Journal of Applied Business, Taxation and Economics Research (JABTER)
Vol. 6, No. 1, October 2026 (Page: 14-24) P-ISSN 2828-4976
https://doi.org/10.54408/jabter.v6i1.656 E-ISSN 2808-263X

Accountability Mediates Service Quality and Transparency Effects on Public Satisfaction at Andi Jemma Airport

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Keywords: *Service Quality, Transparency, Accountability, Public Satisfaction, PLS-SEM.*

Abstract: This study examines the direct and indirect effects of service quality and transparency on public satisfaction, with accountability as a mediating mechanism at the Andi Jemma Masamba Airport Management Unit. A quantitative explanatory design was applied to 177 valid responses from airport users selected through accidental sampling. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity, although discriminant validity was not fully established. Service quality had no significant direct effect on public satisfaction, whereas transparency had a positive and significant effect. Service quality and transparency positively affected accountability, and accountability was the strongest direct predictor of satisfaction. Accountability produced indirect-only mediation in the service quality–satisfaction relationship and complementary partial mediation in the transparency–satisfaction relationship. The model explained 83.2% of the variance in accountability and 84.8% of the variance in public satisfaction. Sensitivity analysis excluding straight-line responses preserved all hypothesis decisions. The findings extend airport service management research by showing that the public value of high-quality service depends on whether users interpret service delivery as transparent and institutionally accountable. Airport managers should integrate consistent information disclosure, traceable complaint handling, performance reporting, and clearly assigned responsibilities into service improvement programs.

Introduction

Public services are increasingly assessed not only through administrative compliance but through the quality, accessibility, openness, and responsiveness experienced by citizens. Satisfaction therefore functions as a practical indicator of whether a public organization

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converts formal mandates into outcomes that users recognize as valuable. Contemporary public-service transformation also emphasizes that service efficiency should be accompanied by transparency, accountability, and citizen-centered delivery (Latupeirissa et al., 2024). This expectation is particularly important in transport facilities, where service processes are time-sensitive, information-intensive, and directly connected to safety, mobility, and regional accessibility.

Airports are complex service environments in which physical facilities, staff interaction, reliability, waiting time, information accuracy, and problem handling jointly shape user evaluations. Reviews of air-transport service research show that SERVQUAL and its adaptations remain dominant, while current studies increasingly call for broader contextual and technology-enabled dimensions (Eboli et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Empirical evidence further indicates that airport service quality can strengthen satisfaction, perceived value, trust, and institutional image (Mainardes et al., 2021). In Indonesia, service orientation and airport service quality have also been associated with passenger satisfaction and airport image (Usman et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the service quality–satisfaction relationship is not mechanically uniform. Airport satisfaction is sensitive to operational conditions, delays, information failures, respondent context, and the allocation of responsibility for service disruptions. Evidence from São Paulo airport shows that internally attributable delays affect satisfaction more strongly than weather-related delays, suggesting that passengers distinguish between uncontrollable events and institutional responsibility (Oliveira et al., 2023). Smart-airport research similarly demonstrates that technology contributes to convenience and confidence only when users can understand and effectively use it (Rubio-Andrada et al., 2023). These findings imply that technical quality alone may be insufficient when users cannot see who is responsible, why a disruption occurs, or how a complaint will be resolved.

Transparency addresses this information asymmetry by making service standards, procedures, schedules, costs, changes, and complaint mechanisms visible and understandable. Operational transparency can improve public-service satisfaction because it allows citizens to observe the work performed, reduces uncertainty, and signals institutional openness (Hsu, 2025). Evidence from rural local government also shows that information disclosure is strongly connected to public trust, service satisfaction, and perceived governance quality (Deeod & Kiettikunwong, 2026). However, disclosure has limited value when information is outdated, inconsistent across channels, or detached from a responsible unit and a visible follow-up process.

Accountability is therefore proposed as the mechanism that translates service quality and transparency into satisfaction. In this study, accountability refers to users' perceptions that the airport follows procedures, assigns responsibility clearly, explains its decisions, responds to complaints, evaluates performance, and takes corrective action. This approach treats accountability as an observable institutional experience rather than a purely formal reporting obligation. It also responds to a research gap: recent airport studies predominantly connect service attributes with satisfaction, image, reuse intention, or behavioral outcomes, whereas public-governance constructs are rarely integrated into the same airport model. Recent evidence that expectation confirmation and satisfaction mediate airport behavioral intentions further supports examining explanatory mechanisms rather than relying only on direct effects (Zhao et al., 2026).

The empirical setting is the Andi Jemma Masamba Airport Management Unit, a regional public airport serving communities whose air connectivity has substantial social and territorial

P-ISSN 2828-4976
E-ISSN 2808-263X

importance. The study asks whether service quality and transparency directly influence public satisfaction, whether they strengthen accountability, whether accountability influences satisfaction, and whether accountability mediates both antecedent relationships. The contribution is threefold. First, it integrates service management and public-governance perspectives in one model. Second, it tests accountability as a mediator in an airport context. Third, it provides evidence from a regional airport rather than the large international hubs that dominate the literature. This focus is consistent with the need for context-sensitive airport service research and for management studies that connect operational performance with institutional legitimacy.

Service Quality and Public Satisfaction

Service quality represents the user's overall evaluation of how well service processes and outcomes meet expected standards. The study operationalizes service quality through tangible evidence, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In an airport setting, these dimensions cover terminal conditions, consistency and timeliness, staff willingness to help, professional competence and safety assurance, and attention to diverse user needs. Although the SERVQUAL tradition has been criticized for requiring contextual adaptation, systematic reviews continue to find it useful for structuring multidimensional passenger evaluations (Eboli et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023).

Airport users generally report higher satisfaction when facilities are adequate, processes are reliable, information is consistent, and staff respond effectively. Studies in Brazil and Indonesia have found positive links between airport service quality and satisfaction-related outcomes (Mainardes et al., 2021; Usman et al., 2023). Yet the strength of the direct relationship may decline when governance-related perceptions are modeled simultaneously. A user may recognize polite staff and adequate facilities while withholding a high overall evaluation if delays are unexplained, complaints are untraceable, or standards are applied inconsistently. The following hypotheses were therefore tested:

H1: Service quality has a positive effect on public satisfaction.
H3: Service quality has a positive effect on accountability.

Transparency, Accountability, and Public Satisfaction

Transparency refers to the timely, accurate, accessible, consistent, and understandable disclosure of information needed to use and evaluate a service. In public management, transparency lowers information asymmetry and enables citizens to judge whether procedures, decisions, and performance are reasonable. Its effect depends on operational relevance: users benefit most when disclosure concerns actual service steps, changes, waiting times, complaint channels, and responsible personnel rather than generic institutional information. Experimental and field-based evidence indicates that operational transparency can strengthen satisfaction and engagement (Hsu, 2025).

Transparency should also strengthen accountability because information makes conduct observable and creates a basis for questions, evaluation, and follow-up. In governance research, disclosure, trust, satisfaction, and accountability are frequently interdependent rather than isolated outcomes (Deeod & Kiettikunwong, 2026). At an airport, publishing a schedule change is transparency; explaining the reason, identifying the responsible service unit, specifying the next update, and documenting the resolution are accountability. The distinction is analytically important because disclosure without responsibility can become symbolic, whereas responsibility without accessible information remains invisible to users.

H2: Transparency has a positive effect on public satisfaction.

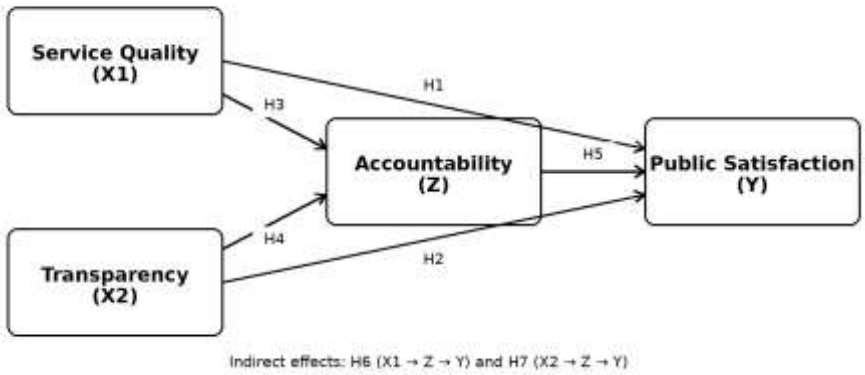
H4: Transparency has a positive effect on accountability.
H5: Accountability has a positive effect on public satisfaction.

The Mediating Role of Accountability

Mediation explains how an antecedent produces an outcome through an intervening mechanism. PLS-SEM mediation analysis evaluates the indirect effect as the product of the antecedent–mediator and mediator–outcome paths and assesses its uncertainty through bootstrapping (Sarstedt & Moisescu, 2024). The proposed mechanism assumes that users interpret reliable, responsive, and professional service as evidence that the institution performs its duties responsibly. Likewise, accessible and consistent information allows users to observe institutional conduct and expect explanations or corrective action. Accountability then converts these signals into a more favorable overall evaluation.

The first indirect pathway predicts that service quality improves satisfaction because it strengthens perceived accountability. This pathway is particularly plausible in public services, where users evaluate not only convenience but also whether the institution fulfills a public mandate. The second pathway predicts that transparency improves satisfaction partly because disclosure demonstrates that the institution is willing to be monitored and held responsible. Digitization research reinforces this logic by showing that improved access and efficiency are most valuable when accompanied by transparency, accountability, and governance safeguards (Latupeirissa et al., 2024).

H6: Accountability mediates the effect of service quality on public satisfaction.
H7: Accountability mediates the effect of transparency on public satisfaction.



Source: Developed by the author.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Method

This study used a quantitative explanatory design to estimate direct and mediated relationships among four reflective latent constructs: service quality, transparency, accountability, and public satisfaction. The unit of analysis was the individual user of Andi Jemma Masamba Airport services. Respondents were recruited through accidental sampling at the service location because the user population was mobile and a complete contemporaneous sampling frame was unavailable. Eligibility required direct experience with the airport service and willingness to complete the questionnaire. Of 178 collected responses, one contained only a timestamp and no item responses; consequently, 177 cases were analyzed.

P-ISSN 2828-4976
E-ISSN 2808-263X

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Service quality was measured with eight items covering tangible evidence, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Transparency used six items concerning information openness, ease of access, procedural clarity, accuracy, consistency, and updating. Accountability used six items covering clarity of responsibility, procedural compliance, explainability, complaint response, evaluation, and follow-up. Public satisfaction used six items concerning expectation confirmation, process convenience, timeliness, staff competence, complaint handling, and facilities. The operational indicators were adapted to the airport public-service context rather than copied as generic commercial-service statements.

Data screening identified 16 missing values among 4,602 possible item observations, equivalent to 0.35%. Because the proportion was very small and no systematic pattern was detected, missing values were replaced with the mean of the corresponding item. Response-pattern screening also found 63 respondents who selected the same score across all 26 items, including 55 respondents who selected the maximum score throughout. Moreover, 92.5% of item responses were concentrated in categories four and five. These patterns were retained in the primary analysis because identical positive evaluations are not automatically invalid, but they were treated as a potential straight-lining and ceiling-effect risk. A sensitivity analysis was subsequently conducted after excluding the 63 cases.

Partial least squares structural equation modeling was selected because the model contains multiple latent constructs, simultaneous direct and indirect effects, and a predictive orientation. The analysis followed established PLS-SEM procedures for measurement and structural assessment (Hair et al., 2022). Indicator reliability was evaluated using outer loadings, internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, and convergent validity using average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was examined through the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). HTMT values above 0.90 were treated as evidence requiring caution because conceptually distinct reflective constructs should demonstrate stronger within-construct than between-construct associations. The structural model was assessed with variance inflation factors, path coefficients, R^2, f^2, and 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Indirect effects and confidence intervals were used to determine mediation.

Table 1. Construct Operationalization

Construct	Operational meaning	Indicators
Service quality (X1)	Users' evaluation of airport service performance	Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy
Transparency (X2)	Openness and clarity of service information	Disclosure, access, procedure, accuracy, consistency, updating
Accountability (Z)	Perceived responsibility for service processes and outcomes	Responsibility, compliance, explanation, response, evaluation, follow-up
Public satisfaction (Y)	Overall evaluation of the airport service experience	Expectation fit, convenience, timeliness, competence, complaints, facilities

Results and Discussion

Data Quality and Respondent Profile

The final sample comprised 177 respondents. Men accounted for 55.9% and women for 44.1%. The sample was relatively young: 42.4% were below 20 years old and 41.8% were 21–

30 years old; respondents aged 31–40 represented 11.9%, and those above 40 represented 4.0%. The education profile included senior-high-school, diploma, undergraduate, and other categories. The concentration of younger users should be considered when interpreting generalizability because older passengers and users with special accessibility needs may evaluate airport processes differently.

All constructs received high mean scores. Service quality had a mean of 4.499 (SD = 0.561), transparency 4.524 (SD = 0.574), accountability 4.565 (SD = 0.561), and public satisfaction 4.555 (SD = 0.578). These results show strongly positive user evaluations, but they also confirm restricted variance. A highly favorable distribution can reflect genuinely positive experience while simultaneously reducing the model's ability to distinguish constructs and increasing estimated correlations. For this reason, the structural results are reported together with measurement limitations and sensitivity tests rather than interpreted solely from statistical significance.

Table 2. Data Screening and Descriptive Summary

Indicator	Result
Initial responses	178
Valid cases analyzed	177
Missing item values	16 of 4,602 (0.35%)
Missing-data treatment	Item-mean replacement
Identical responses across 26 items	63 respondents (35.6%)
Responses in categories 4–5	92.5%
Bootstrap resamples	5,000

Measurement Model

All retained indicators had outer loadings above 0.70. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.929 to 0.938, composite reliability ranged from 0.943 to 0.952, and AVE ranged from 0.676 to 0.767. These values support indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. The constructs therefore measured coherent dimensions of respondents' airport evaluations. High reliability, however, should not be interpreted independently of response concentration, because homogeneous positive answers can inflate internal consistency.

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	AVE	√AVE
Service quality	.929	.943	.676	.822
Transparency	.938	.952	.767	.876
Accountability	.935	.949	.756	.869
Public satisfaction	.937	.950	.762	.873

Discriminant validity was not fully established. The Fornell–Larcker comparison showed that the square root of AVE for service quality was lower than its correlation with transparency, while accountability and public satisfaction also had a correlation exceeding their respective square roots of AVE. HTMT values were 0.923 for service quality–transparency, 0.964 for transparency–accountability, 0.938 for transparency–satisfaction, and 0.969 for accountability–satisfaction. Because these values exceeded 0.90, respondents did not sharply distinguish some governance and evaluative constructs. The overlap is

P-ISSN 2828-4976
E-ISSN 2808-263X

substantively understandable—clear information can be perceived as accountability and can directly enter satisfaction judgments—but it remains a measurement limitation. Future instruments should isolate information availability under transparency, answerability and consequences under accountability, and global evaluation under satisfaction.

Table 4. HTMT Matrix

Construct pair	HTMT	Assessment
Service quality – Transparency	.923	Above .90
Service quality – Accountability	.900	Boundary
Service quality – Public satisfaction	.879	Acceptable
Transparency – Accountability	.964	Above .90
Transparency – Public satisfaction	.938	Above .90
Accountability – Public satisfaction	.969	Above .90

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The model explained 83.2% of the variance in accountability (adjusted $R^2 = 0.830$) and 84.8% of the variance in public satisfaction (adjusted $R^2 = 0.845$). These values indicate strong explanatory power, although the high R^2 values must be interpreted in light of common-source data, restricted response variance, construct overlap, and elevated collinearity. VIF values were 4.001 for both predictors of accountability, while the satisfaction equation produced VIF values of 4.364 for service quality, 6.821 for transparency, and 5.937 for accountability. The latter values indicate substantial shared variance and reinforce the need for cautious coefficient interpretation.

Service quality had a positive but statistically nonsignificant direct effect on public satisfaction ($\beta = 0.113$, $t = 1.166$, $p = 0.244$), so H1 was not supported. Transparency had a positive and significant direct effect on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.261$, $t = 2.536$, $p = 0.011$), supporting H2. Service quality positively affected accountability ($\beta = 0.247$, $t = 2.535$, $p = 0.011$), supporting H3. Transparency was the strongest predictor of accountability ($\beta = 0.689$, $t = 7.449$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. Accountability had the strongest direct effect on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.578$, $t = 7.617$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5.

Table 5. Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	95% CI	Decision
H1	X1 → Y	.113	1.166	.244	[-.073, .305]	Not supported
H2	X2 → Y	.261	2.536	.011	[.057, .459]	Supported
H3	X1 → Z	.247	2.535	.011	[.061, .444]	Supported
H4	X2 → Z	.689	7.449	<.001	[.497, .863]	Supported
H5	Z → Y	.578	7.617	<.001	[.427, .731]	Supported

The nonsignificant H1 result does not imply that service quality is irrelevant. Instead, it indicates that once transparency and accountability are included, the residual direct contribution of facilities, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy is limited. The result differs from studies reporting a direct airport service quality–satisfaction relationship (Mainardes et al., 2021; Usman et al., 2023), but it is consistent with the possibility that service evaluations operate through attribution and institutional interpretation. When users

encounter reliable and responsive service, they may not separate the experience from their judgment that the airport is fulfilling its responsibility. The positive H3 path provides empirical support for this explanation.

The significant H2 and H4 results demonstrate that transparency has both evaluative and governance functions. Clear, accurate, consistent, and updated information directly reduces uncertainty and improves the service experience. At the same time, it gives users evidence that the organization is willing to explain operations and be observed. This dual role is consistent with operational-transparency research showing that visibility can improve satisfaction (Hsu, 2025) and with governance evidence connecting information disclosure to trust, satisfaction, and perceived quality (Deeod & Kiettikunwong, 2026). In a regional airport, where service changes can materially affect access to remote communities, the timing and credibility of information may be as important as the physical service itself.

The H5 result establishes accountability as the central predictor of public satisfaction. Users were more satisfied when they believed that responsibilities were clear, procedures were followed, problems were handled professionally, evaluations were conducted, and complaints received follow-up. This finding extends airport management research beyond customer-experience attributes. Airport service quality studies increasingly recognize that satisfaction and behavioral intention are shaped by expectation confirmation, contextual conditions, and attribution (Oliveira et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2026). The present evidence adds that institutional answerability is a distinct mechanism through which public airport users form an overall evaluation.

Mediation Analysis

The indirect effect of service quality on satisfaction through accountability was 0.143 ($t = 2.535$, $p = 0.011$; 95% CI [0.035, 0.256]). Because the direct effect was nonsignificant while the indirect effect was significant, H6 was supported as indirect-only mediation. Approximately 55.95% of the total effect was transmitted through accountability. Thus, service quality improved satisfaction primarily when good service was interpreted as evidence that the institution performs its public responsibilities consistently.

The indirect effect of transparency on satisfaction through accountability was 0.398 ($t = 4.919$, $p < 0.001$; 95% CI [0.245, 0.563]). The direct and indirect effects were both positive and significant, supporting H7 as complementary partial mediation. The mediated component represented approximately 60.41% of the total effect. Transparency therefore operates through two reinforcing routes: it immediately improves user experience by reducing uncertainty, and it strengthens satisfaction by increasing perceived accountability. The mediated effect was larger than the direct effect, indicating that disclosure creates its greatest value when it is connected to responsibility and follow-up.

Table 6. Indirect Effects and Mediation

Hyp.	Indirect path	Direct	Indirect	Total	VAF	p	Mediation
H6	X1 → Z → Y	.113	.143	.255	55.95%	.011	Indirect-only
H7	X2 → Z → Y	.261	.398	.659	60.41%	<.001	Complementary partial

These mediation patterns refine the conventional assumption that better service automatically produces satisfaction. The service itself remains important, but in a public institution its meaning depends on whether users can connect observed performance to a responsible organization. Similarly, transparency is not merely the publication of information.

P-ISSN 2828-4976
E-ISSN 2808-263X

It becomes consequential when disclosed information identifies what happened, why it happened, who is responsible, what corrective action is being taken, and when the next update or resolution can be expected. This interpretation is consistent with mediation guidance that direct and indirect effects should be evaluated together rather than using a single significance test (Sarstedt & Moisescu, 2024).

Robustness and Managerial Implications

A sensitivity analysis excluded the 63 respondents who gave identical scores to all items, leaving 114 cases. Every hypothesis decision remained unchanged: the direct service quality–satisfaction path remained nonsignificant, while transparency, accountability, and both indirect effects remained significant. R^2 declined to 0.729 for accountability and 0.758 for satisfaction, which is expected when highly homogeneous cases are removed. The stability of signs and significance supports the robustness of the substantive conclusions, but it does not eliminate the need to redesign overlapping indicators and improve sampling procedures.

Table 7. Sensitivity Analysis after Excluding Straight-Line Responses

Path	β (N = 114)	p	Decision unchanged
Service quality → Satisfaction	.102	.295	Yes
Transparency → Satisfaction	.251	.013	Yes
Service quality → Accountability	.236	.018	Yes
Transparency → Accountability	.659	<.001	Yes
Accountability → Satisfaction	.566	<.001	Yes
Service quality → Accountability → Satisfaction	.134	.020	Yes
Transparency → Accountability → Satisfaction	.373	<.001	Yes

The managerial priority is to connect service improvement with visible responsibility. First, information on schedules, operational changes, procedures, facilities, and complaints should be consistent across display boards, announcements, staff explanations, websites, and social media. Second, each operational update should identify the reason for change, expected duration, next update time, and responsible unit. Third, complaints should receive a tracking number, assigned officer, service target, status information, and documented resolution. Fourth, the airport should periodically publish satisfaction findings, recurring complaints, corrective actions, and completion status. Fifth, staff training should integrate technical competence, interpersonal communication, information consistency, complaint recovery, and the authority to escalate unresolved cases.

These actions are relevant to JABTER's applied-management orientation because they convert statistical relationships into operational control practices. The evidence indicates that investments in facilities or friendliness alone may yield limited incremental satisfaction when users cannot observe institutional follow-through. Conversely, a relatively resource-constrained regional airport can strengthen satisfaction through low-to-moderate-cost governance practices: timely information updates, clear accountability maps, complaint traceability, and public reporting. Digital tools can support these practices, but technology should complement rather than replace accessible face-to-face communication, particularly for older users and passengers from areas with limited digital access (Latupeirissa et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that public satisfaction at Andi Jemma Masamba Airport is shaped by the interaction of service experience and governance perception. Service quality did not have a significant direct effect on satisfaction after transparency and accountability were considered, but it significantly strengthened accountability. Transparency directly improved satisfaction and strongly increased accountability. Accountability was the strongest direct predictor of satisfaction and mediated both antecedent relationships. The service quality pathway showed indirect-only mediation, whereas the transparency pathway showed complementary partial mediation. Six of seven hypotheses were supported.

The principal theoretical contribution is the integration of airport service quality with transparency and accountability in a single explanatory model. The findings show that high-quality service acquires public value when users perceive that the institution is responsible for the process and outcome, while transparency creates greater satisfaction when disclosure is connected to answerability and corrective action. The principal managerial implication is that airport service programs should combine facilities and staff performance with consistent information, clearly assigned responsibility, traceable complaint handling, performance evaluation, and publication of follow-up actions.

Limitations

The study used accidental sampling at one regional airport, limiting statistical generalization to all users or other airport categories. The cross-sectional, self-reported questionnaire design cannot establish causality as strongly as longitudinal or multi-source data. Response concentration was substantial, including 63 identical-response cases and a pronounced ceiling effect. Although sensitivity analysis preserved all hypothesis decisions, these patterns may inflate reliability, correlations, and explained variance. Discriminant validity was also not fully achieved, and elevated VIF values indicated considerable overlap among transparency, accountability, and satisfaction. The results should therefore be interpreted as strong context-specific evidence rather than definitive causal estimates.

Suggestions

Future research should use probability-based or time-location sampling, include several regional and commercial airports, and combine questionnaires with interviews, complaint records, waiting-time data, or service-performance indicators. Longitudinal designs could examine whether satisfaction changes after transparency or complaint-management reforms. Measurement development should distinguish the constructs more rigorously: transparency items should focus on availability, accessibility, timeliness, and consistency of information; accountability items should focus on answerability, assigned responsibility, evaluation, consequences, and corrective follow-up; and satisfaction items should capture users' final overall evaluation without repeating antecedent content. Multi-group analysis by age, travel frequency, route type, and digital access would further clarify whether governance mechanisms operate differently across user segments.

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