

The Future of Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty on Travel Agencies

Sara Santos¹, Joana Monteiro², Pedro Manuel do Espírito Santo ², Luísa Augusto¹ and Adriana Oliveira³

¹CISED - Centro de Investigação em Serviços Digitais - Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, , Portugal;

²Instituto Politécnico de Coimbra, ESTGOH, Oliveira do Hospital, Portugal;

³CEOS.PP ISCAP, Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal

ssantos@esev.ipv.pt

joanamonteiro.14@hotmail.com

pedro.santo@estgoh.ipc.pt

laugusto@esev.ipv.pt

aoliveira@iscap.ipp.pt

Abstract: Tourism has emerged as one of the great activities of the 21st century; however, due to globalization and the development of the Internet, travel agencies see some of their business principles being changed by new technologies. Furthermore, the impacts of the pandemic crisis (SARS-COV2) have been highly negative. In the field of tourism, travel agencies have been one of the parts that have undergone the most changes. Countless people have gone to a travel agency to book their trips in the past decade. However, this process is not always carried out in the same way. With the appearance and constant development of new technologies, the first online travel agencies emerged. In addition, the consumer becomes increasingly independent in their travel purchases, and the travel agent's work is limited. Online travel agencies advertise more, offering more attractive prices and other conditions that attract customers to buy their trips without going to a travel agency in a physical space. The relationship between agency and tourist is essentially online. Thus, it is essential to analyze the role of travel agents who have their physical spaces open and intend to increase their business by strengthening customer relationships. It is necessary to focus on consumer trust and loyalty while creating and establishing brand or company value. Thus, the results obtained in this study, through a self-administered questionnaire, from a sample of 512 observations, demonstrate that the perceived quality of the relationship influences the brand's awareness and customer loyalty: consumer satisfaction and trust. In this context, this study highlights the importance of the human relationship in selling tourist products and the tourist's previous experience in loyalty to the travel agency.

Keywords: travel agencies, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, brand trust, brand awareness.

1. Introduction

Tourism contributes to the development of countries and regions and has various effects on economic activity (Lee and Back, 2010). For the development of this sector, it is vital to building a brand in the industry (Liao, 2006).

With the development of the Internet and the shift to online environments by travel agencies, customer loyalty has become an even more significant concern for this sector of activity (Shen, 2018, p.11).

In choosing a destination, brand awareness is a critical factor (Chon, 1992). It was identified as the main component of both destination brand equity (Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011) and brand performance in the tourism industry (Lee and Back, 2008).

Also, brand trust and satisfaction are the critical success factors to travel agencies' competition (Drosos and Tsotsolas, 2015). Therefore, this research aims to study the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty in travel agencies mediated by brand trust and satisfaction. The literature was reviewed, and collected data to test the research hypotheses.

2. Literature review

2.1 Brand awareness

Over the years, brand awareness has been applied in various tourism and hospitality contexts (Oh and Hsu, 2014).

Brand awareness refers to "the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). Aaker (1996) stated that brand awareness includes brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness. When asked to think in a category and a brand comes to the consumer's mind first, it is considered top of mind. This concept is also used in tourism and hospitality research (Tsai et al., 2010).

Brand awareness corresponds to what extent consumers are well-informed (Santo and Cardoso, 2021), recall, and are familiar with a brand (Keller, 1993), choosing their preferred brand (Aaker, 1996).

To create brand equity for destinations brands, it is essential to generate brand awareness in consumers' minds (Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011). This awareness led to the development of consumers' positive feelings about the brand and enhanced the possibility of destination visit behavior (Buil et al., 2013). A higher level of brand awareness contributes to destination brand equity and visitors' loyalty (Boo et al., 2009). Several studies demonstrated that brand awareness positively influences brand equity and loyalty (Pike and Bianchi, 2016) and consumer commitment to a brand (Hsu et al., 2012).

In tourism and marketing literature, different studies support that brand awareness contributes to positive and favorable brand image, brand loyalty, and high perceived quality (Pike et al., 2010).

2.2 Brand trust

The concept of trust has attracted the attention of researchers from different areas, thus becoming a concept of interdisciplinary interest and revealing the relevance that may have in other fields (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Among these fields is the consumption of a product or service, namely because the idea of trust is associated as a substantial value with the consumption of a product or service. This association aggregates the attribution of quality to the product or service (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Thus, the results of different studies have shown that the quality of the product or services has been demonstrated as a variable capable of creating trust (Augusto, Santos, and Santo, 2020a) in the brand and even in the perception of the image of the brand itself (Abror, 2019; Chandio, Qureshi, and Ahmed, 2015; Kumar, Dash, and Purwar, 2013; Wang and Wu, 2012).

In this sense, it can be stated that «a trustworthy brand is one that consistently keeps its promise of value to consumers through the way the product is developed, produced, sold, serviced and advertised, even in bad times when some kind of brand crisis arises» (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2005, p. 188). Moreover, this context is often based on experiences lived by the consumer with a particular product or service of a specific brand; these experiences also help in the evolution of trust in the brand (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). In this sense, organizations must invest in a long-term relationship with their consumers (Sung and Kim, 2010) while transmitting the brand's message and making it credible to the consumer (Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı, and Özşahin, 2011).

When awareness is high, consumers have a more positive opinion about destination characteristics (Nikabadi et al., 2015). Therefore, it is proposed to test the following:

H1: Travel agencies brand awareness positively influences travel agencies brand trust

2.3 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the key to the success of companies in various sectors of activity, especially concerning online travel agencies (Augusto, Santos, and Santo, 2020b; Dutta, Kumar Chauhan, and Chauhan, 2017), contributing to improving their performance (Kobylanski, 2012). Hennig-Thurau (2004) considers that customer orientation on the part of travel agencies strongly determines customer satisfaction and the success of service companies.

Kobylanski (2012) analyzed the attributes of the travel agency service and identified the characteristics that have a significant effect on overall customer satisfaction, namely the quality of the offer, safety, convenience, and comparison of the service delivered with the advertising message, influencing the positive word of mouth, as well as customer loyalty. The interaction of agencies with customers also affects customer satisfaction.

Kourtesopoulou, Theodorou, Kriemadis, and Papaioannou (2019) analyzed the effect of perceived quality on customer satisfaction and purchase intentions and concluded that quality factors, ease of understanding, response time, and intuitive site navigation are most important.

The study by Othman, Harun, De Almeida, and Sadq (2020) shows that after-sales service and marketing communication have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, either directly or indirectly.

Dutta, Kumar Chauhan, and Chauhan (2017) identified the factors that affect travel agency customer satisfaction, concluding that customer expectations and perceived quality influence customer satisfaction. In addition, service quality, customer trust, corporate image, and awareness significantly impact travel agency customer satisfaction (Setiawan and Sayuti, 2017). Thus, it is proposed the following:

H2: Travel agencies brand awareness positively influences travel agencies brand satisfaction

H3: Travel agencies brand trust positively influences travel agencies brand satisfaction

2.4 Customer loyalty

Analyzing various perspectives on the concept of customer loyalty, Shen (2018) considers that online customer loyalty presupposes repeated behavior, preferences, purchases, and intentions.

Customer loyalty is fundamental in the travel agency sector, in a very competitive market (Richard and Zhang, 2012), so several authors have focused on researching the determining factors that influence customer loyalty. For Richard and Zhang (2012), the corporate image has a positive and significant influence on customer commitment and satisfaction, strongly influencing customer loyalty.

Moiescu and Gica (2014) analyzed the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on customer behavioral loyalty, considering service quality as a fundamental social responsibility factor. On the other hand, customer loyalty is essential to ensure the sustainability of travel agencies' business.

The perceived quality of the electronic service directly and positively affects the perceived value, which, in turn, directly and significantly affects consumer loyalty towards online services (Roger-Monzó, Martí-Sánchez, and Guijarro-García, 2015).

Setiawan and Sayuti (2017) also consider that service quality, customer trust, corporate image, and customer satisfaction are variables that significantly impact customer loyalty.

Shen (2018) developed a study to identify the determining factors that impact customer loyalty in travel agencies and concluded that customer trust associated with company integrity and customer perceived value, closely related to price and value and customer expectation regarding price, have a positive influence on online customer loyalty (Santo and Marques, 2022). The brand logo can also interfere with customer loyalty. In turn, switching costs and perceived risks, in terms of security and financial risks, negatively influence online customer loyalty. The quality of online service is not a determining factor in customer loyalty. Therefore, it is proposed the following:

H4: Travel agencies brand trust positively influences travel agencies loyalty

H5: Travel agencies brand satisfaction positively influences travel agencies loyalty

3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative methodology. A survey was conducted among travel agency clients to validate the proposed model. This cross-sectional research had as a unit of analysis these clients, whose data collected through a questionnaire, was analyzed through the valid answers of 512 clients, primarily female (73.5%), below 45 years old (79.5%) with higher education qualifications (70.4%).

Data was collected through a self-administered survey. It was used items adapted from previous studies to measure the constructs. Hence, four items were used for brand awareness from Kim et al. (2018). To measure brand trust and brand satisfaction was used the Silva and Gonçalves (2016) items. The loyalty was measured

with five items proposed by Bezerra and Gomes (2019). All the items used in this study were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

4. Results

For data analysis, Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was chosen to estimate the conceptual model because it enables the researchers to assess causal relationships. The PLS-SEM is appropriate for exploratory research and does not require normality of data (Hair Jr et al., 2016). Additionally, PLS-SEM is executed in two steps. First, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were analyzed and, after analyzing the relations between constructs as suggested by (Hair et al., 2016). The PLS-Algorithm was executed on SMART PLS v3.3.2 (Ringle et al., 2015).

4.1 Common method bias

The responses were collected from the same respondents, and there was a possibility of common method bias. Thus, it was performed Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003), with factor one representing 28.22% of the variance. Furthermore, a preliminary data analysis was carried out to validate VIF - Variance Inflation Factor. VIF values are ranged between 1,832 and 4,413, which is below the threshold value (VIF <5). Therefore, there is no multicollinearity. Accordingly, common method bias would not be a concern. Moreover, it was analyzed the Skewness (Sk), and Kurtosis (Ku) and the items do not diverge from normality (Sk <3; Ku <7) (Hair et al., 2018).

4.2 Measurement model

The validity, reliability, and standardized loadings (λ) were analyzed. Therefore, table 1 shows that standardized item loadings are above the minimum threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2013), which were acceptable for further analysis.

Table 1: Items

Item	λ	t values
<i>Brand Awareness ($\alpha = 0.774$; $\rho A = 0.819$; $CR = 0.835$; $AVE = 0.512$)</i>		
The travel agency is recognised where I live	0.752**	6.208
The travel agency differs from others	0.839**	21.978
I am familiar with the products/services this agency offers	0.762**	18.708
When I think of traveling, this is the first travel agency that comes to mind	0.800**	23.785
<i>Brand Satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.936$; $\rho A = 0.936$; $CR = 0.954$; $AVE = 0.839$)</i>		
Overall, I am satisfied with this travel agency	0.925**	48.830
I am satisfied with my experiences with this travel agency	0.929**	51.961
I am satisfied with the support provided by the staff of this travel agency	0.923**	49.071
The services I enjoyed with this travel agency exceeded my expectations	0.886**	43.130
<i>Brand Trust ($\alpha = 0.868$; $\rho A = 0.869$; $CR = 0.938$; $AVE = 0.883$)</i>		
This agency can be trusted with its products and services	0.942**	70.740
This travel agency is honest	0.937**	55.915
<i>Brand Loyalty ($\alpha = 0.894$; $\rho A = 0.932$; $CR = 0.921$; $AVE = 0.701$)</i>		
In the future, I will use the services of this travel agency	0.894**	58.226
Even if other agencies offer lower prices, I will prefer this travel agency	0.788**	23.520
If possible, I recommend this travel agency	0.927**	86.167
I prefer to book trips to Europe through this travel agency	0.768**	16.983
I always choose this travel agency to book intercontinental trips	0.798**	19.037

λ - Standardized Loadings; ** $p < 0.01$; α = Cronbach's Alpha; AVE - Average Variance Extracted; CR - Composite Reliability

Table 1 also shows that Average Variance extracted (AVE) (ranging from 0.512 to 0.883) and composite reliability (CR) (ranging from 0.835 to 0.954) are above the threshold values (AVE > 0.5; CR > 0.7) (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988, Bagozzi et al., 1991). These values showed convergent validity and reliability for all constructs.

To access the discriminant validity, first, it was examined the Fornell and Larcker criteria (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), and it was verified that the correlations between constructs are below than square root values in diagonals of the AVE (table 2).

Table 2: Discriminant validity - criteria from Fornell and Larcker (1981)

	BAW	LOY	SAT	TRT
Brand awareness (BAW)	0.715			
Loyalty (LOY)	0.719	0.837		
Satisfaction (SAT)	0.674	0.773	0.916	
Trust (TRT)	0.634	0.766	0.861	0.940

BAW = Brand awareness; SAT = Satisfaction; TRT = Trust; LOY = Loyalty

Second, the discriminant validity was examined through the cross-loadings criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 3 shows a comparison of the column loadings, and each indicator exhibits that indicator's loadings on its construct is higher in all cases compared to all its cross-loadings with other constructs.

Table 3: Cross loadings

	BAW	LOY	SAT	TRT
BAW1	0.652	0.247	0.336	0.295
BAW2	0.839	0.568	0.531	0.481
BAW3	0.762	0.521	0.521	0.536
BAW3	0.800	0.774	0.644	0.600
SAT1	0.651	0.672	0.925	0.779
SAT2	0.643	0.724	0.929	0.837
SAT3	0.579	0.667	0.923	0.792
SAT4	0.595	0.764	0.886	0.744
TRT1	0.645	0.715	0.817	0.942
TRT2	0.544	0.725	0.801	0.937
LOY1	0.657	0.894	0.795	0.813
LOY2	0.582	0.788	0.515	0.461
LOY3	0.657	0.927	0.779	0.781
LOY4	0.536	0.768	0.513	0.500
LOY5	0.569	0.798	0.532	0.529

BAW = Brand awareness; SAT = Satisfaction; TRT = Trust; LOY = Loyalty

4.3 Structural model

The results of the hypotheses tests were analyzed by evaluating the significance of the path coefficients through bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples. Table 4 shows the results of hypotheses testing.

Table 4: Hypothesis test

Hyp.	Path	Std β	t value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval		f^2	Result
					Lower	Upper		
H1	BAW -> TRT	0.186	2.282	0.023	0.034	0.357	0.051	Supported
H2	BAW \rightarrow SAT	0.134	2.011	0.044	0.010	0.274	0.044	Supported
H3	TRT -> SAT	0.566	7.211	0.000	0.398	0.704	0.561	Supported
H4	TRT -> LOY	0.388	3.765	0.000	0.175	0.580	0.107	Supported
H5	SAT -> LOY	0.439	4.218	0.000	0.242	0.652	0.137	Supported

β = Standardized path coefficients; BAW = Brand awareness; SAT = Satisfaction; TRT = Trust; LOY = Loyalty

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

This study explored the influence of travel agencies' brand awareness on loyalty. In the analyses of the structural model, it was examined the adjusted R^2 of the endogenous variables in the model, which are 0.637 for loyalty. In addition, it was obtained $R^2= 0,792$ for satisfaction and 0.636 for trust.

In hypothesis testing, the relationship between brand awareness and brand trust in the context of travel agencies was tested. H1 was confirmed ($\beta_{BAW \rightarrow TRT} = 0.186$; $p < 0.05$; $f^2 = 0.051$) which confirmed that trust in travel agencies is a consequence of tourists' image and brand recognition (Abror, 2019).

Hypothesis H2 tested the effects of brand awareness on satisfaction, and it was found that there is a relationship ($\beta_{BAW \rightarrow SAT} = 0.134$; $p < 0.05$; $f^2 = 0.044$). Similar to other studies (Setiawan and Sayuti, 2017), this study reveals that brand awareness has a significant impact on travel agencies tourists' satisfaction. Therefore, it is confirmed hypothesis H2.

The results obtained for hypothesis H3 ($\beta_{TRT \rightarrow SAT} = 0.566$; $p < 0.05$; $f^2 = 0.561$) underline the close relationship between trust and satisfaction in travel agencies. The relationship between trust and satisfaction is high, and it is considered that, in the context of travel agencies, the main antecedent of satisfaction is trust in the brand.

In this study, brand loyalty was the dependent variable. Firstly, it was tested hypothesis H4 and the results ($\beta_{TRT \rightarrow LOY} = 0.388$; $p < 0.05$; $f^2 = 0.107$) support that trust is an important antecedent of brand loyalty in travel agencies. Additionally, it was also found that satisfaction has important effects on loyalty H5 ($\beta_{SAT \rightarrow LOY} = 0.439$; $p < 0.05$; $f^2 = 0.137$). These results are referred to by Setiawan and Sayuti (2017) as their study refers to satisfaction and trust as antecedents of brand loyalty.

Finally, the indirect effects in the model ($\beta_{BAW \rightarrow LOY} = 0.177$; $p < 0.01$), and it was demonstrated that travel agencies' brand awareness influences brand loyalty. These effects are relevant since they identify that tourists' perceived brand awareness affects their travel agency visit behavior as referred to in the literature (Kwun and Oh, 2004).

5.2 Practical contributions

From the analysis carried out, this study is essential for travel agencies' management practice since it reveals that brand awareness is vital for travel agencies and contributes to greater loyalty.

Thus, it is suggested that travel agencies develop a marketing action plan to improve their target recognition. Moreover, it is considered that loyalty is enhanced through a relationship based on the trust and satisfaction of the tourist. Thus, it is suggested that travel agencies improve the orientation towards the tourist.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study has revealed essential conclusions, it was identified some limitations. Thus, it is important to highlight that the sample comprises young tourists (aged below 45 years) and with higher education qualifications. It is suggested that other studies analyze samples with older tourists.

Another limitation identified is that service quality and perceived value were not included as antecedents of brand loyalty. It is suggested to analyze research models that include service quality and perceived value.

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