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81

Does Brand Love Precede Brand Loyalty? Empirical Evidence from Saudi Airline Customers in Strategic Alliance Setting

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Abstract

This research aims to construct a model that combines brand love, brand loyalty, brand image, customer satisfaction, and service quality into a single model, with brand loyalty coming foremost, and test its predictive power in building brand love. Moreover, mediating effect of customer satisfaction and brand image on service quality and brand loyalty affecting brand love was checked. The study adopted an alliance context using an existing SERVQUAL model, a bi-dimensional aspect of brand loyalty and parasocial love relationship theory, to identify brand love as a construct or outcome in the consumer-brand relationship. Using a quantitative approach, survey questionnaires were distributed by unrestricted random sampling among 507 Saudia Airlines customers. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling with SmartPLS 3.0. The results revealed significant relationships between four variables except for the brand image. It was found that brand image had no mediating effect on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. The outcome of this study highlights the importance of airline alliances for service quality, which leads to positive customer satisfaction, brand image, and customer loyalty. A unique contribution of the study is that it revealed that brand loyalty is also an antecedent of brand love.

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1. Introduction

The global aviation sector is one of the world's largest service sectors, with 3.7 billion passengers flying safely to their destinations in 2016 on more than 100,000 daily flights at an approximately 4 percent annual growth rate (IATA, 2017). Increasing competition and digital technologies have made customers more informed about prices and services, and they compare airline services. Airlines have to do more to satisfy and retain customers to remain profitable and survive (Sandada & Matibiri, 2016). To maintain a long-term relationship with passengers, the airline industry introduced the idea of an alliance because it results in a superior, differentiated product, resists marketplace competition, and permits the airlines to increase their destinations without investing or adding new assets (Kuzminykh & Zufan, 2014).

Alliances adopt different forms, such as code-sharing agreements (allowing carriers to market flights operated by a partner airline). Benefits include seamless service to

82

Yasir Ali SOOMRO, Muhammad Yaseen BHUTTO, Myriam ERTZ, Ahsan-ul-Haq SHAIKH, Yasser BAESHEN, Bader Al BATATI /
Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business Vol 9 No 6 (2022) 0081–0093

passengers (ensuring gate proximity and coordinating flight schedules so that passengers feel like they are flying on a single carrier), and mutual recognition of frequent flyer programs among alliance partners (Fageda et al., 2020). Business in the aviation industry has become increasingly complicated, and more airlines have attempted to connect to either of the three offered global alliance networks, SkyTeam Alliance, Star Alliance, and One-World, and the basic goal of joining them is to provide value to consumers (Wang, 2014). In total, these three alliances have 60 airline members and makeup approximately 60% of total air traffic (Chung & Feng, 2016).

Advantages for airlines from global alliances include a destination expansion from code-sharing agreements between airlines and the benefit of sharing centers in cost reduction, e.g., sales offices, preservation centers, food, beverage, or PC platforms, and workforce operations (Wang, 2014). Due to the airlines' ample choice offerings and high competition inside the industry, the switching of passengers among airlines has increased compared to the past (Wang, 2014). For this reason, the companies have recognized that customer satisfaction is critical to business success, as satisfied customers not only have higher response rates but also help attract more customers. In contrast, dissatisfied customers lead to negative promotion and a decline in corporate profitability (Farooq et al., 2018).

Saudi Airlines joined the SkyTeam alliance, the second-largest global alliance with 20 airlines onboard and offering approximately 16,609 daily flights to 1,074 destinations in 177 countries (SkyTeam Factsheet, 2019). This alliance has opened new opportunities for Saudi Airlines to increase its reach, service quality, and revenues and optimize costs (Kuzminykh & Zufan, 2014). Saudi Airlines is trying to refresh its brand image by joining the SkyTeam alliance. After joining an alliance, airlines could increase passenger traffic and annual revenue. Some researchers have taken customers' perceptions of the benefits and loyalty programs of airline alliances into account (He & Balmer, 2017; Wang, 2014). However, of all of these customer perception studies of airline alliances, very few have looked at branding matters.

Despite the growing importance and interest in brand love among practitioners and academics, still little is established about how marketing actions (branding, service quality) influence brand love (Nguyen & Feng, 2021). Despite the relevance of brand love as a reflection of consumers' significant interest in a product or service (Kumar et al., 2021), it has received little attention in the context of airline services.

This paper aims to fill this void in the literature by conceptualizing and empirically analyzing the degrees to which the indicated antecedents are linked to brand love. This study has three significant contributions. First, this study investigates alliance partner service quality in influencing

customer satisfaction, brand image, brand loyalty, and brand love from the customer's perspective. Research in this specific area is lacking. Second, the link between service quality, customer satisfaction, and brand image has been investigated in previous literature (Dirsehan & Kurtuluş, 2018; Lu & Ling, 2008), but less marketing literature has explored the intermediate mechanism. Thus, this study fills this gap and investigates two important variables, customer satisfaction and brand image, as mediators in the relationship between service quality (SkyTeam) and brand loyalty for Saudia Airline passengers. Third, this study explores the concept of brand love because the literature suggests two conflicting situations: brand love is preceded by brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), and brand loyalty is preceded by brand love (Aaker, 1991). This study provides empirical evidence to support Aaker's (1991) claim by analyzing the relationship between brand loyalty and brand love in the aerospace industry.

This study proposes a model that is motivated by service quality (SkyTeam Alliance), mediated through customer satisfaction and brand image, producing brand loyalty and brand love (Zeng et al., 2019). In particular, this study examines three research issues. Do service quality (SkyTeam alliance), customer satisfaction, and brand image vary in their effects on brand loyalty? Do customer satisfaction and brand image influence the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty? Does brand loyalty act as a significant determinant of brand love in the context of airline alliances?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Brand Love

Several studies have addressed the idea of brand love, and among the authors, the definitions of brand love differ. Brand Love is defined as an emotional attachment to the brand. Some scholars have recognized some similarities between brand love and satisfaction (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), But they have recognized that these are two different constructs (Kumar et al., 2021; Mody & Hanks, 2020). According to Shimp and Madden (1988), the thought of brand love and the concept of love is considered something that exists between people for other individuals and a physical object. Moreover, brand love is explained as the level of emotional bond a satisfied customer holds for a specific brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). However, there are opposing views as to whether an interpersonal construct of brand love can be implemented for brands and consumer behavior. Other investigators debate that love is a complex construct to apply to consumer behavior (Batra et al., 2012). According to Batra et al. (2012), love should be based first on the customer's experience and then on interpersonal theory. One of the limitations of brand love theories is that

it is always considered a bi-directional relationship between the brand and consumers, but others (Whang et al., 2004) took inspiration from work related to parasocial interaction (PSI) (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and presented brand love as unidirectional, which implies one-sided love by consumers is explained through parasocial love relationship theory (Fetscherin, 2014).

By theoretical definition, brand love is "the level of passionate, emotional attachment a satisfied consumer may have for a particular trade name and its associated dimensions" (Kang, 2015). Brand love is one of the latest paradigms in theory and practice being studied by marketers. Consumers' brand love influences sought-after outcomes, such as true passion, positive word of mouth, and reduced switching for the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love is a comparatively fresh subject in the marketing literature, especially in the brand loyalty literature. Consequently, it is still under investigation and being discovered (Unal & Aydın, 2013), as it has an inimitable advantage for companies against extreme competition. Thus, this study tried to examine the factors affecting brand love.

2.2. Alliance Background

Airline alliances begin with a purely bilateral agreement. In the past, the agreement was between two airlines only. The bilateral alliance that was common at that time was called a code-sharing agreement, through which two airlines integrated their destinations as one combined product to passengers. Typically, one airline (Marketing Airline) sells the flight with fares determined by their pricing team, whereas the second airline (Operating Airline) charges the marketing airline for all or part of the combined course. Airlines additionally create marketing agreements, including frequent flyer packages (FFP) and other offers (Lazzarini, 2007). By joining an alliance with other airlines, a company can take advantage of achieving economies of scale and improving bargaining power through their investment funds and purchases (Wang, 2014). Goh and Uncles (2003) noted that travelers who opted for airlines that had joined global alliances had better access to the network, provided flawless travel, had convenient priority status access to the lounge, and extended frequent flyer programs (FFP). Despite many studies mentioned above, there are quite a few studies on airline alliances that address branding issues. In addition, the Aviation Alliance studies focused primarily on strategic and operational issues, and less work has been found on the customer perspective.

2.3. Research Model and Hypotheses

The conceptual model of the current research is shown in Figure 1. The model depicts alliance partner service quality, which affects customer satisfaction, brand image, and brand loyalty. Customer satisfaction and brand image play a mediating role in the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty. In return, brand loyalty affects brand love. The definitions and interrelationships of the constructs presented in the conceptual model are listed in subsequent sections.

2.3.1. Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service quality can be understood as an overall customer evaluation of a given service that meets its expectations and is satisfying (Al-Jazzazi & Sultan, 2017). Previous studies have shown that service quality is not a one-dimensional construction. However, the majority of researchers mentioned in their studies that service quality is a multidimensional construct, such as tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, empathy, and assurance (Andrew, 2019; Pakurár et al., 2019; Parasuram et al., 1991).
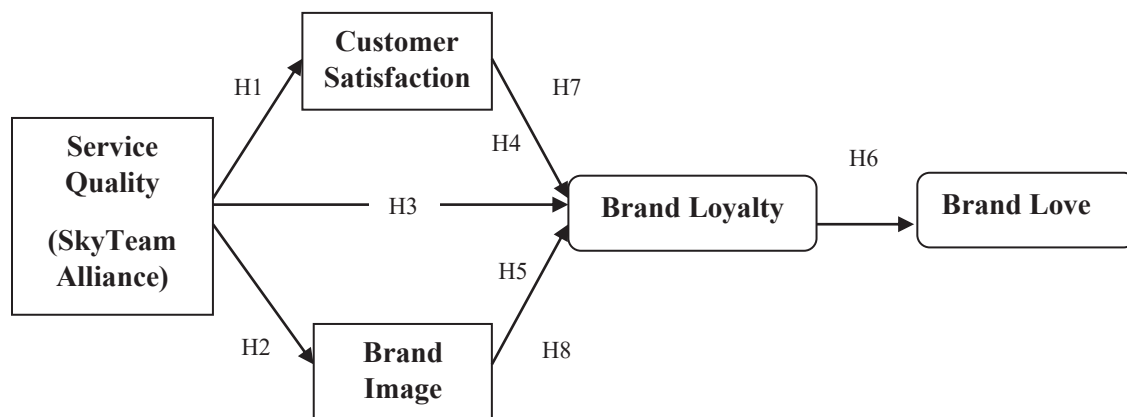

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Understanding customers' specific expectations are the essential step in defining and delivering quality service (Liou et al., 2015). Service quality has aroused widespread interest among researchers, as they believe it improves the company's profitability (Caruana, 2002). Past research claimed that service quality is the antecedent of customer satisfaction (Caruana, 2002; Le et al., 2019). According to previous work (Chang & Yeh, 2002), the quality of the aviation industry is hard to express and measure due to its heterogeneity, integrity, and inseparability. Recent studies in aviation have also shown that service quality is positively related to customer satisfaction (Farooq et al., 2018; Tahanisaz & Shokuhyar, 2020). However, the connection between service quality and customer satisfaction has not been examined from the point of view of the airline alliance. Therefore, the authors formulated the following hypothesis in this study:

H1: *Alliance partner service quality has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.*

2.3.2. Service Quality and Brand Image

Brand image is a widely recognized and salient component of marketing. Brand Image is the perception in the mind of consumers (Soomro, 2019; Soomro et al., 2021). In the context of quality and image, researchers (Altaf et al., 2018) have found that service quality is a significant variable that has a greater on brand image. Others (Dirsehan & Kurtuluş, 2018) argued that perceived quality was improved or impaired by brand image since the perceived quality means that the value and experience of the brand can be assessed based on brand nodes that are contained in consumer memories. According to a previous study (Lu & Ling, 2008), service quality is considered an important dimension in the aviation industry. The researchers showed that airline brand equity undoubtedly affects the customers' acquisition purpose. In the aviation industry, the basic reason for an airline to join an alliance is to improve their service quality, which positively enhances the airline's image in the customers' minds. Based on this logic, this study assumes that partner service quality positively affects the brand image.

H2: *Alliance partner service quality has a significant positive effect on the airline's brand image.*

2.3.3. Service Quality and Brand Loyalty

The relationship between service quality and customer behavior, such as loyalty, is important to retain customers for greater profits. A brand that lacks loyalty is extremely fragile and quickly replaced by other brands (Puspaningrum, 2020). Extensive research literature shows a link between service quality and customer loyalty (Khalifa, 2018; Tariq et al., 2017). Additionally, direct and indirect relationship with other constructs has also been assessed (Khalifa, 2018). When the quality of service is satisfactory, customers are ready to buy more (Khalifa, 2018). In contrast, Cronin et al. (2000) found that service quality assessment elicits an emotional response that leads to successive loyalty behaviors, and suggested that service quality precedes satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis examines whether a direct relationship exists between service quality and brand loyalty.

H3: *Alliance partner service quality has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.*

2.3.4. Customer Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty

According to (Kotler, 2006), customer satisfaction is the result of customer experiences during the purchasing process and affects future customer behavior, such as buyback and loyalty (Pereira et al., 2016). When the company provides high-quality service and meets the expectations of the customer, there is a high probability of customer satisfaction. Previous studies have revealed that service quality is the central objective for air passengers and is required by both corporate and leisure class customers (Young et al., 1994). Past studies suggested that there is an established link between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Hussain, 2016; Lee et al., 2000). However, the link between customer satisfaction and loyalty was primarily ignored by researchers in the context of airline alliances. Therefore, this study proposed the latter hypothesis:

H4: *Customer satisfaction has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.*

2.3.5. Brand Image and Brand Loyalty

A brand image is formed by all personal associations, user experiences, and beliefs associated with a specific brand (Lin & Lu, 2010). This concept is also found to be an important factor in evaluating an organization (or the services it provides) and influencing brand loyalty (Davies & Chun, 2002). Due to the intense competition in the airline industry, brand image plays an important role in attracting new customers for future economic prospects and in achieving competitive advantages over competitors (Ahmed et al., 2020). Airlines with a significant profile can become leaders in the airline industry as their names add value by reducing doubt in passengers' eyes. Good images help organizations create positive emotions and clear up any negative rumors (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998), which results in customer loyalty (Hapsari et al., 2017). It is concluded that brand image positively affects brand loyalty. As such, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Yasir Ali SOOMRO, Muhammad Yaseen BHUTTO, Myriam ERTZ, Ahsan-ul-Haq SHAIKH, Yasser BAESHEN, Bader Al BATATI /
Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business Vol 9 No 6 (2022) 0081–0093

85

H5: *Brand image has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.*

2.3.6. Brand Loyalty and Brand Love

Brand love is classified as a dimension of attachment, but it is sometimes recognized as an independent concept (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Brand love can be seen as a deep emotional brand bond (Long-Tolbert & Gammoh, 2012). The preliminary stage of the consumer-brand relationship is the brand satisfaction obtained from positive consumer assessment and experience with the brand (Ha & Perks, 2005). Prolonged association and satisfaction with the brand can result in brand loyalty, which was found in several past studies (Berry, 2000; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In general, there is an important link between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, and extensive research over the years has confirmed this finding (Bloemer & Lemmink, 1992; LaBarbera & Mazursky, 1984), but there is a lack of attention to the connection between brand loyalty and brand love. Most authors have argued that brand love comes before brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006: Kamat, 2007; Le, 2021). In contrast, some researchers (Aaker, 1991) presented the concept that brand satisfaction can also establish brand loyalty, which can then result in brand love. The authors followed the previous study (Aaker, 1991) and extended this logic by claiming that brand loyalty precedes brand love, and hence we tested the following hypothesis:

H6: *Brand loyalty has a positive and significant effect on brand love.*

2.3.7. Mediating Role of Customer Satisfaction and Brand Image on Brand Love

Researchers have also shown a relationship between three variables: service quality, brand loyalty, and word-of-mouth (WOM) (Roberts et al., 2003). According to (Yen & Gwinner, 2003), extra benefits given to customers strongly increases loyalty (Kheng et al., 2010). Research shows that quality of service will affect customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. In addition, the importance of customer satisfaction is supported as a variable that mediates the relationship between loyalty and its determinants, such as service quality, as shown in many previous studies (Caruana, 2002; Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018). In line with the model and the related literature review, this study assumed that alliance partner service quality positively affects the customers' brand loyalty through customer satisfaction. As such, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H7: *Customer satisfaction has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between alliance partner service quality and brand loyalty.*

Brand image is considered an important concept in consumer behavior research because it influences the subjective perceptions and value, satisfaction, and consistent behavior of the individual (Verhoef et al., 2009). Brand image is a principal factor that is created and shaped by continual brand association with the customers (Ross et al., 2006), and it is a powerful tool for marketing. In the airline industry, brand image has a significant role because it provides additional value that reduces uncertainty in the passengers' minds (Hussain, 2016). Previous studies have argued that brand image has direct and indirect effects on customer loyalty (Wang, 2010). According to (Hu et al., 2009), the brand image conveys the relationship between quality of service and customer loyalty. This study assumes that the quality of service provided by alliance partners has a positive impact on customer brand loyalty through the product image. The following hypothesis was thus proposed (Figure 1):

H8: *Brand image has a mediating role in the relationship between alliance partner service quality and brand loyalty.*

3. Research Methodology

An off-site survey was carried out with the help of ticketing agents. In addition, an on-site survey using a non-probability convenience sampling technique was performed for approximately three months, from September to November 2019. Questionnaires were distributed for data collection from sample respondents that were Saudia Airlines customers taking flights from Jeddah to various international destinations at the King Abdulaziz International Airport South Terminal, as this terminal is dominated by this airline carrier. The research included 507 participants. The demographic details of the respondents can be seen in Table 1.

Sample participants were predominantly male (83%), the remaining were female (17%), and 72.7% of respondents were more than 32 years of age. Of the 507 respondents, 54.0% had a bachelor's qualification. In addition, 50.4% of respondents revealed their monthly income to be more than 15,000 SAR. Finally, respondents also revealed their frequency of travel in a year (Refer to Table 2): 50.6% traveled 2–5 times, 10.9% traveled between 5–10 times, 8.1% more than 10 times, and 31.3% traveled once only.

All construct items used in developing the questionnaire are mentioned in Table 2. The questionnaire constructs were adapted from previous studies and modified to suit the current study (Table 2). The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part I contained the questions related to demographic information, including the respondents' gender, age, and monthly income. Part II collected the passenger perceptions of Saudia Airlines using a five-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3),

Table 1: Demographic Details of Respondents

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	421	83.0
	Female	86	16.9
Age	Less than 18	6	1.2
	18–24	31	6
	25–31	102	20.2
	32–45	191	37.8
	More than 45	177	34.9
Education	No Education	0	0.0
	Bachelor's Degree	274	54
	High School	131	25.8
	Master's Degree	84	16.5
	Ph.D.	18	3.55
Income	0–5,000 SAR	96	18.7
	5,001–10,000 SAR	76	14.9
	10,001–15,000 SAR	81	15.9
	15,001–20,000 SAR	116	22.8
	More than 20,000 SAR	138	27.2
Travel per year	0–1 trips	159	31.3
	2–5 trips	256	50.5
	5–10 trips	55	10.8
	More than 10 trips	37	8.1

Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Section II contained 19 items measured on a five-point Likert scale to measure the responses to the five variables.

Four factors from the Servqual model (reliability, compliance, assurance, and tangibility) as active factors of service quality were used. Each factor mentioned above had one item in the questionnaire modified to ask customers about service quality with Saudi Airlines after joining the alliance. Other variables in the study, such as customer satisfaction and brand image, had four items. Brand loyalty had three items in total.' Last, brand love was measured as unidirectional and had two items representing the 'emotional attachment' factor and one item for 'passionate' and 'self-brand integration,' as shown in Appendix A.

4. Results

To test the proposed hypotheses, partial least square-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 3.1. We applied the two-stage approach of PLS-SEM to assess the conceptual model proposed. First, we evaluated the measurement model to check the validity and reliability of the data collected. Later, the results and assessments of the structural model are given and interpreted for hypothesis assessment.

4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

Factor analysis was performed on each item used in the questionnaire. The results revealed that all the items had factor loadings greater than 0.8 (See table 2). Therefore, all the items were included for further analysis. The test of instrument reliability was done with Cronbach's alpha. The reliability of data and the instrument were measured from which it was assembled. The Cronbach's alpha must be greater than 0.6 for the accuracy of the results. In this study with 507 respondents, all the constructs had Cronbach's alphas greater than 0.7 (Refer to Table 2). All the values in Table 2 indicated that the instrument was highly reliable. The other measures, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE), were also in a good range for all four variables used in the study (Table 3 & Table 4).

Table 2: Measures and Constructs Reliability

Construct and Source	Code	FL	CA	rho_A	CR	(AVE)
Brand Image (Keller, 1993; Dam, 2020)	BI1	0.85	0.896	0.899	0.928	0.763
	BI2	0.881				
	BI3	0.855				
	BI4	0.906				
Brand Love (Tsai, 2014) (Fetscherin, 2014)	L1	0.802	0.862	0.885	0.905	0.705
	L2	0.834				
	L3	0.863				
	L4	0.859				
Brand loyalty	BL1	0.83	0.82	0.821	0.893	0.736
	BL2	0.858				
	BL3	0.884				
Customer Satisfaction (Janawade, 2012)	CS1	0.85	0.883	0.883	0.919	0.74
	CS2					
	CS3					
	CS4					
Service Quality (Hung, 2015)	SQ1	0.816	0.798	0.802	0.869	0.623
	SQ2	0.754				
	SQ3	0.791				
	SQ4	0.795				

Notes: FL: Factor Loadings, CA: Cronbach's Alpha, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Constructs	Brand Image	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Customer Satisfaction	Service Quality
Brand Image	**0.873**				
Brand Love	0.803	**0.840**			
Brand loyalty	0.639	0.905	**0.858**		
Customer Satisfaction	0.577	0.834	0.678	**0.860**	
Service Quality	0.661	0.865	0.711	0.655	**0.789**

Table 4: Model Fit Summary

Indicators	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.042	0.044
d_ULS	0.214	0.228
d_G	0.176	0.178
Chi-Square	484.988	486.976
NFI	0.903	0.903

4.2. Structural Model Evaluation

The second step was to assess the structural model when the reliability of the measurement model was established. When evaluating structural models, beta coefficients and *t*-statistics were considered, along with the measurement of R^2 for endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2013). The bootstrapping technique, based on 5000 samples, was used to analyze path coefficients and relative significance.

In Table 5, the beta coefficients, *t*-values, and significance values for each structural path are shown. The results revealed that alliance service quality had significant effects on customer satisfaction (beta = 0.779, *t* = 24.352, $P \leq 0.05$), brand image (beta = 0.777, *t* = 21.413, $P \leq 0.05$), and brand loyalty (beta = 0.562, *t* = 4.097, $P \leq 0.05$). Hence, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were all supported. Customer satisfaction had a significant relationship with brand loyalty (beta = 0.276, *t* = 2.897), whereas brand image (beta = 0.276, *t* = 2.897) had a non-significant relationship with brand loyalty. Therefore, Hypothesis H4 was supported, and H5 was not supported. Finally, but importantly, the results showed that brand loyalty had a significant positive relationship with brand love ($\beta = 1.036$, *t* = 71.142). Hence, hypothesis 6 was supported.

4.3. Hypothesized Mediation Relationship

Table 6 demonstrates a significant mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the link between service quality and brand loyalty (Beta = 0.215, *t* = 2.896), supporting hypothesis 6. In contrast, brand image failed to mediate the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty (beta = 0.099, *t* = 1.284) statistically. Hence, hypothesis 7 was not supported. The first-order and second-order construct beta values can be seen in the path diagram of the model run (see Figure 2).

5. Discussion

The direct positive effect of service quality on customer satisfaction was statistically significant. The results support previous studies that have found a similar relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Farooq et al., 2018; Hussain et al., 2015). The results showed that the quality of the services provided by the alliance partner is a strong indicator of the satisfaction of Saudia passengers. In addition, ensuring excellent service quality is a strategic tool for customer satisfaction. The partners must, therefore, ensure that they offer a high-quality service, taking into account the four dimensions that have been measured in current research: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and tangibility to increase customer satisfaction. The direct effect of alliance partner service quality on the brand image was statistically significant. H2 was supported, and the result was in line with past studies (Andrew, 2019). The results indicated that Saudia passengers who received high service quality from alliance partners during service delivery would form a positive image of Saudia Airlines. It indicates that when SkyTeam Alliance partners facilitate and entertain Saudia passengers during service delivery, in terms of better and cheap prices, better lounge and environment facilities, and better network access in return, it enhanced the favorable image of Saudia Airlines in the customer's mind. Moreover, customers who have a favorable image of the company are more likely to prefer the organization and recommend it to others. H3 was also supported. Service quality has a direct positive effect on brand loyalty. This finding contradicted the results of some previous work (Kiran & Diljit, 2011) but aligned with the findings of other work (Cronin et al., 2000).

Customer satisfaction had a positive effect on brand loyalty that was statistically significant. H4 was supported. The results supported past studies (Hapsari et al., 2017; Saleem et al., 2017). Results indicated that satisfaction had

Table 5: Assessment Summary (Direct Paths)

| S.No	Structural Paths	Beta Values	*T*-values	*P*-values	Decision
H1	Service Quality → Customer Satisfaction	0.779	24.352	0.000**	Supported
H2	Service Quality → Brand Image	0.777	21.413	0.000**	Supported
H3	Service Quality → Brand loyalty	0.562	4.097	0.000**	Supported
H4	Customer Satisfaction → Brand loyalty	0.276	2.879	0.000**	Supported
H5	Brand Image → Brand loyalty	0.128	1.278	0.202	Not Supported
H6	Brand loyalty → Brand Love	1.036	71.142	0.000**	Supported

Notes: ***p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, remaining all other path analyses are insignificant.

Table 6: Assessment Summary (Mediating Indirect Paths)

S.NO	Structural paths	Beta Value	*T*-value	*P*-values	Decision
H7	SQ → CS → BL	0.215	2.896	0.004**	Supported
H8	SQ → BI → BL	0.099	1.284	0.199	Not Supported

Notes: ***p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, remaining all other path analyses are insignificant.
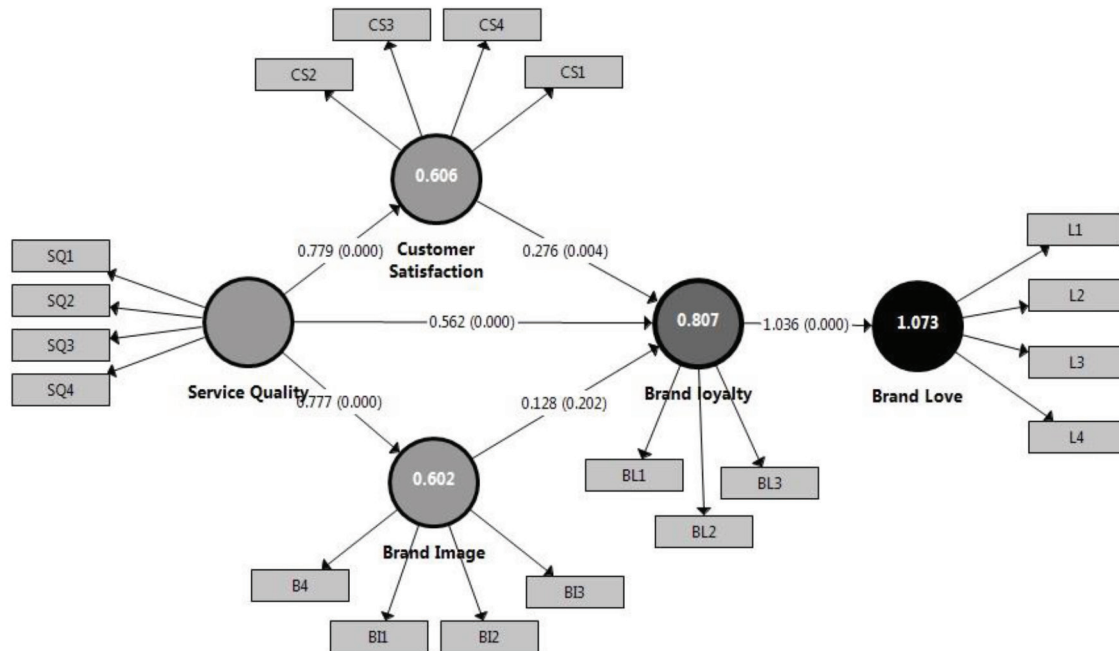
Figure 2: Results of PLS Analysis

a significant effect on loyalty, which showed that satisfied Saudia passengers intended to re-travel through Saudia Airlines services and were more willing to try new products offered by Saudi airlines in the future. At the same time, satisfied customers will tell other people positive things about the airline. The effect of brand image on brand loyalty was found to be statistically nonsignificant. The results are inconsistent with previous research showing that brand image is a good predictor and plays a significant role in brand loyalty (Chen & Liu, 2017; Kim, 2018).

6. Conclusion

Based on the results, Saudia Airlines customers have a clear picture of other multinational brands in the aviation industry and also have sufficient purchasing power, which can lead them to try new and more expensive flight services. The findings in Table 5 revealed a significant positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand love. The results seem to suggest that when customers frequently travel with a specific airline and are satisfied with its services, they become loyal, which in return positively affects and increases brand love. The literature suggests two contradictory proposals: brand love is preceded by brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), and brand loyalty is preceded by brand love (Aaker, 1991). Authors tested loyalty as a precursor to love, and with the results, authors supported the idea that brand loyalty is the forerunner of brand love.

In addition, the study found a significant mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the link between service quality and brand loyalty, as demonstrated in table 6. Support of H7 indicated that if alliance partners actively deliver quality service in terms of better and lower prices, better lounge and environment facilities, and better network access, then customer satisfaction will exhibit more tendency to mediate the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty among Saudia passengers. The brand image failed to mediate the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty statistically. Hence, hypothesis 8 was not supported. The findings seem to suggest that alliance partner service quality does not enhance the brand image of Saudia Airlines in customers' minds which leads them to be loyal. The reason might be that alliance partners do not create different value in their services that make them differ from other industry competitors. Another reason is the availability of other services, such as British Airways and American and Turkish airlines, that offer more facilities. Passengers in the kingdom may give priority to travel and experiencing new services.

6.1. Managerial Implications

This paper focused on the potential role of alliance partner service quality in influencing customer satisfaction, brand image, brand loyalty, and brand love from a customer perspective. The results of the path analysis showed that the service quality of alliance partners had a significant positive effect on satisfaction and that satisfaction subsequently

90

Yasir Ali SOOMRO, Muhammad Yaseen BHUTTO, Myriam ERTZ, Ahsan-ul-Haq SHAIKH, Yasser BAESHEN, Bader Al BATATI /
Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business Vol 9 No 6 (2022) 0081–0093

promoted customer loyalty, which means satisfied customers will continue to fly with the same airline in the future. Managers must note that SkyTeam alliance partner services do not create a valuable image for Saudia customers that make them loyal to Saudia Airlines. Therefore, alliance partners should develop organized methods to assess, monitor, and improve service quality; maintain customer satisfaction, and make customers more loyal to the airline partner. The study also examined the relationship between brand loyalty and brand love and found that loyalty can be the precursor of brand love.

Airlines are strongly advised to carefully consider strategic alliances if want to improve their performance. Bilateral agreements are strongly recommended to increase sales and improve customer experience. It was also evident from this research that joining an alliance will make airlines more attractive and make customers loyal. Airline managers should use newsletters or use other communication channels to inform passengers about the advantages of airline alliances to boost their buying intentions, brand loyalty, and brand love.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study utilized a survey instrument. Therefore, common method bias exists despite screening and reliability analysis. This study was limited by the number of respondents and this limits the generalizability of the findings. Qualitative studies should be conducted to further develop and refine the scales of the constructs. Interviews can provide a better and more in-depth understanding of brand loyalty and the concepts of brand love in a global alliance. Furthermore, future studies should incorporate other interpersonal love scales as mentioned in section 2.1 about brand love. Future researchers can add constructs such as brand experience and review how it works with brand love (Riivits-Arkonsuo & Leppiman, 2015). Lastly, when examining customer satisfaction and loyalty factors, a distinction must be made between economy class and business travelers (Jiang & Zhang, 2016). Therefore, future studies should include the customer segment and participation rates.

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