



Analyzing the Impact of Ethical Sales Behavior on Customer Satisfaction: A Study of Afghanistan's Passengers Transport Industry

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction within the interprovincial transport sector of Afghanistan, addressing a notable gap in the literature on service quality and customer outcomes in high-contact service environments. Drawing on prior research that highlights the role of ethical sales in building trust and aligning customer expectations with actual service performance, the study hypothesizes that ethical sales behavior positively influences customer satisfaction. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to passengers of three major transport companies in Kabul, yielding 338 valid responses. Descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were conducted using SPSS and Amos. The results indicate a weak positive direct effect of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction, suggesting that its influence operates indirectly through mediating variables. Qualitative feedback further revealed operational challenges, including misinformation about schedules and pricing, which affect passenger satisfaction. These findings underscore the complexity of customer satisfaction in transport services and highlight the importance of combining ethical sales practices with improvements in core service delivery. The study contributes to understanding ethical sales behavior in under-researched service contexts and provides practical recommendations to enhance service quality and customer relations in Afghanistan's transport industry.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have demonstrated that when frontline employees communicate in a respectful, empathetic, and socially oriented manner, customers report a higher willingness to interact and greater satisfaction with the service experience (Yao, Kuai & Wang, 2022). Within a broader behavioral framework, ethical sales behavior (ESB), which includes fairness,

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honesty, transparency, and avoidance of manipulative practices during service delivery, emerges as a meaningful dimension that may foster trust and reduce uncertainty in customer interactions, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and long-term relationship outcomes (Roman & Ruiz, 2005). Customer satisfaction remains a critical success factor for service firms globally, as satisfied customers are more likely to stay loyal, spread positive word of mouth, and contribute to firm (Mittal et al., 2023). In many service settings, especially those characterized by frequent, direct interactions between customers and frontline employees, the quality of employees' behavior plays a pivotal role in shaping customers' perceptions of service quality and overall satisfaction (Cheng & Zhao, 2025). Moreover, employees' commitment to service quality and their relational behaviors during service encounters significantly influence customers' service evaluations and loyalty intentions (Pahi et al., 2022).

In the transport sector, ethical behavior is even more critical given the high level of contact in services and the risks of long-distance travel. Ethical sales practices, such as truthful pricing communication, accurate schedule information, and fair treatment of passengers, help build trust and reduce uncertainty, ultimately influencing satisfaction and loyalty (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Kumar et al., 2013). Research across various service industries shows that ESB positively affects customer perceptions by aligning expectations with actual service delivery and fostering a sense of respect and fairness (Tolba, Seoudi & Mishriki, 2015). Therefore, the relationship between ESB and customer satisfaction (CS) remains an important area of investigation, especially in environments where service quality varies widely.

Despite the importance of ethics in shaping passenger experiences, no empirical study has examined the role of ethical sales behavior in influencing customer satisfaction in Afghanistan's transport industry. Existing research on ESB mainly focuses on the transport industry, leaving a clear gap regarding long-distance transport services in Afghanistan. This gap is critical because frontline employees, such as ticket sellers, drivers, and co-drivers, serve as the first point of contact for customers and directly influence their perceptions of fairness, safety, and reliability (Roman, 2003). Given the intensity of passenger movement across provinces and the documented complaints about unethical sales practices, there is a strong need to empirically examine how ESB contributes to or limits customer satisfaction in this sector.

Addressing this gap will provide transport companies with the insights needed to improve service quality, establish ethical standards, and build long-term customer relationships. Understanding whether ethical behavior meaningfully contributes to customer satisfaction can guide managers in designing training programs, revising operational procedures, and enhancing the overall customer experience.

The Afghan interprovincial passenger transport industry represents one such environment. Thousands of passengers travel daily between Kabul and central provinces such as Kandahar and Herat. Distances are long, approximately 480 km to Kandahar and about 1,400 km to Herat from Kabul (Stigter, 2004; Institute of War and Peace Reporting, 2018). However, circumstantial evidence and reports from these passengers suggest that unethical

sales behaviors are common in the transport industry in Afghanistan, including misinformation about departure times, inaccurate descriptions of bus conditions, and high-pressure ticket sales (Obiad et al., 2023). Such practices harm customer trust, lead to negative service experiences, and may prompt switching behavior, thereby increasing the cost of acquiring new customers (Taun, 2015; Okereke, 2022; Roman et al., 2022).

Based on this need, the present study aims to examine the impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction within the interprovincial transport sector of Afghanistan. The study focuses on the behavior of frontline employees who directly interact with customers and seeks to highlight the broader importance of ethical sales practices in enhancing customer relationships.

Accordingly, the specific objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction in the interprovincial transport sector of Afghanistan.
- To examine how frontline employees, including ticket sellers, drivers, and co-drivers, demonstrate ethical sales behavior from the customers' perspective.
- To assess the importance of ethical sales behavior in strengthening customer satisfaction.

The following research questions are intended to be answered.

1. How does ethical sales behavior influence customer satisfaction in the interprovincial transport sector of Afghanistan?
2. How do customers perceive the ethical sales behavior of frontline employees, including ticket sellers, drivers, and co-drivers, in interprovincial transport services?
3. What role does ethical sales behavior play in building and maintaining customer satisfaction in the interprovincial transport sector?

Ethical Sales Behavior

Ethical sales behavior represents a salesperson's honest communication, offering products or services that are relevant to customer needs, and a promise to meet or fulfill the confidentiality of customer information (Aprilia & Warganegara, 2024). Additionally, ethical sales could be identified as societal norms such as fair play, honesty, and full disclosure, and fair and honest action with customers to maintain a long-term relationship with customers which is due to customer satisfaction and trust (Roman & Munuera, 2003); Although there is no generally accepted definition for business ethics, and no any standard measurement that how much an interaction is ethical or unethical, but its definitions are depended that how much the actions are correct or wrong, good or bad, and fair and unfair(Chen & Mau, 2009, as cited by Hazrati et al., 2011). Its opposite in the context of the study, unethical sales behavior, is defined as a short-term salesperson's conduct that enables them to gain at the customer's expense. Examples of such activities include lying or exaggerating about the benefits of a product, lying about availability, lying about the competition, selling products

that people do not need, giving answers when the answer is not known, and implementing manipulative influence tactics or high-pressure selling techniques (Roman & Ruiz, 2005). Customer loyalty and trust can be strengthened through ethical sales practices and by Sales professionals who act ethically, communicating honestly with customers and promoting only those products or services they genuinely believe meet the customers' needs (Aprilia et al., 2024). Sales managers play a crucial role in creating an ethical sales environment by overseeing ethical practices from the recruitment of sales staff to clearly communicating ethical standards and providing proper training to the sales team (Tolba et al., 2015).

Customer Satisfaction

In general, satisfaction is a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment that result from comparing a product or service's perceived performance (or outcome) to expectations. "If the performance or experience falls short of expectations, the customer is dissatisfied. If it matches expectations, the customer is satisfied. If it exceeds expectations, the customer is highly satisfied or delighted" (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 153). Similarly, if the actual performance matches the customer's expectations for a product or service, the customer is satisfied, and the paper argues that customer satisfaction is a core objective for private and public organizations due to its impact on business success (Ahli, Hilmi & Abudaqa, 2024). The more ethical the sales behavior, the more accurate customers' expectations of the service, and the smaller the gap between expectations and performance, the less the cause of dissatisfaction (Tolba et al., 2015). Measuring customer satisfaction in the service sector is challenging because services differ from tangible products. Consequently, satisfaction is assessed not only during service delivery but also after service provision (Safi et al., 2020). Vukmir (2006) describes that satisfaction is influenced by specific factors related to the timing and extent of perceived care. Additionally, demographic factors—such as symptom presentation, practice style, location, and physician-related characteristics—directly affect satisfaction levels.

So, success for every organization depends on customer satisfaction, and when companies start, they get customers first and then make a profit. Moreover, offering outstanding customer service will bring them back to the organization (Abiodun Oje & Yua Henry, 2024).

Ethical Sales Behavior and Customer Satisfaction

Rasyid and Djakasaputra's (2025) study examines the role of ethical sales behavior in shaping customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty within the sportswear industry. Using survey data from 112 consumers and analyzing the results through Structural Equation Modeling, the findings indicate that ethical sales behavior has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction and customer trust. While its direct impact on customer loyalty is positive but not statistically significant, customer satisfaction and trust both significantly contribute to customer loyalty. The study underscores the importance of ethical sales practices in fostering sustainable customer relationships.

Customer satisfaction is widely recognized as a vital determinant of organizational success in both public and private sectors. Prior research has examined the influence of ethical sales behavior, perceived trust, customer loyalty, and green experience on customer satisfaction, particularly within public sector organizations in the UAE. Using primary data collected from 224 respondents through a structured questionnaire, the study applied structural equation modeling to analyze the relationships among these variables. The analysis followed a two-step approach involving measurement and structural models, grounded in the Resource-Based View and expectation confirmation theory. The findings indicate that perceived trust, customer loyalty, and green experience have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction in UAE public organizations. In contrast, ethical sales behavior was not found to have a direct impact on customer satisfaction, although it plays an indirect role by enhancing trust and loyalty. The study highlights the importance of fostering trust, strengthening customer loyalty, and adopting green practices to improve customer satisfaction in the public sector (Ahli et al., 2024).

Ou et al. (2015) examine the role of ethical sales behavior in shaping relationship quality and its subsequent outcomes within the telemarketing context. Using survey data collected from 312 customers of financial institutions in Taiwan, the research applied structural equation modeling to analyze the proposed relationships. The findings demonstrate that key dimensions of ethical sales behavior—such as honesty, security, privacy, non-harassment, and avoidance of overharvesting—significantly enhance relationship quality. In turn, strong relationship quality positively influences relationship commitment and customer loyalty. The study contributes to the relationship marketing literature by highlighting ethical sales behavior as a crucial determinant of sustaining high-quality customer relationships, particularly in telemarketing environments.

Based on Roman et al. (2005), this study investigated the effects of perceived ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment to the salesperson within the financial services sector in Spain. Data were collected using a stratified and random sampling approach involving customers from three banks. Ethical sales behavior was measured with five items, and customer satisfaction with three. The results, supported by confirmatory factor analysis and reliability testing, showed that ethical sales behavior had a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. In addition, customer satisfaction strongly influenced trust and commitment to the salesperson. These findings highlight the central role of ethical sales behavior in strengthening customer relationships in financial services.

Roman (2003) examined the impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty in the financial services industry. Using a random sampling approach, the study collected data from 210 sales representatives and 630 customers. The findings revealed that ethical sales behavior had a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction with core services. However, its direct impact on satisfaction with the company was positive but weak and not statistically supported. When satisfaction with core services was introduced as a mediating variable, ethical sales behavior demonstrated a strong indirect effect on overall

customer satisfaction. The study highlights the mediating role of service-related satisfaction in strengthening the influence of ethical sales behavior on customer outcomes.

Hazrati et al. (2011) used random sampling for the questionnaire; all 225 customers were selected, and 150 questionnaires were distributed to each randomly selected group from six stores. Of these, 278 were valid for analysis. They used a multivariate model to examine the between-variable influences on the customer decision, and a structural equation model to explore the simultaneous-variable relationships in a causal framework. The questionnaire was prepared on a Likert scale. The result shows that ethical sales behavior has a strong impact on customer satisfaction. The result also indicates that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer trust. Other hypotheses showed that customer trust can lead to a positive impact on customer commitment. Okereke (2022) examined the effect of customer service on customer satisfaction using ABC Transport Plc in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, as a case study. The study analyzed five customer service characteristics: reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance, and tangibility. Reliability was defined as the ability of a product or service to perform as expected by customers, aligning with Aprilia et al. (2024), who described ethical sales behavior as offering products or services that are relevant to customer needs. Empathy refers to caring interactions, understanding customer needs, and providing interpersonal attention.

Responsiveness was described as employees' willingness to help customers and to display politeness, consistent with Gillespie and Hennessy (2008), who noted that positive social exchanges, such as responsive service, enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and trust. Assurance was defined as the salesperson's possession of the necessary skills and knowledge to perform services effectively. At the same time, tangibility refers to the extent to which a service presents a clear and concrete physical image. The study employed Cochran's sampling formula and a non-probability purposive sampling technique. A total of 292 questionnaires were distributed, with 210 valid responses collected from customers. Data were subjected to pre-validation testing, and hypotheses were tested using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that assurance and tangibility had a significant impact on customer satisfaction, whereas reliability, empathy, and responsiveness did not.

Tolba et al. (2015) investigated the impact of ethical sales behavior, service quality, and corporate image on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the Egyptian retail banking sector. The study was conducted across eight retail banks in Egypt using a purposive non-probability sampling method, while the banks themselves were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and face-to-face surveys. Of the 470 distributed questionnaires, 409 were completed, yielding a 87% response rate. Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to assess unidimensionality, convergent validity, reliability, and discriminant validity, and the model demonstrated acceptable goodness-of-fit indices. Structural equation modeling using LISREL was applied to test the hypothesized relationships. The results revealed that ethical sales behavior had a significant and positive direct effect on customer satisfaction, indicating that it strongly influences customer satisfaction within the

Egyptian retail banking sector. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of ethical sales behavior as a key determinant of customer satisfaction, thereby supporting the relevance of this objective to the present study.

Rastgoo and Dastran et al. (2016) study examines the relationship between ethical sales behavior and customer satisfaction at the Iran Insurance Company in Fars province. Using structural equation modeling and data from 447 participants, the research found no significant direct relationship between ethical sales behavior and customer satisfaction. However, ethical sales behavior positively influenced customer trust, which, in turn, positively affected customer satisfaction and loyalty. The study highlights that while ethical sales behavior does not directly impact customer satisfaction, it plays a crucial role in building trust, which indirectly enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Shadab's (2012) study, grounded in Transaction Cost Theory, examines the effects of ethical sales behavior on customer-related outcomes, particularly loyalty, within buyer–seller relationships. The findings indicate that ethical sales behavior reduces perceived transaction costs by enhancing transparency, honesty, and fairness in exchanges. As a result, customers experience greater confidence and satisfaction in their interactions with salespeople, which strengthens relational outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty. The study suggests that when salespeople behave ethically, customers perceive lower risk and uncertainty, resulting in more satisfying service experiences and stronger long-term relationships.

The reviewed literature provides a comprehensive understanding of ethical sales behavior (ESB) and its relationship with customer satisfaction (CS) across various service industries. Empirical evidence consistently suggests that ESB, characterized by honesty, transparency, fairness, and customer-oriented conduct, positively influences customer trust, loyalty, and satisfaction. Studies conducted in sectors such as retail, banking, financial services, and sportswear demonstrate that ethical behavior aligns customer expectations with actual service delivery, thereby reducing uncertainty and enhancing the overall service experience (Rasyid & Djakasaputra, 2025; Roman et al., 2005; Tolba et al., 2015; Hazrati et al., 2011). Additionally, research highlights the critical role of frontline employees in shaping customer perceptions, emphasizing that the quality of interpersonal interactions and relational behaviors during service encounters significantly affects customer satisfaction and loyalty intentions (Yao, Kuai & Wang, 2022; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Kumar et al., 2013). In high-contact services such as the transport sector, where passengers directly interact with ticket sellers, drivers, and co-drivers, the importance of ESB is particularly pronounced, as ethical practices contribute to trust, reduce perceived risk, and foster positive service experiences.

Despite these strengths, several limitations emerge from the existing literature. Most studies have been conducted in banking, retail, or other commercial contexts, leaving a notable gap in the transport sector, particularly in developing countries like Afghanistan. While the majority of research demonstrates a positive relationship between ESB and CS, some studies indicate that the effect may be indirect, mediated through trust or loyalty rather

than a direct impact (Rastgoo & Dastran, 2016; Ahli et al., 2024). This inconsistency highlights the need for further investigation into the direct relationship between ESB and CS in specific, high-contact service environments. Moreover, there is no universally accepted metric for measuring ethical sales behavior, which limits comparability across studies and underscores the need for context-specific operationalization (Chen & Mau, 2009; Hazrati et al., 2011). Operational realities in the transport industry, such as long-distance travel, schedule adherence, vehicle conditions, and passenger safety, are often overlooked in the literature, despite their potential influence on customer satisfaction.

Overall, the literature establishes a solid theoretical foundation linking ethical sales behavior to positive customer outcomes, particularly through enhancing trust, loyalty, and satisfaction. However, gaps remain in understanding the direct influence of ESB on customer satisfaction in unique, high-contact service contexts such as Afghanistan's interprovincial transport sector. Addressing this gap is critical for determining whether ethical sales practices alone are sufficient to enhance customer satisfaction or whether additional operational and service-related factors must also be considered. The current study aims to fill this gap by empirically examining the direct impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction in Afghan transport services, providing insights for improving service quality, ethical standards, and long-term customer relationships. Based on this explanation, the study's hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1: Ethical sales behavior has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction in the transport industry of Afghanistan.

Conceptual Framework

Although some studies suggest that ethical sales behavior may influence customer satisfaction indirectly through trust and loyalty (Rastgoo & Dastran, 2016; Ahli et al., 2024), substantial empirical evidence supports a direct relationship between ethical sales behavior and customer satisfaction (Roman et al., 2005; Hazrati et al., 2011; Tolba et al., 2015). Given the objective of the present study, trust and loyalty are excluded to maintain parsimony and to specifically test the direct effect of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction.

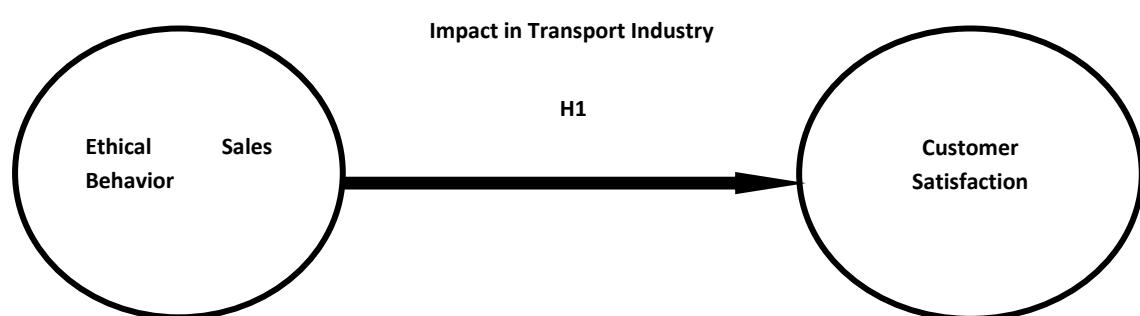


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

RESEARCH METHOD

This part explains the research methodology employed to examine the direct impact of Ethical Sales Behavior (ESB) on Customer Satisfaction (CS) in selected transport companies in Kabul, Afghanistan. It details the research philosophy, approach, strategy, methods, data collection, scale development, sampling, software used, data preparation, analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

The study adopts a positivist research philosophy, focusing on the measurement of relationships between Ethical Sales Behavior (independent variable) and Customer Satisfaction (dependent variable). Positivism emphasizes objectivity, quantification, and hypothesis testing, which aligns with this study's reliance on structured questionnaires, numerical data, and statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

A deductive approach is used, beginning with the existing theory and literature on ethical sales behavior and customer satisfaction (Roman et al., 2005; Tolba et al., 2015; Aprilia & Warganegara, 2024). Based on prior research, the study formulates a hypothesis that ESB positively affects CS and empirically tests it using primary data collected from passengers.

The study employs a descriptive correlational research strategy. Descriptive studies assess the current state of phenomena, while correlational studies examine relationships between variables without manipulating them (Sekaran et al., 2016). The strategy is suitable for analyzing how passengers perceive ethical sales behavior and its impact on satisfaction in the transport sector.

Data Source

Data for this study were collected using both secondary and primary sources. Secondary data were obtained from academic journals, research books, published articles, and periodical reports to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the research.

Instrumentation

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, designed to measure six dimensions of ethical sales behavior and three dimensions of customer satisfaction. The questionnaire was organized into three sections. The first section captured respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, educational level, occupation, and the specific transport company utilized among the three selected for this study. The second section focused on ethical sales behavior, drawing on the six-item scale developed by Alrubaiee (2012), as cited by Ahli (2024). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), providing a quantitative measure of respondents' perceptions of ethical sales practices. The third section measured customer satisfaction using a three-item scale adapted from Roman et al. (2005), with responses recorded on a 10-point scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree). Additionally, two supplementary questions were included to capture respondents' perceptions of the positive and negative attributes of the transport companies, providing qualitative insights to

complement the quantitative data. This design ensured a comprehensive assessment of both ethical sales behavior and passengers satisfaction.

Sampling Technique

In all three transport companies, there is no formal system or database for daily, monthly, and yearly registration of passengers transferred from Kabul to other provinces, and the exact population is unknown. So, we use Cochran's formula (1963) for sample size and the purposive sampling method for data collection. Purposive sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling method in which everyone available to us is considered a sample element, but those who meet the research criteria and better understand the situation are predefined (Mohsin, 2016). In the literature, the same purposive method is used by Tolha et al. (2015), who found that ethical sales behavior had a significant impact on customer satisfaction in retail banking in Egypt.

Cochran's Formula

As we mentioned in the previous part, when the population is unknown, we can use Cochran's formula for sample size, which is calculated below:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 (pq)}{e^2}$$

n=Sample size

e =Margin of error (what is considered 5% in this research)

Z=Value from a table at a given confidence level, say (95%), is 1.96

P = Estimated proportion of the population that has the given attribute. What is 50% here? Say that 50% of the passengers travel from Kabul to other provinces, and 50% travel in the opposite direction.

q=1-p, That is **q**=1-0.5= 0.5

$$1- n = \frac{1.96^2 (0.50*0.50)}{0.05^2} = 384$$

These 384 questionnaires are distributed among the three transport companies' customers (say, passengers). The number of questionnaires is larger than that of Gerald Nwora et al. (2017), who distributed 353 questionnaires, 203 to sales persons and 150 to customers in six Nigerian banks.

Measurement Tools

All 384 questionnaires, based on the purposive sampling method, are distributed to customers of each transport company (e.g., Passengers) at their main terminals in Kabul city. After data collection, for analyzing the relationship and impact between Ethical Sales Behavior (ESB) and Customer Satisfaction (CS), the study first employs descriptive analysis to summarize demographic data and overall trends in ESB and CS. Reliability and validity testing

will be conducted using Cronbach's Alpha (with a threshold of >0.7) to assess internal consistency, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure for sampling adequacy, and factor analysis to confirm construct validity. Pearson correlation analysis will be used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between ESB and CS. At the same time, simple linear regression will determine the impact of ESB on CS and quantify the proportion of variance in CS explained by ESB.

Table 1. Measurement Items for Ethical Sales Behavior and Customer Satisfaction

Construct	Item Code	Questionnaire Item	Scale
Ethical Sales Behavior <i>(Alrubaei, 2012; cited in Ahali, 2024)</i>	ESB1	The salesperson lies about availability to make a sale.	1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
	ESB2	The salesperson lies about competitors to make a sale.	1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
	ESB3	The salesperson gives answers when they do not really know.	1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
	ESB4	The salesperson applies sales pressure even though they know that the product/service is not exemplary for me.	1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
	ESB5	The salesperson makes a rosy picture of the product/service to make it sound as good as possible.	1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
	ESB6	Customer benefit is the organization's top priority.	1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
Customer Satisfaction <i>(Roman et al., 2005)</i>	CST1	The amount of contact I have had with this salesperson has been adequate.	1 = Totally Disagree to 10 = Totally Agree
	CST2	I am satisfied with the level of service this person has provided.	1 = Totally Disagree to 10 = Totally Agree
	CST3	In general, I am satisfied with my dealings with this salesperson.	1 = Totally Disagree to 10 = Totally Agree

Note: All items were measured using self-administered questionnaires.

FINDINGS

Demographics

Transport companies in Kabul, Afghanistan, with 338 completed and returned, yielding a 88% response rate. The sample was predominantly male (97%), with only 3% female respondents, indicating a significant gender disparity in service usage. Age distribution showed that the majority of respondents were between 18 and 33 years old (84%), while the 34–41 and 42–49 age groups accounted for 14% and 2%, respectively, with no respondents over 50. Regarding educational background, most participants held a bachelor's degree (42%), followed by 14th-grade graduates (22%), master's degree holders (22%), high school graduates (11%), Ph.D. holders (2%), and 1% were illiterate, reflecting a relatively educated sample. Occupationally, the majority were government employees (67%), with unemployed individuals (19%), private-sector employees (9%), and self-employed individuals (5%) comprising the remainder. Respondents were relatively evenly distributed across the three transport companies, with Wardak BA BA representing 37%, Mirwais Nika Ltd. 32%, and Ahmad Shah BA BA 31% of the sample.

Reliability and Validity Testing

Reliability refers to the extent to which a measurement instrument consistently produces the same results when applied under similar conditions, and in SPSS this is commonly evaluated using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency of scale items (George & Mallery, 2018); Validity refers to how well a research instrument measures the concept it is designed to assess. It is essential for ensuring that the results of a study are accurate and meaningful. High validity enables researchers to make sound interpretations and informed decisions based on the findings, thereby strengthening the credibility and practical usefulness of the results. (Andersson et al., 2024)

Internal Consistency (Cronbach's Alpha)

Internal consistency refers to the degree to which items within a test or measurement instrument consistently assess the same construct. It is commonly evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, where a high value indicates that the items are closely related and effectively measure the same underlying concept (Andersson et al., 2024). To assess the reliability of the constructs, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for both the independent and dependent variables. The construct of Ethical Sales Behavior (ESB), measured by five items (ESB1 to ESB5), yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.943, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Sekaran et al., 2016). For Customer Satisfaction (CS), measured by three items (CS1-CS3), the Cronbach's alpha was 0.931, indicating good reliability.

Sampling Adequacy (KMO and Bartlett's Test)

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.666, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.6. This result supports the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also significant ($p < 0.05$), confirming that correlations between items are sufficiently significant for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2019).

Test of Normality

For running a correlation and a simple regression model between ESB and CS, normality is assumed to be significant. (Sharma & Kumar, 2024) emphasis that for the normality tests, the value of Alpha of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk should be greater than 0.05. The first five items are grouped by mean into one variable for ESB, and the CS's three items are grouped by mean into one variable in the compute variable in SPSS. Then the normality test for ESB follows normality laws, as explained in the table below.

Table 2. Test of Normality (Ethical sales behavior)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Ethical sales behavior	0.047	338	0.069	0.992	338	0.086
Customer Satisfaction	0.056	338	0.340	0.986	338	0.078
	a. Lilliefors Significance Correction					

The alpha value is greater than 0.05 for both the Kolmogorov and Shapiro tests, with 0.69 and 0.86 for ESB and 0.340 and 0.078 for CS. This indicates that the ESB and CS data follow the normality rule.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 3. Total variance explained by ESB

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	
1	3.448	43.098	43.098	3.448	43.098	43.098	3.230
2	1.966	24.578	67.677	1.966	24.578	67.677	2.245

Table 3 shows that the total variance in customer satisfaction explained by ethical Sales Behavior is 67.677.

Table 4. Pattern Matrix. (Factor loading)

Item	Component 1	Component 2
ESB1	.868	-
ESB2	.763	-
ESB3	.661	-
ESB4	.869	-
ESB5	.824	-
CS1	-	.778
CS2	-	.882
CS3	-	.835

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 4. The item lower than threshold is deleted for getting unidimensionality, so here item six (ESB6) is removed because of low factor loading and it negatively impact the overall construct (Hair et al., 2019); than 8 items are showing two constructs, and shows that threshold of the factor loading is almost higher than 0.6, higher threshold of the factor near to 1 showing strong relationship and higher than 0.6 is determined acceptable level (Zainudin, 2012).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is used to estimate the measurement model. It attempts to determine whether the observed (indicator) variables' loadings and the number of components (construct) correspond to what is predicted by theory (Malhotra, 2010). In other words, CFA determines the validity of a scale or model that was previously built using required data, or that has a theoretical foundation (Vui Shau, 2017).

The table 5 presents the results of the reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and correlation analysis for the study constructs. Composite Reliability (CR) values for Ethical Sales Behavior (0.904) and Customer Satisfaction (0.939) exceed the recommended threshold

of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. Similarly, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for both constructs are above 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table 5. Source Amos 27 Model fit

Construct	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Ethical Sales Behavior	Customer Satisfaction
Ethical Sales Behavior	0.904	0.632	0.044	0.915	0.743	0.210***
Customer Satisfaction	0.939	0.890	0.044	1.371	-0.210***	0.944

Source: Amos 27.

Composite reliability (CR) should be 0.6 and above, and average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5(Vui Shau,2017). Therefore, following the criteria outlined by Zainudin (2012), the study confirms that all constructs in the model meet the requirements for Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability. So, the Model fit measurement shows that there is no validity concern, and the model is fit to what is being predicted/measured. The test for construct validity is also found acceptable, with AVE > 0.5 and CR > 0.7 (benchmarked), and the AVE is also greater than MSV (maximum shared value) (ÇETİNKAYA et al., 2018). The correlation results reveal a positive relationship between Ethical Sales Behavior and Customer Satisfaction ($r = 0.310$, $p < 0.001$)

Correlation

As the data show normality for both variables, DV and IDV, we run a Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between the variables. Item six was not considered for correlations; it was eliminated from the factor loading analysis.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix

Variable	Ethical Sales Behavior	Customer Satisfaction
Ethical Sales Behavior	1	0.289
Customer Satisfaction	0.289	1

Sample Size (N): 338

p-value for Ethical Sales Behavior \leftrightarrow Customer Satisfaction: 0.000

Table 6 The Pearson Correlation shows the relationship between ESB and CS is negative at 0.289, indicating a weak positive relationship between the variables. In comparison, the p-value (0.000) indicates statistical significance (typically $*p* < 0.05$).

Regression Analysis

Regression is a statistical method which explains the relationship between the variables and describing the changes in the dependent variables that occur because of the changes that happen in independent variable.

Table 7. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.289	0.30	0.29	2.28067

Predictors: (Constant), Ethical Sales Behavior

Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

In Table 7. In linear regression, $R = 0.289$ indicates that the relationship between ESB and CS is 0.289% in observed transport companies, which suggests a weak positive or insignificant relationship between the variables. Another one, R Square, shows that 30% of the variation in CS comes through ESB in CS across the selected transport companies, indicating that the dependent variable CS is only explained 30% by ESB, with the remaining 70% explained by other variables not considered in this research. Adjusted R^2 (0.29) accounts for sample size and predictor numbers, indicating a modest fit. Std. Error (2.28) measures average prediction error.

Table 8. ANOVA Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	30.407	1	18.407	3.639	.001
Residual	1747.687	336	6.201		
Total	1766.094	337			

Predictors: (Constant), Ethical_Sales_Behavior

Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

In Table 8, the regression sum of squares (30.407) reflects the proportion of variance in customer satisfaction explained by ethical sales behavior, while the residual sum of squares (1747.687) represents unexplained variance. With one degree of freedom for the regression model and 336 degrees of freedom for the residuals, the mean square values further support the adequacy of the model in explaining variations in customer satisfaction.

Overall, the findings indicate that ethical sales behavior has a statistically significant impact on customer satisfaction, supporting the study's hypothesis that ethical conduct by frontline employees contributes positively to customers' service evaluations. Although the explained variance is modest, the model's significance underscores the practical importance of ethical sales practices in shaping customer satisfaction, particularly in service-oriented industries such as the transport sector. This means that ethical sales behavior accounts for a portion of the variability in customer satisfaction, while the remaining variability is explained by other factors not included in the model.

Table 9. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized (Beta)	Coefficients	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	6.605	-		12.521	< .001
Ethical Sales Behavior	0.289	0.291		1.881	.001

Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

In Table 9, the regression analysis examined the effect of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction. The constant term is statistically significant ($B = 6.605$, $t = 12.521$, $p < .001$), indicating that when ethical sales behavior is held at zero, the baseline level of customer satisfaction remains relatively high.

Ethical sales behavior shows a positive unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.289$), suggesting that a one-unit increase in ethical sales behavior is associated with a 0.289-unit rise in

customer satisfaction. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.291$) indicates a moderate positive relationship between ethical sales behavior and customer satisfaction.

However, the effect of ethical sales behavior is statistically significant at the 5% significance level ($t = 1.881$, $p = .001$). So, our hypothesis is accepted: ESB has a positive and significant impact on CS.

These findings suggest that while ethical sales behavior is positively related to customer satisfaction, its variance is 0.3 in CS. So, the remaining 70% of the variance is explained by variables not included in this study. It is context-dependent, potentially operating through mediating variables such as customer trust or loyalty. This result is consistent with prior studies that found ethical sales behavior to have a strong influence on customer satisfaction indirectly rather than directly.

Customers' views about the problems and facilities associated with these companies

Common problems of the companies prioritized by customers

1. [REDACTED] 22% High ticket price
2. [REDACTED] 19% Not traveling on time
3. [REDACTED] 15% Picking up other passengers on Aisle
4. [REDACTED] 12% Not providing services such as rest-room, mobile charging, etc.
5. [REDACTED] 9% Not turning on AC during Hot session
6. [REDACTED] 7% Not stopping the car when needed on the road
7. [REDACTED] 6% Not having a proper waiting area in the terminal
8. [REDACTED] 4% Giving the seat to someone else in case of late arrival
9. [REDACTED] 3% misbehavior by the official, such as ticket seller, driver, and driver assistant,
10. [REDACTED] 2% Not dropping passengers at their proper place

Figure 2. Common problems

COMMON TRANSPORT COMPANY PROBLEMS (Relative Frequency)

In the figure above, respondents identified problems with these companies; most respondents (22%) selected high ticket prices when traveling from Kabul to the south and southwest provinces. The misbehavior of a ticket seller, driver, or assistant driver is selected by (3%) of all respondents, which is the second lowest percentage of respondents' selection. So we can say that customer satisfaction is influenced mainly by other factors rather than ESB, as shown in Figure 2.

Common facilities of the companies and Facilities prioritized by customers

1. [REDACTED] 24% New and high quality cars
2. [REDACTED] 21% dropping passengers the proper place
3. [REDACTED] 19% turning on the AC in cold and hot sessions
4. [REDACTED] 16% Not delaying the travel time
5. [REDACTED] 11% Kind and gentle behavior by the officials
6. [REDACTED] 6% Not picking up passengers on the aisle
7. [REDACTED] 2% cheap ticket
8. [REDACTED] 1% having a proper waiting area for passengers

Figure 3. Passenger Facility Priorities

In another question, respondents were asked what facilities are available with these three transport companies. Most respondents (24%) selected new, high-quality cars/buses. The fifth option of kind and gentle behavior by officials, such as ticket sellers, drivers, and assistant drivers, is selected by (11%) of the respondents, which is the lowest percentage. This also indicates that, in these transport companies, the CS is not only affected by ESB but also by other factors that are not considered in this research.

Customers' Views about Ethical Sales Behavior Questions

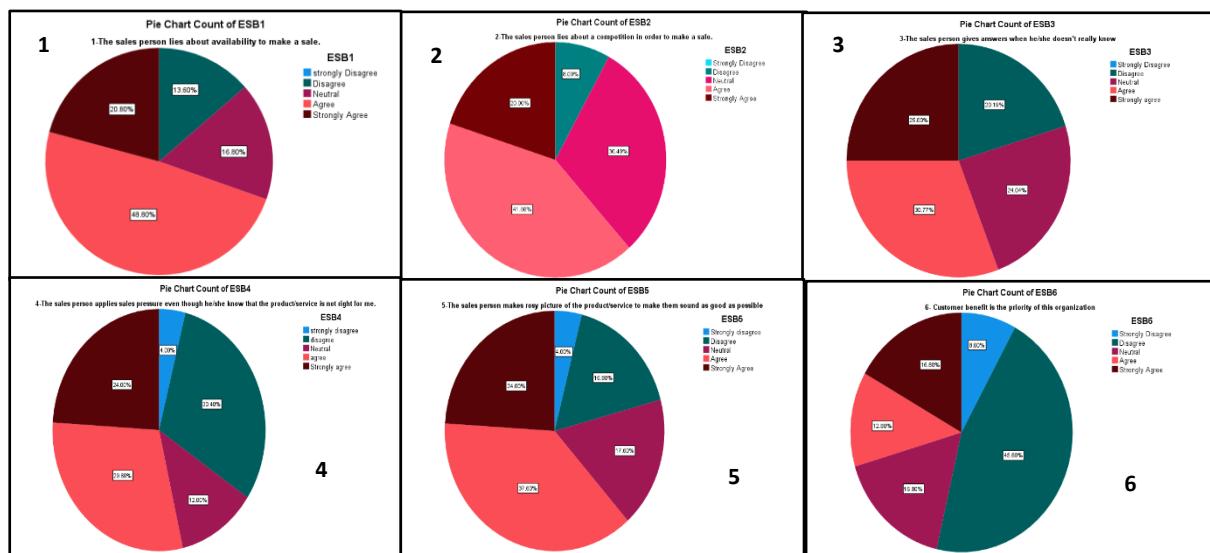


Figure 4. Customer Responses about ESB

An analysis of the six pie charts provides essential insights into customer perceptions of ethical sales behavior among sales personnel in the selected transport companies. The data reveal a pattern of customer dissatisfaction regarding various unethical practices.

The first chart shows that nearly 49% of respondents agree that salespersons lie about seat availability to secure a sale. This suggests a significant trust issue between customers and sales representatives. Similarly, the second chart shows that 42% agree that salespersons provide false information regarding trip completion, further indicating manipulative behavior aimed at persuasion rather than transparency.

The third chart illustrates that 31% of participants agree that sales personnel respond to queries even when they do not know the accurate answer. This behavior compromises the quality and reliability of information shared with customers. Furthermore, the fourth chart shows that 30% of respondents agree that salespersons apply pressure to make a sale even when they know the service is not suitable for the customer, which is a clear violation of ethical sales standards.

In the fifth chart, 38% of respondents agree that salespeople exaggerate the features and quality of the service, creating an overly optimistic image to influence purchasing decisions. Finally, the sixth chart shows that 46% of respondents disagree with the statement that customer benefit is a priority for these companies. This strongly implies that customers perceive the organizations as being more profit-driven than customer-centric.

These findings directly address the second objective of this study: to evaluate the ethical behavior of salespersons in the passenger transport industry in Kabul. Based on the analysis, it is evident that ethical sales behavior is lacking. Respondents perceive salespeople as engaging in deceptive practices, pressuring customers, and misrepresenting services. This behavior undermines customer trust and satisfaction, which are crucial components of long-term customer relationships.

In addition to ethical concerns, respondents cited other factors that negatively influenced their satisfaction. These include: The respondents have chosen other preferences that impact their satisfaction, such as higher prices, new and high-quality cars/buses, not traveling on time, dropping off at a proper location, turning on AC in cold and hot weather, and picking up other passengers on the aisle. Together, these elements paint a comprehensive picture of dissatisfaction and reinforce the conclusion that both ethical sales behavior and operational efficiency need substantial improvement to enhance customer satisfaction in the sector.

This study examined the impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction within the interprovincial transport sector of Afghanistan, addressing a significant contextual gap in the existing literature. The empirical findings indicate that ethical sales behavior is positively associated with customer satisfaction, as evidenced by the positive correlation coefficient and regression coefficient. This suggests that greater honesty, transparency, and fairness in sales interactions tend to coincide with customer satisfaction. This confirms that the first objective has been met.

The regression model as a whole was statistically significant, indicating that ethical sales behavior contributes to explaining variation in customer satisfaction, although to a limited extent. The relatively modest explained variance suggests that multiple factors beyond ethical

sales behavior alone influence customer satisfaction in the transport sector. These findings align with prior studies that report ethical sales behavior as an important, but not exclusive, determinant of satisfaction in service settings (Roman, 2003; Ahli et al., 2024).

In addition to the quantitative findings, respondents highlighted several practical issues affecting their satisfaction. Showing that the current ethical situation of frontline employees in companies is unethical and poor. Customers frequently reported problems such as misinformation about departure times, lack of transparency about pricing, poor vehicle condition, and inconsistent staff behavior, which address the second objective. At the same time, respondents acknowledged positive facilities that can affect their satisfaction, including new and high quality cars, roping on passengers on exact place or turning on AC during hot or cold session, and reliable scheduling. These qualitative insights reinforce the quantitative results by illustrating how ethical and unethical sales practices directly shape passengers' service experiences.

The findings suggest that ethical sales behavior enhances customer satisfaction, which is essential for long-term relationships and improved service quality, along with other variables that customers mentioned, such as facilities and problems associated with these companies.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the role of ethical sales behavior (ESB) in shaping customer satisfaction (CS) within the Afghan interprovincial transport sector. The discussion below is structured to answer the research questions, compare the findings with prior studies, interpret the results, and highlight limitations and future research directions.

The first research question asked: How does ethical sales behavior influence customer satisfaction in the interprovincial transport sector of Afghanistan? The findings reveal a weak positive relationship ($\beta = 2.8$) between ESB and CS, with only 30% of the variance in customer satisfaction explained by ethical behavior. This indicates that while ESB contributes to customer satisfaction, it alone is insufficient to ensure high levels of satisfaction in this context.

These results partially align with prior research reporting a significant positive relationship between ESB and CS (Roman et al., 2005; Hazrati et al., 2011; Tolba et al., 2015). However, they are more consistent with studies suggesting that the effect of ESB may be indirect or mediated through relational factors such as trust and loyalty (Roman, 2003; Rastgoo & Dastran, 2016; Ahli et al., 2024). In the Afghan transport sector, satisfaction is strongly influenced by operational factors—such as safety, comfort, punctuality, and vehicle conditions alongside interpersonal interactions. Ethical sales behavior helps manage customer expectations but cannot compensate for deficiencies in core service performance. These findings support expectation confirmation theory, which emphasizes that satisfaction depends on the alignment between expected and delivered service outcomes (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The second research question asked: How do customers perceive the ethical sales behavior of frontline employees, including ticket sellers, drivers, and co-drivers? The study indicates that customers generally perceive frontline employees as exhibiting severe ethical behavior, showing that the current ethical situation of frontline employees in companies is unethical and poor. Customers frequently reported problems such as misinformation about departure times, lack of transparency about pricing, poor vehicle condition, and inconsistent staff behavior. Nevertheless, perception of ethical conduct alone does not guarantee satisfaction when operational standards are inconsistent.

This finding repeats prior research highlighting the relational role of ESB in building trust and reducing uncertainty (Roman & Ruiz, 2005; Shadab, 2012).

The third research question asked: What role does ethical sales behavior play in building and maintaining customer relationships? The results suggest that ESB contributes to the development of customer relationships in service providers. While its direct impact on immediate satisfaction is limited, its indirect effect through relational mechanisms may be more significant over time. This finding highlights the importance of incorporating relational variables such as trust, loyalty, and perceived risk into future models.

Unlike studies in banking, insurance, or retail sectors in stable economies (Roman et al., 2005; Hazrati et al., 2011), this study was conducted in a breakable, under-researched environment with weak regulatory oversight and inconsistent service standards. These contextual factors appear to dilute the direct impact of ethical behavior on customer satisfaction, emphasizing that systemic improvements such as service standardization and safety enforcement are necessary alongside ethical conduct.

This study has several limitations. First, the measurement model did not include relational variables such as trust or loyalty, which may mediate the relationship between ESB and CS. Second, the study focused only on the Afghan interprovincial transport sector, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or industries. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference and the assessment of long-term effects.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating mediating and moderating variables, conducting longitudinal studies to capture changes in satisfaction and relationships over time, and expanding the research to other service sectors or regions with similar operational challenges. Comparative studies across different countries could also provide insights into the role of contextual factors in shaping the impact of ethical sales behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction in Afghanistan's interprovincial transport industry. The findings demonstrate that ethical sales behavior is positively related to customer satisfaction, although its direct effect is not strong. This result suggests that ethical conduct remains important but may operate through indirect

pathways such as trust, perceived fairness, and relationship quality rather than exerting an immediate influence on satisfaction.

The study fills an essential empirical gap by providing evidence from a service sector and geographical context that has received limited academic attention. By focusing on frontline employees such as ticket sellers, drivers, and co-drivers, the research highlights the critical role of interpersonal ethics in shaping passenger perceptions. The qualitative feedback further underscores that unethical practices, such as misinformation and high-pressure sales tactics, undermine trust and negatively affect service experiences.

From a managerial perspective, transport companies are encouraged to institutionalize ethical sales practices by establishing clear codes of conduct, providing staff training, and implementing monitoring mechanisms. Improving transparency in pricing, ensuring accurate communication about schedules, and promoting respectful treatment of passengers can strengthen trust and enhance customer relationships. However, ethical behavior should be complemented by improvements in core service quality, including safety, comfort, and reliability, to achieve meaningful gains in customer satisfaction.

This study successfully achieved its objectives by demonstrating the positive impact of ethical sales behavior on customer satisfaction in Afghanistan's interprovincial transport sector. The findings show that customers recognize unethical conduct among frontline employees and that such behavior plays a critical role in damaging satisfaction. Ultimately, ethical sales behavior contributes to moderately customer relationships and improved service quality.

Overall, this study reinforces the importance of ethical sales behavior as a foundational element of customer relationship management while highlighting the need for broader service improvements and more nuanced analytical models to understand its impact on customer satisfaction.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

In this study, the first author was primarily responsible for identifying the research gap, developing the research objectives and hypotheses, collecting the data, conducting data analysis, and interpreting the findings. The second author provided overall supervision throughout the research process, played a key role in selecting and refining the research topic, and guided the research design and methodological approach. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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