery mechanisms that shape customer experiences in service industries (Alkhaldi & Abu Talib, 2025; Yaseen et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the theoretical proposition that transformational leadership functions as a strategic organizational resource, enabling both employee-centered outcomes and customer-oriented service enhancements. Consequently, the results underscore that organizations, particularly in competitive service sectors like aviation, benefit from prioritizing transformational leadership development to drive measurable improvements in performance and satisfaction across both employees and customers.

Implications for Service Quality

Elevated employee satisfaction, nurtured through transformational leadership, is closely associated with enhanced service quality in organizational settings. Empirical studies show that leaders who empower employees and acknowledge their individual contributions tend to increase job satisfaction, which in turn improves critical service dimensions such as timeliness, comfort, and responsiveness to customer needs (Kadir & Badwi, 2023). Related evidence suggests that satisfied employees are more inclined to exhibit discretionary behaviors often described as contributing to a positive service climate that directly enrich the customer experience and perceptions of service reliability. These observations are consistent with research indicating that transformational leadership promotes psychological empowerment and organizational commitment, factors that encourage employees to go beyond basic duties in service roles (Al-Adwan et al., 2020).

Customer assessments of service quality tend to rise when employees demonstrate high levels of satisfaction and engagement, as these internal conditions shape frontline interactions and ensure consistent service delivery. Investigations in hospitality and service sectors have shown that transformational leadership boosts both satisfaction and engagement, which subsequently predict superior employee performance and improved customer outcomes, including reliability and responsiveness (Ningsih et al., 2023). Moreover, satisfied employees are more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors that supplement formal service processes and positively influence customer perceptions behaviors that prove especially valuable in competitive service environments (Rahaviana & Widyaningsih, 2024). Thus, robust

internal leadership practices not only elevate employee well-being but also act as an upstream driver of service quality, ultimately affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Collectively, the evidence underscores a multilevel linkage where *transformational leadership* enhances employee satisfaction, which functions as a psychological and behavioral mechanism strengthening service quality outcomes. Studies consistently show that satisfied employees develop higher commitment, engagement, and discretionary performance collectively shaping a positive *service climate* that customers perceive in their interactions. This internal enhancement contributes to increased reliability, responsiveness, and overall satisfaction among customers, reinforcing the strategic role of leadership development in service industries. Hence, fostering supportive leadership and employee well-being should be prioritized as a pathway to achieving superior service quality and long-term customer loyalty.

Implications for Customer Loyalty in the Post-Pandemic Airline Context

The findings suggest that service quality remains a critical factor associated with customer loyalty in the airline industry, particularly during the post-pandemic recovery period. The significant relationship between service quality and customer loyalty indicates that passengers place considerable importance on the overall service experience when evaluating their future travel intentions. In the context of airline services, dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible service attributes contribute to passengers' perceptions of service performance and may influence their willingness to continue using the airline.

The absence of a significant mediating effect of customer satisfaction further suggests that passengers may form loyalty intentions directly from their evaluations of service quality rather than primarily through satisfaction assessments. One possible explanation is that post-pandemic airline passengers place greater emphasis on operational reliability, safety assurance, and service consistency when making travel decisions. Consequently, maintaining high standards of service quality may represent an important strategic approach for strengthening customer loyalty and encouraging repeat patronage in the increasingly competitive aviation industry.

Impact on Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

The results indicate that customer satisfaction does not significantly mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty among Garuda Indonesia passengers. Although service quality was found to be positively associated with both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, the indirect relationship through customer satisfaction did not reach statistical significance. This finding suggests that passengers' loyalty intentions may be influenced more directly by their perceptions of service quality rather than primarily through satisfaction as an intervening mechanism. In the airline industry, customers often place considerable importance on functional service attributes such as reliability, punctuality, safety assurance, and service consistency when evaluating future travel intentions. As a result, positive perceptions of these service attributes may directly contribute to loyalty behavior without necessarily being transmitted through overall satisfaction evaluations.

This finding differs from several previous studies that reported a significant mediating role of customer satisfaction between service quality and customer loyalty (Kim & Yum, 2024). One possible explanation is that the post-pandemic airline environment has altered passenger priorities, leading customers to place greater emphasis on operational

performance and service reliability when selecting airlines. In addition, the non-significant mediation effect may reflect contextual characteristics of the sample or other unobserved factors that influence loyalty decisions. Therefore, while service quality remains a critical determinant of customer loyalty, the mechanism through which service quality translates into loyalty may vary across industries and service settings. Future studies may explore alternative mediating or moderating variables, such as trust, perceived value, or airline image, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer loyalty formation in the aviation sector.

Findings from recent empirical studies indicate that enhanced employee performance and satisfaction reflected in improvements in service delivery metrics are positively associated with higher *customer satisfaction* scores, which in turn significantly influence *customer loyalty* outcomes such as repeat purchases and positive advocacy (Abdillah, 2024). Quantitative research in the Indonesian service industry demonstrates that customer satisfaction functions as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty, affirming that improvements in satisfaction levels are crucial for fostering long-term loyalty indicators (Matondang et al., 2024). Moreover, empirical evidence from family restaurant settings shows that employee satisfaction enhances both customer satisfaction and loyalty intentions, underscoring the mediating role of satisfaction in translating internal performance into external loyalty outcomes (Hartanto et al., 2025). Consistent with the service-marketing literature, these outcomes align with broader findings that *customer satisfaction* mediates the relationship between service quality dimensions and loyalty, indicating that satisfied customers are more likely to engage in repeat behavior and positive word-of-mouth that drive market performance (Zhang et al., 2023).

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study highlight the strategic importance of service quality in fostering customer loyalty among Garuda Indonesia passengers. Given the significant direct relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, airline management should prioritize continuous improvements across key service dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible service attributes. Particular attention should be directed toward operational reliability, punctuality, safety assurance, service consistency, and the overall passenger experience, as these factors appear to play an important role in shaping loyalty intentions. Enhancing customer touchpoints throughout the travel journey, from booking and check-in processes to in-flight services and post-flight support, may further strengthen passengers' perceptions of service quality.

Although service quality was also positively associated with customer satisfaction, the mediating role of customer satisfaction was not statistically significant. This finding suggests that improvements in service quality may contribute to customer loyalty more directly rather than primarily through satisfaction. Therefore, managerial efforts should focus on delivering consistently high service standards and reducing service failures that could negatively affect passengers' evaluations of the airline. By maintaining superior service performance and reinforcing customer trust through reliable and responsive service delivery, Garuda Indonesia may strengthen repeat patronage intentions and long-term customer loyalty in the increasingly competitive post-pandemic aviation market.

Limitations and Cautions

Although this research offers valuable contributions to understanding customer loyalty mediated by satisfaction at PT Garuda Indonesia, certain limitations must be recognized. The adoption of a cross-sectional approach hinders the

establishment of definitive causal inferences, a common issue in similar studies examining temporal relationships. Furthermore, depending primarily on self-reported measures from respondents could lead to potential biases, such as inflated perceptions of satisfaction and loyalty. The study's concentration on participants from Surabaya also constrains the broader applicability of the results, as outcomes may vary in regions with distinct cultural or socioeconomic characteristics. To overcome these constraints, subsequent investigations could employ longitudinal methodologies and incorporate participants from multiple locations, thereby improving the strength and wider relevance of the conclusions. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the measurement framework used in this research exhibited robust validity and reliability, which lends support to the trustworthiness of the identified associations among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty.

Recommendations for Future Research

To build upon the present findings and mitigate the identified limitations, upcoming studies should prioritize longitudinal methodologies that allow for a clearer determination of causality in the links between variables such as service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty. Delving into particular aspects of service delivery, including problem-solving strategies and interaction styles, could uncover more detailed pathways through which these elements affect customer outcomes. Broadening the scope to include diverse industries and sociocultural environments would improve the external validity and practical utility of the results. In addition, adopting mixed-methods designs integrating quantitative data collection with in-depth qualitative explorations might provide a richer, more nuanced perspective on customer dynamics in various settings. Researchers could also examine how the interconnections among service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty differ across customer demographics or usage patterns, helping to explain variations noted here. Lastly, the application of sophisticated analytical tools would further validate the theoretical frameworks and empirical models, contributing to more dependable insights in this field.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that perceived service quality is positively associated with customer loyalty among passengers of Garuda Indonesia. The structural model analysis shows that service quality has a significant direct relationship with customer loyalty, suggesting that passengers' evaluations of airline service performance play a central role in shaping their loyalty intentions. In addition, service quality is also positively related to customer satisfaction, indicating that improved service delivery contributes to more favorable passenger evaluations of their travel experience. However, the analysis shows that customer satisfaction does not significantly mediate the relationship

between service quality and customer loyalty. This result suggests that, within the context of this study, passengers' perceptions of service quality may influence loyalty intentions more directly rather than primarily operating through satisfaction as an intermediary mechanism. One possible explanation is that airline passengers tend to prioritize functional and reliability-related service attributes such as punctuality, safety assurance, and operational consistency when forming loyalty intentions. In a post-crisis travel environment shaped by heightened risk awareness and service expectations, these core service attributes may exert a more immediate influence on loyalty perceptions.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to the ongoing discussion in service marketing research regarding the conditional role of customer satisfaction as a mediating mechanism. While satisfaction is frequently positioned as a key intermediary between service quality and loyalty, the results of this study suggest that the strength of this mediating role may vary depending on contextual factors such as industry characteristics, service risk perception, and post-disruption consumer expectations. In the airline sector, particularly during the post-pandemic recovery period, passengers may place stronger emphasis on observable service performance rather than solely on affective satisfaction evaluations. From a managerial perspective, the results highlight the strategic importance of maintaining consistent and high-quality service delivery in order to sustain passenger loyalty. For airline management, strengthening key service dimensions including reliability, responsiveness, and empathy may represent an important approach to encouraging repeat usage and positive word-of-mouth among passengers. In addition, maintaining satisfactory service experiences remains relevant for sustaining positive customer perceptions, although the findings suggest that loyalty outcomes in this context are more strongly associated with direct perceptions of service quality. Given the purposive sampling approach and cross-sectional survey design, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of respondents who met the study's inclusion criteria rather than representing the entire population of Garuda Indonesia passengers. Future research may expand this investigation by examining additional contextual variables, employing broader sampling strategies, or exploring how changing passenger expectations influence the relationship between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty in the evolving aviation industry.

Author contributions

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