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Enhancing Customer Loyalty in the Low-Cost Airline Sector Through the Mediating Role of Satisfaction and Trust: A Case Study of Transavia Passengers

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Abstract :

Abstract:

Given the intense competition in the air transport sector, passenger relationship management has become a major concern. However, the impact that relational variables such as service quality and ticket price can have on low-cost airline passenger trust, satisfaction, and loyalty is often over looked. Therefore, in this research paper, we attempt to study the impact of relational factors on low-cost airline passenger loyalty by identifying the mediating role of trust and passenger satisfaction. To do this, we conducted opinion surveys with 400 passengers Transavia of the low-cost airline and analyzed the data using structural equation modeling methods. Our results indicate that service quality and ticket price do not directly affect passenger loyalty but rather exert an indirect effect through the mediation of passenger satisfaction. The results also support our hypothetical predictions that passenger satisfaction has a significant impact on passenger loyalty, and that passenger trust plays no mediating role in this relationship. We therefore conclude that passenger satisfaction is the main driver of passenger loyalty, rather than the direct influence of service quality, ticket price and passengers' trust. This research provides new insights into the determinants of low-cost airline passenger loyalty, as well as theoretical and managerial implications that can benefit administrators in the low-cost airline sector.

Keywords: Service Quality; Price; Trust; Satisfaction; Loyalty and Low-Cost Airlines.
Jel Classification Codes : C12; D12; M31

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1. Introduction

Emerging economies are experiencing increasing competition in the low-cost airline sector, which has highlighted the importance of the concept of passenger loyalty (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015); (Fu, 2023); (Phuong, Huan, & Anh, 2024). In addition to the tourism sector, which is one of the most important pillars of economies worldwide (Rabhi & Kouach, 2024),in recent years, the sector of low-cost airline has experienced remarkable growth, playing a pivotal role in the economic development of various countries worldwide (Wang, Zheng, Tang, & Luo, 2023)(Hameed, Chatterjee, Zainab, Tzhe, Yee, & Khan, 2024). Furthermore, it creates numerous job opportunities, attracts foreign investment, and contributes to the development of regional and local airports, which positively impacts the country's economic growth across various sectors (Felix & Saucedo, 2025). Although the airline industry is a growing market, it's highly competitive due to low-profit margins (Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016). Airlines are under attack from various challenges: (1) fuel prices, (2) low-cost airlines, (3) the economic crisis, (4) increased security precautions, (5) staff shortages, and (6) government regulations, etc (Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016). To survive in such an environment, airlines should not allow their customers to switch to any other airline (Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016). To ensure their retention, it's essential for airlines to know how to retain customers and meet their expectations to earn their loyalty (Shen & Yahya, 2021). In this context, (Bosque & Martin, 2008) stated that "the study of loyalty in tourism is a newer phenomenon" (p.557). Furthermore, it is important to identify the key factors that can influence a customer's choice and make that choice a repeated one, which makes the passengers loyal to the airline (Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016). Some recent studies have found that the competitive environment allows passengers to benefit from a wide range of airline services that are offered at affordable prices (Park, Lee, & Nicolau, 2020); (Mosleh, Maulan, & Haque, 2023). Compared to full-service airlines, low-cost carriers (LCAs) focus only on the basic transportation function and do not add other service elements, which allows for the elimination of additional fees for food, baggage, beverages, and preferred seating(Schlumberger & Weisskopf, 2014) (Shen & Yahya, 2021). Therefore, over the past few years, the low-cost airline market has seen an increasing number of services available in the market (Devi & Yasa, 2021), which has significantly changed the landscape of the airline industry (Chou, 2015).

The past decade has seen many studies on LCAs, most of which focused on airlines in the US and EU markets [(Mason & Alamdari, 2007); (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015);(Forgas, Moliner, & Sanchez, 2010);(Namukasa, 2013);(Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016)] and in Asia [(Vlachos & Lin, 2014); (Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015); (Chou, 2015); (Chen & Tanomsin, 2018); (Giao & Vuong, 2021); (Shen & Yahya, 2021)]. In the early 1970s, the successful low-cost business model developed by Southwest Airlines spread to the United States. This led to the emergence of LCAs that had a significant impact on the civil aviation market. However, (Forgas, Moliner, & Sanchez, 2010) pointed out that there's a specific category of airline users who are loyal to LCAs, while others still prefer traditional national airlines. In this context, (Porter, 1985); (Lawton, 2003) and (Klophaus, 2005) pointed out that LCAs can ensure long-term success if they can develop determinants of passenger loyalty (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015). However, this type of airline industry has consistently operated with extremely thin profit margins and high operating costs compared to the flight price offered by full-service airlines, which is usually a significant price difference. Therefore, achieving a sales volume (attracting as many passengers as possible) and this can only be achieved by adjusting and identifying the factors that influence earning passenger loyalty in the low-cost airline service sector.

Research Problem

Accordingly, one of the key questions of our study is to identify the factors that lead to the loyalty of LCA users. In line with the previous discussion, this study attempts to investigate whether service quality and price have an effect on trust, satisfaction and passenger loyalty in the context of LCAs. Exploring the relationships between these would enrich the literature that has

studied the determinants of customer loyalty in the context of the low-cost airline industry and explore the indirect roles of the service quality and ticket price variables in explaining customer loyalty with the mediating role of trust and passenger satisfaction in the LCAs' industry. Therefore, the research problem of our study is as follows:

To what extent do service quality and ticket price affect passenger loyalty in low-cost airlines, both directly and indirectly, through the mediating roles of trust and passenger satisfaction?

Research Importance

Previous studies have generally neglected this phenomenon, focusing only on studying passenger loyalty and their intentions to revisit full-service airlines and not LCAs [(Vlachos & Lin, 2014);(Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015);(Murali, Pugazhendhi, & Muralidharan, 2016);(Liu & Lee, 2016);(Shah, Z, Imam, & Raza, 2020)]. These findings can serve as a starting point for airlines that wish to increase their market share by attracting new customers, thereby offering basic airline services at a lower cost compared to full services, so that they can offer a variety of services to earn the loyalty of as many passengers as possible.

Research Objectives

This study will expand the understanding of the determinants of passenger loyalty for low-cost airlines. In this study, we will examine the aforementioned relationships by modeling perceived service quality (PQUAL), price (PR), and passenger loyalty (LOY) with a focus on the mediating role of passenger satisfaction (SAT) and passenger trust (TRU). Thus, our study highlights the following hypothetical relationships: PQUAL/SAT/LOY and PR/SATIS/LOY by revealing the mediating roles of SAT and TRU.

Research Structure

To achieve the study's objectives, the article is structured as follows: After reviewing the introduction, we will propose a review of the literature that addressed the topic of our study in the second section, and then we will set the hypotheses to be confirmed in this study. The third section also deals with the adopted methodology to treat the data and test the hypotheses, followed by a fourth section dedicated to data analysis and results, and finally, a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications and recommendations will be made, and the study limitations will be addressed, which will enable airline managers and stakeholders to develop effective marketing strategies tailored to meet passengers' expectations and desires

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Low-Cost Airlines (LCAs)

According to(Bagwell & Kellerman, 2023), LCAs are known as budget airlines, which typically operate a single type of aircraft with a capacity of around 200 passengers. They charge low fares for their services, foregoing many of the traditional services that passengers enjoy on full-service airlines. Furthermore, many studies have indicated that the mindset of LCA passengers does not include high expectations for the services provided due to the well-known business model. This type of commercial airline gives passengers the freedom to choose their ticket price (a low price)(Chen & Tanomsin, 2018).In contrast, the authors added that this means fully-funded airlines will charge for additional amenities (such as in-flight meals and baggage allowances), thereby causing a significant loss in market share for traditional airlines to newly emerging LCAs, due to the attractive ticket price offered by LCAs compared to full-service airlines. Additionally, (Chen & Tanomsin, 2018)pointed out that LCAs have managed to offer a relatively low price to their customers by providing minimal services and offering additional services at a higher-than-usual cost. To compete with LCAs, full-service airlines had to reduce their operating costs and airfare prices. However, to escape this competition, full-service airlines primarily focus their market on long-haul flights that LCAs cannot operate on due to their high costs (Login, 2017).

2.2 Service Quality, Satisfaction, and Passenger Loyalty to Low Cost Airlines

In the air transport sector, the increase in the number of air passengers has led to an increased demand for the quality of service provided by airlines (Oghojafor Ben, Ladipo Patrick Kunle, & Rahim Ajao, 2016)(Giao & Vuong, 2021). As such, service quality is evaluated and perceived through its performance related to specific characteristics (a comparison between expected service and actual performance), while passenger satisfaction is evaluated after their experience with the service(Shen & Yahya, 2021). In this regard, airline managers should build strategies that enable them to meet and match passenger service expectations with the dimensions of service quality to earn passenger satisfaction and loyalty (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015); (Leong, Hew, Lee, & Ooi, 2015); (Giao & Vuong, 2021). Some previous research has shown that passenger satisfaction can be affected by service quality and has confirmed the positive and significant effect of service quality on passenger satisfaction (Leong, Hew, Lee, & Ooi, 2015)(Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015)(Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016)(Chen & Tanomsin, 2018)(Giao & Vuong, 2021)(Shen & Yahya, 2021)(Bagwell & Kellerman, 2023)(Hameed, Chatterjee, Zainab, Tzhe, Yee, & Khan, 2024), which indicates the crucial role of the service quality provided by airlines in increasing passenger satisfaction. This means that the service quality of LCAs will have a positive impact on passenger satisfaction according to the comparison between expectations and actual performance and lead to passenger loyalty. Based on previous studies, we propose the following two hypotheses:

$H_{1.1}$: Service quality positively affects customer satisfaction in the airline industry.

$H_{1.2}$: Service quality has a positive relationship with customer loyalty in the airline industry.

2.3 Perceived Price, Satisfaction, and Customer Loyalty

Consumers often use price to choose products and services, so when a customer is about to make a decision to choose a service, they often give the highest importance to price (Mosleh, Maulan, & Haque, 2023). According to the literature that has studied the behavioral impact of price, customers evaluate prices based on a reference price (Friesen, 2020);(Hameed, Chatterjee, Zainab, Tzhe, Yee, & Khan, 2024). Therefore, price can be used as a fundamental tool to achieve a competitive advantage that motivates passengers to choose specific airline services (Park, Lee, & Nicolau, 2020)(Mosleh, Maulan, & Haque, 2023). Therefore, reasonable prices or higher rewards are satisfactory factors for all LCA passengers (Mikulic & Prebezac, 2011)(Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016). The results of the study by (Vlachos & Lin, 2014) also showed that a low airfare is the main consideration for passengers when choosing an airline, which increases their sense of satisfaction. As a result, the following hypothesis is formulated:

***$H_{2.1}$**: Price has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction in the airline industry*.
According to (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015), the study by (Martinez & Yague Gillen, 2006)found that price has a significant effect on the loyalty of customers who regularly buy the service (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015). However, (Varki & Colgate, 2001)believe that customers' perception of a fair price during the service experience is an important factor that affects customer loyalty (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015). In contrast, the results of other previous studies (Zahari, 2011)(Curry & Gao, 2012)indicated that price has a significant negative effect on customer loyalty. A study by (Vlachos & Lin, 2014)also showed that a low travel fare is the main consideration for passengers when choosing an airline, and similarly, a study by (Liu & Lee, 2016) concluded that monetary price is positively correlated with the intention to revisit (Shen & Yahya, 2021). Therefore, based on the previous studies mentioned above, this study hypothesizes the following:

***$H_{2.2}$**: Price is positively related to passenger loyalty*.

2.4 Trust, Satisfaction, and Airline Customer Loyalty

(Giao & Vuong, 2021) confirmed that trust has been widely discussed as a key factor for business success. For example, (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)believe that customer trust is related to the company's reliability and integrity. These factors may include, for example, experience, confidentiality, punctuality, courtesy, and social responsibility. For example, trust can reduce the perceived risks associated with the LCA sector. In this regard, (Gronroos, 2007) advised companies to provide a purchasing experience in a way that makes customers perceive the company as trustworthy at all times. According to marketing literature, passenger trust can be inferred through satisfaction (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015)(Giao & Vuong, 2021). Additionally, Akamavi et al. (2015) noted that previous studies have assumed that satisfaction is a prerequisite for trust (Anderson & Srinvasan, 2003)(Forgas, Moliner, & Sanchez, 2010). From this, we conclude the following two hypotheses:

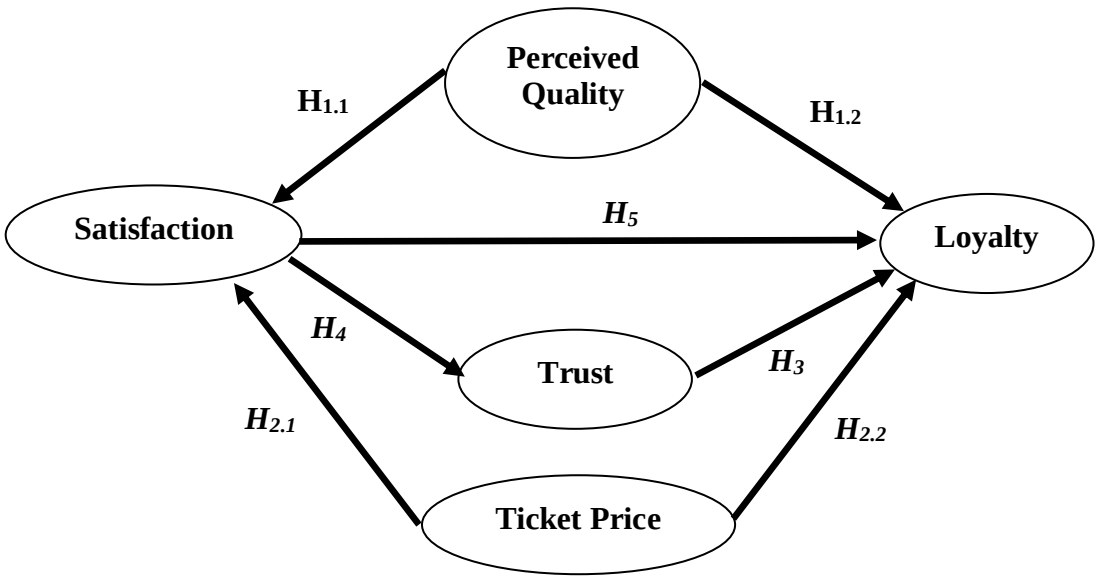
***H_3**: Customer trust in airlines is positively related to their loyalty to them.*

***H_4**: Customer satisfaction with airlines directly affects their trust in them.*

(Forgas, Moliner, & Sanchez, 2010) found that there is a broad consensus among researchers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) that customer satisfaction is a prerequisite for their loyalty and is thus considered one of the main antecedents of customer loyalty. Conversely, if customers are not satisfied with an airline, they may not reconsider flying with the same airline on future trips, and instead will be more likely to switch to competing airlines (Namukasa, 2013) (Shen & Yahya, 2021). It is known that customer satisfaction results from a comparison of previous expectations with the results of various transactions and experiences the customer has had. Therefore, if the level of satisfaction is low as a result of these experiences, the level of customer loyalty to the airline will also be negatively affected and suffer. Conversely, when customer satisfaction increases, their loyalty also increases (Forgas, Moliner, & Sanchez, 2010). This leads us to propose the last hypothesis, which includes the following:

***H_5**: Customer satisfaction with airlines directly and positively affects their loyalty to them.*

Figure 1: Theorical model



Source: Prepared by researchers

3. Methodology

To test the effect of service quality and price on loyalty through the mediating role of satisfaction and trust, we selected a sample of 400 passengers who prefer to travel on the low-cost

airline Transavia. We used a quantitative approach to collect primary data directly from passengers in a survey we conducted in 2024.The questionnaire consists of two main parts: The first part includes items from the theoretical model variables, while the second part includes demographic questions designed to ask for information about gender, age, education, and wages. To test the hypotheses, we used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) methods, specifically path analysis.

3.1 Study Sample and Data Collection

This study collected data from a number of passengers on Transavia flights between Zenata Airport in Tlemcen and Orly Airport in Paris, excluding participants who did not use this airline. Transavia was chosen as a case study because it is one of the most active low-cost carriers in the region, and because the competitive and challenging aviation market makes studying its service model and passenger experience important for understanding the determinants of loyalty within this sector. Moreover, there are indications of expanding its activity through the opening of a new agency and the offering of competitive deals and prices, which shows that it is betting on the growth of demand for its services in Algeria.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain data over a period of approximately one year. The total number of retrieved forms was approximately 450. A non-probability sampling method was adopted due to time and budget constraints. This population represents low-cost airline customers in the specific route context, allowing the study to examine factors affecting passenger loyalty within this segment. After filtering the data by excluding invalid or incomplete forms, we finally kept 400 valid questionnaires for use, with a response rate of 88%.

Table 1. Participants' profile. (N = 400)

Criteria	categories	Percentage
Gender	Males	53.78
	Females	46.22
Age	30<=	18.36
	Between 31 and 49	43.62
	50 >=	38
Educational Level	University	50
	Middle and Secondary	45.64
	Primary	4.36
Monthly Income	50<	40.81
	Between 50 and 100	34.44
	=>100	24.74

Source: Prepared by researchers based on Statistica.08 outputs

We've summarized the descriptive statistics of the sample in Table.1. Of the 400 participants in the study, males made up 53.78% and females 46.22%, which are very close proportions and are consistent with the overall proportion in Algeria. Furthermore, the largest percentage of individuals in the sample included in the study (43.62%) was in the age group of 31 to 49 years. In addition, the proportion of the age group 30 years and under was (18.36%) while the remaining 38% was for the age group 60 years and over. Likewise, half of the surveyed passengers were university graduates, while the percentage of those with a middle and secondary level was 17.73%, and only 4.36% of the passengers had an elementary level. Moreover, among the 400 participants in the survey, more than 59% had income salary of more than 50,000 DZD, which indicates an acceptable purchasing power for the studied sample.

3.2 Questionnaire Items

We conducted preliminary tests of the questionnaire items with LCA passengers, asking for their feedback on the questionnaire items, and after reviewing them, we adapted them to the study. Table 4 presents the details of these items. To ensure content validity, most of the items in this study were adopted and adapted from previous studies in the same field. The 20 items measuring *perceived service quality* were adopted from the gaps model developed by (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The 6 items measuring *ticket price* were taken from the studies by (McMullan,

2005)(Oliver, 1999) and (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015). Likewise, *passenger satisfaction* was measured using 11 items adopted from the researchers (Yi & La, 2004) (Maxham, Netemeyer, & Lichtenstein, 2008)(Fournier & Mick, 1999) and (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015). The10 items of *trust* variable was also adopted from the studies by (Bogicevic, Bujisic, Bilgihan, Yang, & Cobanoglu, 2017); (Cronin, Brady, Michael, & Hult, 2000); and (Prentice & Kadan, 2019). Finally, *passenger loyalty* was measured using 8 items adopted from (Jayawardhena, Souchon, Farrell, & Glanville, 2007); (De ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer, 1998); (Dimitriades, 2006)and (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015). All items were measured according to a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "1" (strongly disagree) to "7" (strongly agree).

4. Analysis and Results

After presenting the theoretical model, the study sample, and the questionnaire, we will, in this section, present a descriptive overview of the study sample, test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire items, and perform a confirmatory factor analysis. We will also analyze the regression coefficients between the study variables that help us test the hypotheses.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

The results of the factor and reliability analysis shown in Table.2 confirmed the validity of five components of the measurement tool: Service Quality (QUAL), Ticket Price (PR), Passenger Satisfaction (Sat), Trust (Trust), and Passenger Loyalty (Loy), which accounted for the explained variance in the data, which ranged from 59.19% to 75.74%, exceeding the recommended minimum value of 50%. The factor structure resulting from these measures had good internal reliability, as the Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.7, ranging from 0.86 to 0.978 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Akamavi et al, 2015). The descriptive data such as mean ($\overline{X}$) and standard deviation (Std) also showed that the average of the sample's responses mostly trended towards agreement (5, 6, and 7), which is evident from the fact that most of them were greater than 4. As for the standard deviation (Std.), it is close to 1.5, which indicates that the sample's responses are close to each other.

Table 2. Statistical Summary of Descriptive, Factor and Reliability Analysis (N=400)

Study Variables	$\overline{X}$	Std	Cronbach α	KMO	V(X)	Bartlett test
Perceived Quality [PQUAL]	5,95	1.3	0,962	0,964	71,05	8757
Ticket Price [PRICE]	5,87	1.58	0.86	0.849	59.19	1055
Trust [TRU]	5.99	1.7	0.959	0.95	75.74	4822
Satisfaction [SAT]	5.21	1.28	0.978	0.958	82.01	6255
Loyalty [LOY]	5.82	1.43	0.954	0.919	75.11	3397

Source: *Prepared by researchers based on Statistica.08 outputs*

With regard to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy, it recorded values above 84% (exceeding the minimum threshold of 50%). This result is considered very good and confirms the presence of a relationship between the items of each variable. Finally, the results of Bartlett's test for the chi-square coefficient were all statistically significant ($P < 0.05$). This leads us to reject the null hypothesis of variable independence and indicates the presence of statistically significant relationships among them. Based on the above, it is clear that the questionnaire items are reliable and valid for the study.

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Following the descriptive analysis and reliability testing of the data, we can now proceed with the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the items included in the measurement model. Researchers in this field agree that to evaluate the suitability of a CFA measurement model, we use two main criteria: the measurement model (to assess convergent and discriminant validity to ensure the unidimensionality of the research constructs) and the structural model validity.

First, many studies indicate that for CFA, we must ensure our theoretical model fits the empirical data by comparing the fit indices. The chi-square/degrees of freedom (Khi^2/df) ratio

should be between 2 and 5. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) should be between 0.04 and 0.08. All other fit indices—for example, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), and the Bollen's Rho, should be greater than 0.9.

We ran separate CFA models for the six constructs, as recommended by researchers such as Eid (2007) and Jayachandran et al. (2005), and as used by (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015). Overall, as summarized in the analysis results in Table.4, the fit coefficient results for the measurement model indicated acceptable model fit, as all indices were appropriate and confirmed a good fit with the data.

Table 3. Reliability and Validity of Item Loadings

Items	λ	AVE	CR
Perceived Quality [PQUAL]			
In general, the airline's aircraft appear modern and new.	,698		
In general, the airline's physical facilities are good.	,759		
In general, Transavia's staff appear professional.	,831	**0.62**	**0.97**
In general, the aircraft equipment is good.	,818		
The performance with this airline is meticulous.	,755		
This airline is diligent in meeting customer requests.	,776		
In general, this airline delivers its services the first time.	,795		
In general, this airline handles flight cancellations and delays well.	,729		
In general, check-in with Transavia is error-free.	,841		
In general, the staff provides accurate information in a timely manner.	,869		
Transavia's staff provides prompt service at check-in.	,850		
This airline's staff provides prompt service on board.	,868		
In general, Transavia's staff are not too busy to respond to requests.	,702		
I travel with confidence with Transavia.	,858		
I feel safe in my dealings with this airline.	,868		
I am pleased with the friendliness of this airline's staff.	,815		
In general, I am satisfied with the staff's knowledge of how to answer questions.	,865		
I received personal attention from this company.	,792		
Overall, the check-in hours worked for me.	,849		
Overall, this company has the customer's best interests in mind.	,835		
Ticket Price [PRICE]			
Usually, when choosing an airline, I pay attention to good offers.	,835		
I compare prices when choosing an airline.	,841	**0.59**	**0.89**
I believe I am paying a fair price for the quality of service provided by Transavia.	,690		
I am not willing to pay a higher price for the service provided by this airline.	,759		
I would consider another airline if it offered a higher price.	,691		
I would consider purchasing a cheaper ticket.	,787		
TRUST[TRUST]			
Most of what this airline says about its products is true.	,766		
In general, I trust Transavia's employees.	,823		
I feel I trust this company.	,857	**0.69**	**0.95**
I believe Transavia is a very reliable company.	,821		
The information Transavia provides is truthful and honest.	,857		
In general, this company delivers on its promises.	,888		
This company pays great attention to its customers' needs.	,854		
Transavia has the resources and experience to provide excellent service.	,799		
I am confident that this company provides good service.	,872		
The company's promises (on its website and in the media) are fulfilled.	,793		
Satisfaction [SAT]			
I felt happy after traveling with Transavia.	,883		
My choice to travel with this airline was wise.	,908		
I believe I made the right decision by choosing this airline.	,922	**0.81**	**0.98**
I was satisfied with the way they treated me.	,906		
Overall, I am satisfied with the way the staff treated me.	,847		
Overall, I am satisfied with traveling with this airline.	,933		
I believe I made the right decision by choosing Transavia.	,943		
Overall, I am satisfied compared to other airlines.	,904		
This airline always meets my expectations.	,904		
My impression of them has improved.	,894		
I am now more positive about Transavia.	,916		

Loyalty [LOY]			
I will use this company more often in the coming years.	,783		
I consider it my first choice for travel.	,835	**0.75**	**0.96**
I consider myself a lifetime customer of Transavia.	,812		
I prefer to travel with this company over its competitors.	,871		
I would like to use this company again in the future.	,882		
I would encourage others to choose Transavia.	,921		
If anyone wants to travel, I would suggest using this company.	,923		
There is a 99% chance that I will travel with this company in the future.	,895		

Source: *Prepared by researchers based on literature reviews*

Note: ***λ****: Factor loadings.* ***AVE****: Average Variance Extracted.* ***CR****: Composite Reliability.*

Table 4. Measurement Model Results for Fit Indices of Reflective Scales (ML/OLS)

Latent Variables	Khi2 (df)	GFI	AGFI	RMS	Bollen's Rho	NFI	NNFI	CFI
Perceived Quality [PQUAL]	1606,53 (189)	0,99	0,99	0.05	0,9	0,99	0,99	0,99
Ticket Price [PRICE]	86,87 (9)	0,99	0,98	0.05	0,97	0,98	0,97	0,98
Trust [TRU]	270,92 (35)	1.00	0,99	0.02	1.00	0,99	1.00	1.00
Satisfaction [SAT]	619,38 (44)	0,99	0,99	0.03	0,99	0,99	0,99	0,99
Loyalty [LOY]	365,93 (20)	0,99	0,99	0.05	0,99	0,99	0,99	0,99
Recommended thresholds	\	**>0.9**	**>0.9**	**<.08**	**>0.9**	**>0.9**	**>0.9**	**>0.9**

Source: *Prepared by researchers based on Statistica.08 outputs*

Additionally, this study performed a confirmatory factor analysis by examining the convergent validity of each variable. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity is evaluated by meeting three conditions. First, the factor loadings (λ) must be significant and greater than 0.5. As shown in Table 3, the results indicated that the factor loadings for all items were statistically significant at a 0.05 level (t-test value greater than 1.96) and these loadings ranged from 0.690 to 0.933, thus all exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.5. This leads us to accept the construct validity.

Second, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is used to measure the measurement error variance extracted by a set of indicators, its value should be greater than 0.5. The AVE values for the Perceived Quality (PQUAL), Price, Sat, Trust, and Loy scales were 0.62, 0.59, 0.69, 0.81, and 0.75, respectively, all exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.5 (see Table 5). Finally, this study tested the reliability of each scale using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, where their results were greater than 0.7 and statistically significant (<0.05), which demonstrates the internal reliability of the aforementioned scales. Based on the above, we can state that our data has acceptable convergent validity.

4.3 Results of Regression Relationships among Study Variables

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses of the study model that determine customer loyalty to low-cost airlines. To evaluate the quality of the theoretical (structural) model, we used the following fit criteria: χ^2, df, GFI, RMR, CFI, NFI, and TLI.

Table 5. Evaluation of Overall Model Fit (OLS)

Model	**Conformity indicators obtained**						
Conformance Criterion	**James-Mulaik-Brett Parsimonious Fit Index**	**TLI**	**Bollen's Rho**	**NFI**	**CFI**	**AGFI**	**GFI**
Conformance Overall Model	0.914	0.95	0.94	0.95	0.95	0.949	0,952

Source: *Prepared by researchers based on Statistica.08 outputs*

This study tested the proposed model using path analysis. For this purpose, we used IBM SPSS v22 and Statistica v.08. After performing the test using the OLS (Ordinary Least Squares)

estimation method, the results of the fit criteria, summarized in Table 5, confirmed that the structural model provides a good fit for the study sample data.

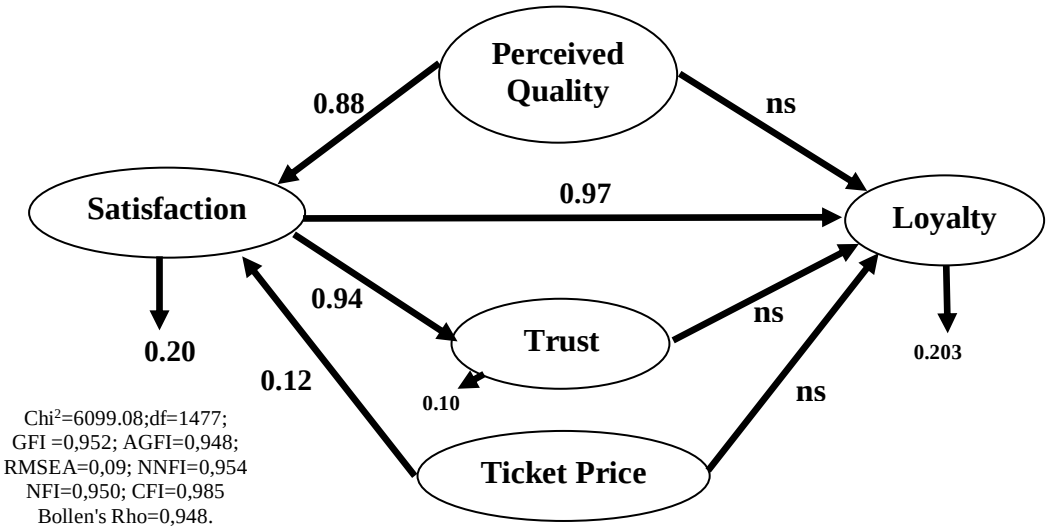
Furthermore, Table.6 and Figure.2 summarize the empirical results of the experimental model. The hypothesis testing results showed four significant paths at $p<0.05$, two non-significant paths at $p>0.05$, and one significant but negative path. Consequently, the results testing the relationships between perceived quality, ticket price, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty showed that all hypothesized relationships were supported except for Hypothesis $H_{1.2}$ (between perceived quality and loyalty), Hypothesis $H_{2.2}$ (between price and loyalty), and Hypothesis H_3 (between trust and loyalty).

Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing (T > 1.96, p < 0.05)

Relationships & Hypotheses	Regression Coefficient ß	T-Value	p-Value	Test Result
$H_{1.1}$: (PQUAL)-116->(SATIS)	0,88	74,11	0,00	Accepted
$H_{1.2}$: (PQUAL)-117->(FID)	0,07	1,14	0,25	Rejected
H $_{2.1}$: (PRICE)-118->(SATIS)	0,12	4,67	0,00	Accepted
$H_{2.2}$: (PRICE)-119->(LOY)	-0,08	-3,09	0,00	Accepted
H_3: (TRU)-122->(LOY)	-0,14	-1,52	0,12	Rejected
H_4: (SATIS)-120->(TRU)	0,94	144,75	0,00	Accepted
H_5: (SATIS)-121->(LOY)	0,97	8,56	0,00	Accepted

Source: *Prepared by researchers based on Statistica.08 outputs*

Figure 2: Results of structural model analysis



Source: Prepared by researchers based on Statistica.08

Our results support a significant and positive relationship between perceived quality and passenger satisfaction [$ß_{1.1}$=+0.88, $p<0.05$], indicating a very good correlation. Conversely, no significant relationship was found between perceived quality and loyalty [$ß_{1.2}$=+0.07, $p>0.05$]. This supports hypothesis $H._{1.1}$ and refutes hypothesis $H._{2.1}$. At the same time, in light of hypothesis $H._{1.2}$, a positive correlation was found between the ticket price and airline passenger satisfaction [$ß_{2.1}$=+0.12, T>1.96 and $p<0.05$]. In contrast, and contrary to our expectations for hypothesis $H._{2.2}$, the relationship between ticket price and passenger loyalty was inverse [$ß_{2.2}$=-0.08, T>1.96 and $p<0.05$]. This leads us to accept hypothesis $H._{1.2}$ and reject $H._{2.2}$. Regarding the third hypothesis, no significant relationship was found between passenger trust and their loyalty to the airline [$ß._3$=-0.14, $p>0.05$], which resulted in the non-confirmation of hypothesis $H._3$. As the results showed, we found

that passenger satisfaction is very strongly and positively correlated with their trust in the airline under study [ß$_4$=+0.94, p<0.05], as well as with their loyalty to it [ß$_5$=+0.97, p<0.05]. Thus, hypotheses H_4 and H_5 are supported. Moreover, our research findings support the idea that service quality and ticket price are positively and indirectly related to passenger loyalty, which proves the important mediating role of passenger satisfaction. In contrast, the trust variable did not play any mediating role between the relational variables (service quality and ticket price) and passenger loyalty. In the study, we assumed that ticket price is positively associated with passenger satisfaction in the low-cost airline sector. According to the previous results of (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015); (Calisir, Basak, & Calisir, 2016); (Chen & Tanomsin, 2018) and(Shen &Yahya, 2021), a significant and positive relationship exists between price and satisfaction, which is consistent with the findings of our study.

5. Discussion of Results

Through this study, we attempted to investigate the determinants of customer loyalty to low-cost airlines. We also attempted to study the mediating effect of trust and satisfaction. This enabled us to achieve some results which we discuss as follows:

First, as we previously hypothesized, the results of this study revealed that service quality significantly affects passenger satisfaction with low-cost airlines. Specifically, it was found that good service will lead to increased passenger satisfaction. This means that the satisfaction of Transavia passengers with low-cost airlines will be significantly influenced by the high quality of service provided by the employees of these low-cost airlines. Thus, these results are similar to the finding that service quality has a positive impact on satisfaction [(Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015); (Chen & Tanomsin, 2018); (Giao & Vuong, 2021); (Shen & Yahya, 2021); (Bagwell & Kellerman, 2023); (Hameed, Chatterjee, Zainab, Tzhe, Yee, & Khan, 2024)].

Second, these studies also found that ticket price can achieve high levels of loyalty by achieving passenger satisfaction and not through its direct effect on passenger loyalty, which is exactly what the results of the study by (Akamavi, Mohamed, Pellmann, & Xu, 2015) reached. In contrast, as our results showed, price did not directly affect passenger loyalty to low-cost airlines because the test result was not statistically significant. This result is consistent with other studies [e.g: (Shen & Yahya, 2021); (Mosleh, Maulan, & Haque, 2023)and (Hameed, Chatterjee, Zainab, Tzhe, Yee, & Khan, 2024)] which found that ticket price has an impact on passenger satisfaction. These results mean that perceived price is not directly related to passenger loyalty, and therefore, an increase in the latter is achieved by first achieving satisfaction. The possible reason is that the ticket price with low-cost airlines is relatively low compared to full-service airlines, which makes many passengers consider the price of services acceptable and compare it with the quality of service, resulting in their satisfaction with it and becoming loyal to it.

Third, the results of this study showed a significant direct positive relationship between passenger satisfaction and their loyalty to low-cost airlines without the need to gain passenger trust. These results confirm the result of previous studies conducted by(Bloemer & Odekerken-Schroder, 2002), and which concluded that customer satisfaction is one of the most important drivers of loyal customers to the brand (Hussein et al., 2015). Therefore, airlines should be keen to satisfy passengers as much as possible because gaining their satisfaction will affect their behavioral intentions in the future.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to test a theoretical model, which summarizes a set of relationships between variables (perceived service quality and ticket price) that lead to gaining passenger loyalty in the low-cost aviation sector market through the mediating role of passenger satisfaction and their trust in the services provided by Transavia. The results of this study showed that the perceived service quality provided by the Transavia had an indirect effect on passenger loyalty through the mediation of satisfaction. Furthermore, the study results indicated that ticket price also had no direct effect on passenger loyalty except by gaining their satisfaction with the services provided by the

company. As was discovered in this study, trust did not play the same role that satisfaction played in improving passenger loyalty. On this basis, the results of the conceptual model of this study can benefit future studies of researchers interested in evaluating the impact of perceived service quality and ticket price on passengers' loyalty to airlines through the mediating role of satisfaction and passengers' trust.

6.1 Recommendations

This study provides managerial contributions that may benefit managers of low-cost airlines operating in the market as follows:

First, passengers expressed their satisfaction and loyalty to the dimensions of service quality in the study, namely reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance, and that these variables have an indirect effect on loyalty through passenger satisfaction. The results of this study will help low-cost airline managers in exploring the important elements (dimensions) to allocate effectively their tangible resources to meet the expectations of their passengers. Therefore, airlines must realize the strategic importance of service quality: and focus on the idea that continuous quality improvement is not expensive in the long run.

Second, the results of this study showed that ticket price also has an indirect effect on customer loyalty through the mediation of satisfaction. Therefore, low-cost airlines must succeed in determining the appropriate ticket price, i.e. setting competitive prices. In this regard, we concluded through this research that low prices attract customers to buy this type of ticket.

Third, the results of this study provide practical evidence of the relationship between passenger satisfaction and their loyalty in the LCA sector and try to expand the understanding and scope of previous studies conducted in the air transport service sector. Based on the foregoing, we hope that our study will contribute to enriching studies conducted on the aviation market in Europe and North Africa in terms of evaluating the quality of services provided by low-cost airlines, and setting air ticket prices in line with the purchasing power of passengers, which leads to their satisfaction and gaining their loyalty for as long as possible.

Fourth, to measure the study variables, we used a questionnaire that contains a set of important elements that were developed and applied in this research and that have not been measured before; This in itself is an important contribution to this study because it is very suitable for use by airline managers operating in the market of Loc Cost Airlines to build passenger loyalty.

6.2 Study Limitations and perspectives for Future Research

There are several limitations to this study, some of which we will present and which should be taken into account in future research. Firstly, for this study, we selected a sample of passengers who traveled from the Zenata Airport in Tlemcen to Orly Airport in Paris, which may limit the generalizability of the results to the low-cost aviation sector as a whole. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies include passengers traveling to other destinations and across multiple routes, in order to test the theoretical model more accurately and enhance the comprehensiveness of the findings. Secondly, the pilot study was conducted with Transavia, a low-cost airline that operates extensively in various destinations across the Mediterranean region. Therefore, the data primarily reflects the behavior of passengers to these specific destinations. To obtain more comprehensive results, we recommend replicating the study in other regions around the world. Thirdly, there is a need to conduct comparative studies that include other low-cost airlines or different flight routes, and even comparisons between a low-cost carrier and a full-service airline, in order to identify differences in the determinants of passenger loyalty. To enhance the comprehensiveness of the results, future studies are also encouraged to conduct research with passengers of airlines competing with Transavia, followed by a comparative analysis of loyalty levels across these airlines. Fourthly, this study focused only on relational variables to enhance passenger satisfaction and loyalty, so other factors that passengers may consider important can be included, such as: Customers' experience, company image, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. Based on

this, researchers can explore other factors in their future studies that could enhance passenger loyalty to low-cost airlines.

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