

Article

The Influence of CSR and Service Experience on the Reuse Intention Among Air China Passengers: The Mediating Role of Brand Love and Customer Satisfaction

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Abstract

In the environment in which competition in the aviation industry is intensifying and services are becoming increasingly homogeneous, a deep understanding of the key factors influencing passenger loyalty is beneficial for airlines to adopt more differentiated policies, thereby enabling long-term development. Exploring these dynamics within the framework of social and economic sustainability in the aviation sector, this study conducted a questionnaire survey of 375 Air China passengers. The collected data were analyzed using SEM (structural equation modeling) to investigate the relationships among service experience, corporate social responsibility (CSR), brand love, customer satisfaction, and reuse intention. The empirical results show that service experience has a significant and positive impact on both brand love and customer satisfaction. Also, CSR is key to boosting passengers' emotional attachment and overall satisfaction. The findings also show that passengers with higher brand love and satisfaction are more likely to reuse the airline's services. The results highlight how integrating CSR and service experience into an emotional-cognitive path serves as a strategic roadmap for securing a sustainable competitive advantage in a homogeneous market. Based on these insights, the research proposes practical managerial implications to help Air China develop sustainably and stay competitive in the long run.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR); service experience; brand love; customer satisfaction; reuse intention; aviation industry; social sustainability



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1. Introduction

In the context of increasingly fierce competition and growing homogeneity of services in the aviation industry, the scope for differentiation among airlines is gradually narrowing. The key issue for airlines to gain a sustained competitive advantage and achieve long-term development is thus raised [1–3]. This is because the sustainable development of the aviation industry does not only depend on environmental or operational efficiency. It also relies on the ability to establish long-term and stable relationships with customers. This relationship constitutes a core component of social and economic sustainability in the service sector [4]. According to Dyllick and Hockerts [5], corporate sustainability requires maintaining both social capital through relationship building and economic capital through long-term value creation. In this study, social sustainability refers to the cultivation of relational capital and trust between the airline and its passengers. Economic sustainability is operationalized as the capacity for long-term survival through enhanced loyalty and

retention. By integrating CSR and service experience as precursors to emotional and cognitive evaluations, this model aligns with these socio-economic pillars. Ethical engagement and service excellence foster a resilient customer base, which ensures the enduring viability of the industry [5].

Due to the relatively high awareness and trust of corporate social responsibility (CSR) among Chinese consumers, they are more likely to convert good CSR records into positive evaluations of enterprises and purchase intentions [6]. Relevant studies also indicate that CSR has become an important strategic tool for airlines to achieve sustainable development [7]. In the unique institutional context of China, CSR initiatives are increasingly viewed not merely as voluntary branding strategies but as essential components of national policy alignment and the broader ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) framework [8]. Therefore, for Chinese full-service carriers like Air China, integrating CSR into the core service model is a critical pathway to fulfilling social expectations while securing long-term market viability. From a sustainability perspective, CSR initiatives serve as a vital link between corporate growth and societal values, ensuring that airlines contribute to the social pillar of sustainability while maintaining market competitiveness [7,9]. At the same time, CSR and service experience are widely regarded as important factors influencing passenger value perception and trust [2,10]. This research provides meaningful recommendations for practitioners by demonstrating how ethical engagement and service excellence jointly foster a resilient customer base in a market where CSR has transitioned into an indispensable institutional requirement. Research in the aviation industry also shows that service experience and CSR play a significant role in shaping passengers' emotional connections, satisfaction, and long-term behavioral outcomes [7,11].

However, a significant research gap remains in the integrated approach to these constructs. First, previous studies have often treated airport services [12,13] and airline services [14] as separate entities. This approach fails to examine the combined influence of corporate responsibility and service excellence. Second, a large portion of the existing literature has been concentrated on specific regions like the Korean aviation market [14]. This concentration limits the generalizability of findings to the unique institutional and cultural landscape of the Chinese airline industry [8]. Finally, while the independent effects of CSR and service experience have been studied, there is still a lack of investigation into how they jointly drive the dual pathways of emotional attachment (brand love) and cognitive satisfaction to influence reuse intention. This study investigates these deficiencies by proposing an integrated framework tailored to the Chinese full-service carrier context. Although brand love has been widely studied in retail, hotels, and luxury goods sectors, its research in the aviation service sector is still relatively limited [15]. Integrating such emotional variables into the service model is crucial for the sustainable management of airlines, as it fosters a resilient customer base capable of withstanding market volatility [7]. Moreover, many studies have systematically explored the influence of service experience, perceived value, and satisfaction on passengers' behavioral intentions from a cognitive perspective, but few studies have simultaneously integrated cognitive value and emotional pathways to explain passengers' behavioral responses [16,17]. Especially in the context of the Chinese airline industry, there are relatively few integrated empirical studies at the passenger level [8].

In response to the aforementioned research deficiencies, the key objective of this research is as follows. Firstly, we will explore how the service experience in the airline industry and CSR (corporate social responsibility) influence passengers' intention to reuse the service. Secondly, this study examines the direct impact of service experience on brand love and customer satisfaction, as well as the influence of CSR on brand love and customer satisfaction. Finally, this study further analyzes the influence of brand love and

customer satisfaction on passengers' reuse intention. The goal of this research is to construct and test the structural relationship among CSR, service experience, brand love, customer satisfaction, and reuse intention. It also empirically tests an integrated cognitive and emotional path theory model for airline passengers' reuse intention, providing a theoretical basis for sustainable relationship marketing and brand management.

This study aims to investigate the following questions. Does the service experience of airlines significantly affect passengers' brand love and customer satisfaction? Will airlines' engagement in corporate social responsibility behaviors enhance passengers' brand love and satisfaction? If passengers' brand love and satisfaction increase, will it lead to an increase in reuse intention?

This study provides meaningful insights particularly within the context of Air China and its passengers. Theoretically, first, by introducing brand love into the study framework of the Chinese full-service carrier sector, this study verifies the role of brand love in shaping passenger behavior. Second, this study constructs a structural equation model to integrate the cognitive perspective and the emotional perspective to observe how they jointly affect passengers' reuse intention. This approach contributes to the understanding of relationship management specifically within the institutional landscape of the Chinese airline industry. Practically, first, this research enables managers to enhance passengers' emotional connection and satisfaction by integrating service experience and CSR initiatives into their marketing strategies. Second, specifically for Air China, the research findings offer a strategic roadmap to improve passenger retention and secure a competitive advantage in a market where service offerings are becoming increasingly homogeneous.

As this study focuses on the passengers of full-service carriers in China, due to the limitations of the research background and methods, the results should be interpreted with caution. For the research structure, Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on CSR, service experience, brand love, customer satisfaction, and reuse intention, and proposes six hypotheses. Section 3 presents the research model and explains the research methods. Section 4 shows the empirical results and validates the model. Section 5 discusses the research conclusions and implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Service Experience

Service experience is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct representing the internal and subjective response of a customer to any direct or indirect contact with a company [18]. Within the service sector, it encompasses both functional and experiential elements that elicit cognitive and affective responses from consumers [19,20]. In the aviation sector, these evaluations are formed through ongoing interactions with various service attributes across the passenger's journey, ranging from pre-flight services to in-flight experiences [11,21].

This research identifies three primary dimensions of service experience specifically tailored to the full-service carrier (FSC) context in China: employee service, physical environment, and core service performance. These dimensions are justified by the unique characteristics of the Chinese full-service carrier's market. First, employee service reflects the quality of interpersonal interactions, which is vital in the Chinese hospitality context where relational value and social harmony are emphasized. Second, the physical environment, including cabin facilities and cleanliness, represents the premium tangible cues expected by FSC passengers as symbols of status and comfort. Third, core service performance, such as safety and punctuality, serves as the essential baseline for establishing passenger trust and functional reliability [22]. By integrating these three dimensions, this

study provides a comprehensive measure of the passenger experience within a competitive and culturally specific institutional landscape.

Empirical evidence across various service industries demonstrates the significant role of service experience in shaping customer behavior. In the tourism and hospitality sectors, high-quality experiences trigger positive emotions and attitudes, serving as a critical foundation for brand love [23,24]. However, a comprehensive understanding of service experience requires acknowledging its negative dimensions. Ju et al. [25] emphasize that negative memories, such as service failures or poor interpersonal encounters, can influence the passenger evaluations more than positive ones, often leading to a rapid erosion of trust. Beyond these negative considerations, the positive impact of service experience on customer satisfaction is reinforced when the perceived performance meets or exceeds prior expectations [26]. Integrating sensory, emotional, and cognitive elements of experience has been proven to significantly enhance long-term passenger loyalty and retention by fostering a resilient customer base [27,28]. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *Service experience positively affects brand love.*

H2: *Service experience positively affects customer satisfaction.*

2.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to voluntary company actions that balance economic, social, and environmental interests beyond legal obligations [9,11]. Within the aviation industry, CSR is commonly regarded as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing economic, social, and environmental responsibilities [7,11]. Based on these conceptual frameworks, this study defines corporate social responsibility as the subjective evaluation of airlines' fulfillment regarding economic, social, and environmental responsibilities measured through social contributions, environmental operations, and economic contributions such as job creation.

The existing literature, beginning with early studies by Sen and Bhattacharya [29], indicates that consumers' perceptions of companies' CSR activities significantly enhance evaluations of corporate image and lead to increased satisfaction [29]. From a broader strategic perspective, leading global organizations recognize a direct and positive relationship between CSR engagement and customer satisfaction, highlighting CSR as an important marketing and relational tool [30]. Empirical findings further demonstrate that CSR improves customer satisfaction by enhancing the overall assessments of performance [31] and by shaping favorable consumer perceptions [32]. Furthermore, the mechanism through which CSR influences satisfaction involves the enhancement of perceived value and corporate trust. Companies that actively engage in socially responsible practices build a reservoir of goodwill that buffers against negative service encounters and strengthens the emotional bond with consumers [33]. This positive evaluation of companies' ethics increases the perceived value of the service, which is a critical antecedent of satisfaction. Philanthropic activities elicit positive brand recognition, paving the way for higher levels of customer satisfaction [34]. Emotional mechanisms also play a crucial role, as CSR initiatives generate positive emotional responses that lead to greater customer satisfaction [35]. In service contexts within hospitality and aviation industries, CSR involvement has been found to enhance customer satisfaction and cultivate stronger relational outcomes [36,37]. Recent airline research confirms that CSR initiatives including environmental sustainability and social equity strengthen passengers' positive perceptions and emotional responses toward airlines, resulting in higher satisfaction with airlines' services [7,11].

Previous studies have also shown that information about airlines' fulfillment of social responsibilities can enhance consumers' positive emotions, such as feelings of affection, because people tend to positively evaluate the moral behavior of airlines [38–40]. Conversely, companies' wrongdoings can damage brand reputation, highlighting CSR as a critical strategic tool for enhancing reputational outcomes [41]. Building on this perspective, Lee et al. [11] argue that CSR-driven perceptions stimulate emotional resonance and moral satisfaction, which are essential antecedents of brand love. Empirical evidence further confirms that customers who perceive a brand as socially responsible are more likely to develop stronger emotional attachment and positive affect toward the brand, thereby strengthening brand love [42]. Similarly, research in retail and service contexts demonstrates that CSR initiatives emphasizing environmental values and employee welfare play a vital role in fostering brand love [43]. In the airline industry, Han et al. [44] also reveal a significant positive relationship between CSR and brand love based on customers' service experiences. Moreover, consumers' perceptions of brands' ethicality and socially responsible practices enhance emotional brand evaluations, which are fundamental to the development of brand love [45]. Recent studies further emphasize that authentic CSR initiatives cultivate consumers' emotional attachment, serving as a key mechanism through which airlines' responsible behaviors translate into stronger brand love [46,47]. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: *CSR positively affects customer satisfaction.*

H4: *CSR positively affects brand love.*

2.3. Brand Love

Brand love is defined as a unique emotional attachment and connection stemming from deep emotional responses accumulated during interactions between consumers and the brand [48–50]. This connection is continuously strengthened by the satisfaction derived from repeated positive brand experiences [51,52]. To build on these conceptual frameworks, this study operationalizes brand love as passengers' emotional attachment and affection toward the airline brand.

Prior research consistently demonstrates that brand love is one of the key factors in enhancing customers' reuse intention and long-term brand relationships. Brand love, conceptualized as a deep emotional attachment to a brand, has been established as a significant predictor of positive consumer behaviors, including loyalty and behavioral intentions [49]. From a theoretical perspective, the formation of brand love is deeply rooted in attachment theory and self-expansion theory. Attachment theory suggests that consumers develop emotional bonds with brands similar to human relationships, which fosters long-term commitment and reduces the likelihood of switching to competitors [53]. Furthermore, self-expansion theory posits that consumers integrate the brand into their self-concept when the brand provides identity-related benefits, leading to a profound sense of love and loyalty [54]. Consumers who develop strong emotional attachment and affection toward a brand are more likely to maintain long-term relationships with the brand, as emotional bonds increase commitment and reduce switching behavior, thereby leading to higher reuse intention [11,55]. Scholars further suggest that favorable brand evaluations and emotions such as love encourage repeated purchasing behavior [44,56]. Empirical evidence supports this view by revealing that brand love has a positive influence on the repurchase behavior within young consumers and Generation Y across various product and service contexts [57,58]. Moreover, studies on destination and retail brands indicate that brand love significantly enhances loyalty-related behaviors, such as word of mouth, recommendations, revisit intention, and repeat purchasing [48,59,60]. In the aviation

industry, a previous study also investigated a significant association between airline brand perceptions and repeat purchase intention, suggesting that brand love contributes to airline loyalty and reuse intention [61]. In view of these emotional mechanisms, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: *Brand love positively affects reuse intention.*

2.4. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined as an emotional and cognitive assessment resulting from the comparison between initial expectations and actual service performance [26]. In the aviation sector, this encompasses a passenger's overall evaluation of both online and offline service experiences [3]. Accordingly, this study operationalizes passenger satisfaction as the degree of happiness and fulfillment passengers feel during their overall travel experience, reflecting the alignment between airline services and passenger expectations [7].

Extensive prior research has consistently confirmed that customer satisfaction has a significant influence on customers' reuse intention. Customer satisfaction is a key determinant of behavioral intentions, including repurchase and reuse intentions [14,16]. This relationship is largely explained by the expectancy–disconfirmation paradigm, which posits that satisfaction serves as a primary reinforcement for future behavioral decisions [26]. When passengers perceive that airline service performance meets or exceeds their standards, the resulting positive emotional state significantly lowers the perceived risk of future transactions, thereby increasing the likelihood of choosing the same airline [3]. In the context of airline and service industries, passenger satisfaction has been identified as a decisive antecedent of reuse intention and a fundamental driver of passenger loyalty and repeat purchasing behavior [14]. Based on these empirical arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: *Customer satisfaction positively affects reuse intention.*

2.5. Reuse Intention

Reuse intention is conceptualized as the subjective likelihood that passengers will continue to utilize a service following their prior experiences [62]. Within the aviation sector, it represents a critical indicator of passenger loyalty, reflecting the passenger's willingness to maintain a long-term relationship with the airline [63,64].

Previous studies define this construct as the intention to repurchase or revisit a service, which is primarily driven by satisfaction and service quality [65,66]. Lee et al. [11] further suggest that reuse intention reflects a passenger's subjective willingness to select the same airline for future needs, serving as a behavioral consequence of favorable service evaluations.

Based on these conceptual frameworks, this study operationalizes reuse intention as a passenger's intention to utilize the same airline service for future travel requirements.

2.6. The Mediating Role of Brand Love and Customer Satisfaction

This research adopts the S-O-R framework (Stimulus–Organism–Response) to build a robust theoretical foundation for mediating roles of brand love and customer satisfaction. In this perspective, external stimuli (S), specifically service experience and CSR initiatives, are processed through the passenger's internal states (O) before manifesting as a behavioral response (R). Within this model, the internal state is operationalized through two distinct pathways, a cognitive pathway (customer satisfaction) and an affective pathway (brand love). These mediators serve as the psychological mechanisms through which functional and ethical stimuli influence the final behavioral response of reuse intention. While passen-

ger satisfaction represents a rational assessment of service performance, brand love reflects the deep emotional attachment and resonance with the airline brand. By integrating the cognitive and emotional mediators, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how airlines translate strategic efforts into long-term passenger retention and sustainable relationship management.

3. Methodology

3.1. Survey Design

This study constructed the survey instrument in accordance with the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. A total of 20 quantitative measurement items were developed based on well-established studies related to service experience, brand love, corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction, and reuse intention (see Table 1). Each item was carefully reviewed and refined to ensure consistency with the research objectives. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

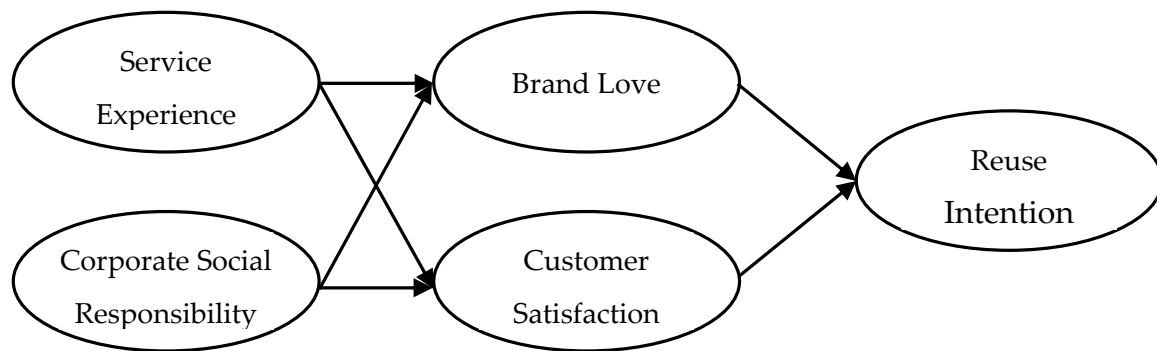


Figure 1. Research model.

To establish the cross-cultural validity and semantic equivalence of the survey instrument, a rigorous translation and back-translation procedure was conducted. Two bilingual researchers specializing in aviation management first translated the original English scales into Chinese; then, a newly assigned translator back-translated those versions into English to assure there were not any semantic discrepancies. Finally, a panel of three aviation management experts reviewed the translated items to verify their face validity and contextual relevance to the Chinese full-service carrier market. Furthermore, following the procedural recommendations of Tarhini et al. [67], this study employed a convenience sampling method. This method is a non-probability approach based on voluntary participation. Although this non-probability approach can enhance the efficiency of data collection, it may also limit the generalizability of the research results. To verify the clarity and practical efficacy of the questionnaire, the pilot test process was conducted. This process involved four rounds of testing, involving a total of eight volunteers. After each round, the survey items were polished based on the participant feedback regarding semantic clarity and technical terminology. This iterative refinement was repeated until no further ambiguities were reported, ensuring the final instrument was easily understood by Chinese passengers.

Table 1. Quantitative measurement items.

Variables	Number	Measurement Items	References
Service Experience	1	Air China employees are attentive.	An and Noh (2009) [21]; Wu and Cheng (2013) [22]
	2	Air China offers comfort.	
	3	Air China has a fresh cabin atmosphere.	
	4	Air China's service is safe.	
Corporate Social Responsibility	1	Air China makes efforts to participate in environmental campaigns.	Park et al. (2015) [68]; Zhu et al. (2013) [69]
	2	Air China makes efforts to use resources efficiently.	
	3	Air China makes efforts to use eco-friendly products.	
	4	Air China makes efforts to create new jobs.	
Brand Love	1	I love the Air China brand.	Batra et al. (2012) [49]; Aro et al. (2018) [24]
	2	I believe the Air China brand deserves love.	
	3	I have an affection for the Air China brand.	
	4	I consider Air China to be my favorite brand.	
Customer Satisfaction	1	I am satisfied with my flying experience with Air China.	Andaleeb and Conway (2006) [70]; Bezerra and Gomes (2015) [71]
	2	I would recommend Air China to others as a result of my satisfaction.	
	3	I would say the services of Air China exceed my expectations.	
	4	I would say the services of Air China represent the ideal airline I expect.	
Reuse Intention	1	I intend to fly with Air China.	Tseng (2013) [72]
	2	I will fly with Air China again.	
	3	I am going to fly with Air China in the future.	
	4	I have reuse intention to fly with Air China.	

3.2. Data Analysis

The formal investigation of this study was conducted using the Wenjuanxing (Questionnaire Star) survey platform. The QR code and/or the link was delivered through WeChat, a predominant social media platform in China. The instrument incorporated a screening question to verify Air China flight experience within the preceding six months. To ensure data integrity and validity, the survey system was configured to automatically block respondents who did not meet this criterion or those who left any items unanswered from proceeding further, thereby preventing incomplete or ineligible responses from being saved in the final dataset. Following data collection, the research team manually confirmed the submissions to ensure there was no case exhibiting straight-lining or any invalid responses among the data. This process yielded 375 valid cases for analysis. The final sample size ($N = 375$) provided a solid scientific basis for structural equation modeling, as it exceeds the recommended minimum ratio of 10 to 20 observations per estimated parameter [73]. To address potential non-respondent error, this study employed the procedure of Armstrong and Overton [74] by examining the differences between early and late respondents. This approach remains a standard methodological safeguard in recent aviation research like Lee et al. [11], particularly when a formal comparison with non-respondents is infeasible due to the unspecified nature of the WeChat audience. T-tests and chi-square tests comparing the first and last 25% of respondents revealed no significant differences in demographics or core constructs ($p = 0.238\text{--}0.901$), confirming the absence of non-response bias.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 30, including descriptive statistics and assessments of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α). Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 30 was conducted to evaluate the convergent validity, discriminant validity, and model fit, followed by structural equation modeling (SEM) path analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. The maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method was employed for the analysis. To justify the use of ML for the 5-point Likert scale data, the normality of all items was assessed. The results showed that skewness values ranged from -0.469 to -0.195 , and kurtosis values ranged from -0.947 to -0.500 , confirming that the data approximately followed a normal distribution. To address potential common method

bias (CMB), Harman's single-factor test was performed. The results indicated that the first factor accounted for 27.307% of the total variance, which is well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that CMB is not a significant concern in this study. Additionally, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were assessed to examine potential multicollinearity. The results showed that VIF values ranged from 1.109 to 1.162, confirming that multicollinearity is not a significant issue for the structural equation modeling in this study.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 375 respondents who had recently flown with Air China. Female respondents accounted for 46.4% of the sample, while males represented 53.6%. With regard to age distribution, 10.1% of participants were under 20 years old, 27.2% were between 21 and 30 years old, 24.0% were aged 31–40, 17.6% fell within the 41–50 age group, 16.0% were between 51 and 60 years old, and 5.1% were over 60 years old.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	201	53.6
	Female	174	46.4
Age	Below 20	38	10.1
	21–30	102	27.2
	31–40	90	24.0
	41–50	66	17.6
	51–60	60	16.0
	60 and above	19	5.1
Monthly Income	Below 5000 CNY	83	22.1
	5000–7000 CNY	20	5.3
	7000–9000 CNY	48	12.8
	9000–12,000 CNY	51	13.6
	12,000–20,000 CNY	77	20.5
	20,000 CNY and above	96	25.6
Education	High School	91	24.3
	Undergraduate	124	33.1
	Master's Degree	94	25.1
	Doctoral Degree	66	17.6
Occupation	Company Management	76	20.3
	Company Staff	155	41.3
	Student	47	12.5
	Retiree	53	14.1
	Self-employed	44	11.7
Annual Travel Frequency	0–1	78	20.8
	2–5	167	44.5
	5–10	102	27.2
	10 and above	28	7.5
Travel Purpose	Business Travel	92	24.5
	Leisure Vacation	126	33.6
	Visiting Family and Friends	123	32.8
	Study Abroad	34	9.1
Nationality	Chinese	358	95.5
	Non-Chinese	17	4.5

In terms of monthly income, 22.1% of respondents earned less than 5000 CNY (approximately USD 695), 5.3% reported incomes between 5000 and 7000 CNY (approximately USD 695 to 970), 12.8% reported incomes between 7000 and 9000 CNY (approximately USD 970 to 1250), 13.6% reported incomes between 9000 and 12,000 CNY (approximately USD 1250 to 1670), 20.5% reported incomes between 12,000 and 20,000 CNY (approximately USD 1670 to 2780), and 25.6% reported incomes exceeding 20,000 CNY (approximately USD 2780).

Regarding occupation, company employees constituted the largest proportion of the sample (41.3%), followed by corporate managers (20.3%). Retired individuals accounted for 14.1%, students for 12.5%, and self-employed respondents for 11.7%. In terms of educational background, 24.3% of respondents had completed high school education, 33.1% held a bachelor's degree, 25.1% possessed a master's degree, and 17.6% held a doctoral degree.

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Prior to hypothesis testing, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) verified the measurement model, with results presented in Table 3. Evaluation of the measurement model encompassed assessing unstandardized estimates, standard errors (S.E.s), critical ratios (t-values), standardized factor loadings (λ), and squared multiple correlations (SMCs). All items met or exceeded the recommended SMC threshold of 0.4, indicating that latent factors explain a significant proportion of variance within each measurement item. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values, all exceeding the 0.7 threshold, confirmed the internal consistency and reliability of the constructs.

Table 3. CFA (confirmatory factor analysis).

Variables	Number	Unstd.	S.E.	t-Value	Std.(λ)	Cronbach's Alpha	SMC	AVE	CR
Service Experience	1	1.062	0.065	16.438	0.807	0.877	0.652	0.640	0.877
	2	1.005	0.062	16.236	0.798		0.637		
	3	0.984	0.061	16.076	0.791		0.626		
	4	1	-	-	0.804		0.649		
Corporate Social Responsibility	1	1.059	0.080	13.183	0.751	0.826	0.564	0.554	0.833
	2	0.944	0.074	12.750	0.723		0.523		
	3	0.981	0.074	13.239	0.755		0.570		
	4	1	-	-	0.749		0.561		
Brand Love	1	1	-	-	0.716	0.841	0.513	0.566	0.839
	2	1.081	0.084	12.832	0.749		0.562		
	3	1.113	0.084	13.207	0.777		0.604		
	4	1.123	0.086	13.061	0.766		0.587		
Customer Satisfaction	1	1	-	-	0.757	0.842	0.573	0.577	0.844
	2	1.016	0.072	14.119	0.775		0.600		
	3	0.890	0.070	12.654	0.692		0.479		
	4	1.110	0.076	14.620	0.809		0.655		
Reuse Intention	1	1	-	-	0.800	0.847	0.640	0.577	0.845
	2	0.879	0.064	13.713	0.722		0.522		
	3	0.914	0.063	14.424	0.759		0.576		
	4	0.927	0.065	14.343	0.755		0.570		

Note: Unstd. = unstandardized estimate; S.E. = standard error; Std.(λ) = standardized factor loading; SMC = squared multiple correlation; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CR = composite reliability.

To further assess internal consistency, Cronbach's α coefficients were calculated. As reported in Table 3, all constructs demonstrated Cronbach's α values above the threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal reliability. Convergent validity and construct reliability were evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). As shown

in Table 3, all computed values for service experience (CR = 0.877, AVE = 0.640), corporate social responsibility (CR = 0.833, AVE = 0.554), brand love (CR = 0.839, AVE = 0.566), customer satisfaction (CR = 0.844, AVE = 0.577), and reuse intention (CR = 0.845, AVE = 0.577) satisfied the recommended thresholds. These results confirm adequate convergent validity and construct reliability for all variables. Evaluation of discriminant validity followed the Fornell–Larcker [75] criterion, comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with inter-construct correlations. Additionally, assessment of the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) ensured a more rigorous verification in accordance with recent methodological recommendations. As illustrated in Table 4, the square root of the AVE for each latent variable exceeds its correlation with any other construct. All HTMT values remain below the conservative 0.85 threshold, ranging from 0.243 to 0.427. These metrics verify that each construct is empirically distinct, thereby establishing robust discriminant validity.

Table 4. Discriminant validity results (Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT).

Constructs	Service Experience	Corporate Social Responsibility	Brand Love	Customer Satisfaction	Reuse Intention
Service Experience	0.800	0.243	0.306	0.332	0.368
Corporate Social Responsibility	0.197	0.744	0.324	0.395	0.362
Brand Love	0.263	0.270	0.752	0.325	0.427
Customer Satisfaction	0.286	0.330	0.274	0.760	0.322
Reuse Intention	0.317	0.304	0.36	0.272	0.760

Note: Diagonal elements in bold represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Off-diagonal elements represent the correlations between constructs. Italicized elements in the upper triangle represent the HTMT (Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio) values.

4.3. Model Fit

Table 5 presents the overall model fit indices for the proposed conceptual model. The results demonstrate that most fit indicators meet or exceed the recommended standards. Specifically, the absolute fit indices indicate a satisfactory model fit ($\chi^2 = 282.285$, $df = 163$, $p < 0.001$, $CMIN/df = 1.732$, $RMR = 0.082$, $GFI = 0.931$, $AGFI = 0.911$, $RMSEA = 0.044$ [90% CI: 0.035, 0.053]). In addition, the incremental fit indices fall within acceptable ranges ($NFI = 0.916$, $CFI = 0.961$). Taken together, these findings suggest that the measurement and structural models exhibit good overall fit with the observed data.

Table 5. Model fit results.

Division	Result	Recommendation or Closer	Reference
Absolute fit index	$\chi^2(df, p)$	282.285 (163, <0.001)	-
	CMIN/df	1.732	$2 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 3$
	RMR	0.082	$RMR < 0.10$
	GFI	0.931	$0.90 \leq GFI \leq 0.95$
	AGFI	0.911	$AGFI > 0.90$
	RMSEA	0.044 [0.035, 0.053]	$0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.08$
Incremental fit index	NFI	0.916	$0.90 \leq NFI \leq 0.95$
	CFI	0.961	$0.95 \leq CFI \leq 0.97$

Note: χ^2 = Chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; RMR = Root Mean Square Residual; GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CI = confidence interval; NFI = Normed Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index.

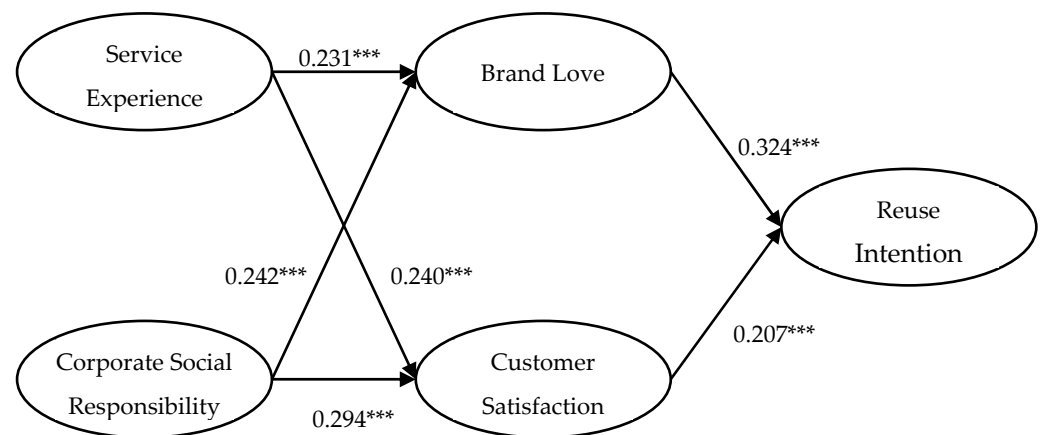
4.4. Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The results of the path analysis are summarized in Table 6, and the structural model is illustrated in Figure 2. The findings reveal that service experience has a significant positive effect on brand love ($\beta = 0.231$, $SE = 0.049$, $CR = 3.819$, $p < 0.001$) and customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.240$, $SE = 0.053$, $CR = 4.060$, $p < 0.001$). Corporate social responsibility also exerts significant influences on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.294$, $SE = 0.063$, $CR = 4.746$, $p < 0.001$) and brand love ($\beta = 0.242$, $SE = 0.058$, $CR = 3.867$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 6. Hypotheses path analysis results.

No	Hypothesis	Coefficient (Standardized)	S.E	C.R.	<i>p</i>	Results
H1	Service Experience → Brand Love	0.231	0.049	3.819	***	Supported
H2	Service Experience → Customer Satisfaction	0.240	0.053	4.060	***	Supported
H3	CSR → Customer Satisfaction	0.294	0.063	4.746	***	Supported
H4	CSR → Brand Love	0.242	0.058	3.867	***	Supported
H5	Brand Love → Reuse Intention	0.324	0.071	5.230	***	Supported
H6	Customer Satisfaction → Reuse Intention	0.207	0.062	3.499	***	Supported

Note: explanatory power (R^2): brand love = 0.169, customer Satisfaction = 0.198, reuse intention = 0.197. (***) $p < 0.001$.



Note: *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 2. SEM analysis results.

Furthermore, brand love demonstrates a significant positive impact on reuse intention ($\beta = 0.324$, $SE = 0.071$, $CR = 5.230$, $p < 0.001$), while customer satisfaction also positively influences reuse intention ($\beta = 0.207$, $SE = 0.062$, $CR = 3.499$, $p < 0.001$). Evaluation of the structural model's explanatory power relied on squared multiple correlations (R^2) for the endogenous constructs. The model accounted for 16.9% of the variance in brand love ($R^2 = 0.169$), 19.8% in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.198$), and 19.7% in reuse intention ($R^2 = 0.197$). Based on Cohen's [78] criteria, these values represent a medium effect size, confirming practical relevance with behavioral and social science research contexts. These results, combined with the significant path coefficients, provide strong empirical support for hypotheses H1 through H6. Furthermore, to formally test the mediating roles of brand love and customer satisfaction, a bootstrapping analysis with 5000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval (CI) was performed [79]. As shown in Table 7, all indirect effects were statistically significant, as the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals did not include zero.

This confirms that our model operates within a full mediation framework, where independent variables influence reuse intention exclusively through the identified mediators.

Table 7. Results of indirect effects and mediating roles (bootstrapping).

Path	Indirect Effect	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	<i>p</i>	Results
Service Experience → Brand Love → Reuse Intention	0.075	0.038	0.126	0.001	Significant
Service Experience → Customer Satisfaction → Reuse Intention	0.050	0.021	0.091	0.001	Significant
CSR → Brand Love → Reuse Intention	0.078	0.039	0.136	0.001	Significant
CSR → Customer Satisfaction → Reuse Intention	0.061	0.026	0.112	0.001	Significant

Note: $p < 0.001$ (based on 5000 bootstrap resamples).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that service experience and perceptions of corporate social responsibility significantly influence reuse intention among Air China passengers, indirectly through brand love and customer satisfaction. The significance of this study lies in applying the existing service experience and CSR theories to the aviation field and expanding them, while integrating cognitive value (customer satisfaction) and emotional factors (brand love) to explain passengers' behavioral intentions, providing an effective theoretical basis for the long-term and sustainable development of airlines. By empirically validating the integrated path of cognition and emotion, this research offers a holistic perspective on how airlines can achieve socio-economic sustainability in a highly competitive environment. This section will clearly present the research results, academic and management implications, research limitations, and future research directions.

5.1. Findings

The empirical results show that all the hypotheses in the model were supported. This indicates that in the aviation industry, improving service experience and corporate social responsibility is conducive to enhancing passengers' brand loyalty and satisfaction, thereby increasing their intention to make repeat purchases.

The research results indicate that the service experience has a significant positive impact on both brand love and customer satisfaction. This suggests that passengers not only make rational service evaluations during the flight but also gradually develop an emotional attachment to the airline brand. This finding is consistent with the research results of Lee et al. and Ha [11,23], which state that high-quality service experiences can trigger positive emotional responses from passengers and thereby promote the formation of emotional attachment.

Furthermore, corporate social responsibility (CSR) also has a significant positive impact on brand love and customer satisfaction, which is consistent with the research conclusion of Chung et al. [7] in the aviation industry. This indicates that passengers consider the social responsibility performance of airlines as an important indicator for evaluating their company value, reinforcing the social dimension of sustainability within the aviation industry. At the same time, He and Li as well as He et al. [36,37] also pointed out that companies' active participation in social responsibility activities helps to enhance customer satisfaction and further promotes more stable and long-term customer relationships.

The study also found that both brand love and customer satisfaction have a significant positive impact on the intention to reuse. Among them, brand love enhances passengers' willingness to choose the airline again at an emotional level, and this result is also supported by Lee et al. [11].

Based on this, all the proposed paths in the model have been supported. The results suggest that high-quality service experiences are positively associated with passengers'

emotional responses. These emotional responses, in turn, are related to enhanced brand loyalty and a higher likelihood of choosing the airline again. This aligns with the perspective that favorable service encounters serve as a critical foundation for building long-term affective bonds with passengers. At the same time, the airline's active fulfillment of CSR can enhance passengers' moral recognition and social trust in the airline, improve passengers' satisfaction, and is related to more emotional connections with the airline, thereby establishing a foundation for a sustainable corporate–stakeholder relationship.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. Academic Implications

In terms of academia, this study fills the research gap in previous studies by analyzing the impact of passengers' cognitive and emotional perspectives on Air China. Although there were research frameworks for service experience and CSR on passenger satisfaction in previous studies, this study incorporated brand love into the consumer behavior model of the aviation industry, enriching the application scenarios of brand emotions in the pursuit of sustainable service ecosystems. Moreover, the research subjects of this study were consumers who have experienced Air China, providing a new theoretical research foundation for the aviation industry and helping to address the research deficiencies in other countries as samples.

5.2.2. Managerial Implications

This study provides strategic imperatives for Air China practitioners. Managers must recognize that CSR in the Chinese market represents a core institutional requirement aligned with national ESG policies. Failing to maintain authentic ethical engagement risks the erosion of brand love, the emotional foundation of passenger loyalty. Therefore, Air China should move beyond superficial promotion and embed social and environmental responsibilities into actual service touchpoints. This strategic direction aligns with recent findings [80], demonstrating that sustainability practices serve as a core institutional requirement for enhancing brand equity in the Asian aviation sector. The significance of the service experience pathway suggests that cognitive satisfaction alone is insufficient to provide sustainable competitive advantages. To secure long-term passenger retention, leadership should foster synergy between CSR and service departments. Neglecting the emotional resonance of these initiatives may risk losing resilient customer segments to competitors that prioritize value-driven engagement.

5.3. Limitations

This study presents several significant limitations that warrant consideration. The sample, restricted to Air China passengers recruited via WeChat, introduces potential coverage and selection biases, as the data primarily reflects digitally active passengers within a specific carrier context. This specificity may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader aviation market or diverse geographical regions. Methodologically, the reliance on a cross-sectional design and self-reported data restricts the ability to establish definitive causal relationships and necessitates cautious interpretation regarding potential measurement errors, selection bias, or common method bias (CMB). Furthermore, the research lacks explicit controls for competing airline brands, meaning passengers' emotional attachment to Air China may be influenced by simultaneous experiences with or perceptions of rival carriers, which prevents a more isolated assessment of brand love. Finally, while a multi-stage pilot test was conducted, the inherent challenges of cross-cultural translation involving Chinese, English, and Korean may have introduced subtle linguistic nuances that require broader pre-testing in future studies to ensure measurement invariance.

5.4. Future Research Directions

To enhance generalizability, future research should expand the geographical and institutional scope beyond the Chinese market. Comparative analyses involving other major Asian markets, such as Korea and Japan, would provide deeper insights into regional service perceptions and cultural variances in brand attachment. Additionally, comparing more diverse groups—such as low-cost carriers versus full-service carriers, or international versus domestic airlines—and reflecting on differences in sustainability perceptions and their implications would be meaningful. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of passenger behavior, qualitative approaches or longitudinal research designs could be introduced. Future studies may also incorporate multi-group structural equation modeling to examine whether the proposed relationship varies across different ages and generations or flight frequencies and nationalities. Integrating these diverse methodologies and samples would enrich the theoretical framework established in this study, enabling its broader generalization. In an era of heightened social transparency, investigating the effects of perceived greenwashing on brand love can be more critical. Finally, exploring AI-driven personalized services as a mechanism for fostering emotional resonance represents a promising frontier for sustainable relationship marketing in the aviation market.

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