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## EXAMINING THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF INTENTION TO RECOMMEND ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECURITY SERVICE QUALITY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF INTERNATIONAL AIR PASSENGERS IN KENYA

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### **Abstract**

*This Air passenger satisfaction is a multidimensional construct that has been scrutinized using a variety of conceptual and methodological frameworks. The objective of this study was to determine the extent to which intention to recommend influences the relationship between the perceptions of quality of security services and satisfaction among air passengers in Kenya. A positivistic philosophical underpinning was embraced for this study. The five service quality dimensions of tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, reliability and empathy within a modified SERVPERF scale. Customer satisfaction and intention to recommend airport services were the other variables considered for this study. This study was conducted using primary data gathered via a semi-structured questionnaire administered to 461 randomly selected respondents located at two international airports in Kenya. A response rate of 83.30 percent was achieved. Partial least squares structural equation (PLS-SEM) modelling techniques were used to analyze the data. The study found that intention to recommend has a complementary partial mediation effect on the relationship between perceived security service quality and customer satisfaction. The study findings are valuable in providing insights into the perception of security service quality especially in this underexplored arena of scholarly inquiry. Implications for theory, practice and policy making are highlighted. Study limitations and suggestion for future research to extend this line of inquiry are provided.*

**Keywords:** *SERVPERF, security service quality, customer satisfaction, intention to recommend, air passengers*

## Introduction

As the competitive space in the aviation industry becomes more crowded and the rules of the game become tougher, improved service quality has become crucial for success in the long run. There is general consensus that airport security is a top priority and remains a key input to satisfaction (Gkritza, Niemeier & Mannering, 2006; Chonsalasin, Jomnonkwao, & Ratanavaraha, 2021). Contemporary streams of inquiry uncover the prominence of scrutiny into the overlap between service quality and tourism within the context of air passenger experience (Spasojevic, Lohmann, & Scott, 2018). Extending from this vein of research is the emerging need to examine services beyond the in-flight air travel experience to the ground-based services among them security services which are extensive, complex, hostile and intrusive (Lum et al. 2015). Additionally, new realities such as the eruption of the coronavirus pandemic in the year 2020 have led to widespread service disruption which includes a focus on hygiene; a fact that is evidenced by today's drift towards contactless air travel. This scenario represents major alterations in consumer behavior and service provider innovation which holds a myriad of scholarly and practical research opportunities (Sheth, 2020; Wanjala, 2020; Das et al. 2021). In spite of this state of affairs there appears to be limited focus on the pressing agenda to empirically examine the perceptions of airport security service quality and its impact on customer satisfaction and intention to recommend.

Noting the central importance of the selection and decision process of air travelers, a clear understanding of the complexities and interrelationships of these variables is an important research agenda.

Kenya aspires to be a top ten leading long-haul tourism destination by 2030. Tourism is pivotal for the country and the sector aims to move from 1.6 million tourist arrivals in 2016 to 2.5 million tourist arrivals in 2022, and the creation of direct employment in the sector of 561,800 people by 2030 (Kenya Medium Term Plan III 2018-2022). Insecurity together with political upheavals have had a negative effect on tourism arrivals and earnings. Consequently, the country has struggled to maintain its position as a desired tourism and investment destination (Sindiga, 2019). This state of affairs is supported by prior literature suggesting that safety and security of a destination have the highest impact on the choice of destination (Kozak & Decrop, 2009). The conduct of airport security is focused on preventive measures to mitigating the risk of aircraft hijacking. This is particularly so for international travel which is a condensed and sequential process that is multifaceted and highly engaging for users and service providers (Hasisi & Weisburd, 2011). This situation stands in the way of current air passengers' primary concern for more satisfying and remarkable experiences while at airports (Bezerra & Gomes, 2020). Additionally, there is growing expectation for airports is to compete for their traffic given liberalization efforts such as the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), the African

Continental Free Trade Area (AcFTA) and the African passport and the free movement of people under Agenda 2063 by the African Union (AU, 2013). The implication of these continent-wide policy interventions is the increased focus on enhancing the reach of air transport services to create the right conditions for the freedom of movement for goods and services. As such there is an urgent need for empirical studies that are relevant and current in this field.

The nature of the causal relationship between service quality and satisfaction has been the subject of considerable debate and controversy. This has been explained as resulting from the lack of consensus as to the operationalization and definitions of the two constructs among researchers (Teas, 1993). Yet the specific dimensions of service quality that contribute substantially to customer satisfaction have yet to be exhaustibly identified. The dominant approach in academic and practical research aimed deriving an understanding the delivery of improved service quality in a structured and integrated manner is the gaps model proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988). The five service quality dimensions under the gaps model include tangibility, assurance empathy reliability, responsiveness. The central focus of the gaps model is the customer gap which describes the differences between customer expectations and perceptions. This model has been criticized as being a basic skeleton for understanding the service quality construct (Cronin & Taylor, 1994). Oliver (1980) observed that for service and goods manufacturing firm's quality improvement is the principal factor that impacts customer

satisfaction and consumers' behavioral intentions. Customer satisfaction is explained as the post-purchase judgement of the service and is conceptualized as transaction specific or cumulative (Woodside, Frey & Daly, 1989; Bitner & Hubbert, 1994; Jones & Suh, 2000). Customer satisfaction is also viewed as a consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product or service after consumption (Tse & Wilton, 1988). Intention to recommend refers to the subjective probability that an individual will take a particular action such as repurchasing a product or service (Dolnicar, Coltman & Sharma, 2015). Nevertheless, where there have been various efforts to examine the relationship between service quality, satisfaction and intention to recommend; it remains complex and yet to be fully understood (Cronin, Brady & Hult, 2000).

It is during consumption of a service that consumers are able to determine the quality of the service to their satisfaction (Gronroos, 2001). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between perceived security service quality and intention to recommend from an encounter perspective rather than from a global perspective. Due to the inseparability of the production and consumption of most services the encounter provides an opportunity for a firm to capture future customer purchases and intent. A preliminary review of the literature suggests there have been meagre efforts to build scientific knowledge to provide policy makers and practitioners the tools to

participate effectively in the essential role of conceptualizing and delivering innovative country and airport specific service experiences to encourage travel and tourism towards economic prosperity. Given the need for managerial and policy interventions to enhance the air travel experience this study conducted an empirical inquiry into the interaction between satisfaction, intention to recommend and security service quality from a developing country context. Consistent with the foregoing discussion the current study focuses on the relationship between the three key variables under inspection as they relate to the end user of the most complex of airport services which is the international air travel experience in Kenya.

### **Study Objective**

The objective of this research is to determine the extent to which intention to recommend influences the relationship between the quality of security services and satisfaction of air passengers in Kenya

### **Problem Statement**

Service quality is an important consideration for firms and for all types of consumers; therefore, gaining an understanding the determinants of behavior remains a key goal for scholars in marketing (Taylor & Baker, 1994). There remains some uncertainty in conceptualizing the nature and directionality of the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. Cronin and Taylor (1992) explained that quality was one of the many service factors that contribute to satisfaction. In the literature part of the consensus is that satisfaction leads to favorable behavioral

outcomes such as positive word of mouth or recommending service and returning even if prices increase (Williams & Soutar, 2009). Other authors including Getty and Thompson (1994) observe that intentions to recommend via positive word of mouth were a function of perceptions of the overall quality of the experience rather than the expressed level of satisfaction. In contrast other authors among them Kyriakaki, Stavrinoudis & Daskalopoulou (2020) suggest that the link between satisfaction and intention to rebuy may not hold in all circumstances. The emerging gap is that service related studies have largely focused on the connection between the antecedents of satisfaction more than the outcomes (Bezerra & Gomes, 2020). This situation presents an area of uncertainty in attempting to reach generalizable conclusions in research.

The assessment and measuring of service quality using the gap model as operationalized by the service quality (SERVQUAL) scale proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) remains a much-applied concept in studies related to service quality. However, it remains highly debated and has been criticized for providing a basic skeleton to understand the concept (Hoffman & Bateson, 2017). On the other hand, the service performance (SERVPERF) scale proposed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) and tested by Brady, Cronin and Brand (2002) of a performance-only measurement of service supports the measurement of perceptions only in assessing perceived service quality. Like the SERVQUAL scale, it measures only the perceptions under the five service quality dimensions. In contrast Gronroos

(2001) explained that the most important characteristic of services is that they are in fact processes, not things. As such service firms have no tangible products and can only offer interactive processes. Like Cronin and Taylor (1992), Gronroos (2001) holds that perceived service quality under the scope of technical and functional features of service are key to understanding the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. This idea goes beyond the product focused notions of outcome consumption towards process consumption that characterizes services. Despite this debate, concerns exist due to the over-simplification of the service quality construct which ignores key variables that explain the exact reasons for variation in behavioral intention.

Empirical inquiry into the mediating role of intention to recommend on the relationship between service quality and satisfaction is meagre. For instance, Jonathan-Zamir et al (2016) found that behavioral elements such as respect, concern and transparency mediated the perceptions of perceived hostility of airport security service in Israel. Relatedly Moon, Yoon and Han (2017) examined perceptions of airport safety as a moderator in the relationship between airport physical environment and customer satisfaction. On the other hand, Park and Jung (2011) found a direct effect of service quality on value, satisfaction, airport image and passenger behavior in Korea. In contrast Meesala and Paul (2018) explained that reliability and responsiveness were the service quality components that impacted satisfaction of private hospital patients in India. Studies in Kenya have tested different variables as mediators. For instance, Richu,

Stephen, Gituro and Mary (2022) found that logistics service quality as explained by functional and technical quality mediated the relationship between logistics management practices and customer satisfaction. On the other hand, Ondiek, Odock and Njihia (2022) revealed a mediating effect of competitive advantage as measured by neutralization of competitor activities and exploitation of market opportunities in the relationship between supply chain quality management practices and organizational performance in the private healthcare system in Kenya.

A preliminary review of literature suggests that there is substantial variability of definitions and overlap of operationalization of the construct of service quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intention which makes it difficult for a conclusive body of knowledge to develop. Whereas there might be a complementary link between the three variables under inquiry the nature of this link remains to be fully explored and explained. In addition, the depth and diversity of business contexts there arise influences from different environmental, cultural and anthropological factors which when combined could lead to different results upon testing. This state of affairs presents a substantial research gap. Further there appears to be a dearth of empirical evidence from prior scholarly work empirically investigating the mediating effect of intention to recommend on the relationship between service quality and satisfaction of air passengers in Kenya. Given that background, this study addressed the research question ‘what is the mediating influence of intention to recommend on the



relationship between perceived quality of security services and satisfaction of air passengers in Kenya?’

### **Literature Review**

A dominant paradigm used to understand the link between the construct of customer satisfaction and service quality is the expectancy disconfirmation theory (EDT). The basis for EDT is the computation of disconfirmation as the discrepancy between prior expectations of a good or service actual performance (Oliver, 1980; Tse & Wilton, 1988). The gaps model (Parasuraman et al (1985, 1988) explains satisfaction as the difference between expectations and perceptions. The lack of adequacy in explaining the relationship between service quality and satisfaction has led to the need for other related theories to be applied to gain an understanding of the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. As a result of that discrepancy this study considered applying the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen & Fishbein 1980) as the second anchor for its inquiry. The theory of reasoned action holds that an individual’s positive or negative evaluation of a consumption experience or attitude and perceived social pressure or subjective norms will influence the intention to perform an activity, which in turn determines actual behavior. The theory is relevant to a wide range of actors but is limited because it assumes that individual action is not constrained by external factors (Bagozzi, 1992). The theory of reasoned action has been adapted to show that customer satisfaction has a positive effect in attitude change in the post purchase period

and that these positive attitudes enhance repurchase intentions.

The five service quality dimensions include tangibility which refers to physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel. Assurance refers to knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Empathy means the ability to offer caring and individualized attention to customers. Reliability is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. These five components compose a quality system that could potentially improve functional quality and service performance. Satisfaction is a widely studied phenomenon that is optimally described as a summary cognitive and affective reaction to prior consumption experience, in other words, the consumer’s fulfillment response (Rust & Oliver, 2000). Customer satisfaction is a consumer’s response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product or service after consumption (Tse & Wilton, 1988).

The relationship between air travel security and satisfaction has received scholarly attention with diverse foci. Bogicevic, Yang, Bilgihan and Bujisic (2013) examination of online reviews from air passengers in regards to their experiences identified airport security as one of the dissatisfiers to the satisfaction with service. In the United States of America (USA) Sakano, Obeng and Fuller (2016) scrutinized air travelers’ satisfaction with Transport Security

Administration (TSA) security procedures and personnel and their subsequent safety perception. Their findings revealed that screening processes and wait time, and courtesy of airport security officers were important to the outcome of safety perceptions. Sakano et al. (2016) also found that air travelers' confidence in equipment for screening checked-in bags and additional screening selection were key components of their perceptions. In contrast Hasisi and Weisburd (2011) study of perceptions of airport security checks in Israel revealed that there were key differences between groups in their assessments of aspects of trust, feelings of humiliation fairness perceptions and intimidation by security personnel. The study exposed the performance of airport security personnel as well as the procedures during security service as the strongest predictors of customer satisfaction. An extension of this study conducted by Jonathan-Zamir et al. (2016) found significant mitigating effect of behavioral elements such as respect, concern and transparency on the perceived hostility of airport security service. Relatedly Lum et al. (2013) study in the USA examined perceptions of fairness security screening procedures at an airport and revealed that there were differences between how whites and non-whites were treated; with non-whites being more likely to receive additional screening. These studies' findings also reveal that socio-demographic characteristics including race, educational level, frequency of flight, and flight purpose could affect the gap between expectations and perceptions of the security service quality among passengers.

Studies applying the SERVQUAL scale have tested different relationships and revealed different outcomes. In the medical services sector in India Meesala and Paul (2018) tested the five components of the SERVQUAL scale amongst patients who has used private healthcare services and found that reliability and responsiveness had the strongest influence on customer satisfaction. The other components namely empathy, tangibility and assurance were not found to be statistically suitable. In addition, the study found that satisfaction was directly related to loyalty to the hospital. Pakdil and Adyin (2007) study among airline customers in Turkey employed a weighted SERVQUAL scale revealed that availability was the least important while responsiveness was the least important component of service quality for airline passengers whilst assessing airline services. On the other hand, Park and Jung (2011) case study at a major airport in Korea applied the SERVQUAL scale and found a direct effect of service quality on value, satisfaction, and airport image and passenger behavior among transit passengers. Bezerra and Gomes (2015) study in Brazil found that passengers who are more likely to assign higher ratings for overall satisfaction with the airport also show higher levels of satisfaction regarding their evaluation of check-in, security, atmosphere, basic facilities and prices. In particular, the study found a link between the frequency of air travel and the decreased likelihood to present higher levels of overall satisfaction.

From tourism related literature Dolnicar et al., (2015) meta-analysis of top-tier journal articles explained that guests who had

visited a destination before were a better predictor of intention to return than satisfaction. Notably the study exposed concerns about the validity of the position that satisfaction had a significant effect on intention to return on methodological and conceptual grounds. Thus, indicating that the link between customer satisfaction and behavioral intention may be more multifaceted than the predictions proposed by the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). Importantly for this study Dolnicar et al. (2015) advance concerns about the validity of the conclusion that a high level of satisfaction leads to repurchase; a finding supported by Kozak, Huan and Beaman (2002) study of repeat and non-repeat travel which revealed that tourists may only visit a destination once. In a related online study using social media platforms in Australia revealed that overall airport satisfaction was mediated by airport reuse and destination revisit intention (Prentice & Kadan, 2019). The weight of these observations suggest the difficulty in evaluating the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Prior research locally embraced different operationalizations of variables of service quality and satisfaction. Notably Richu et al (2022) explained that the relationship between logistics management practices and customer satisfaction was partially mediated by logistics service quality. Customer satisfaction was operationalized as loyalty and expectations met and service quality was operationalized as functional and technical quality. On the other hand, Ondiek et al (2022) revealed that a partial mediating

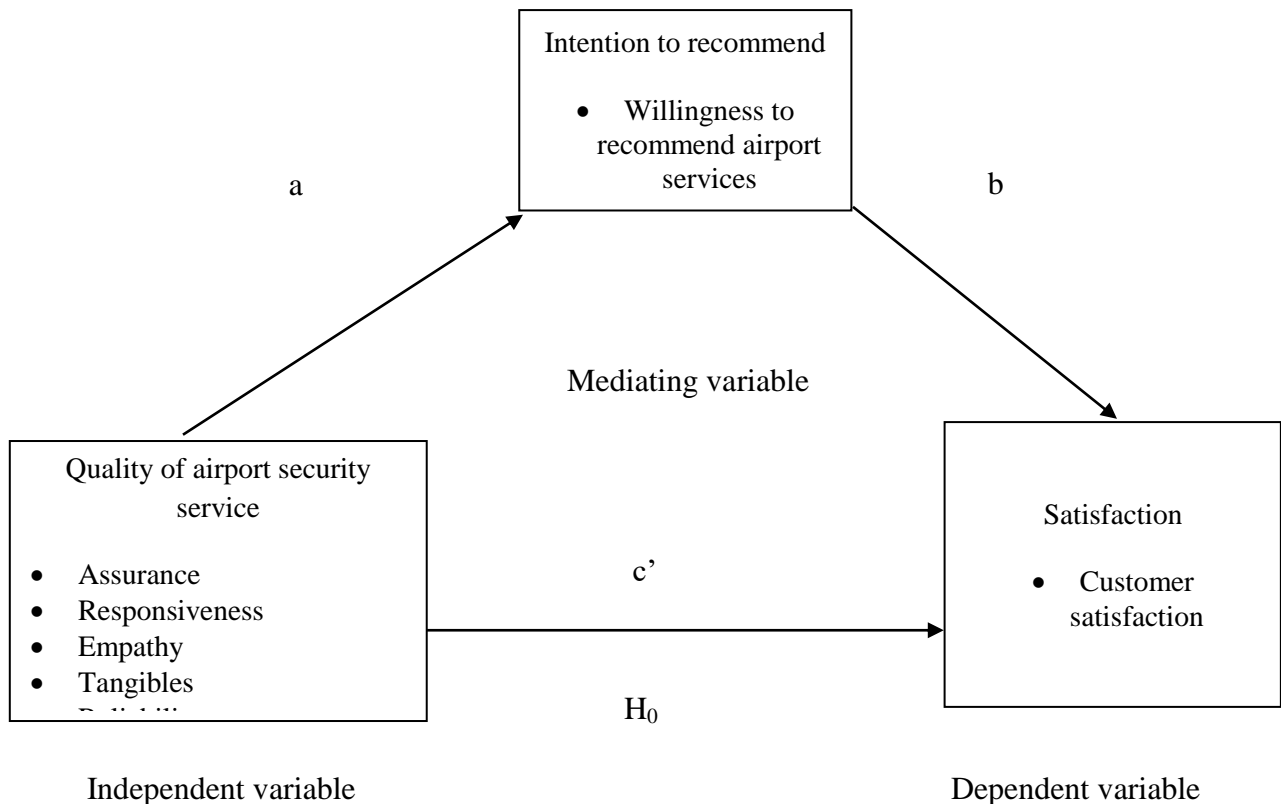
effect of competitive advantage in the relationship between supply chain quality management practices and performance. Competitive advantage was measured by neutralization of competitor activities and exploitation of market opportunities. Among some of the items under quality management was supplier quality management. These findings indicate that the mediating role of intention to recommend has yet to receive sufficient attention in Kenya and the region. Within the air passenger service context in the region and locally there is scanty evidence of scholarly efforts examining the relationship between security service quality and satisfaction and the mediating role of intention to recommend. Consistent with the foregoing discussion it is plausible that there could be a mediating influence of intention to recommend on satisfaction and therefore empirical scrutiny was justified. A preliminary review of the literature suggests that there is a positive relationship between security screening and satisfaction. At the same time there is evidence of diverse research approaches to examining the phenomena under inquiry. Nevertheless, there remains a gap relating to deriving a holistic understanding of passenger satisfaction with ground-based air services and more so the quality of security services. Crucially it emerges that the mediating effect of intention to recommend has received limited explorations. Given this state of affairs the study therefore proposed a conceptual framework to scrutinize the mediating effect of intention to recommend on the relationship between perceived security service quality and satisfaction empirically.



### Conceptual Framework

The objective of this study to determine the extent to which intention to recommend mediates the relationship between the relationship between the perception of quality of airport security influences and satisfaction of air passengers. Anchored on the theoretical foundation of this study and the literature review it was proposed that intention to recommend has a mediating role in the relationship between perceived security service quality and customer satisfaction. In the proposed conceptual

framework quality of airport security service is operationalized under the five components of the SERVQUAL scale namely assurance (ASRC), responsiveness (RESPON), empathy (EMPTHY), tangibles (TANGB) and reliability (RELIAB) which make up the independent variable. Satisfaction is the dependent variable and is operationalized as customer satisfaction (CS). Finally, intention to recommend (ITR) is the proposed mediating variable. A schematic of the proposed conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**

Path a denotes the effect of quality of security service on intention to recommend. Path b denotes the effect of intention to recommend on satisfaction. The path c' denotes the mediating effect of intention to recommend on the relationship between quality of security service and satisfaction. The proposed study hypothesis is outlined as:

$H_0$ : Intention to recommend has no mediating effect on the relationship between quality of airport security service and satisfaction.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

The philosophical underpinning for this study was positivism. As such the research assumed that no absolute truth and that knowledge can only be produced from objective empirical investigations that are conducted via scientific means (Crotty, data, data analysis and subsequently hypothesis testing. This approach required the systematic gathering of data from a considerable population within a specific duration of time. Therefore, the study adopted a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional research design as it helped discover associations amongst variables within a particular interval of time (Schindler, 2021).

### Sampling

The population of interest was departing international air passengers in Kenya. The primary objective was to investigate air passengers' perceptions of airport security service quality. The context and reason for this sample frame is important to clarify because in Kenya security checks are conducted on departing air passengers, not on those arriving. This sample frame is a rich area of inquiry as the process is highly structured and orderly and has been employed to assess service quality in prior

1998). Supported by a positivistic philosophy this study outlined a research question aimed at determining the influence of intention to recommend on the relationship between security service quality and customer satisfaction. In order to accomplish the research objective this study applied procedures and exact specifications of the studies among them Jonathan-Zamir et al (2016) and Chonsalasin (2021).

### Sample Design

An appropriate sample size is one that ensures that enables the researcher to adequately predict and test statistical significance of the relationships under scrutiny. The sample was based on international departures recorded at two international airports in Kenya namely Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) and Moi International Airport (MIA). Accordingly, the study employed the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample calculation table with a confidence interval of 0.05. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2018) the number of international departures by air was 3,315,000. However, as the sample was not known in advance the study implemented a twenty percent non-response rate derived from the pilot study. The sample structure is outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1**      **Sample structure**

Location	Passengers (2018)	Population Proportion (%)	Sample size (N)	Non-response adjustment (%)	Adjusted sample
JKIA	2,604,000	78.65	384	20	362
MIA	711,000	21.35		20	99
Total	3,315,000	100.0			461

Source: KNBS (2018)

**Data Collection**

A structured self-administered questionnaire was used to gather primary data. The instrument consisted of four parts. The first part covered general demographic information. The second part queried perceptions airport security service, the third part satisfaction and the fourth part willingness to recommend the airport services. The instrument adopted the twenty-two item SERVPERF scale proposed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) to assess security service quality with some modification to suit the local perspective. In order to assess customer satisfaction a single question derived from Oliver (1997) was adopted. Similarly, intention to recommend was captured by a single statement borrowed from Moon et al. (2017).

A pilot study was conducted to inspect any levels of unexpected variability, to reveal sources of errors and to detect any measurement challenges (Nassiuma, 2000). In order to develop an appropriate data collection instrument, a two-step process was followed. First, an assessment of the survey instrument was conducted by airport security officials, tourism experts and university professors. This helped to modify unclear terminology and to remove overly general items. Second, a pilot study was conducted among conveniently selected passengers who were not part of the final sample. Fifty passengers were approached and thirty-four accepted to participate in the survey. Sixteen respondents declined to participate. Third, a test of reliability of the pilot data was conducted via computing Cronbach’s alpha with a result of 0.974

which was above the threshold of 0.70 (Sarstedt, Ringle & Hair, 2017).

Based on the recommendation from Dolincar et al (2015), constructs should be measured using appropriate answer options that allow respondents to express their level of satisfaction as well as their behavioral intention. Therefore the final data collection instrument comprised of twenty-four items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1=not at all, 2=to a small extent, 3=to a moderate extent, 4=to a large extent and 5=to a very large extent. A 5-point Likert-type scale in the range was deployed for the items assessing security service quality. A Likert-type scale of 1 to 10 was used to assess customer satisfaction. Intention to recommend was rated against a five-point Likert scale of 1= highly unlikely to 5=very likely.

Fieldwork was conducted during 2021 at JKIA and MIA which are the two major international airports in Kenya. Respondents were selected using of the random number table (Rand Corporation, 1955). Only international departing passengers located in the boarding gates of the airport terminal building participated in the survey. This is because the respondents had recently completed airport security screening

procedures and had sufficient time to complete the questionnaires. Screening questions checked that respondents were above 18 years and their proficiency with the English language. Participation was voluntary and data was collected at all times of airport activity.

## Results and Discussion

Following data collection, it was established that out of 461 respondents approached 429 scripts were received. Data cleaning revealed 45 incomplete scripts which were discarded, leaving 384 complete scripts for analysis. The response rate was computed as 83.30 percent. Descriptive analysis of the sample revealed that 61 percent of the respondents were male and 53 percent were Kenyan nationals. Moreover, 65 percent of the respondents were between 25 and 44 years of age. The primary occupational activity was full-time employment (74 percent) and the most common reason for travel was visiting friends and family (43 percent). Finally, 69 percent of the sample had college level education and above. With these characteristics the sample was considered to be sufficiently comprehensive. Table 2 summarizes the sample characteristics.

**Table 2 Sample Characteristics**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	236	61
	Female	148	39
Nationality	Kenyan	202	53
	Other	182	47
Age	18 to 24 years	61	16
	25 to 34 years	163	42
	35 to 44 years	87	23
	Above 45 years	73	19
Frequency of flights per year	2 times	160	42
	3 to 4 times	79	21
	More than 5 times	145	37
Reason for travel	Visiting friends and	165	42
	Business	64	17
	Education	53	14
	Tourism	33	9
	Employment	69	18
Highest level of education	Up to Secondary school	49	13
	College	80	21
	Undergraduate degree	147	38
	Master's degree and	108	28
Occupation	Employed	285	74
	Unemployed	99	26

Source: Primary Research Data, 2021

The objective of the study was to determine the extent to which intention to recommend mediates the relationship between security service quality and customer satisfaction. Therefore, a key outcome of the data analysis was to assess the predictive ability of the model. Further, this study was aimed at identifying substantial effects whilst testing the relationships proposed. In order

to explore and better understand the phenomena under inquiry it was considered that it was valuable to reveal substantial effects where they are present (Hair, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019; Chin et al. 2020). To this end partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) techniques were applied as they were a particularly powerful



statistical analysis tool and were suited to the study objective.

The data were subjected to tests to assess internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. In order to do so construct reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha and Joreskog's (1971) composite reliability  $P_c$ . In partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) Cronbach's alpha is the lower bound while Joreskog's composite reliability is the upper bound of internal consistency reliability. The threshold for both these measures was 0.70. The computed values for

Cronbach's alpha and  $P_c$  was 0.944 and 0.95 respectively hence the data met the established cut-off. Convergent validity was assessed by computing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value across all the items associated with the construct of service quality. The AVE threshold is 0.5 or higher and indicates that, on average, the construct explains more than 50 percent of the variance of the items (Sarstedt et al. 2017). The assessment of reliability and validity are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3 Assessment of Reliability and Validity**

		Convergent Validity			Internal Consistency Reliability	
		Loadings	Indicator Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability $P_c$	Cronbach's Alpha
Variables	Indicators	>0.70	>0.50	>0.50	>0.70	>0.70
QSS	RELIAB1	0.587	0.345	0.466	0.95	0.944
	RELIAB2	0.46	0.212			
	RELIAB3	0.672	0.452			
	RELIAB4	0.676	0.457			
	RELIAB5	0.44	0.194			
	RESPON1	0.568	0.323			
	RESPON2	0.699	0.489			
	RESPON3	0.657	0.432			
	RESPON4	0.648	0.42			
	ASRC1	0.748	0.56			
	ASRC2	0.663	0.44			
	ASRC3	0.693	0.48			

	ASRC4	0.606	0.367			
	EMPTHY1	0.697	0.486			
	EMPTHY2	0.791	0.626			
	EMPTHY3	0.779	0.607			
	EMPTHY4	0.761	0.579			
	EMPTHY5	0.734	0.539			
	TANGB1	0.712	0.507			
	TANGB2	0.772	0.596			
	TANGB3	0.734	0.539			
	TANGB4	0.785	0.616			
CS	CS	1	1	SI	SI	SI
ITR	ITR	1	1	SI	SI	SI

Source: Primary Research Data, 2021

QSS= quality of security services, CS = customer satisfaction, ITR = intention to recommend  
 SI= single indicator

From the initial data analysis some of the indicators exhibited loadings below 0.708; however, they form an absolute contribution to the construct of service quality on the grounds of measurement theory (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1994). In addition, prior empirical research has substantiated the relevance of these indicators for the measurement of service quality (Park & Jung, 2011; Meesala & Paul, 2018). Bootstrapping is the most widely used method for standard error estimation in PLS-SEM. The bootstrapping procedure is a non-parametric inferential technique that randomly draws several sub-

samples with replacement from the original subset. Should the bootstrap confidence intervals of an indicator weight include zero then it indicates

that the weight is not statistically significant. In this case bootstrapping with 10,000 samples with no sign changes indicated that the confidence intervals did not have zero in between them, hence they were acceptable. The statistical significance of the indicators via bootstrapping outcome is as outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4 Bootstrapping Reliability and Validity Measures**

	Loadings	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	p-values
RELIAB1	0.587	0.050	11.726	0.001
RELIAB2	0.460	0.052	8.919	0.001
RELIAB3	0.672	0.044	15.317	0.001
RELIAB4	0.676	0.032	20.960	0.001
RELIAB5	0.440	0.043	10.255	0.001
RESPON1	0.568	0.041	13.902	0.001
RESPON2	0.699	0.031	22.921	0.001
RESPON3	0.657	0.040	16.447	0.001
RESPON4	0.648	0.040	16.217	0.001
ASRC1	0.748	0.030	24.929	0.001
ASRC2	0.663	0.037	18.000	0.001
ASRC3	0.693	0.041	16.997	0.001
ASRC4	0.606	0.046	13.115	0.001
EMPTHY1	0.697	0.036	19.368	0.001
EMPTHY2	0.791	0.026	30.334	0.001
EMPTHY3	0.779	0.027	29.357	0.001
EMPTHY4	0.761	0.028	26.827	0.001
EMPTHY5	0.734	0.034	21.370	0.001
TANGB1	0.712	0.033	21.724	0.001
TANGB2	0.772	0.026	29.315	0.001
TANGB3	0.734	0.033	22.046	0.001
TANGB4	0.785	0.026	30.028	0.001

Source: Source: Primary Research Data, 2021

The results from the bootstrapping analysis showed that all the indicators were statistically significant at  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore, the researchers retained all the indicators of

the SERVPERF scale in the following part of the data analysis. Discriminant validity was assessed by computing the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of correlations (HTMT)

with a threshold of 0.85 (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). In order to test the statistical significance of this result bootstrapping with 10,000 samples and no sign changes option

was executed as per the suggestion by Franke and Sarstedt (2019). The HTMT result is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5 Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**

	HTMT Values	Bca [2.5%;97.5% }
ITR -> CS	0.5992	[0.507; 0.680]
QSS -> CS	0.5614	[0.458;0.650]
QSS -> ITR	0.4170	[0.292;0.536]

Source: Primary Research Data, 2021

Bca =bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals

All the HTMT values were all below the threshold of 0.85. If the bootstrap confidence intervals of an indicator weight include zero then it indicates that the weight is not statistically significant. In this case derived from bootstrapping with 10,000 samples with no sign change option indicated that the confidence intervals did not have zero in between them, hence they were acceptable. This result indicated that discriminant validity was not an issue. Thus, following an evaluation of the measurement model by means of standard evaluation criteria (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, 2021) the reliability, validity and discriminant validity were considered appropriate for mediation analysis to proceed.

**Mediation Analysis**

The goal of the general mediation causal model is to explain the mediating effect; however, another important aim is prediction (Shmueli et al. 2019). State of the art procedures for testing mediation hold that the indirect effect a x b provides researchers with

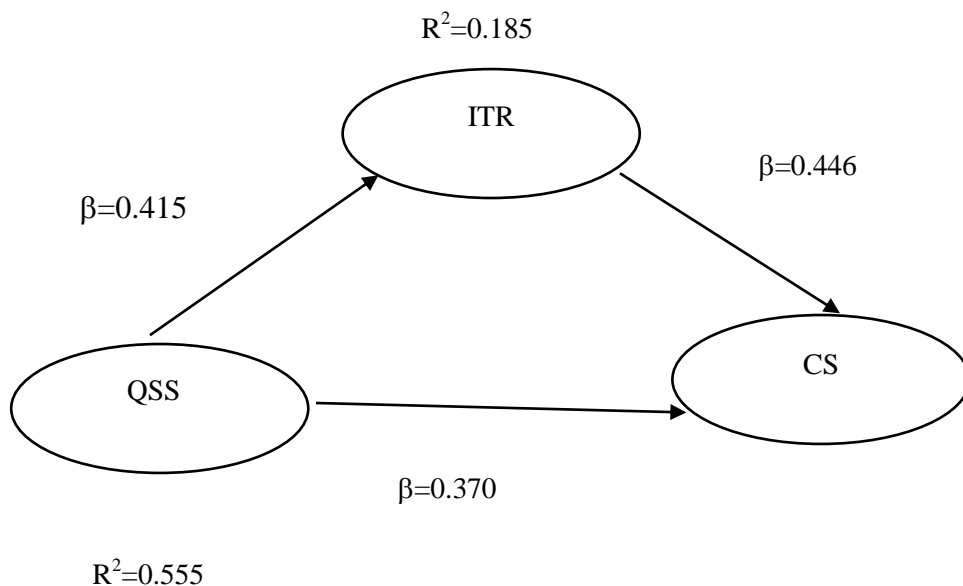
all the information for testing mediation (Zhao, Lynch & Chen, 2010; Nitzl, Roldan & Cepeda, 2016). Secondly, that the strength of the indirect effect a x b determines the size of the mediation. Thirdly that a bootstrap procedure should be used to test the significance of the indirect effect a x b (Fig. 1).

Prior to conducting mediation analysis Henseler and Sarstedt (2013) recommend assessing the global goodness of fit of the model. In the context of PLS the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value of less than 0.08 indicates that a PLS path model provided a sufficient fit for the empirical data (Nitzl et al. 2016). The computed SRMR value was 0.0763 with a Chi-square  $X^2= 2011.306$  indicating that the model was a sufficient fit for the data. To scrutinize the mediation effect of intention to recommend on the relationship between security service quality and satisfaction the general mediation causal model proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986)

was employed. As a result of the mediation testing the empirical model was developed and is outlined in Figure 2.

on the relationship between quality of security services and customer satisfaction

Figure 2 Empirical model for the mediating effect of intention to recommend



The summarized result from mediation testing is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6 Mediation Analysis**

Total Effect (QSS -> CS)		Direct effect (QSS -> CS)			
Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value		
0.555	0.001	0.370	0.001		
Indirect effect of QSS on CS					
Hypothesis	Coefficient	SD	T value	p-values	BCa [2.5%; 97.5%]
H <sub>0</sub> : QSS->ITR->CS	0.185	0.0320	5.826	0.001	[0.126;0.252]

Source: Primary Research Data, 2021

BCa = bias corrected and accelerated confidence interval, SD = standard deviation



## Results and Discussion

In the general mediation causal model proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation is present where the independent variable (QSS) still explains a portion of CS, the dependent variable that is independent of ITR, the mediator variable. In this case path a ( $\beta = 0.415$   $p > 0.05$ ) denotes the path from the independent variable to the mediator variable. Path b ( $\beta = 0.446$   $p > 0.05$ ) represents the path from the mediator variable to the dependent variable. Finally, path c' ( $\beta = 0.370$   $p > 0.05$ ) presents the direct effect of the independent variable to the dependent variable when the mediating variable ITR is included in the analysis. From the analysis depicted in Table 6 the total effect of QSS on CS was statistically significant ( $R^2 = 0.555$ ;  $t = 11.670$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). With the inclusion of the mediating variable (ITR) the impact of QSS on CS was also statistically significant ( $R^2 = 0.185$ ;  $t = 5.826$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). Meaning that a portion of the effect of QSS on CS is mediated through ITR. This finding demonstrated that the relationship between QSS and CS is mediated by ITR. Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis  $H_0$  and inferred that intention to recommend has a statistically significant mediating effect on the relationship between quality of airport security service and satisfaction.

The bias corrected bootstrap confidence interval is the ideal approach for detecting mediating effects when the mediating effect is present hence avoiding Type II error (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). Further analysis of the data included bootstrapping 10,000 samples and no sign changes (Franke &

Sarstedt, 2019) disclosed that the bias corrected confidence interval did not include zero thereby providing support of the statistical significance of the finding. An assessment of the categorization of the mediation was also conducted. According to Zhao et al (2010) mediation decision tree partial mediation is observed when independent variable exerts some of its influence on the dependent variable via the mediating variable. In this study, as the direct effect c' and the indirect effect a x b point in the same direction then there was observed complementary partial mediation Nitzl et al (2016); Zhao et al (2010). The finding means that the proposed mediating variable explains or falsifies the relationship between the independent (QSS) and dependent variable (CS). This study therefore concluded that intention to recommend has a complementary partial mediation effect on the relationship between security service quality and customer satisfaction.

## Discussion

Following the objective of the study the relationships between the constructs of interest was investigated. This study was conducted to determine the extent to which intention to recommend mediates the relationship between security service quality and customer satisfaction. Testing the study hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) revealed statistical evidence of the mediating effect of intention to recommend in the relationship between quality of security service quality and satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.185$   $p < 0.01$ ). The study hypotheses was rejected meaning that intention to recommend mediates the

relationship between security service and customer satisfaction among air passengers in Kenya.

The dominant approach to examining service quality has been the SERVQUAL scale proposed by Parasuraman et al (1985, 1988). Relatively few studies have embraced the SERVPERF scale despite its ability to adequately capture the service quality construct. At the same time there are studies that have tested different relationships and revealed different outcomes. Methodologically this study differs several others in critical ways. For instance, In the medical services sector in India Meesala and Paul (2018) tested the five components of the SERVQUAL scale amongst patients who has used private healthcare services and found that reliability and responsiveness had the strongest influence on customer satisfaction. The other service quality components of empathy, tangibility and assurance were not found to be statistically suitable. In addition, the study found that satisfaction was directly related to loyalty to the hospital. In the aviation sector Fodness and Murray (2007) study in the USA employed both a modified SERVQUAL scale to measure quantitative service quality supported followed by qualitative assessment of those measures revealed that passengers' expectations of airport service quality included three key function, interaction and diversion dimensions. Relatedly Chonsalasan et al (2020) objective was to create a model for measuring airport quality by using confirmatory factor analysis to identify passengers' expectations in Thailand and concluded that 33 variables categorized under seven domains of access,

security, check-in, airport facilities, wayfinding, airport environment, and arrival services were statistically significant. An important observation is that both Fodness and Murray (2007) and Chonsalasin et al (2021) study objective was to develop a model for passengers' service quality expectations.

Bezerra and Gomes (2015) study in Brazil found that passengers who are more likely to assign higher ratings for overall satisfaction with the airport also show higher levels of satisfaction regarding their evaluation of check-in, security, atmosphere, basic facilities and prices. In particular, the study found a link between the frequency of air travel and the decreased likelihood to present higher levels of overall satisfaction. According to the results, a passenger is more likely to assign higher ratings for overall satisfaction with the airport the higher his or her level of satisfaction regarding the five dimensions of check-in, security, ambience, basic facilities, and prices. In contrast, higher satisfaction with the convenience dimension meant that it was less likely the passenger would assign higher ratings for overall satisfaction; a finding consistent with those of Pakdil & Adyin (2007) and Park and Jung (2011)

The findings from this study compare to those of Prentice and Kadan (2019) online study based on departing airline passengers in Australia that found overall airport service quality was significantly related to airport reuse and destination revisit. In addition, the study revealed that passenger satisfaction and reuse of airport exerted a mediation effects in the relationship between

airport service quality and airport reuse and destination revisit intention. Additionally, this study finding compares Moon et al (2017) study in the aviation sector in Korea tested the moderating role of perceived safety in the relationship between satisfaction and the intention to revisit and the willingness to spend more. Quality was operationalized as airport physical surroundings, layout accessibility, facility aesthetics, seating comfort, electronic equipment and displays, and cleanliness. Four of the five quality components were significant in explaining satisfaction; with electronics being invalid. Importantly the study found a statistically insignificant moderating effect of perceived safety in the relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

This study found a statistically significant effect of security service quality on customer satisfaction with an  $R^2=0.555$  ( $p>0.05$ ). Meaning that perceived security service quality accounted for 55 percent of the change in customer satisfaction. Following PLS-SEM mediation analysis the mediating effect of intention to recommend on the relationship between security service quality and customer satisfaction was also found to be significant with an  $R^2=0.185$  ( $p>0.05$ ). Meaning that 18.5 percent of the variation in customer satisfaction from the influence of perceived security service quality was attributed to intention to recommend. The findings from this study stands in contrast to findings from local studies. For example, Richu et al (2022) The study operationalized customer satisfaction as loyalty and expectations met and service quality was operationalized as functional

and technical quality as proposed by Gronroos (2001). The revealed a positive relationship between logistics management practices and customer satisfaction with an  $R^2=0.482$  ( $p>0.05$ ). The study also found a positive relationship between logistics service quality and satisfaction with an  $R^2=0.342$  ( $p>0.05$ ). By applying the four step Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation analysis procedure a partial mediation effect of logistics service quality on the relationship between logistics management practices and customer satisfaction of shippers in Kenya was revealed.

This study accepted five service quality components as proposed by Parasuraman et al (1985) and further accepted the performance only measure (SERVPERF) of the service quality construct as per Cronin and Taylor (1992). In discussing their findings Richu et al (2022) reveal that functional quality was more important than technical quality. This study revealed that the perceptions only service quality scale as expounded by Cronin and Taylor (1992) is a valid and coherent foundation on which to quantitatively assess perceptions of security services quality by international air passengers in Kenya. In summary an analysis of this study findings provides support to the position that mediating role of intention to recommend has yet to receive sufficient attention in Kenya and the region. Specifically, within the air passenger service context in the region and locally insufficient attention has been given to examining the relationship between security service quality and satisfaction and the mediating role of intention to recommend for international air passengers in Kenya.

## Conclusion

This study revealed that intention to recommend has a complementary partial mediation effect on the relationship between security service and customer satisfaction for international air passengers in Kenya. This was a meaningful finding in the development of the extension of theory as it has revealed a distinction in effect between what are perceived as two somewhat similar outcomes. An important theoretical implication is the need for further empirical testing of the conceptual model and the interactions between the variables to provide further support for this study finding. This study extends the frontiers of knowledge by supplying a novel understanding of the interrelationships between service quality, satisfaction and intention to recommend under the anchor of the theory of reasoned action and EDP. The conceptual model presented in this study can be used as a theoretical foundation for the development of research designs. This may enable researchers to deliver more realistic estimators of the mediating impact of intention to recommend on the relationship between quality of security services and customer satisfaction. Prior literature suggests this realm of inquiry has received limited attention particularly in developing country contexts.

Alongside handling the logistical demands of increasing air traffic, airports also play a role in tourism by providing a first impression of the country and destination (Martin-Cejas, 2006, Prentice & Kadan, 2019). As such managers of airports must

focus on improving service quality. These efforts will assist counter the perception that passenger expectations regarding the airport experience is associated with the idea of minimum tolerable performance. Managers understand that delivering superior service quality supports the improvement of customer satisfaction ratings and profits. The managerial implication of this study finding is that the perceived quality of airport security service could be improved if customer problems were effectively handled in real time as the security screening procedure is happening. An additional managerial implication is the need to focus on employee satisfaction that aspect ultimately impacts the level of service and commitment they provide to the consumer and employer. Noting that fifty eight percent of the respondents in this sample were between the ages of 18- and 34-years old airport managers could communicate and educate air transport users with the aim of conveying clearly that the service that they are offering is better than that of competing airports. Now and in the future passenger concerns of airport security and hygiene will remain intertwined. Therefore, the top priority for managers is to reduce customer perceptions of the costs associated with undergoing airport security and hygiene procedures. Managers should ensure that the right service strategies are chosen and implemented appropriately.

The policy implications of this study include the need for a deliberate governmental intervention to enhance and anchor full collaboration of the airport authorities with agencies like Kenya Tourism Board and Brand Kenya to conducting aggressive

worldwide campaigns to build confidence in Kenya as a safe and secure tourism destination. A support to these local policy initiatives would be for the establishment of frameworks for facilitating long term regional and international sharing of best practice with the aim of achieving seamless and contactless air travel. That would include dedicating resources to upskilling of personnel and upgrading of security screening infrastructure in order to deliver a delightful passenger experience. Such policy initiatives would have the most significant influence on satisfaction with the quality of security services for air passengers in Kenya.

This study had limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the sampling frame was departing international air travellers for reasons of simplicity and precedence. This approach neglected a large part of airport users and providers such as domestic air travellers, and transiting passengers, and staff who are also subject to security screening procedures. As a consequence, the findings from this study can be generalized to departing international air passengers in Kenya. Second, the positivist philosophy and quantitative measurement of perceived service quality by adopting a modified SERVPERF scale which was somewhat limited in its apprehension of the construct of service quality. A possible means to establish deeper insights into the nature of service quality would be to execute similar studies under a critical realist philosophy which would involve qualitative data acquisition and analysis. Future inquiry could borrow from the findings of this study to identify other complementary dimensions

of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in other service industries in Kenya.

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