



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

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## UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIPS OF CORPORATE IMAGE, EMOTION, VALUE, SATISFACTION, AND LOYALTY AMONG AIR PASSENGERS: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study developed and tested an integrative model to examine the relationships between air passengers' perceptions of corporate image, emotion, value, and satisfaction and to investigate the impacts these variables on their loyalty. Analysis of surveyed data from 730 air passengers reveals that emotion directly influences both value and satisfaction, and indirectly influences loyalty. As hypothesized, corporate image had a significant and direct influence on value, satisfaction and loyalty. The results show that value directly influences satisfaction and loyalty, that satisfaction indirectly influences loyalty. We also found the model to be invariant between female and male air passengers.*

### KEYWORDS

corporate image, emotion, value, satisfaction, loyalty.

### INTRODUCTION

In a greatly competitive environment, airlines compete sternly for new air passengers. Over time and with the escalation competition, airlines have come to apprehend their performance can get better by concentrating more on preserving air passengers than frequently proceeding in a conquest approach. In fact, loyalty has been commonly documented as a crucial advantage in competitive markets (Reinartz and Kumar, 2002). Investment in loyalty management is particularly imperative if consumers face low switching costs, since they are not confined by a contract (Kumar and Shah, 2004). The final objective of any company is profit and loyalty is one of the means to accomplish that aim (Reichheld, 1996). Researchers assert that growing customer retention is a primordial means to generate returns for a firm (Zeithaml et al., 1996), so it will become highly crucial for airlines to identify the factors that drive the retention of air passengers.

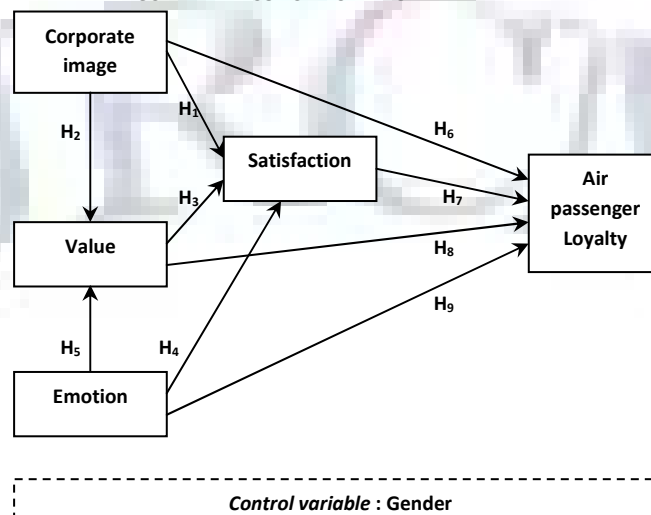
In spite of its significance, there are noticeable gaps in our knowledge of the drivers for loyalty as well as it has not been well investigated in airline service context. In fact, the majority of the researchers considered only the connection between service quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Chen, 2008; Park et al., 2004). Moreover, when modeling passengers' decision process, the key constructs generally considered include perceived value, perceived performance, service expectation, behavioural intentions, satisfaction (Chen, 2008; Park et al., 2004). Although scholars have advanced the understanding of service oriented constructs in transport management setting, there continue to be a require to advance the theories and methodologies by integrating new concepts and modified models in order to improve the prognostic power of these frameworks (Oh, 1999). Therefore, the initial thrust of this work is to offer an integrative model of air passenger loyalty based upon a documented connection between other constructs. Second, research exploring emotion, corporate image, value, and satisfaction focuses mainly on goods producing companies as well as on retail stores (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 1998; Bloemer and Ruyter, 1997; Dowling, 1988) and research has never simultaneously assessed the relative effect of these central variables on airline service encounter outcomes.

To recapitulate, the purpose of the current study is principally to empirically test a proposed framework to better appreciate air passengers' perception judgments and the effect of those judgments on their loyalty. It is worth noting that there exist no published researches that have studied simultaneously the relationship among value, corporate image, emotion, satisfaction, and loyalty. In order to give insights into the design and implementations of effective air passenger retention tactics, we categorize air passengers into two segments according to the gender.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The conceptual model which guided development of the study's hypotheses is shown in Figure 1. Empirical support for hypotheses used to test each proposed relationship and literature related to the exploratory research question is provided in subsequent sections.

FIGURE 1: THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL





**CORPORATE IMAGE, SATISFACTION, AND VALUE**

A limited number of studies was conducted on customer's image evaluations of services. In addition, researchers have not included the role of corporate image into air passenger loyalty. Corporate image is a key variable in the global service assessment. In line with Keller (1993), we consider this construct as a perception of a firm held in consumer memory and manipulates like a strainer which affect the judgement of the action of the organization. Fazio (1989) asserts that service assessments are the most important source of corporate image. Researchers define image as a person's mental depiction of awareness, judgment, feeling, belief and overall impressions about a service (Pike and Ryan, 2004; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Baloglu, 1999). The significance of this construct is recognized while it influences user behavior (Telisman-Kosuta, 1994). Unluckily, no study has been carried out on the effect that corporate image of an airline has on the air passenger loyalty development. The role of this construct in the creation of perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty is investigated in the present study.

The assessment of services is complicated, essentially because of its intangibility. Hence, satisfaction with the service encounter would be significantly influenced by the preconceived image the user has of the firm (Kristensen et al., 1999; Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998). According to Joppe et al. (2001), the complicatedness for persons to assess their experiences and the confidence in their images of the service, could validate the thought that image is an antecedent of satisfaction. Researchers hypothesize that corporate image, via a halo effect, influences an individual's appraisal of value as well as satisfaction (Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998). In this investigation, a cumulative measure reproducing a user's global feeling and mental schema of the organization reflects corporate image (Zimmer and Golden, 1988). Air passengers who develop a favourable mental representation of an airline service will tend towards superior level of satisfaction throughout a halo effect. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

H1: Corporate image has a significant, positive effect on air passenger satisfaction.

Positive image generates a consumption experience more enjoyable, therefore pleasurable customers experience satisfying social as well as affective advantages. Johar and Sirgy (1991) confirm that perceived value is generally influenced concurrently by utilitarian aspects and symbolic image. More recently, Petrick (2002) empirically shows that perceived value is considerably controlled by utilitarian, emotional, and symbolic factors. Consequently, we expect corporate image to directly influence air passenger perceived value:

H2: Corporate image has a significant, positive effect on perceived value.

Perceived value and satisfaction are constructs that are connected whereas dissimilar, both have been supposed as relative judgments (McDougall and Levesque, 2000) and outcome of a comparison between gains and costs (Woodruff, 1997). Nevertheless, they have points of divergence as well. While value takes place at different phases of the consumption experience, counting the pre and post use stage, satisfaction is commonly viewed as a post-consumption assessment. Butz and Goodstein (1996) announce that satisfaction is related to attitudes whereas value is more linked to behavior. Several scholars have established a significant and positive effect of value on satisfaction (Yang and Peterson, 2004; Eggert and Ulaga, 2002; McDougall and Levesque, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000). However, other researchers affirm that satisfaction is a driver of perceived value (Petrick et al., 2001; Bolton and Drew, 1991). The present study considers satisfaction as a response to an assessment process; more particularly, satisfaction is analysed as the consequence of the individual's appraisal of the value derived from the utilization experience. Thus:

H3: Perceived value has a significant, positive effect on air passenger satisfaction.

**EMOTION**

In defining emotions, Burns and Neisner (2006) refer to the origin of understanding emotions in the earlier nineteenth century work of James (1890), who considered them as being multifaceted, involving different patterns of arousal. More recently, Bagozzi et al. (1999) consider emotions as "a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of an events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically; and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and the person having it".

Individuals' emotions and their judgements have been demonstrated to be robustly linked and proficient to anticipate person behavior (Lois and López-Sáez, 2009; Barksy and Nash, 2002). Emotions exhibited throughout the use process are supposed to engender emotional trace in memory. According to Cohen and Areni (1991), these traces are accessible for persons to incorporate into their satisfaction states. Likewise, Bagozzi et al. (1999) assert that emotions play an important role in individuals' purchase intentions. Furthermore, many scholars have established a direct link between emotions and satisfaction (Lee et al., 2005; Van Dolen et al., 2004; Phillips and Baumgartner, 2002; Jun et al., 2001; Wirtz et al., 2000; Wirtz and Bateson, 1999). Therefore, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H4: Air passenger emotion has a significant, positive effect on their satisfaction.

A number of scholars as Shiv et al. (1997), Siemer and Reisenzein (1998), and Pham et al. (2001) asserts that emotions enhance task efficiency. They place emotion ahead of cognition as the first factor for influencing person behavior, contend that individuals have a general propensity, more or less, to seek out affective situations, like emotional stimuli, and show a preference to use emotion in interacting with the life world. According to this stream of scholars, if emotions ameliorate product perceptions, there is a better chance that product purchase will occur. Besides, several researchers stress that emotions affect perceived value positively (for instance Tsai, 2005). Thus, emotion is expected to influence air passenger perceived value positively.

H5: Air passenger emotion has a significant, positive effect on perceived value.

**LOYALTY**

The conceptualization and the measurement of loyalty has often remained limited (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) for instance focused on repurchase intentions, willingness to repurchase, and word-of-mouth communication, while Bloemer et al. (1999) empirically demonstrated, across four different types of service industries, that loyalty is indeed a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the loyalty to the company, the propensity to switch, the willingness to pay more, the external response to problem, and the internal response to problem. In line with Ibrahim and Najjar (2008b) we define loyalty as the biased behavioural reaction, expressed over time, by some decision making unit, with respect to one company out of a set of companies. Loyalty has been commonly acknowledged as an imperative advantage in competitive markets, moreover investments in loyalty management is particularly significant if consumers face low switching costs, since they are not cramped by a contract. Hart and Rosenberger (2004) examine the role of corporate image in the development of customer loyalty in service setting and show that image has a direct influence on customer loyalty and an indirect influence through satisfaction. These results corroborate the findings of previous studies. For instance, Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) found both a direct and indirect effect of image on loyalty. Consequently, a favourable corporate image appears to stimulate loyalty for an organization. Thus:

H6: Corporate image has a significant, positive effect on air passenger loyalty.

Satisfaction also is a significant predictor of loyalty (Palmatier et al., 2006; Yang and Peterson, 2004; Petrick and Backman, 2002; Kim and Cha, 2002; Brady and Robertson, 2001; Yu and Dean, 2001; Petrick et al., 2001; Cronin et al., 2000; McDougall and Levesque, 2000; Baker and Crompton 2000). For example, Cronin and Taylor (1992) maintained that satisfaction is considered to act as an antecedent to loyalty. Similarly, Oliva et al. (1992) suggested that the relationship between service satisfaction and loyalty is non-linear. These claims are consistent with the findings of Choi and Chu (2001). Thus, the seventh hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Air passenger satisfaction has a significant, positive effect on air passenger loyalty.

Furthermore, several scholars support the conception that value drives loyalty (Gallarza and Gil Saura, 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003; Wirtz and Chew, 2002). For instance, in service setting Bolton and Drew (1991) affirm that value is a major driver of repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth. As well, experimental support for this relationship is proved in various contexts (Petrick et al., 2001). Chang and Wildt (1994) explain that perceived value mediates the quality – loyalty relationship. Therefore the following hypothesis is advanced:

H8: Perceived value has a significant, positive effect on air passenger loyalty.

Emotions has been proved to influence different reactions such as motivation to purchase (Baker et al., 1992), approach behaviour (Hui et al., 1997), spending levels (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982), and several researchers have established significant connection between emotions and satisfaction (Yuksel and Yuksel,

2008; Machleit and Mantel, 2001; Oliver, 1993). However, there are limited enquiries concerning emotions and loyalty. The noted exceptions, Allen et al. (1992) found that emotions affect repeat donation behavior. Barsky and Nash's (2002) exhibit that emotions are positively related to willingness to pay and return. More recently, Pullman and Gross (2004) found that emotions play a crucial role in elucidating customer loyalty. This leads to the next hypothesis:  
H9: Emotion has a significant, positive effect on air passenger loyalty.

#### GENDER DIFFERENCE

Scholars have demonstrated important divergences between women and men in their processing of information, feelings, affects, donation behaviours, and shopping (Grewal et al., 2003; Otnes and McGrath, 2001; Kempf et al., 1997; Brody and Hall, 1993; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991; Gould and Weil, 1991). To elucidate these dissimilarities, authors have either relied on sociological as well as biological justifications. Sociological elucidations take into account many theories for example the gender schema (Firat and Dholakia, 1998), personality analysis (Bem, 1974), and multi-factorial gender identity (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974), while biological vindications include brain hemispheric motion and hormone differences (McGlone, 1980).

In spite of the fact that gender differences attested to be a rich field of investigation, exploration on gender differences in airline service is overlooked. Research on gender differences in consumption has shown remarkable dissimilarities between women and men consumers. For instance, Grewal et al. (2003) showed that female shoppers have a more favourable attitude towards shopping than male shoppers. Evans et al. (1996) found that women were considerably affected by social referents more than men. In addition, Hu and Jasper (2004) confirmed that men and women perform differ in numerous activities for example purchasing, time spent during the consumption experience, and the pleasure with the consumption experience. These results on gender differences associated to consumption deserve the exploration of the question: "Is the proposed model moderated by air passengers' gender?". Nevertheless, due to the lack of gender difference support in relation the specific interconnections that we suggest, we do not propose a formal hypothesis. As a substitute, we will merely investigate gender differences to help us better comprehend this phenomenon in hope to guide to future testing.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaires were distributed and collected at three international airports in Tunisia (North Africa). Data collection covered all weekdays and day parts. All of the data collection occurred in May and June 2009. In total 1000 air passengers were approached. After screening the questionnaire for incompleteness and abnormalities, a usable sample of 730 was obtained. Air passengers were randomly solicited and invited by trained interviewers to complete a self-administered questionnaire. The survey began with introductory statement that asked respondents to administer their own responses, assured them of confidentiality, and so forth. Respondents were thanked and offered a can of juice/coffee. The final sample was made up of 370 men and 360 women from a range of age between 24 and 70. The air passengers were split on marital status (79.6% married and 20.4% single). The sample was fairly well educated with 33.1% of air passengers having completed some college and 47.8% having completed a university degree.

### MEASURES

To improve the content validity of the measurement scales, different stages were taken. First, based on a review of the relevant literature and previous measures, multi-item scales were generated for corporate image, perceived value, emotions, satisfaction, and loyalty. Wherever possible, existing measurements that had been used in past studies were adopted. Second, three independent judges (two academics and a practitioner) individually reconsidered the questionnaire for suitability, abnormalities, and ambiguity (Tabachnik and Fidell, 1999). The questionnaire was iteratively amended based on comments received from the independent judges. Third, a pilot test was carried out among air passengers. 55 questionnaires were collected and the questionnaire was further revised based on the pilot study. The last version of the questionnaire is discussed below.

Corporate image is measured with three items. The items being "Please rate airline X's reputation" (V1), "Please rate airline X's prestige" (V2), and "Please rate the reputation of airline X's services" (V3) (Zeithaml, 1988). All items are on a five-point scale with "extremely low" and "extremely high".

Perceived value is an overall tradeoff between 'benefits' versus 'costs' (Lovelock, 2000). Two items measure perceived value. The labels were: "considering the ticket I pay for the airline X, I believe that the airline X offers sufficient services" (V4), and "the ticket price of the airline X is reasonable" (V5) (Chen, 2008).

In order to assess airline passenger we adopt the scale developed by Tsai (2005); "the services offered by airline X are pleasant to senses" (V6), "the services offered by airline X look delightful" (V7), and "there is no distress elicited by the services offered by airline X" (V8). Respondents used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from '1= never' to '5 = very often'.

Air passengers were solicited to rate their overall satisfaction on two five-point numeric scales ranging from '1= very dissatisfied' to '5 = very satisfied'. The first question was: "How satisfied are you with the services you receive from airline X?" (V9). The second question was: "Overall, how satisfied are you with airline X" (V10) (Stank et al., 1999).

Air passenger loyalty is assessed with two items, one measuring passive loyalty and the other the active loyalty (Ganesh et al., 2000). The items being "I would highly recommend the airline X to my friends and family" (V11), and "As long as everything remains the same, I do not foresee myself switching to a different airline" (V12). Both indicators are measured on five-point scale ranging from "extremely unlikely" to "extremely likely".

## RESULTS

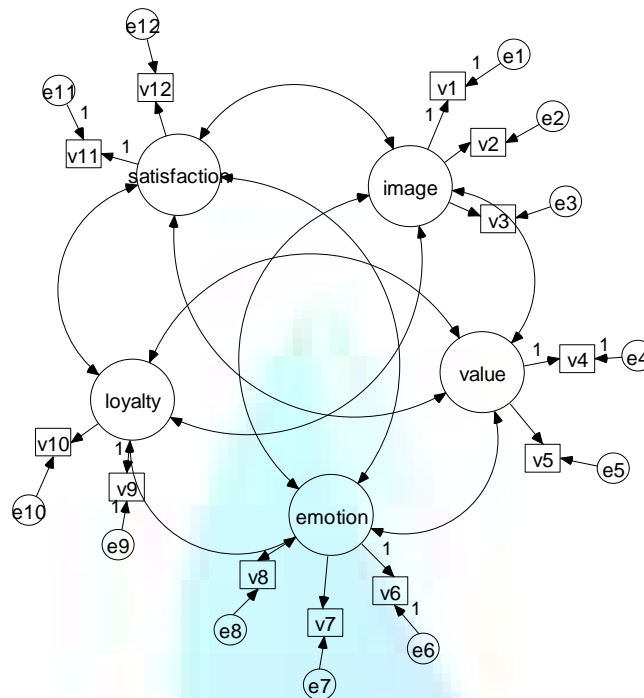
We analysed the research model using the Maximum Likelihood method. AMOS4.0 was selected to perform the data analyses in the present study. AMOS tests the significance of the relations between theoretical constructs and the predictive power of the exogenous variable (Byrne, 2001). Therefore, AMOS is appropriate for predictive applications and theory building since it considers all path coefficients simultaneously and permits examination of direct and indirect connections (Bollen, 1989). AMOS assesses several individual indicators loadings in the context of a theoretically specified framework rather than in separation, hence it besides allows researchers to avoid biased and incompatible parameter estimates for equations (Byrne, 2001).

### MEASUREMENT MODEL

The measurement model is shown in Figure 2, the results show a reasonable fit to the data (RMR = 0.058, NFI = .919, CFI = .931, GFI = .944, AGFI = .901, RMSEA = .080, Chi-square = 249.944). The modification indices were predominantly low and all the loadings were significant. Therefore, this measurement model was tentatively accepted as the study's measurement model.



FIGURE 2: THE MEASUREMENT MODEL



A Jöreskog reliability index for each construct was calculated to assess the degree to which indicators are free from random error and consequently yield consistent findings. Reliability indexes in our measurement model ranged from 0.67 to 0.84. These reliabilities denoted that the individual scales, when taking as a group, performed fairly well in the model. The measurement properties are reported in table 1.

TABLE 1: THE MEASUREMENT MODEL EVALUATIONS

Constructs	Items	Loading	Std. error	t-statistic	Reliability index
Corporate image	V1	1			0.84
	V2	1.062	0.033	32.302	
	V3	0.581	0.036	16.021	
Perceived value	V4	1			0.67
	V5	0.936	0.100	9.343	
Emotion	V6	1			0.82
	V7	1.071	0.124	8.635	
	V8	1.375	0.153	9.004	
Loyalty	V9	1			0.75
	V10	0.989	0.097	10.151	
Satisfaction	V11	1			0.78
	V12	0.905	0.055	16.527	

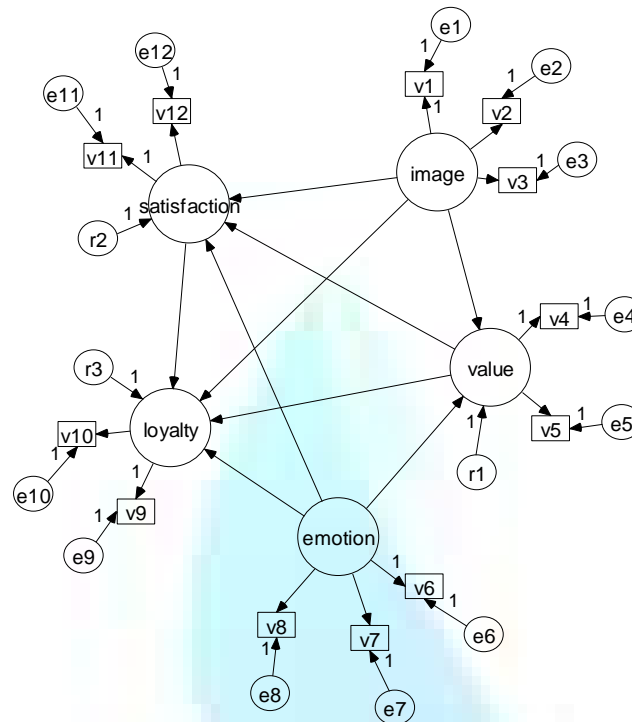
Discriminant as well as convergent validity of the constructs were assessed in order to examine if the items were measuring what they were proposed to measure. The results show that all student tests were significant at 0.01 level. Likewise, none of the standardized residuals is more than (2) or under (-2). These results offer evidence of convergent validity (Hatcher, 1994). We further assessed discriminant validity in the measurement model by examining a confirmatory factor analysis model, which included the five latent variables, corporate image, perceived value, emotions, satisfaction and loyalty. The procedure advocated by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was used. First, this base model, where all paths between the latent constructs were freely estimated, was tested using AMOS. Then, each correlation parameters was constrained to 1 separately, and the correspondent models were estimated. The  $\Delta\chi^2$  values between the constrained models and the unconstrained model suggest that the fit measure of each of the constrained models was significantly worse (at a  $p = .005$  level) than the fit measure of the base model. Thus, a strong indication of discriminant validity was present in the measurement model, since the probability that all combinations of the latent variables adequately represent the same construct is less than 5%.

Therefore, the items used to operationalize the constructs are suitable for testing the hypothesized linkages in the full structural equation model

**STRUCTURAL MODEL TESTING**

The research model that was tested in the present study is exposed in Figure 3. It differs from the model in figure 2 in that figure 3 depicts the causal relationship among exogenous and endogenous variables. An exogenous variable is an independent variable whose causes lie outside the model. In this case, both image and emotion are exogenous variables in the structural model. In contrast to exogenous variables, the postulated causes of endogenous variables are included in the model. In the current model, value, satisfaction, and loyalty are all endogenous variables.

FIGURE 3: THE STRUCTURAL MODEL



We analysed the structural model using the Maximum Likelihood method. We first assessed the proposed model by assessing the path coefficients for the hypothesized relationships. The “proposed model” column in table 2 depicts these coefficients. The  $\chi^2$  value for this model was significant ( $\chi^2 = 253.522, p < 0.001$ ), also the GFI showed satisfactory fit. Of the nine proposed relationships, eight were significant. Then, we constrained the nonsignificant path to “0” and re-assessed the structural model. The results are summarized in the “revised model” column of table 2. The eight remaining paths were statistically significant. The fit indices were approximately the same as those for the first model. The findings of the present study suggest eliminating the path from emotion to loyalty since the path coefficient ( $\lambda_{\text{emotion-loyalty}}$ ) was not significant ( $\lambda = 0.142, t = 1.545$ ).

TABLE 2: STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS AND FIT STATISTICS FOR THE PROPOSED AND THE REVISED MODEL (N = 730)

Hypothesized paths	Expected sign	Proposed model	Revised model
H <sub>1</sub> : Corporate image → Satisfaction	+	0.180	0.181
H <sub>2</sub> : Corporate image → Perceived value	+	0.129	0.129
H <sub>3</sub> : Perceived value → Satisfaction	+	0.536	0.528
H <sub>4</sub> : Emotion → Satisfaction	+	0.619	0.621
H <sub>5</sub> : Emotion → Perceived value	+	0.563	0.581
H <sub>6</sub> : Corporate image → Loyalty	+	0.105	0.093
H <sub>7</sub> : Satisfaction → Loyalty	+	0.215	0.266
H <sub>8</sub> : Perceived value → Loyalty	+	0.260	0.271
H <sub>9</sub> : Emotion → Loyalty		0.142 (N.S.)*	-
<b>Fit statistics</b>			
$\chi^2$		253.522	255.892
RMR		0.062	0.063
GFI		0.943	0.943
AGFI		0.902	0.903
NFI		0.917	0.917
CFI		0.931	0.930
RMSEA		0.080	0.079

\* N.S.: not significant.

Table 2 exposes the coefficients for the paths in the revised model. They showed the strength of the direct influence of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable, and that of one endogenous variable on another. The direct effect refers to the effect of one variable on another that is not mediated by any other variables in the model (Bollen, 1989).

Hypothesis 1 stated that corporate image has a significant, positive effect on satisfaction. The path coefficient was 0.181 and the t value was 5.014, which was significant at  $\alpha = .01$ . This significant coefficient provided evidence of support for hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 explored the relationship between corporate image and perceived value. This hypothesis 2 was supported since the t-test for the path coefficient was significant (t value of 3.464).

The air passenger’ perceived value was expected to relate positively to overall satisfaction level. The greater perceived value toward the airline, the higher it was anticipated would be their levels of satisfaction. This relationship was found to be significant with an alpha level of .01 with a t-value of 6.306, so hypothesis 3 was supported.

It was hypothesized that emotion would influence satisfaction. The higher the emotion of air passengers, the higher it was anticipated would be the levels of satisfaction. The significant coefficient (t value of 5.742) enabled hypothesis 4 to be supported.

It was postulated that a higher level of emotion leads to a higher level of perceived value. The path between the two constructs was significant (t value of 5.842) so hypothesis 5 was supported.

The air passengers' loyalty was expected to be influenced positively by corporate image, satisfaction, and perceived value. When air passengers have positive and favourable image towards an airline and have high levels of satisfaction as well as perceived value, they are more likely to recommend the airline to their friends and family or they do not switch to a different airline as long as everything remains the same. The path coefficients were all found to be significant, so hypotheses 6, 7 and 8 were all supported (t values > 2.92).

The direct, indirect and total effects of all endogenous and exogenous variables in the model are reported in table 3. Direct effects, according to Bollen (1989), are the influence of one variable on another that are not mediated by any other variable. Indirect effects are ones that are mediated by at least one other variable, and the total effects are the sum of direct and indirect effects. While direct effects are calculated by multiplying all the path coefficients for each route of indirect influence. If an independent variable has more than one route of indirect influence on a dependant variable, then the indirect effects for each route are summed to calculate the overall indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Bollen, 1989).

**TABLE 3: DIRECT, INDIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS OF EXOGENOUS AND ENDOGENOUS VARIABLES**

	Perceived value			Satisfaction			Loyalty		
	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T
Emotion	0.581	0	0.581	0.621	0.307	0.928	0	0.405	0.405
Corporate image	0.129	0	0.129	0.181	0.068	0.249	0.093	0.101	0.195
Perceived value	0	0	0	0.528	0	0.528	0.271	0.141	0.412
Satisfaction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.266	0	0.266

Notes: D – direct effects; I – indirect effects; T – total effects

Table 3 indicates that emotion had a stronger direct effect (0.581) on perceived value, than did corporate image (0.129). In addition, these two variables also directly influenced satisfaction as well as indirectly through perceived value.

Corporate image not only directly contributed to air passenger loyalty, but it also indirectly influenced loyalty through two routes. One route was through satisfaction, while the second route was through perceived value and satisfaction (see figure 3). Thus corporate image had total effects of 1.95 on loyalty, with a direct influence of .093 and an indirect influence of 0.101

Air passenger loyalty was either directly or indirectly influenced by perceived value. Perceived value had the strongest total effect (0.412). While emotion had the second strongest total effects (0.405), its indirect effect was the highest (0.405). Corporate image had the lowest total effect (.195) on air passenger loyalty among all variables.

**MODERATING EFFECTS OF GENDER: MULTIGROUP ANALYSIS AND LATENT MEAN STRUCTURE**

Once support for the main effects had been found, the next step was to include the gender into the model (the revised model) in order to gain further insights. Two separate baseline for men (N = 370) and women (N = 360) were established and a simultaneous model against which subsequent restrictive models will be compared. The baseline women and men structural models, along with corresponding fit indices and standardized parameter estimates, are respectively shown in figure 4 and 5. For the women group, the overall goodness-of-fit was acceptable:  $\chi^2 = 137.315$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , GFI = 0.939, CFI = 0.939, NFI = 0.912, RMSEA = 0.074. Likewise, the overall fit of the men group was satisfactory:  $\chi^2 = 122.910$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , GFI = 0.945, CFI = 0.947, NFI = 0.919, RMSEA = 0.067.

**FIGURE 4: WOMEN MODEL (N = 360)**

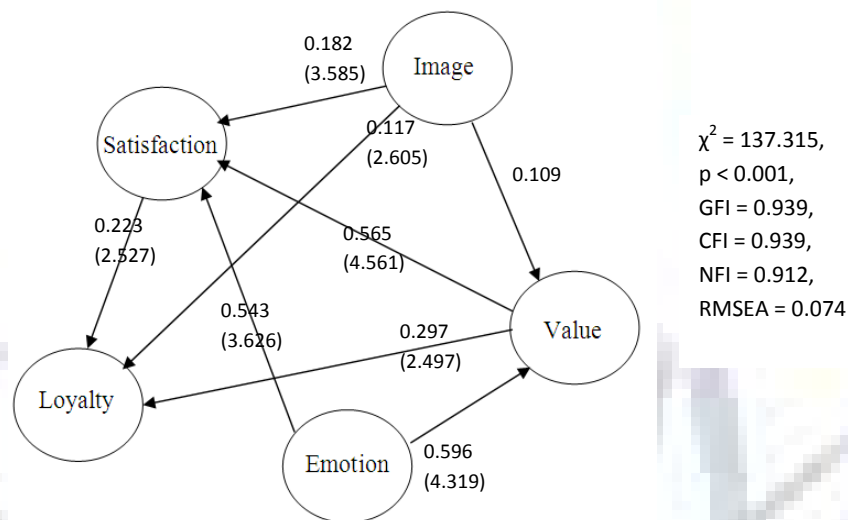
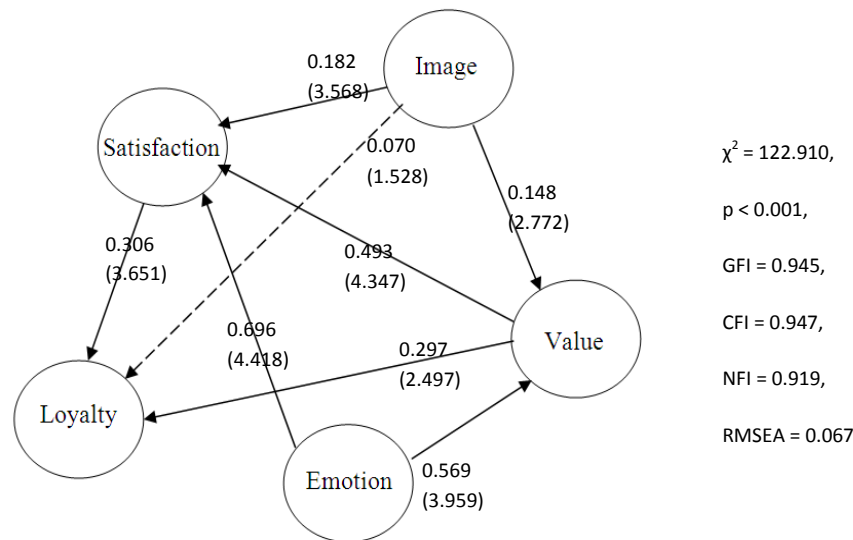


FIGURE 5: MEN MODEL (N = 370)



Overall, the standardized results of the two baseline models were good. Yet, corporate image had no significant effect on loyalty in men group. A more stringent test of the specified model (the initial revised model) would hold the estimated parameters of its measurement part equal across the two groups in question. So, a multiple group analysis was calculated in a hierarchical approach.

In a first step, an overall  $\chi^2$  difference was calculated for the moderator variables. Technically, a model with equality constraints is compared to a model that allows the parameters to vary. This test imposes that null hypothesis that the gender variable does not have any effect on the eight parameters. Then, constraints were imposed to test the invariance of the model across various subgroups. According to Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), who propose a hierarchical procedure in multigroup analysis, the equivalence of measurement weights was analysed in a second step. Because these models are nested with the general model having one degree of freedom less than the restricted model, the  $\chi^2$  values will always be lower for the general model (Homburg and Giering, 2001). Significant differences (CR = 3.84 at the 5% level) indicate that the hypothesis of the moderator effect is supported. In a last step, the invariance of the means of the latent variables was tested. The purpose of testing latent mean structures is to test the equivalence of means related to each underlying factor. Because these factors cannot be observed directly, latent means can be calculated for one group only. These results of the multigroup analysis and the latent mean structure are shown in table 4 and table 5, respectively.

TABLE 4: RESULTS OF MULTIGROUP ANALYSIS

Gender		$\Delta\chi^2$ (df = 1)
Men	Women	
$V_{(\text{emotion} - \text{perceived value})} = 0.569 (3.959)$	$V_{(\text{emotion} - \text{perceived value})} = 0.596 (4.319)$	0.018
$V_{(\text{corporate image} - \text{perceived value})} = 0.148 (2.772)$	$V_{(\text{corporate image} - \text{perceived value})} = 0.109 (2.096)$	0.226
$V_{(\text{emotion} - \text{satisfaction})} = 0.696 (4.418)$	$V_{(\text{emotion} - \text{satisfaction})} = 0.543 (3.626)$	0.503
$V_{(\text{perceived value} - \text{loyalty})} = 0.250 (2.275)$	$V_{(\text{perceived value} - \text{loyalty})} = 0.297 (2.497)$	0.080
$V_{(\text{perceived value} - \text{satisfaction})} = 0.493 (4.347)$	$V_{(\text{perceived value} - \text{satisfaction})} = 0.565 (4.561)$	0
$V_{(\text{corporate image} - \text{loyalty})} = 0.070 (1.528)$	$V_{(\text{corporate image} - \text{loyalty})} = 0.117 (2.605)$	0.523
$V_{(\text{corporate image} - \text{satisfaction})} = 0.182 (3.568)$	$V_{(\text{corporate image} - \text{satisfaction})} = 0.182 (3.585)$	0
$V_{(\text{satisfaction} - \text{loyalty})} = 0.306 (3.651)$	$V_{(\text{satisfaction} - \text{loyalty})} = 0.223 (2.527)$	0.426

$\Delta\chi^2 = 1.441$  (Df = 8), Not significant for all gammas set equal across subgroups.

TABLE 5: LATENT MEAN STRUCTURE

Group	Corporate image	Emotion	Perceived value	Satisfaction	Loyalty
Women +	0	0	0	0	0
Men	-0.039 (t = -0.498)	0.012 (t = 0.236)	-0.022 (-0.284)	0.020 (t = 0.279)	0.021 (t = 0.334)
+ Reference group					

As can be seen from table 4 and 5, there is no difference between men and women regarding the global pattern underlying airline loyalty.

**CONCLUSION**

The principal aim of this study was to propose and test a conceptual model designed to elucidate air passenger's loyalty. Furthermore, we attempted to identify whether the suggested model is invariant between male as well as female air passengers. As such, the present research is a notable step in gaining an understanding of airline loyalty and is unique in that it exposes an airline loyalty framework exploring a set of previously unproven connections. Our study may be the first one to focus on the determinants of air passengers' loyalty. In fact, past research on loyalty has been limited to service industries or goods and has not included a focus on this relationship in the airport industry. The model was empirically tested using surveyed data from 730 air passengers. The current work contributes to the transportation literature. In fact, an integrative model was tested to simultaneously assess the relations between corporate image, emotion, perceived value, and satisfaction and to simultaneously examine these variables in the prediction of air passenger loyalty. The empirical findings

from this latent variable structural equation model offer valuable insights to airport managers. Hence, this model should be useful to managers for determining the influence of diverse tactics as well as strategies (improving satisfaction, value, and image) on the airport loyalty intention measures of passive and active loyalty.

It is worth noting that because of the presence of a suppressor effect derived from the model complexity, we could not support the path from emotion to loyalty, which has been established in past researches in services context (e.g., Pullman and Gross, 2004; Barsky and Nash, 2002; Allen et al., 1992). Whereas, the insertion of other constructs in our model leads us to important implications. As for gender as a moderator, corporate image was found to have a predictive effect on air passenger loyalty in the case for females (but not in the case for males). This result was the only disparity caused by gender. Nevertheless, a multigroup and a latent mean analysis demonstrated a significant invariance of the significant structural path across women and men groups concerning the abovementioned connection. In other words, we can conclude that gender is not a significant moderator in our airline loyalty model. In that sense, similar psychological mechanism seems to operate for males as well as for females air passengers.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present study was subject to several limitations that may affect the interpretation of the findings. The first limitation is the possibility to generalize the results outside Tunisia. Replication in other global contexts is suggested to resolve this limitation. Second, some important variables are not included into the model (for example service quality). Third, the sampling method for our study was a convenience sampling that was not scientifically designed. So, the outcomes of this study may not have represented the entire population, due to this non-probability sampling method. Therefore, notable efforts should be devoted to identifying any possible biases in these nonrandom samples. Finally, this research arises as a consequence of bias resulting from self-complete surveys. Especially, measurement error may result from inaccuracies in an individual's reporting of data.

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