

Article

Understanding the Repurchase Intention of Premium Economy Passengers Using an Extended Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract: This study investigates the repurchase intention of passengers who have experienced premium economy class. To achieve the research purpose, we examine the relationship among psychological factors, perceived price, perceived service quality, perceived value and repurchase intention using a research model extended from the theory of planned behavior (TPB). The survey data were collected both airside and landside at two major Korean international airports from 382 passengers who used premium economy class. The results show that the repurchase intention of passengers is influenced by the attitude, perceived behavioral control, and perceived value derived from price and service quality; repurchase intention is not influenced by the subjective norm. These findings will enable air carriers to better understand the intention of premium economy passengers with respect to psychological and service value perspectives. They can also be used to improve marketing capabilities and the sustainable profitability of premium economy service.

Keywords: perceived price; perceived service quality; perceived value; premium economy class; theory of planned behavior

1. Introduction

Increasing competition in the air transportation industry has spurred airlines to endeavor to provide better flight environments, and premium economy class has appeared as one of those efforts. Premium economy class is a step up from standard economy class, and it has rapidly become prevalent due to passenger demand [1]. Passengers regard air transportation as part of the travel experience and seek comfortable flights in that experience, and as such, premium economy class is increasing in popularity [1]. Also, unfavorable economic conditions such as the financial crisis in 2008 have encouraged business travelers to consider changing their seats to premium economy class [2]. According to Carlson Wagonlit Travel and Travelport [3], the number of passengers in first and business classes decreased while that of passengers in premium economy class increased by up to 157% on average for three years from 2015 to 2017 in Singapore. This trend is expected to continue, and recent studies have confirmed that demand for premium economy service has further growth potential [1,2,4].

Despite the gradual growth of this service, there are not many related studies regarding this topic [1,2]. Within the restricted number of published research results, most studies have focused on investigating the willingness to pay for seat comfort including extra seat width, pitch and legroom (see, e.g., [5–7]) rather than examining the relationship between passenger psychological factors, value and behavioral intention. However, in order to enhance marketing capabilities and the sustainable profitability of premium economy service, it is important to identify factors that affect passenger purchase intention and reflect such factors in airline marketing and operational strategies. The repurchase intention of customers is strongly related to customer loyalty, and integrated forms of customer loyalty are essential

to business sustainability [8]. In the present study, our research model uses the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to investigate the repurchase intention of premium economy passengers. The TPB model is a widely used methodology in air transportation and tourism research to understand psychological factors that affect the intention of customers [9–14].

We also explore the effects of perceived value regarding repurchase intention by assuming that the perceived value of the premium economy service is derived from price and service quality [15–19]. From the demand side, Hugon-Duprat and O’Connell [1] observe that premium economy service has grown as a result of a compromise between conflicting values: Conservative consumption caused by the economic downturn and the desire for comfortable travel experiences. Kuo and Jou [2] explain that the primary purpose for airlines to introduce premium economy class, from the supply side, is to attract travelers who want higher service quality as well as a reasonable price. There is also another reason passengers’ might be willing to pay a premium price for the service. The fare price of business class from New York to London, as an example, is around 17 times more expensive than that of standard economy class [20]. By contrast, the price of premium economy class is about three times more expensive than that of standard economy. Therefore, there is a considerable possibility that passengers who hesitate to purchase first or business class due to high prices will switch to premium economy class. In terms of needs for higher comfort and service quality, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Annual Review [21] reported that 85% of passengers preferred higher and more customized services and they were ready to spend their money on these services. This shows that passengers desire high service quality, and they are likely to use premium economy class. Accordingly, we simultaneously consider two variables—service quality and price—while examining the effect of perceived value regarding repurchase intention.

In summary, we use the TPB model to investigate psychological factors in passenger repurchase intention. In particular, we add perceived value to the TPB model while assuming that the value is influenced by price and service quality. In the literature on tourism and airline services, some studies have simultaneously considered the service value factors and individual factors of the TPB model, including attitude and subjective norm [22–25]. However, thus far, few studies using the entire TPB model have examined the behavioral intention of travelers while simultaneously considering the relationship among price, service quality and value. Based on this extended TPB model, we investigate the direct effects of major factors enclosed in the research model. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions (RQs).

RQ 1. Which factors directly motivate repurchase intentions for premium economy service?

RQ 2. What is the magnitude of the direct impact of critical factors?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the basic explanation of premium economy class and related studies. Section 3 explains the theoretical framework of the TPB model with service evaluation variables to support the proposed research model and develops hypotheses. All hypotheses are established by thoroughly reviewing the relevant literature. Section 4 determines the relationship between variables and tests the hypotheses. We also evaluate the validity, reliability and goodness of fit to test the structure of the proposed research model. Section 5 discusses the findings, implications, and future usability of research results. Finally, Section 6 summarizes and concludes this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Premium Economy Class

Premium economy class is a mid-level class between economy and business class, introduced by Eva Air and Virgin Atlantic in the early 1990s. Refer to the detailed features in Table 1. Premium economy class is a relatively new airline service that has grown significantly over the last few years. Within the past three years, three major air carriers in the US (DL, AA and UA) began offering premium economy service,

and premium economy class has also continued to grow in the Southeast Asian aviation market [26]. At present, 46 airlines provide premium economy service in the world [27], and a considerable number of airlines plan to introduce the service in the near future, especially for long haul flights [2]. These endeavors have benefitted both passengers and airlines. For passengers, the premium economy cabin provides a new option for more comfortable travel experiences at relatively low prices. According to Vink et al. [28], comfort plays a key role in the flight experience and is positively related to future repurchase decision making. In their research, the wide legroom and comfortable seats were strongly associated with the overall comfort of passengers during the flight, and these seat-related comfort factors were rather affordable options in the premium economy class. Thus, a premium economy cabin can be a competitive alternative for business or first class travelers, as well as for leisure travelers who are willing to pay slightly more for comfort [1]. For air carriers, premium economy service makes it possible to manage their services efficiently with limited seat space [1] and to gain a better reputation [29]. As a result, the premium economy service can contribute to increases in airline revenues and price dispersion [7,30]. Although very few studies have analyzed the willingness to pay for premium economy class [2] and the rationale for implementing premium economy class [1], there are still few airline-specific research studies that have examined the overall value of premium economy and the determinants that influence customer purchase intentions.

Table 1. Comparisons of seat sizes and additional services between premium and standard economy classes of the top-five premium economy services [31].

Airline	Seat Class	Pitch	Width	Additional Service
NZ	Premium Economy	41~42	18.5~20	Free additional baggage Extended dining menu service
	Standard Economy	31~33	17.1~17.8	
QF	Premium Economy	38~42	19~20.5	Priority boarding, Free self-serve bars Extensive wine service
	Standard Economy	31~32	17~17.5	
SQ	Premium Economy	38	19~19.5	Priority boarding, Private storage space Individual reading light
	Standard Economy	32~34	17.5~19	
LH	Premium Economy	38~39	18~19	Free additional baggage, Welcome drink Fine china tableware and personal water
	Standard Economy	31~32	17.1~18.2	
AF	Premium Economy	38~40	18~19	Individual reading light, Priority boarding Free additional baggage, Free airport lounge
	Standard Economy	31~34	17~18	

Note: The table was created using data from the official websites of corresponding airlines and seatguru.com.

2.2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.2.1. Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is an extension of the theory of reasoned action [32]. In TPB, an individual's intention is assumed to be an indicator of the effort or willingness to act, and a strong predictor of actual behavior [32,33]. According to Ajzen [32], personal intention is affected by three psychological factors—attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control (PBC). TPB has been recognized as one of the most prominent theories to understand and predict individual behaviors in various fields such as the food industry [34–36], the tourism and hospitality industry [37–39] and the acceptance of mobile technology [40]. TPB has also contributed to analyzing passenger intention in aviation industry research, including for low cost carrier (LCC) choice behaviors [10,41], environmental issues [42,43] and safety issues [11].

In TPB, attitude refers to the degree of favorable or unfavorable evaluation toward a specific behavior, which is developed from the belief that the performance of that behavior is likely to lead to a positive or negative outcome [32]. Attitude is developed through past experiences or information, and it represents a general tendency toward a product or service [39]. When the result of a behavior is predicted positively, a favorable attitude is formed, and it strengthens the intention to perform the behavior [32]. In the tourism industry, the influence of traveler attitude regarding intention has been demonstrated in multiple studies [44–47], and there are also a few studies on the air transport industry [10]. Liou [48] demonstrated that passenger attitude had a positive effect on in-flight shopping intention, and Buaphiban and Truong [10] showed that passenger intention to select LCCs was positively related to attitude. Therefore, we hypothesize that attitude toward premium economy service has a positive effect on the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger.

Subjective norm is defined as an individual's psychological tendency to act in response to the expectations of a person or people that influence him/her [32] and can represent social pressure in a broad sense. The impact of the subjective norm on behavioral intention has been well documented in many research topics, including food consumption [36,49,50] and the hospitality industry [51–53]. For air travelers, the subjective norm affects passenger decision-making with respect to airline and destination selection [9,39]. In particular, Kim, Kim and Shin [54] examined the reuse of airline websites for B2C e-commerce and found that the subjective norm had a significant impact on passenger intention to reuse. Also, Buaphiban and Truong [10] demonstrated the positive effect of the subjective norm on LCC passenger intention. Therefore, we hypothesize that the subjective norm has a positive effect on the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger.

PBC refers to the perceived ease or difficulty in performing a specific behavior [32], and it consists of diverse factors that include time, money and information. PBC is an added component in the theory of reasoned action to address a situation in which a behavior is incompletely controlled [55]. According to Ajzen [32], PBC is similar to the self-efficacy suggested by Bandura [56]. Based on the meaning of self-efficacy, the ease of a behavior is a very important factor in performing a given behavior, and it can affect an individual's decision-making and emotional response [56,57]. For some behaviors, even if a person has a positive attitude and feels social pressure, he/she cannot possess a behavioral intention without sufficient money or knowledge, which is represented by PBC. In this vein, a specified degree of PBC is required to consume the premium economy service. Ajzen [32] suggests that a person with strong PBC is likely to have a positive intention, and we thus hypothesize that PBC has a positive effect on the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger. Based on the theoretical background discussed above, three hypotheses are established.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Attitude positively influences the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Subjective norm positively influences the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Perceived behavioral control positively influences the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger.*

2.2.2. Relationship between Service Evaluation Variables and Behavioral Intention

Perceived price is defined as a monetary or non-monetary (e.g., time, effort) sacrifice from the customer's perspective [16,58]. In the purchasing process, customers usually compare objective and reference prices and make a decision based on their perception [16,59]. Related studies have demonstrated that a customer's perception toward price is one of the most significant factors in changing the customer's behavior [60], decision making [15,16] and customer loyalty [61]. In particular, according to Zeithaml [16], perceived price directly influences the customer's value perception. In tourism research, Sánchez et al. [62] suggested four functional values—installation, professionalism, perceived quality and perceived price—that

affect the perceived value of customers who purchase tourism products. Among the four values, they found that perceived price had the greatest impact on perceived value. In the airline industry, prior studies have emphasized the impact of price in ticket purchasing, with results revealing that an acceptable price positively affects passengers' perceived value [63,64]. Based on the previous literature, we hypothesize that perceived price positively influences perceived value.

Perceived service quality is explained as a quality level of service determined by customer judgment [16]. Previous studies have suggested that service quality is a strong influencer in the customer decision process [65,66] and is useful to predict perceived value [66,67]. In the air transport industry, perceived service quality refers to the overall performance of a particular airline from the passenger's perception, including in-flight entertainment, kindness of the cabin crew, seat comfort and so forth. Many researchers have emphasized that service quality is an important factor for airlines to survive [68–71] and to increase the perceived value of passengers [72,73]. In general, passengers who use or plan to use a premium economy service are likely to expect improved service quality over standard economy class. As a result, we hypothesize that perceived service quality has a positive effect on the perceived value of passengers. In this study, we evaluate the service quality of premium economy class in terms of seat comfort, in-flight service and the overall evaluations of passenger perceptions.

Perceived value refers to a comprehensive evaluation of customers regarding a service based on their experience [16]. In general, perceived value is based upon perceived price and perceived service quality [74]. The trade-off relationship between perceived price and perceived quality is the most important factor when customers make a purchase decision. In previous studies, researchers emphasized this relationship and found that both variables could influence customers' perceived value. For example, according to Thaler [75], when customers made their decision to buy a product or service, they compared the objective price with their reference price while considering its quality, and their purchase was made when the product (or service) had a valuable utility. The utility represented by perceived value played a critical role in understanding customers' purchasing behavior [75]. From a similar point of view, Kashyap and Bojanic [17] asserted that perceived value was measured through an assessment of the trade-off relationship between price and quality, and the customer's value provided a summary of the overall experience. Chang and Wildt [15] demonstrated that perceived price and perceived quality led to perceived value, and the perceived value motivated the purchase intention of customers. In addition, Petrick [76] found that perceived value could affect the decision to revisit the same destination or repurchase similar products. In the tourism and aviation management fields, many studies have demonstrated that perceived value has an impact on customer's behavioral intention [77–81] and that the price and service quality of air carriers significantly affects the purchase decisions of customers and their perceived value [82,83]. In particular, Chen, Li and Liu [84] found that a passenger's perceived value had a critical impact on repurchase intention, and Yang et al. [73] also asserted that a passenger's repurchase intention was essentially based on perceived value. Because premium economy class passengers pay more and expect higher service quality, their perceived value through price and quality is expected to be a crucial factor in their repurchase intention. The TPB is open to adding additional variables [32], and proper additional constructs might improve the predictive power of the TPB [85]. Therefore, perceived price, perceived service quality and perceived value are added as external variables, and three hypotheses are established based on the theoretical background. Figure 1 represents the proposed research model.

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Perceived price positively influences the perceived value of premium economy passenger.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Perceived service quality positively influences the perceived value of premium economy passenger.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *Perceived value positively influences the repurchase intention of premium economy passenger.*

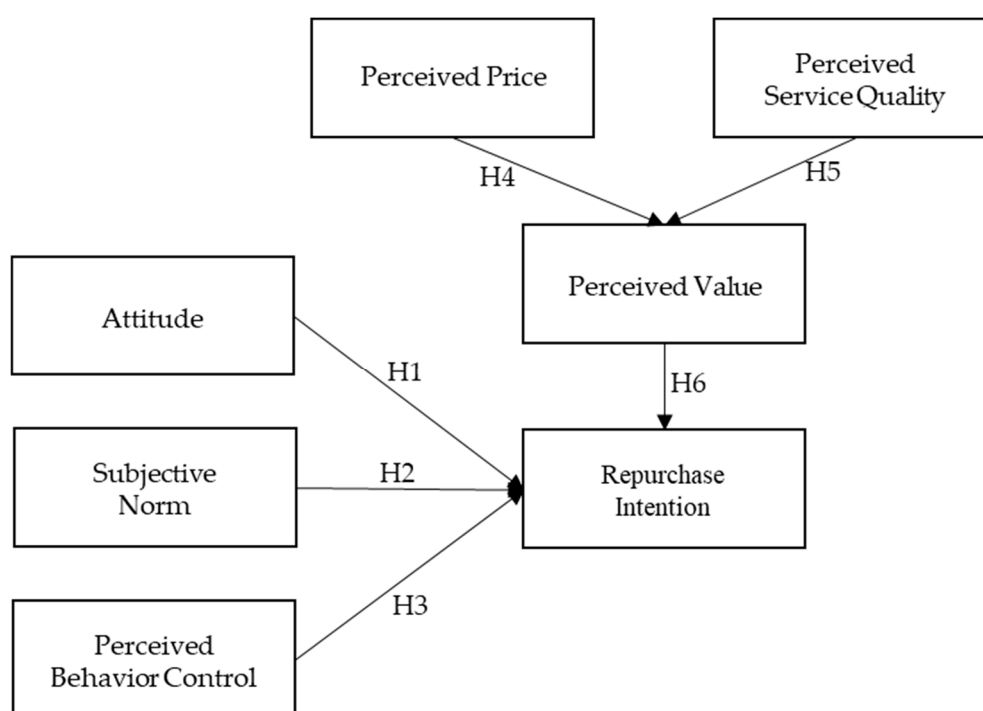


Figure 1. Theoretical research model.

3. Methodology

Data Collection and Analytical Method

The survey data were collected both airside and landside in two major Korean international airports—Incheon and Gimpo—from 11 to 26 February 2019. Items on the questionnaire were designed based on the related literature discussed above. The questionnaire was pre-tested by 30 people and revised properly to ensure content validity. The questions were refined based on interviewers' feedback and opinions regarding the questionnaire. Using the 30 samples, the Cronbach's alpha values were obtained and ranged from 0.752 to 0.878, exceeding the recommended value. The finalized version of the questionnaire was composed of eight questions for demographic and travel-related characteristics, and 21 questions for seven constructs. In the seven parts used for construct measurements, parts 1 to 3 measured the three psychological factors of the TPB, parts 4 to 6 examined the perceived price, perceived service quality and perceived value, respectively, of the premium economy class, and part 7 investigated the repurchase intention of the passengers. All questionnaire items were measured using a 5-point-Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey was conducted face-to-face with passengers who had experienced premium economy service at least once. A total of 382 usable responses were collected. Because premium economy service accounts for the smallest portion of the seating capacity in an airline service despite its strong tendency toward growth (e.g., 6% for Singapore Airlines [86]), about 40% of the survey data were collected airside at airports (with assistance from those airports) to increase the sample sizes and expedite sampling speed. Demographic and travel-related information is displayed in Table 2. There were slightly more males (56%) than females (44%), and the majority of respondents ranged in age from 20–29 (30%) and 30–39 (35%). In addition, most respondents (65%) had experienced premium economy service within one year from the moment they responded to the survey.

We statistically examined whether the collected data were representative of the air travel population. Compared to the 2018 Global Passenger Survey ($n = 10,408$) conducted by the IATA [87], this sample was good at representing the demographic characteristics of the global air travel population. We conducted paired sample t-tests for the critical demographic variables (i.e., age and gender portions) between

sample and population groups and there was no statistically significant difference in the critical demographics between groups. Refer to the test results summarized in Table 3.

Table 2. Demographic and travel-related information ($n = 382$).

Attribute	Subgroup Categories	Sample Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	215	56%
	Female	167	44%
Age	10–19	12	3%
	20–29	115	30%
	30–39	132	35%
	40–49	60	16%
	50–59	42	11%
	≥60	21	5%
Purpose of travel	Leisure	186	49%
	Business	81	21%
	Visit friends and relatives	54	14%
	Others	61	16%
Occupation	Company employee	147	38%
	Private business	55	14%
	Student	73	19%
	Professional	25	7%
	Housewife	11	3%
	Government employee	23	6%
	Others	48	13%
Monthly income	Less than \$1000	63	16%
	\$1000–2000	21	5%
	\$2001–3000	110	29%
	\$3001–4000	83	22%
	More than \$4000	105	27%
Period of most recent experience	Within 6 months	163	43%
	Within 6 months~1 year	84	22%
	Within 1~2 years	64	17%
	Within 2~3 years	28	7%
	Over 3 years	43	11%

Table 3. Paired sample t -tests for age and gender portions between sample and population groups.

Gender			Age		
	Population	Sample		Population	Sample
mean	0.500	0.500	mean	0.165	0.167
variance	0.034	0.007	variance	0.006	0.017
observations	2	2	observations	6	6
correlation	1		correlation	0.869	
df	1		df	5	
t -statistics	-3.97×10^{-16}		t -statistics	-0.055	
p -value	1		p -value	0.958	

Figure 2 shows the home regions of the respondents and the airlines they experienced. The left panel indicates the home regions of airlines. The Asian region consists of eight airlines in seven countries—BR (Taiwan), CI (China), CX (Hong Kong), CZ (China), NH (Japan), OZ (Korea), SQ (Singapore) and VN (Vietnam). Europe includes eight airlines in eight countries—AF (France), AY (Finland), AZ (Italy), BA (United Kingdom), KL (The Netherlands), LH (Germany), LO (Poland) and SU (Russia). The Americas contain four airlines in two countries—AA (US), AC (Canada), DL (US) and UA (US). Oceania includes two airlines in two countries—NZ (New Zealand) and VA (Australia). The right panel shows the

home regions of the respondents. Asia includes six countries—China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Europe includes six countries—France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Russia and the United Kingdom. The Americas contain three countries—Brazil, Canada and the US. Oceania includes one country—Australia.

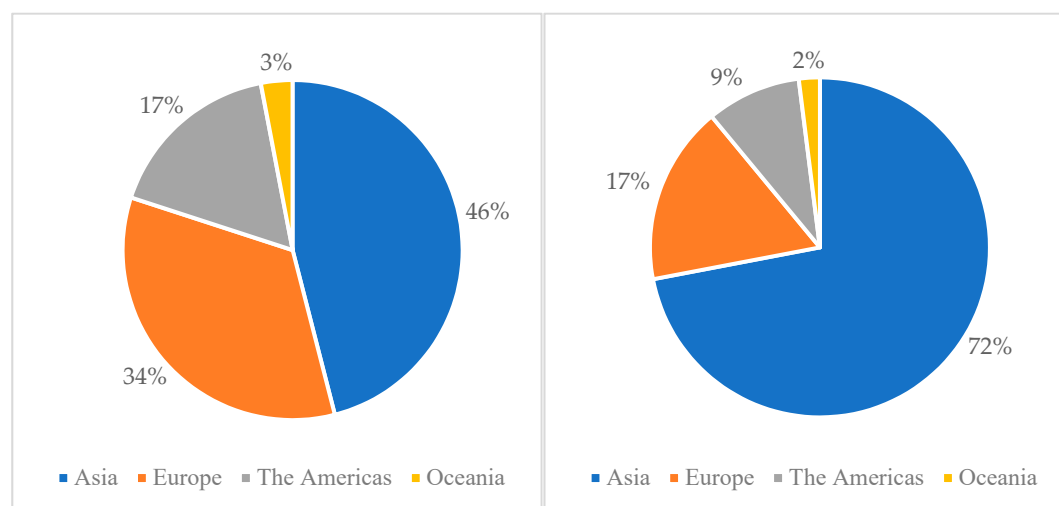


Figure 2. Regionality distribution of survey data. The left and right panels indicate the home regions of airlines and the home regions of the respondents, respectively.

Before testing hypotheses in the research model, we conducted one-way ANOVA tests for seven constructs to determine whether there was any statistically significant difference in average Likert ratings between the groups with different demographic and travel-related characteristics. From the test results, we were able to find a statistical difference between the income levels (in PBC and perceived price), period of most recent experience (in repurchase intention), and home regions of airlines (in attitude and repurchase intention). From the further statistical tests for all possible combinations of two groups, passengers who earn more than \$4000 a month indicated a more positive PBC and perceived price for premium economy service. Customers who have experienced the service within 6 months reported a more positive repurchase intention. Also, passengers using airlines housed in Asia and Oceania indicated a more positive attitude and repurchase intention. However, we could not find any statistical difference between the gender, travel purpose, occupation, and home regions of respondents based on the ANOVA. Refer to the one-way ANOVA test results summarized in Table 4.

In this study, we used structural equation modelling (SEM), which describes the relationship between observed variables and test hypotheses [88]. We also employed Cronbach's alpha coefficient [89] to assess reliability through internal consistency. Internal consistency is a concept that determines whether all items in the questionnaire measure the same attribution or configuration, and high internal consistency can prove proper reliability [90]. The data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS AMOS 24 [91].

Table 4. One-way ANOVA tests for constructs between groups with different income levels, period of most recent experience, and home regions of airlines. Highlighted values denote statistical significance (p -value < 0.05) and do not support the null hypothesis ($H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \dots = \mu_k$).

	AT	SN	PBC	PP	PSQ	PV	RI
M_INC							
Less than \$1000 ($n = 63$)	3.85	3.61	3.57	3.57	3.69	3.65	3.70
\$1000–2000 ($n = 21$)	3.52	3.37	3.29	3.14	3.54	3.51	3.22
\$2001–3000 ($n = 110$)	3.80	3.49	3.68	3.36	3.65	3.68	3.70
\$3001–4000 ($n = 83$)	3.95	3.66	3.90	3.53	3.85	3.90	3.87
Over \$4000 ($n = 105$)	3.78	3.66	3.99	3.64	3.63	3.56	3.65
F-statistics	1.021	0.817	3.965	2.835	1.109	2.304	1.165
p -value	0.396	0.515	0.004	0.024	0.352	0.058	0.170
P_MRE							
Within 0.5 year ($n = 163$)	3.97	3.70	3.84	3.60	3.81	3.78	3.92
Within 0.5~1 year ($n = 84$)	3.71	3.56	3.70	3.38	3.61	3.66	3.50
Within 1~2 years ($n = 64$)	3.73	3.48	3.82	3.43	3.57	3.59	3.62
Within 2~3 years ($n = 28$)	3.77	3.52	3.49	3.39	3.70	3.63	3.56
Over 3 years ($n = 43$)	3.60	3.40	3.74	3.52	3.53	3.54	3.47
F-statistics	2.214	1.173	0.937	1.292	1.820	1.104	3.199
p -value	0.067	0.322	0.442	0.273	0.124	0.355	0.013
A_HR							
Asia ($n = 176$)	3.89	3.69	3.82	3.48	3.77	3.63	3.81
Europe ($n = 130$)	3.65	3.43	3.68	3.49	3.63	3.62	3.52
Americas ($n = 65$)	3.77	3.55	3.70	3.56	3.47	3.65	3.58
Oceania ($n = 11$)	4.42	3.91	4.15	3.58	3.97	3.67	4.27
F-statistics	3.467	2.320	1.169	0.201	2.507	0.026	3.126
p -value	0.016	0.075	0.321	0.896	0.059	0.994	0.026

Note: AT = attitude; SN = subjective norm; PBC = perceived behavioral control; PP = perceived price; PSQ = perceived service quality; PV = perceived value; RI = repurchase intention; M_INC = monthly income; P_MRE = period of most recent experience; A_HR = home region of airlines.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the construct and test the validity and reliability of the measurement model. Before performing the CFA, we checked normality for the Likert scales using skewness and kurtosis criteria, and the normality assumption was satisfied [92]. Convergent validity is evaluated by using standardized factor loading and the average variance extracted (AVE). To ensure convergent validity, all factor loadings should be greater than 0.70 and the AVE should be greater than 0.50 [93]. The factor loadings of the items in our research model varied from 0.754 to 0.945, and all AVEs exceeded the recommended threshold, ranging between 0.688 and 0.810. The outcomes satisfied the proper degree of convergent validity. The model reliability was evaluated via composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. It is recommended that the composite reliability should exceed 0.7 and the proper value for Cronbach's alpha should also exceed 0.7. As shown in Table 5, all composite reliability values exceeded 0.95 (except for one, which came to 0.949). The Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.869 to 0.943, exceeding the recommended value. The results satisfied the proper degree of reliability. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing AVEs to the square of inter-construct correlations. All squared values of inter-construct correlation should be lower than the AVE values [93]. As shown in Table 6, all AVE values exceeded the square values of inter-construct correlation, and this ensured discriminant validity.

Table 5. Construct reliability and convergent validity.

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude	1. I have a positive perception toward the premium economy class.	0.889	0.769	0.971	0.906
	2. I think traveling in premium economy class would be fun.	0.888			
	3. I think traveling in premium economy class would be relaxing.	0.850			
Subjective Norm	1. My friends or relatives would support my use of premium economy class.	0.862	0.747	0.960	0.909
	2. People who are important to me would prefer that I use premium economy class.	0.860			
	3. People whose opinions I value would prefer that I use premium economy class.	0.903			
Perceived Behavioral Control	1. If I want to use premium economy class, it would be easy.	0.825	0.688	0.949	0.885
	2. I have enough resources and knowledge to use premium economy class.	0.877			
	3. Using premium economy class is not difficult for me.	0.850			
Perceived Price	1. The price of premium economy class is reasonable.	0.857	0.726	0.967	0.869
	2. The price of premium economy class is appropriate for my consumption level.	0.880			
	3. The price of premium economy class is acceptable.	0.754			
Perceived Service Quality	1. The in-flight service (e.g., meals and entertainment) in premium economy class is good.	0.823	0.745	0.961	0.885
	2. Premium economy class seats are wide and comfortable	0.843			
	3. The overall service quality of premium economy class is satisfactory.	0.870			
Perceived Value	1. Premium economy class offers value.	0.893	0.741	0.973	0.879
	2. The overall value of premium economy class is high.	0.854			
	3. I gain more than what I sacrifice from using premium economy class.	0.795			
Repurchase Intention	1. I am willing to use premium economy class again.	0.901	0.810	0.971	0.943
	2. I will positively consider repurchasing premium economy class.	0.945			
	3. I will recommend premium economy class to other people.	0.917			

Table 6. Square inter-construct correlations and average variance extracted (AVEs). AVEs are highlighted in the top diagonal of the matrix, and the square inter-construct correlations are presented diagonally under the AVEs. All inter-construct correlations are significant at the 0.05 significance level.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. AT	0.769						
2. SN	0.723	0.747					
3. PBC	0.496	0.394	0.688				
4. PP	0.179	0.202	0.263	0.726			
5. PSQ	0.173	0.120	0.065	0.315	0.745		
6. PV	0.292	0.230	0.114	0.406	0.616	0.741	
7. RI	0.651	0.530	0.424	0.341	0.274	0.510	0.810

4.2. Structural Model

The structural model analysis consists of checking the model fit and testing the hypotheses. The results show that almost all of the goodness of fit indicators are included in their acceptable ranges except the GFI value [94]: $\chi^2 = 495.240$ ($df = 171$, $p = 0.000$); GFI = 0.895 (recommended > 0.90); CFI = 0.953 (recommended > 0.95); NFI = 0.930 (recommended > 0.90); $\chi^2/df = 2.896$ (recommended < 3); RMSEA = 0.071 (recommended < 0.08). The results suggest that the research model fits well. The results of the hypothesis tests are summarized in Table 7. H1 and H3 are supported, but H2 is not supported. This shows that among the three psychological factors of the TPB model, attitude and PBC positively influence the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger while subjective norm does not; standardized coefficient of attitude = 0.449 ($p < 0.001$), standardized coefficient of PBC = 0.204 ($p < 0.001$), standardized coefficient of subjective norm = 0.113 ($p = 0.161$). This suggests that positive attitude and a high PBC value can increase the intention to repurchase premium economy class.

Table 7. Hypothesis tests.

Hypothesis	Structural Coefficient	t-Value	p-Value	Result
H1: Attitude → Repurchase intention	0.449	4.796	***	Supported
H2: Subjective norm → Repurchase intention	0.113	1.401	0.161	Not supported
H3: PBC → Repurchase intention	0.204	3.777	***	Supported
H4: Perceived price → Perceived value	0.306	5.864	***	Supported
H5: Perceived service quality → Perceived value	0.600	10.565	***	Supported
H6: Perceived value → Repurchase intention	0.469	11.617	***	Supported

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

H4, H5 and H6 are all supported. That is, the perceived price and perceived service quality are statistically significant, and they positively influence perceived value; standardized coefficient of perceived price = 0.306 ($p < 0.001$), standardized coefficient of perceived service quality = 0.600 ($p < 0.001$). Among the variables affecting repurchase intention, perceived value has the most significant influence—standardized coefficient is 0.469 ($p < 0.001$). The results suggest that positively perceived price and quality increase passengers' perceived value, and passengers who believe that premium economy service provides a valuable experience have a positive repurchase intention. Figure 3 depicts the results of the relationships among all the constructs.

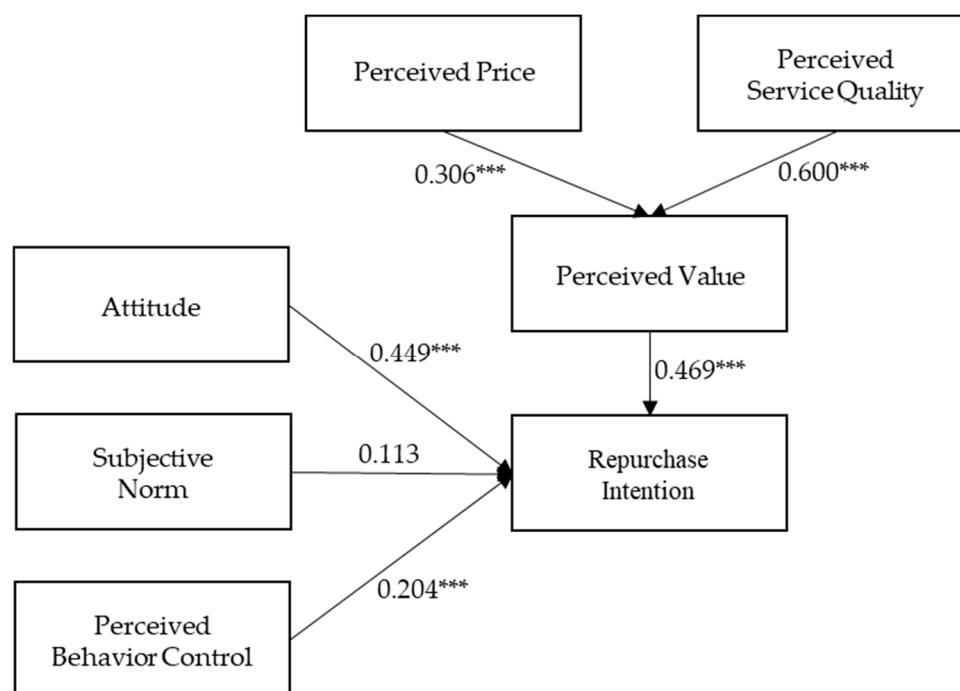


Figure 3. Research model results (** $p < 0.001$).

5. Discussion

5.1. Impact of Psychological Factors in TPB Regarding Repurchase Intention

The results of this study show that passenger attitude and PBC have a positive effect on the repurchase intention of premium economy passengers. Attitude is the second most significant motivator (0.449) among the components of the proposed TPB model. This result indicates that if passengers have positive thoughts and emotions toward premium economy class, they will be more likely to choose premium economy service as their travel mode. PBC also has a positive effect on repurchase intention for premium economy class (0.204), indicating that a passenger's intention to repurchase that class will increase when the passenger feels that he/she can control the relevant conditions when using premium economy class. The slightly more expensive fare level of premium economy class (compared to that of standard economy class) prompts passengers to consider their financial capabilities, which is potentially a critical PBC attribute [95]. Therefore, passengers who believe that the premium economy class fare is affordable will be more likely to choose that class.

Subjective norm does not have a significant impact in this study. This suggests that premium economy passengers are less sensitive to external recommendations and tend to voluntarily decide whether to use the service. To understand this result, it should be noted that premium economy class is the least common airline service with respect to the capacity volume and time duration in which the service has been introduced. To be influenced by subjective norm, a passenger should obtain prior recommendations or information from people around him/her while having experienced premium economy service. However, premium economy seats account for a very restricted portion of total airline seats and only a small number of air carriers operate premium economy service despite the increasing trend. Also, premium economy class is currently applied to specific aircrafts and long-haul routes with limited resources. As a result, premium economy service is still not as prevalent as other services, and, in addition, the related information is not as widespread as the information for other classes. Because the number of passengers that have experienced the service is still not large compared to the number of airline passengers, it is relatively difficult to gain information or recommendations from individuals who have experienced premium economy class.

5.2. Impact of Service Evaluation Variables Regarding Repurchase Intention

In this study, both perceived price and service quality have a positive impact on perceived value, and perceived value is the most influential factor in predicting a passenger's intention to repurchase. The results are consistent with previous studies that have shown that perceived value is an antecedent in understanding behavioral intention [15,16,66,77] and that perceived value is influenced by price and quality [16,64,83]. The results show that premium economy passengers evaluate price and service quality simultaneously through their experience, and their intention to repurchase will increase when they think premium economy service is well worth experiencing. Perceived service quality is almost twice as important as perceived price while having an impact on the perceived value of premium economy passengers. This finding indicates that premium economy passengers would consider service quality first when evaluating the overall value of premium economy service. The finding is consistent with previous studies that have emphasized the effect of service quality on a customer's value [77,78]. Perceived price also demonstrates a positive effect on the perceived value of premium economy passengers. The results suggest that if a passenger thinks that the fare for premium economy class is affordable, the passenger will be more likely to recognize the value of the service.

5.3. Practical Implications

Despite successful applications of the premium economy service class, there is a paucity of studies regarding premium economy class in the air transport literature. Within the restricted selection of previous research, most studies have focused on the rationality of premium economy class implementation and customer willingness to pay [1,2]. On the contrary, research regarding the behavioral intention of passengers has not been significantly carried out thus far. By proposing an extended TPB model, this study endeavors to comprehend the premium economy passenger's perception and psychological factors that influence the intention to repurchase.

As the demand for premium economy class increases, an appropriate design and continuing improved updates for the service are very important to enhance the sustainable profitability of airlines. In fact, continuous improvements should be carried out as a prerequisite for service sustainability. This study offers some managerial implications for airlines to strengthen the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger. Perceived value has the most significant impact on the repurchase intention of the premium economy passenger while being simultaneously affected by price and service quality. Thus, airlines should design and deliver their premium economy class to enable passengers to feel that they are treated with respect, as well as to feel satisfied from boarding to deplaning. For example, cabin crews should strive to instantly resolve inconveniences to maintain a proper degree of service quality. At the same time, a strategic balance between service quality and price is needed to create higher value. When pricing, it is certainly natural to consider acceptable price ranges from the passenger point of view to encourage continuous purchases. Through such efforts, airlines can convey the impression that passengers will encounter a more valuable flight experience in relation to the price they pay for that service experience. In terms of TPB variables, the attitude and PBC had significant impacts on repurchase intention. Therefore, airlines should deploy marketing strategies to improve their reputations and convey favorable images to passengers. Also, airlines should provide reasonable prices and offer active promotions to elicit the passenger belief that the selection of premium economy class is totally within their control. Such efforts would sustain passengers' intention to repurchase premium economy class, and they might also increase customer loyalty. A strongly unified structure of customer satisfaction and loyalty guarantees business sustainability [8].

6. Summary and Conclusions

The increasing demand for more comfortable travel options has prompted airlines to strive to offer higher service quality at lower prices and thereby increase competitiveness. Premium economy class represents one of these efforts to balance the trade-off between two essential values—quality and price.

Although air carriers have successfully implemented the premium economy class, the (re)purchase intention of premium economy passengers has not been frequently investigated in the related literature. Our research proposed an extended TPB model by adding perceived value derived from perceived price and perceived service quality as external variables to investigate passenger perception. Although there are some research results that simultaneously consider the service value factors and individual factors of the TPB model such as attitude and subjective norm, very few studies have combined service value factors into the entire TPB model while examining the behavioral intention of travelers in tourism and airline service research. Based on the proposed TPB model, we were able to determine the major motivators of passenger repurchase intentions and estimate the magnitude of the direct impact of those motivators. The results show that both perceived price and perceived service quality can increase perceived value, and high perceived value can strongly influence repurchase intention. Among the TPB variables, attitude and PBC also have a positive effect on repurchase intention, whereas the effect of subjective norm is not statistically significant.

The proposed model was tested by using face-to-face surveyed data from 382 passengers who had experienced premium economy class. Because we collected data from respondents and airlines from a diverse range of countries (16 traveler nationalities and 19 airline nationalities), the data might exclude the effect of cultural and social characteristics from specific regions. Also, the data covers almost half (22 among 46) of the airlines that currently offer premium economy class despite the dominance of Asia and Europe.

According to Hugon-Duprat and O'connell [1], premium economy class has shown steady growth while standard economy class is stagnant. To realize the competitive advantages of premium economy class, Kuo and Jou [2] highlighted that airlines need to understand the factors that affect a traveler's choice to select premium economy class. To ensure sustainable profitability and manageability, it is important to analyze passenger perceptions and determine the psychological motivators that influence decision-making. The findings of this study can help practitioners to specifically understand the relationship between factors that have a positive impact on repurchase intention. Also, the findings can provide insights for airlines to increase customer loyalty and develop their premium economy class as a sustainable service. In addition, the proposed research model was well structured to sufficiently explain the repurchase intentions of passengers while producing suitable values for model validity, reliability and goodness of fit.

We finalize this study by stating a few research limitations. First, because we have evaluated service quality through only three attributes (i.e., seat comfort, in-flight service and overall service quality), it is necessary to expand the number and/or coverage of service quality attributes to provide more precise measurements. Second, we have defined that subjective norm, which has been proved to be statistically insignificant, was influenced by familiar relationships such as family and friends in this study. However, if we stretch the meaning of the variable to encompass a wider scope of social pressure [32], the range of referents affecting subjective norm would also be widened to unspecified individuals in society as well as individually close relationships to better understand the effect of social influence. In this vein, future studies using social media and big data are highly recommended. For instance, Jailivand and Samiei [96] conducted an empirical study with tourists who had used travel reviews as an information source and found that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) could influence all TPB variables. Although lots of studies have looked at the tourism and hotel businesses using online reviews (see, e.g., [97–102], and the references therein), research in the air transportation industry still has substantial growth potential [103–106]. Finally, we investigated the repurchase intention of only experienced passengers in this study. It is plausible to examine passenger purchase intention while dealing with the general public, including unexperienced customers, as another future avenue of research.

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