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The Influence of Airport Image and Facility Functionality on Word of Mouth: The Mediating Role of Positive Emotions

Titien Rahayuningsih, Ruslan
Mangement, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Enam Enam Kendari
titienrahayuningsih7@gmail.com, ruslankaisar5@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of airport image and facility functionality on passengers' word-of-mouth behavior by examining the mediating role of positive emotions. As airports increasingly evolve into complex service environments, understanding how physical and perceptual attributes shape passengers' emotional responses and behavioral intentions becomes strategically important. A quantitative research design was employed using a survey method involving 385 passengers at halu oleo kendari airport, indonesia. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling–partial least squares (sem-pls) to test both direct and indirect relationships among the proposed constructs. The findings reveal that airport image and facility functionality have significant direct effects on positive emotions, travel intention, and word-of-mouth communication. Moreover, positive emotions play a crucial mediating role in strengthening the relationships between airport image and travel intention, as well as between facility functionality and word-of-mouth behavior. The results demonstrate that well-functioning airport facilities and a favorable airport image enhance passengers' emotional experiences, which subsequently increase their intention to travel and their willingness to recommend the airport to others. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the airport management and consumer behavior literature by empirically validating positive emotions as a key psychological mechanism linking airport attributes to behavioral outcomes. Practically, the findings provide valuable insights for airport managers to prioritize improvements in facility performance and image-building strategies in order to foster positive passenger emotions, enhance loyalty, and stimulate favorable word-of-mouth promotion. Future research is encouraged to incorporate additional moderating variables and expand the study across multiple airport contexts.

Keywords: Airport Image; Facility Functionality; Positive Emotions; Word of Mouth; Passenger Experience

1. Background of Study

The expansion of global mobility has driven a sharp increase in air passenger volumes, underscoring the strategic importance of airports within transportation systems. (Graham, 2023; Spijkerboer, 2018). Airports have evolved from simple transit points into multifunctional service centers, where the quality and functionality of facilities strongly affect passenger experiences. In a highly competitive aviation market, airport image and facility performance are critical in shaping passengers' travel intentions and word-of-mouth dissemination (Hung & Khoa, 2022). Accordingly, gaining deeper insights into the effects of these elements on passenger behavior is essential for airport management and aviation industry stakeholders.

The functionality of airport facilities includes various aspects that support passenger comfort and efficiency, such as ease of access, cleanliness, security, and lounge comfort. Previous studies have shown that good functionality can increase passenger satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn increases the intention to return to using the airport's services (Ma et al., 2022). In addition, the image of the airport, which includes passengers' perception of the reputation and quality of airport services, also plays an important role. A positive airport image can increase passenger confidence and intention to recommend the airport to others.

Although many studies have been conducted on the influence of facility functionality and airport image on passenger satisfaction and loyalty, there is still a lack of understanding of how these factors specifically affect travel intention and the dissemination of information by word of mouth through the mediation of positive emotions. Many previous studies have focused on aspects of passenger satisfaction in general without further examining the deeper emotional role in shaping passenger intentions and behavior. For example, research by Antwi et al. (2022) found that affective image and satisfaction play an important mediating role in the relationship

between airport staff assistance and passenger loyalty Antwi et al. (2020). Another study by Ma et al. (2022) the function of facilities, accessibility of layout, and cleanliness of airports increased passenger satisfaction which in turn increased travel intent. These studies highlight the importance of mediating variables such as satisfaction, affective image, and relationship quality in influencing passenger loyalty and behavioral intentions. However, there is still a lack of exploration of the role of positive emotions as a deeper mediator in the relationship between facility functionality, airport imagery, travel intent, and word of mouth (Saut & song, 2022). Research by Usman et al. (2023) also highlights the mediating role of passenger satisfaction and relationship quality in shaping airport image and passenger loyalty (Giao & Vuong, 2021). To fill this gap, this study aims to explore the role of positive emotions as mediators in the relationship between facility functionality, airport imagery, travel intent, and word of mouth, providing deeper insights into how these elements influence passenger behavior.

This study aims to explore and understand the influence of facility functionality and airport image on passengers' travel intention and word of mouth through the mediation of positive emotions. This research was conducted on. The main contribution of this research is to provide a deeper insight into the role of positive emotions in shaping passenger behavior at Haluoleo Kendari Airport, which can be used by airport managers to improve their services and marketing strategies. In addition, this research is expected to add to the literature on airport management and passenger behavior in the context of the ever-growing aviation market.

2. Literature review

Facility Functionality

Functionality denotes the degree to which physical assets, including machinery, equipment, and furnishings, are structured to support effective task accomplishment (Ma et al., 2022). In the context of the physical environment of airports, Facility Functionality refers to how well airport facilities meet operational needs and passenger comfort (Chonsalasin et al., 2021). Optimal functionality of airport facilities can have a direct impact on passenger satisfaction and operational efficiency. Elements such as terminal layout, cleanliness, comfort in waiting areas, accessibility, and the quality of public service facilities like restrooms, lounges, and information services are crucial aspects that shape passengers' perceptions of airport quality. Furthermore, the functionality of facilities is also linked to operational safety and security. This includes the effectiveness of baggage handling systems, security screening procedures, and the availability of adequate emergency facilities. A study by (Yıldız & Cil, 2021) highlights the importance of facility design that considers efficient passenger and baggage flow, which can reduce waiting times and minimize the risk of congestion. Therefore, Facility Functionality at airports not only affects passenger satisfaction but also serves as a critical factor in ensuring safe and efficient airport operations.

Airport image

The image of the airport has been extensively researched in the business category related to customer perception (Lee & Yu, 2018). The image ranges from a holistic impression, a general impression to a very detailed evaluation of a product, brand, store, or company. Image is a holistic way in which customers define a business organization in their minds (Pantouvakis & Renzi, 2016). It is mentally constructed based on some general impressions with the sum of total impressions, and the construction is formed from the elements of various goods and attributes through beliefs, ideas, and feelings towards goods. When a person receives information about an object, the information will be processed to create an image of the object in the brain so that the person can describe it. The image is seen from various points of view. In tourism, the recognition of the image of the destination is influenced by cognitive and affective evaluations. Image is the starting point of tourist expectations that ultimately determine tourist behavior. The image of an airport is formed from passengers' evaluation of airport attributes (Nghiêm-Phú & Suter, 2018) or the overall impression of passengers towards the airport. Focus on physical attributes, such as environmental conditions, signs, symbols, and space functions, which make passengers more impressed. Other researchers include the psychological attributes of airports, such as staff friendliness, check-in speed and efficiency, security, service courtesy, and service reliability.

Positive Emotions

The incorporation of positive emotional elements can strengthen the image of the airport as a comfortable and appealing place for passengers (Batouei et al., 2020). highlight that joy and patience exhibited by airport staff contribute to the creation of a supportive airport environment. Training and skill development initiatives are therefore crucial in sustaining positive passenger experiences. Staff enthusiasm and friendliness strongly shape

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passenger perceptions and emotions, while a welcoming airport image can further support the growth of regional tourism and air travel. (Saut & song, 2022). Therefore, concrete steps in training and developing the skills of airport officers in practicing the concept of positive emotions are very important.

The integration of positive emotion management, technological support, and effective marketing practices allows airports to achieve key objectives, including higher revisit intentions, stronger word-of-mouth effects, and enhanced brand positioning (Batouei et al., 2020). Thus, the airport can continue to be a desirable destination for travelers and be an important part of supporting the tourism industry in the region. To realize the concept of positive emotions in practice at airports, the first step that can be taken is to create a continuous training program for airport officers (Chirambo, 2023). This training can include situation simulations with various scenarios of interaction between officers and passengers, as well as an in-depth understanding of the importance of a friendly and patient attitude in serving travelers. With an ongoing training program, airport staff will be more skilled in dealing with various situations and can continue to hone their skills in creating a pleasant experience for passengers.

Travel Intention

Recurring tourism consumption is one of the most important factors for the sustainability of the tourism industry. The airport's continued revenue growth is highly dependent on passengers who travel many times (Papatheodorou, 2021). Travel intention is defined as a person's desire or intention to travel. The intention to travel has two sources, namely personal sources and sources of information. Travel intention is the desire or intention to travel in doing a tour. Travel intention which is the result of mental processes that lead to action and convert motivation into behavior. Intention is the readiness of an individual to perform a certain behavior. This is assumed to be a direct antecedent of behavior. It is based on attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, with each predictor weighted based on its importance in relation to the behavior and population of interest. A good physical environment in a travel destination can influence travel intention by creating a positive, comfortable, and attractive experience for customers (Moon & Han, 2018). Functional facilities, attractive aesthetics, easy-to-navigate layouts, and maintained cleanliness can all contribute to increased travel intention and support for the tourism industry.

Word of Mouth

Word of mouth marketing has become an increasingly important aspect in the aviation industry, especially in the context of airport operations. The airport serves as a hub of activity, where passengers from diverse backgrounds and experiences meet, creating a suitable environment for the exchange of information and recommendations (Batouei et al., 2020). In the fast-paced and often stressful airport environment, travellers rely heavily on word of mouth to make decisions about everything from dining options to retail stores and flight experiences. Therefore, understanding and leveraging WOM marketing has become crucial for airport businesses looking to attract and retain customers (Loo, 2020). In this paper, we will delve into the concept of word of mouth marketing in the airport environment, exploring its impact, strategies to harness its potential, and the unique challenges and opportunities it offers. Word-of-mouth marketing has a significant impact on business at airports (Vo et al., 2019). The information and recommendations disseminated by passengers can influence the perception and purchasing decisions of others. This can have an impact on the growth of restaurants, shops, and services at the airport. In addition, WOM can also affect the image of the airport itself, both in terms of cleanliness, service efficiency, and security (Nadimi et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important for airport management and other stakeholders to understand how important it is to ensure a positive passenger experience so that they will provide strong recommendations to others. To achieve WOM marketing success at airports, it is important for businesses to integrate this approach into their overall marketing and operational strategies. This includes engaging airport staff in delivering a positive customer experience, creating incentive programs for passengers who provide positive recommendations, and collaborating with service providers to ensure quality consistency across airports.

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method to collect data from airport passengers. The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows systematic and objective measurement of the variables studied, as well as allows statistical analysis to test the hypothesis proposed. Data was collected through questionnaires specifically designed to measure airport image variables, airport facilities, positive emotions, travel intentions, and word-of-mouth information dissemination. The sample in this study is 385 airport passengers.

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Respondents were selected using the purposive sampling method, where only passengers who had sufficient experience at the airport that was the focus of this study were included. The purposive sampling technique is used to select respondents who are relevant to the research objectives. Data collection was carried out at Halu Oeleo Kendari Airport, where researchers distributed questionnaires to passengers who were waiting for flights or had just arrived. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of several parts, each measuring a different variable, to measure , measured Airport image adopted from (Saut & song, 2022), Positive Emotions from (Pantouvakis & Gerou, 2023), travel intention, facility functionality and WOM from (Batouei et al., 2020). The indicators to measure the variables in this study are adapted from previous literature and have been tested for validity and reliability. A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure each item, with answer options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The collected data was analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) technique. SEM-PLS was chosen because it was able to handle complex models with many latent variables and indicators. In addition, SEM-PLS does not require strict data distribution assumptions, making it more flexible to use on survey data. The results of the SEM-PLS analysis were used to test the significance and strength of the relationship between airport images, airport facilities, positive emotions, travel intentions, and the spread of information by word of mouth.

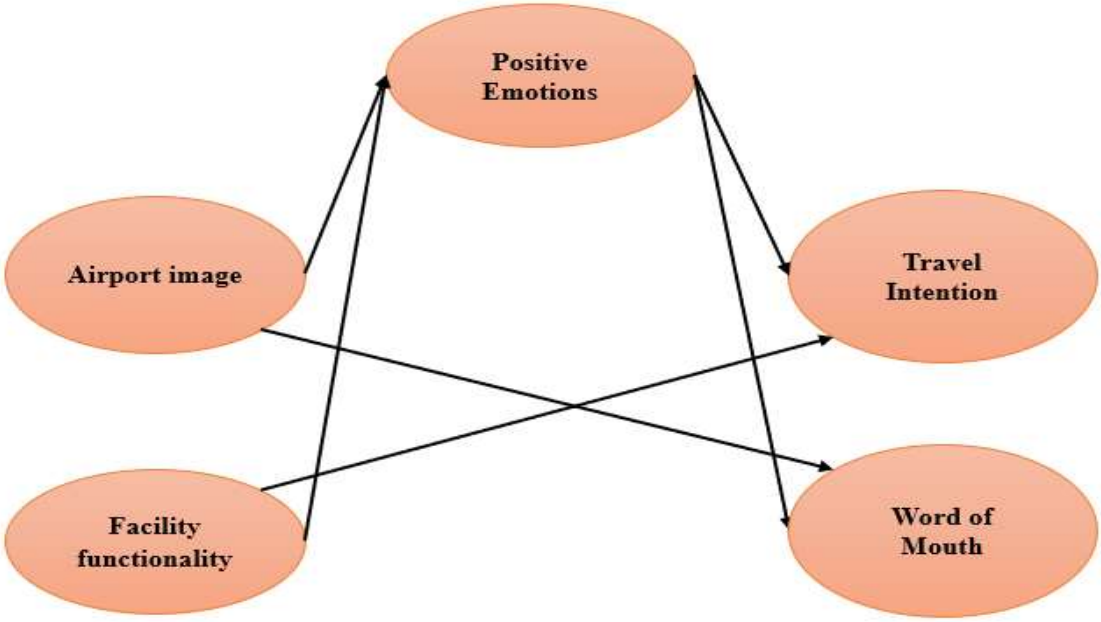

Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of a final integrated model

4. Results and discussion

Based on data analysis, it was obtained from this study showing the characteristics of respondents from a sample of 385 people. Based on gender, the majority of respondents were male (62.34%) and female (37.66%). In the age category, most of them were 31-37 years old (63.64%), followed by 24-30 years old (22.6%), 45-51 years old (8.05%), and 38-44 years old (5.71%). Based on education, the majority are Bachelor graduates (69.35%), followed by high school graduates (13.25%), Postgraduate (11.69%), and DIII (5.71%). In terms of employment, the majority of respondents were Traders/Self-Employed and Civil Servants (37.14% each), followed by Private Employees (14.55%) and Students (11.17%). Based on income, most respondents had an income of less than 5 million rupiah (63.12%), followed by an income of 6-10 million rupiah (14.55%), 11-15 million rupiah (8.57%), 16-20 million rupiah (8.31%), and more than 20 million rupiah (5.45%).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents (N=385)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Sex	240	62,34
Man	145	37,66
Woman	385	100

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Age	87	22,6
24-30	245	63,64
31-37	22	5,71
38-44	31	8,05
45-51	385	100
Education	51	13,25
SMA	22	5,71
DIII	267	69,35
Bachelor	45	11,69
Postgraduate	385	100
Occupation	56	14,55
Private Employees	43	11,17
Student	143	37,14
Trader/Self-Employed	143	37,14
Civil Servants	385	100
Income	243	63,12
< 5 million	56	14,55
6-10 million	33	8,57
11-15 million	32	8,31
16-20 million	21	5,45
≥ 20 million	385	100

Table 2. Results of the Measurement Model

Variables	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Airport image (AI)	AI1	0,94	0,86	0,93	0,88
	AI2	0,93			
Facility functionality (FF)	FF1	0,79	0,83	0,89	0,66
	FF2	0,82			
	FF3	0,83			
	FF4	0,82			
Positive Emotions (PE)	PE1	0,94	0,92	0,95	0,86
	PE2	0,91			
	PE3	0,93			
Travel Intention (IT)	TI1	0,9	0,89	0,93	0,82
	TI2	0,91			
	TI3	0,9			
Word of Mouth (WOM)	WOM1	0,85	0,81	0,89	0,72
	WOM2	0,85			
	WOM3	0,85			

This table shows the results of the reliability and validity analysis of constructs for several dimensions: Airport Image (AI), Facility Functionality (FF), Positive Emotions (PE), Travel Intention (IT), and Word of Mouth (WOM). Each dimension is measured using specific items. The reliability value was measured by Cronbach's Alpha, with the highest score on Positive Emotions (PE) of 0.917. Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are also presented to assess the internal consistency and validity of convergence. PE has the highest AVE value of 0.857. All dimensions show Cronbach's Alpha above 0.8, indicating good reliability,

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while AI and IT show high CRs of 0.934 and 0.930, respectively. The highest AVE value was found in AI at 0.876. Overall, the measuring tools of this study have adequate internal consistency and validity.

Table 3. HTMT result

	AI	FF	PE	IT	WOM
AI					
FF	0,535				
PE	0,448	0,661			
IT	0,503	0,750	0,610		
WOM	0,528	0,756	0,635	0,672	

The table above shows the Heterotrait-Monotraite (HTMT) ratio for several dimensions, namely Airport Image (AI), Facility Functionality (FF), Positive Emotions (PE), Travel Intention (TI), and Word of Mouth (WOM), which are used to evaluate the validity of discrimination between different constructs. The highest HTMT value between AI and other constructs is 0.528 with WOM. FF had the highest HTMT value of 0.756 with WOM, showing a moderate correlation. PE shows the highest HTMT value of 0.661 with FF, while TI shows the highest value of 0.750 with FF. Overall, these HTMT values show that although there is some correlation between the constructs, the values are still within acceptable limits for good discriminatory validity, ensuring that the measured constructs differ from each other.

Table 4. R Square and Q2

	R Square	Q2
PE	0,357	
IT	0,304	0,757
WOM	0,458	

Based on the research "Facility Functionality and Airport Image on Travel Intention and Word of Mouth and in Positive Emotions Mediation: Airport Passenger Study," a Q2 value of 0.757 indicates that the model has excellent predictive power. This indicates that functional airport facilities and a positive airport image significantly increase passengers' intention to travel and their tendency to recommend airports, with positive emotions as mediators. These findings emphasize the importance of managing facilities and a positive airport image to improve the passenger experience, which ultimately increases their intention to return to the airport and share their positive experience with others

Table 5. Hypotheses relationship testing

Direct Effect	Effect	p-value	Hypothesis testing
Airport image > Positive Emotions	0,171	0,003	Accepted
Airport image > Travel Intention	0,143	0,001	Accepted
Airport image > Word of Mouth	0,157	0,001	Accepted
Facility functionality -> Positive Emotions	0,5	0,000	Accepted
Facility functionality -> Travel Intention	0,443	0,000	Accepted
Facility functionality -> Travel Intention	0,404	0,000	Accepted
Positive Emotions -> Travel Intention	0,237	0,000	Accepted
Positive Emotions -> Word of Mouth	0,251	0,000	Accepted
Indirect Effect			
Airport image > Positive Emotions -> Travel Intention	0,041	0,034	Accepted
Facility functionality > Positive Emotions -> Travel Intention	0,119	0,001	Accepted
Airport image > Positive Emotions > Word of Mouth	0,043	0,032	Accepted
Facility functionality > Positive Emotions > Word of Mouth	0,126	0,001	Accepted

The analysis results in this study reveal eight significant direct influences of airport image, airport facility functions, and positive emotions on travel intentions and word-of-mouth communication. First, the airport's image has a significant impact on passengers' positive emotions (effect value = 0.171; p = 0.003), which then contributes to an increase in their intention to travel (effect value = 0.143; p = 0.001) and a tendency to share their experiences through word-of-mouth (effect value = 0.157; p = 0.001). This indicates that a good airport image can foster positive feelings, leading to stronger travel behavior and a desire to share positive experiences.

Additionally, the functionality of airport facilities also has a significant direct influence on several aspects. Well-functioning facilities significantly enhance passengers' positive emotions (effect value = 0.5; p = 0.000), which in

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turn strengthens their intention to travel (effect value = 0.443; p = 0.000). Good airport facility functionality also increases the likelihood of passengers sharing their experiences through word-of-mouth (effect value = 0.404; p = 0.000). These findings suggest that adequate airport facilities play a crucial role in shaping positive passenger behavior. Beyond direct influences, this study also identifies four significant indirect influences, where positive emotions act as a mediator. First, airport image affects travel intentions through positive emotions (effect value = 0.041; p = 0.034), showing that a good image creates positive emotions that reinforce the intention to travel. Furthermore, airport facility functionality also impacts travel intentions through positive emotions (effect value = 0.119; p = 0.001), demonstrating how good facilities can enhance travel intentions by improving passengers' moods.

Lastly, the findings show that airport image and facilities also indirectly influence word-of-mouth communication through positive emotions. The airport image has an indirect effect on word-of-mouth through positive emotions (effect value = 0.043; p = 0.032), while airport facilities affect word-of-mouth through the same channel (effect value = 0.126; p = 0.001). These findings highlight the importance of airport management in enhancing both the image and facilities to create positive emotions among passengers, which ultimately encourages them to share positive experiences and contributes to a better airport reputation. This study reveals that airport image and the functionality of its facilities play a key role in shaping passengers' positive emotions. These positive emotions, in turn, have a significant impact on passengers' travel intentions and their tendency to share their experiences with others. When passengers perceive a good airport image and enjoy quality facilities, they are more likely to feel satisfied and motivated to travel, as well as to share their experiences positively through various channels, including word-of-mouth.

Furthermore, the study also shows that the relationship between airport image, facilities, and passenger behavior is not only direct but also influenced by positive emotions acting as a mediator. This means that while the airport image and facilities directly impact travel intentions and word-of-mouth communication, their effects can be amplified when passengers experience strong positive emotions (Baharuddin & Mahdzar, 2020). These emotions serve as a bridge linking passengers' perceptions of the airport to their actual behaviors in terms of travel intentions and sharing experiences (Antwi et al., 2021). Moreover, the airport image and facilities not only directly influence passenger behavior but also indirectly through their emotional experiences. A pleasant and positive experience at the airport not only increases passengers' desire to return to the airport but also encourages them to recommend it to others (Bakır et al., 2022; Wattanacharoensil et al., 2017). This underscores the need for airport management to pay special attention to how passengers perceive and feel about the airport environment, as this can impact overall loyalty and public perception (Bezerra & Gomes, 2019). Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of airport management continuously improving the image and quality of the facilities offered. By creating a positive and enjoyable environment, airports can not only enhance passenger satisfaction but also encourage them to become brand ambassadors who are happy to share their experiences with others (Kefallonitis & Kalligiannis, 2019). This ultimately contributes to a better airport reputation and increases customer loyalty.

5. Conclusion

This study has identified the significant influence of airport image variables and airport facilities on positive emotions, travel intentions, and the spread of information by word of mouth. The results of the analysis show that both the image and airport facilities have a significant direct and indirect influence on these variables. Images of airports, for example, affect positive emotions, travel intentions, and the spread of information by word of mouth. Airport facilities have also been shown to influence positive emotions, travel intentions, and the spread of information by word of mouth. In addition, the analysis showed that positive emotions played a significant role as a mediator in the relationship between airport images and travel intent and the spread of information by word of mouth. Positive emotions also mediate the influence of airport images on travel intentions with high significance. Similarly, airport images affect the spread of information by word of mouth both directly and through travel intent. These results emphasize that both the visual and functional aspects of the airport contribute significantly in shaping the passenger experience and perception, which in turn influences their intention to travel and share their experience. This study makes an important contribution to the airport management literature and consumer behavior in the context of air travel by identifying a significant relationship between airport images, airport facilities, and positive emotions on travel intent and the dissemination of information by word of mouth. The results of the study confirm the role of mediating positive emotions, adding a new dimension to the study of consumer behavior. These findings provide practical guidance for airport management to improve the visual and functional aspects of the airport, such as improving facilities and strengthening the image of the airport, which is expected to increase satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth promotion. The limitations of this study include data

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limited to one airport, quantitative approaches, and additional variables that are not covered. For future research, it is recommended to conduct similar studies on different airports, using a qualitative approach, and considering additional variables such as service quality, security, and comfort.

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