



Factors Affecting Intention to Switch and Intention to Repurchase in Premium Economy Airlines

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Abstract. Premium economy is an expanding cabin product that targets long-haul travelers seeking extra comfort without the full business-class fare. This study examines how airline tangibility (e.g., cabin cleanliness, seating comfort, catering, and other in-flight amenities) shapes perceived service quality and customer satisfaction, and how these in turn relate to switching and repurchase intentions among premium-economy passengers surveyed in this study. Using a cross-sectional, non-experimental design, we surveyed 314 premium-economy passengers and analyzed the data with PLS-SEM in SmartPLS. Tangibility strongly predicted perceived service quality ($\beta = 0.773$) and also increased satisfaction ($\beta = 0.293$). Perceived service quality enhanced satisfaction ($\beta = 0.546$). Satisfaction emerged as the key driver of behavioral intentions, positively influencing switching intention ($\beta = 0.666$) and repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.653$). Construct reliability and validity criteria were met ($AVE > 0.50$; $HTMT < 0.90$). These findings underscore the central role of tangible cabin attributes in creating perceived quality and satisfaction that foster retention and repurchase. Managerial implications for product design, cabin service, and communication are discussed, alongside study limitations and directions for future research.

Keywords: Airline tangibility; Perceived service quality; Customer satisfaction; Switching intention; Repurchase intention

1 Introduction

Premium economy flights are positioned between standard economy and business class, offering greater comfort and personalized service for a higher ticket price [1], [2]. They offer advantages such as more legroom, better catering, and cabin cleanliness, which contribute to greater passenger satisfaction and their intention to purchase again [3], [4], [5].

However, passengers may decide not to repurchase premium economy class when their expectations are not met, especially when they do not consider the additional cost to be justified [1], [6], [7]. This dissatisfaction motivates passengers to seek other alternatives [8].

Previous research has examined related constructs in various contexts, including the United States, Europe, and Asia [7], [9], [10]. However, premium economy passengers have received considerably less attention in the literature than low-cost and business-class passengers, particularly in Latin America.

The research objective of this study is to examine how airline tangibility, perceived service quality, and customer satisfaction influence switching and repurchase intentions among premium economy passengers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Airline Tangible

Airline tangibility was first introduced in 2006 as a construct referring to the physical attributes that passengers perceive during the flight, such as seating, cleanliness, air conditioning, and internet connectivity [11], [12], [13]. These elements contribute to the overall perception of service quality [14].

Research has examined tangibility in low-cost [13] and business-class airlines [15], as well as in airports, since passenger experience begins before boarding [12]. Empirical findings confirm that tangibility is a determinant of perceived service quality [16], [17] and also influences passenger satisfaction [11], [18]. Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Airline tangibility positively influences perceived service quality in premium economy flights.

H2: Airline tangibility positively influences customer satisfaction in premium economy flights.

2.2 Perceived Service Quality

Originally developed in the 1980s for service industries [19], [20], [21], perceived service quality is defined as the comparison between customer expectations and actual service received [22]. In airlines, it represents one of the main criteria for passenger choice [2], [23].

This construct has been studied across multiple sectors, including airlines [4], [22], hospitality [24], public transport [25] and e-commerce [26]. Some studies conceptualize it with five or ten dimensions [25], [27], while others treat it as a unidimensional construct [28], [29].

Perceived service quality has been consistently linked to satisfaction [28], [30] and repurchase intention in the airline sector [28], [31]. Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Perceived service quality positively influences passenger satisfaction in premium economy flights.

H4: Perceived service quality positively influences repurchase intention in premium economy flights.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the passenger's positive evaluation of airline performance, shaped by the service experience and fulfillment of needs [13], [30]. It has been analyzed under different terms, such as passenger satisfaction [29], consumer satisfaction [32] or perceived satisfaction [33].

This construct is widely examined in sectors such as airlines [28], [34], airports [35], restaurants [36] and digital platforms [37]. Studies confirm its role as a mediator between service perceptions and behavioral intentions. Specifically, satisfaction influences both switching intention [38] and repurchase intention [10], [15]. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Customer satisfaction positively influences switching intention in premium economy flights

H6: Customer satisfaction positively influences repurchase intention in premium economy flights.

2.4 Switching Intention

Switching intention refers to the passenger's decision to discontinue service with one airline and switch to another provider [8], [39]. It arises when passengers perceive that competitors can better meet their needs [40].

This construct has been studied in sectors such as airlines [6], e-commerce [41], hotels [27], and delivery services [42].

2.5 Repurchase Intention

Repurchase intention is defined as the willingness of customers to repeat a purchase after a positive evaluation of prior experiences [10], [43]. It represents a future commitment of the passenger to the airline brand [26].

The construct has been studied across industries such as airlines [4], [29], e-commerce [44], banking [45] and tourism [43]. Evidence shows that repurchase intention is directly linked to satisfaction and service quality [23], [28].

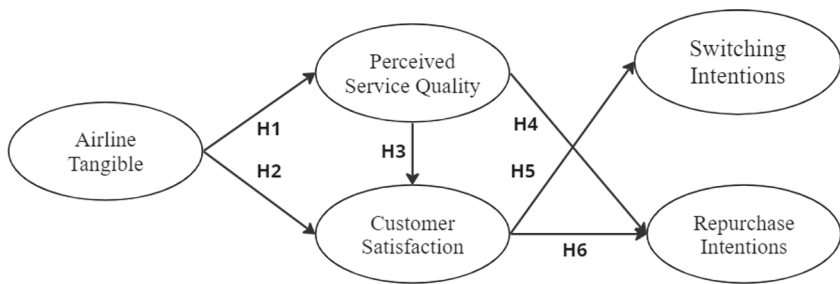


Fig. 1. Research model

3 Method

An explanatory, cross-sectional, and quantitative design was applied to analyze the relationships among the proposed variables [10], [15]. The sample was selected through non-probability convenience sampling, selecting national and international passengers who had taken at least one international flight in premium economy during the last year [4], [9], [24].

Data were collected using a structured and self-administered survey measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated “strongly disagree” and 5 “strongly agree” [46], [47].

The survey was conducted between August and September 2024, obtaining 369 responses, of which 314 were retained for analysis. The questionnaire was distributed both in person, during corporate meetings, training sessions, and business trips, and virtually through Microsoft Teams to reach respondents abroad. The final sample consisted of 61.78% male, 38% female, and 0.32% identifying as other. Regarding residence, 59.78% lived in Lima, 25.54% in other provinces, and 14.67% abroad. In terms of education, 44.84% reported postgraduate studies, 39.40% undergraduate studies, 12.77% technical education, and the remaining 3% other levels of education.

Variables were measured with previously validated scales adapted to the airline context. Airline tangibility was assessed with six indicators [13], perceived service quality with three [48], customer satisfaction with four [13], switching intention with four [49], and repurchase intention with three [2].

4 Results

To validate the proposed relationships, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied [13], [34], using SmartPLS for data processing [10], [50]. The measurement model was first assessed through individual reliability, where all factor loadings

exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, except for AI1, which obtained a loading of 0.643 and was therefore removed. Composite reliability was then examined through Cronbach’s alpha, with values ranging from 0.842 to 0.906, surpassing the minimum requirement of 0.70 [51].

Similarly, Rho_A values ranged from 0.848 to 0.906, while Rho_C values were between 0.891 and 0.934, confirming the internal consistency of the constructs [52]. Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs was above the 0.50 threshold, supporting convergent validity and confirming the adequacy of the measurement model [51].

Table 1. Reflective measurements model first order.

Items	Loadings	Alpha of Cronbach	Rho_A	Rho_C	(AVE)	VIF
AT2	0.810	0.875	0.876	0.91	0.668	1.967
AT3	0.845					2.395
AT4	0.835					2.246
AT5	0.814					1.990
AT6	0.781					1.778
PSQ1	0.823	0.843	0.848	0.906	0.762	1.684
PSQ2	0.894					2.375
PSQ3	0.900					2.412
CS1	0.844	0.906	0.906	0.934	0.781	2.076
CS2	0.900					3.205
CS3	0.910					3.549
CS4	0.878					2.656
SI1	0.834	0.842	0.869	0.891	0.672	2.067
SI2	0.839					2.375
SI3	0.802					2.170
SI4	0.802					1.434
RI1	0.871	0.865	0.867	0.918	0.788	2.090
RI2	0.902					2.554
RI3	0.889					2.213

Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), with all values below the threshold of 0.90, as shown in Table 2. These results confirm the absence of discriminant validity issues and indicate that the constructs included in the study are conceptually distinct from each other [53].

Table 2. Discriminant validity (HTMT criterion).

	PSQ	SI	RI	CS	AT
PSQ					
SI	0.802				
RI	0.810	0.727			
CS	0.881	0.725	0.899		
AT	0.899	0.751	0.791	0.802	

Subsequently, the criteria of the structural model were evaluated. When assessing the existence of collinearity through the VIF, it was observed that there is no collinearity among the indicators, since all values were below the threshold of 5, ranging between 1.903 and 4.146 [54]. Likewise, when analyzing the explanatory power through R^2 , the results showed that perceived service quality (PSQ) reached a value of 0.595, customer satisfaction (CS) obtained 0.628, switching intention reached 0.441, and repurchase intention an adjusted R^2 of 0.441. These values indicate satisfactory explanatory capacity within the context of the present study [55], [56].

To test the hypotheses, bootstrapping was performed using PLS-SEM [53]. In this process, a significance level was established by considering p-values below 0.05 as the criterion for confirming the relationships between the variables [51].

Table 3. Results of hypothesis testing

		Beta (β)	t-value	f ²	P<0.05	Decision
H1	AT-> PSQ	0.773	16.240	1.482	0.000	ACCEPTED
H2	AT-> CS	0.293	4.564	0.094	0.000	ACCEPTED
H3	PSQ -> CS	0.546	8.324	0.325	0.000	ACCEPTED
H4	PSQ-> RI	0.188	2.208	0.041	0.027	ACCEPTED
H5	CS-> SI	0.666	12.140	0.298	0.000	ACCEPTED
H6	CS-> RI	0.653	8.229	0.492	0.000	ACCEPTED

The strongest relationship was observed between airline tangible (AT) and perceived service quality (PSQ), with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.773$ ($p = 0.000$), representing the most robust effect in the model. Likewise, AT showed a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction (CS) ($\beta = 0.293$, $p = 0.000$). PSQ also influenced CS ($\beta = 0.546$, $p = 0.000$) and repurchase intention (RI) ($\beta = 0.188$, $p = 0.027$). Furthermore, CS demonstrated a strong relationship with switching intention (SI) ($\beta = 0.666$, $p = 0.000$) as well as with RI ($p = 0.000$). Based on these results, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6 were supported, confirming the validity of the proposed model.

Regarding effect sizes (f^2), all relationships exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.02 [55], indicating that the links $AT \rightarrow PSQ$, $AT \rightarrow CS$, $PSQ \rightarrow CS$, $PSQ \rightarrow RI$, $CS \rightarrow SI$, and $CS \rightarrow RI$ possess sufficient explanatory strength. Finally, the predictive

accuracy of the model was assessed through Q^2 values, all of which were greater than zero [57]. Specifically, PSQ ($Q^2 = 0.599$), CS ($Q^2 = 0.511$), SI ($Q^2 = 0.392$), and RI ($Q^2 = 0.460$) confirmed the model's predictive relevance in the context of premium economy airline services.

5 Discussion and conclusions

The relationship between airline tangibility and perceived service quality (H1: AT $\rightarrow$ PSQ) was strong ($\beta = 0.773$), confirming the importance of tangible attributes in shaping service perception. Similar results were found by Ong et al. (2023) ($\beta = 0.721$), while Boubker and Naoui (2022) reported a weaker effect ($\beta = 0.172$), likely due to contextual differences in data collection.

Airline tangibility also had a moderate impact on customer satisfaction (H2: AT $\rightarrow$ CS; $\beta = 0.293$), in line with Farooq et al. (2018) and Kos Koklic et al. (2017), although lower values may reflect changes in expectations after the pandemic. Likewise, perceived service quality showed a strong relationship with satisfaction (H3: PSQ $\rightarrow$ CS; $\beta = 0.546$), consistent with Hassan and Salem (2022) and Law et al. (2022).

Regarding H4 (PSQ $\rightarrow$ RI), perceived service quality significantly influenced repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.188$), supporting Law et al. (2022), though differing from Octaviani et al. (2023), who rejected the hypothesis during the pandemic context. Customer satisfaction was also identified as a significant predictor of switching intention (H5: CS $\rightarrow$ SI; $\beta = 0.666$, $p = 0.000$), aligning with Hamzah et al. (2023) and Li et al. (2024). Finally, satisfaction strongly influenced repurchase intention (H6: CS $\rightarrow$ RI; $\beta = 0.653$), in line with Baumeister et al. (2022) and Chonsalasin et al. (2022).

Overall, all hypotheses were supported, with AT $\rightarrow$ PSQ being the strongest relationship. These findings support the proposed model and confirm the relevance of tangibility, service quality, and satisfaction in explaining the behavior of the premium economy passengers included in this study.

5.1 Implications for management

The findings confirm that tangible factors such as comfort, cleanliness, catering, and technological infrastructure significantly enhance passengers' perception of service quality and satisfaction in premium economy. Therefore, airlines should prioritize improvements in cabin design, ergonomic seating, and in-flight amenities, as well as clear communication of the superior value offered by this service category. These strategies are particularly relevant for first-time passengers, for whom tangible elements strongly shape their evaluation of the service.

Furthermore, enhancing passenger satisfaction reinforces loyalty, reduces switching intention, and increases repurchase intention among premium economy passengers. Practical actions such as providing additional legroom, personalized assistance, and reliable connectivity can differentiate premium economy from standard services, generating a competitive advantage. Communicating these improvements through digital platforms and customer testimonies can further strengthen the perception of added value and consolidate long-term preference.

5.2 Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations. Firstly, since it was conducted exclusively in Peru, the results may not be fully generalizable to other geographic contexts, particularly because the sample included few foreign participants. For future research, it would be advisable to incorporate more diverse samples from different countries to enhance external validity.

Secondly, the research focused mainly on customer satisfaction as a driver of switching intention, without considering other variables that may also influence passenger behavior. Future studies could expand the model by incorporating factors such as passenger expectations or perceived value, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind switching and repurchase intentions in the premium economy sector.

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