



MEASUREMENT CUSTOMER- BASED AIRLINE BRAND EQUITY: AN ENGLAND BASED STUDY



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Abstract

The objective of this research is to examine airline brand equity model from the customer's perspective. For this purpose the relationship among dimensions of brand equity in the airline industry are investigated. Survey was undertaken in the UK at International Birmingham Airport. Data was collected from 244 British passengers through face to face interviews by using a structured questionnaire. The results of this empirical study indicate that brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty are important components of customer-based brand equity.

Keywords: Consumer based brand equity, Service quality, Airline industry

HAVAYOLU ENDÜSTRİSİNDE MÜŞTERİ TEMELLİ MARKA DEĞERİNİN ÖLÇÜLMESİ: İNGİLTERE UYGULAMASI

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı tüketici temelli marka değerini havayolu endüstrisinde test etmektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda marka değerine ait boyutlar havayolu endüstrisine uyarlanarak incelenmiştir. Araştırma İngiltere'nin uluslararası Birmingham hava alanında 244 İngiliz yolcu ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucu tüketici temelli marka değerini oluşturan marka bilinirliği, marka imajı, algılanan kalite ve marka bağlılığının marka değerini belirlemede önemli rol oynadığını ortaya koymaktadır

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tüketici temelli marka değeri, hizmet kalitesi, havayolu endüstrisi

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1- Introduction

Brand equity is regarded as a very important concept in business practice as well as in academic research because marketers can gain competitive advantages through strong brands (Aaker, 1998, Keller, 2000). Building strong brands has become a marketing priority for organizations today because it yields a number of advantages. Strong brands help the firm establish an identity in the market place (Aaker, 1996). Branding plays a special role in service firms because strong brands increase trust in intangible products (Berry 2000, p. 129). A strong brand with positive brand equity has several advantages to a service firm such as higher margins, greater customer loyalty brand extension opportunities, more powerful communication, more favorable customer response to price change effectiveness higher consumer preferences and purchase intentions. A strong brand increases the consumer's attitude strength is toward the product associated with the brand. The consumer's awareness and associations lead to perceived quality, inferred attributes, and eventually, brand loyalty (Keller, 1993; Rangaswamy et al., 1993). This perspective is labeled as customer-based brand equity (Shocker et al., 1994, p. 104)

The role of brand equity in the service industry is very important because service has some unique features including intangibility, variability and inseparability (Gbiselli, 2012, p 148).

The study of brand equity in the service industry is relatively new. Maintain that building a service brand is different than building a product brand also that managing a service brand should be conceptually different than managing those of product. (Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). Although numerous local or global brands of different product categories have been employed to measure the brand equity, literature on brand equity within the airline industry has not been fully investigated (Kim and Kim, 2004, p. 117).

The purposes of this study are to examine an airline brand equity model of the international passengers in England based on four dimensions of brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty and to probe the relationship among four dimensions and their influences on brand equity. This research uses a sample of data collected from English air passengers in International Birmingham airport in England.



2- Literature review

Consumer-based brand equity

Building strong brands has become a marketing priority for organizations today because it yields a number of advantages. Strong brands help the firm establish an identity in the market place (Aaker, 1996). In measuring the overall value of a brand, marketing researchers and practitioners have begun to examine the concept of “brand equity” (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), which has been referred to the tremendous value that the brand name brings to the producers, retailers and consumers of the brand.

The equity that the strong brand possesses can give the company a loyal consumer franchise that could bring substantial returns to firm similarly, the 1989 Marketing Sciences Institute defines brand equity as the value that is added by the name and rewarded in the market with better profit margins or market shares. It can be viewed by customers and channel members as both a financial asset and as a set of favorable associations and behaviors (Norjaya et al, 2007, p. 43).

Aaker (1991) defined brand equity as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” while Keller (1993), defined brand equity as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand”.

There are many classifications and dimensions proposed in the analysis of brand equity. Aaker (1991), conceptualized brand equity as a set of assets (or liabilities) suggesting the five categories of brand equity: perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association, and other proprietary brand assets The last element is usually disregarded in marketing research because it is not directly related to the customer. Keller (2002), separated into two components: awareness and association, Schocker and Weitz (1988), establish brand equity in function of loyalty and image. Agarwal and Rao (1996), consider overall quality and choice intention as the main dimensions of brand equity Vazquez et al (2002), indicate the importance of stored associations expressing both functional and symbolic utilities, etc. Yoo and Donthu (2001), referred to consumer-based brand equity as “cognitive and behavioral brand equity at the individual consumer level” which can be described and measured by four dimensions of brand: perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand



association. One important consensus among the definitions is that brand equity is the incremental value of a product due to the brand name (Srivastava and Shocker1991).

3- Model and hypotheses

In this paper we conceptualize brand equity in accordance with Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), using a consumer perspective. Brand equity is therefore referred to as consumer- based brand equity and defined as the value consumers associate with a brand, as reflected in the dimensions of *brand awareness, brand image (associations), perceived quality and brand loyalty*.

The first dimensions Brand awareness refers to “ the ability of a potential buyer recognise or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness “relates to the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease with which it does so” (Keller, 1993), and also, defined as the power of brand’s existence on the minds of consumers, is an important constituent of brand equity. Brand awareness is defined as knowing the brand and being aware of the brand (Pappu and Quester, 2006:4). If a customer recognizes a certain brand name or can recall it, the brand will have a higher chance of being selected than an unknown brand (Tam, 2008, p.7). Briefly the first step to build brand equity is to create brand awareness (Aaker, 1991).

A brand recognized by consumers is much more preferred than a brand not recognized. In case that the brand has just entered into the options of consumers, whether the brand will be preferred or not depends on brand awareness. The possibility of the brands with low brand awareness to be preferred by consumers is pretty low (Zikmund at al, 2003).

Brand awareness is argued as being a first and necessary, but not sufficient, step leading to trial and repeat purchases because the effect of awareness results at best in product curiosity (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007).

Brand image is a set of brand association that are anything linked in memory to a brand, usually in some meaningful way (Aaker,1991). Another definition suggests that brand image is data fields about the brand on the consumer’s memory which include the meaning of the brand for consumers (Keller, 1993). Consumer based brand equity accrues when consumers have a high level of awareness and hold some strong favorable, and unique brand image in their memories. Image have to be unique, strong and favourable to have a positive effect on brand equity (Keller, 2003).



Brand image is fairly important for marketing experts and consumers. Marketing experts use brand image in differentiating, positioning and extending the brand, creating positive attitudes and feelings towards the brand and offering the benefits of buying and using a certain brand. Consumers use brand image to process, organize and remember the data about the brand on their memories and to help purchasing decision (Low and Lamb, 2000. 351).

Perceived quality is consumers' subjective verdicts about the superiority or excellence of products or services in general. Perceived quality is the subjective assessments of consumers or users (not managers or experts) about the quality of the product. Perceived quality is not the real quality of the product, but the subjective verdicts of consumers about the superiority or excellence of the product's performance as a consequence of their subjective assessment (Parasuraman et. al, 1988).

The best way for a brand to increase perceived quality is to invest in improving its real objective quality moreover the firm has to communicate the quality of its brands through quality signals in its marketing actions. Thus, consumers perceive brand quality through their direct experiences with the brand and the information obtained in the environmental factors (Yoo et al 2000). Perceived quality lends value to a brand in several ways; high quality gives consumers a good reason to buy the brand and allows the brand to differentiate itself from its competitors, to charge a premium price and to have a strong basis for the brand extension. (Aaker,1991).

Finally Brand Loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/ service consistently in the future thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior (Oliver 1999).

Jacoby et al, (1974, p. 35), stated that brand loyalty differs from brand attitude and habit, although the latter can indicate brand loyalty. Loyal customers are less likely to switch to a competitor solely because of price, they also make more frequent purchases than comparable non-loyal customers (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998). Brand loyalty plays an outstanding role in generating brand equity not only because of its capacity to keep a customer loyal, but also because that customer's loyalty extends to brands in the company's portfolio (Villarejo and Sanchez 2005, p. 437). Brand loyalty is the intention of the consumer

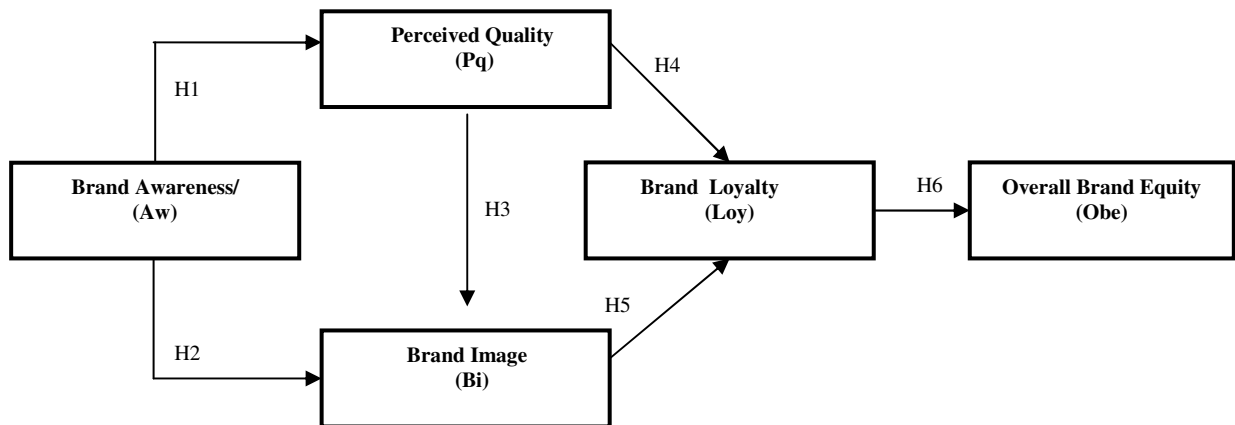


to buy only a certain brand (Odin et. al, 2001). Loyal customers are less likely to switch to a competitor solely because of price, they also make more frequent purchases than comparable non-loyal customers (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998).

Hence the following six hypothesis of the relationship among, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand image, perceived quality and brand equity are proposed the five hypotheses with a conceptual model (see in figure 1) are proposed as follows

- H1: Brand awareness has a positive effect on perceived quality
- H2: Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand image
- H3: Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand image
- H4: Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty
- H5: Brand image has a positive effect on brand loyalty
- H6: Brand loyalty has a positive effect on overall brand equity

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Airline Brand Equity



4. Research Methodology

4.1. The measuring instrument

The questionnaire was designed as a survey instrument including all constructs of the proposed model to investigate the hypotheses of interest.

The survey questionnaire consists of six sections. The first section is designed to obtain each respondent's attitudes toward an airline's brand awareness with a three-item based on



Aaker (1996) and Yoo et al. (2000). The second section deals with the measurement of perceived quality with a four items based Pappu et al, (2006; 2007), the third section is designed to understand each respondent's airline image with a three item based on park (2007), the fourth section deals with the measurement of airline brand loyalty with three items based yoo et al, (2000), the last section identifies each respondent's over all perception of airline brand equity with a four items based Yoo at al, (2000). All of the designed measurements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

4.2. Data Collection

The sample of the survey is composed of england passangers that waits at the international departures of Birmingham international airport face to face interview is conducted to 244 passangers, The field was done in May and June 2012. The individuals questioned were over 18 years old English passanger and had traveled with the Turkish airline at least three times in 5 years the respondent data consist of almost an even share of female (52.8 percent) and male (47.2 percent) respondets. The big majority of the respondents are aged 28- 35 years old (36.3 percent) of the sample 54.7 percent are single

4.3. Data analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) And structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis were used to check construct validity and the goodness of fit indices for the measurement and structural models

4.4. Measurement model

As a preliminary step for the tests to be done to check over the hypotheses asserted within the framework of this study, the validity and credibility of the scales have been realized via the LISREL 8.30 program. There are views in the literature regarding the fact that the LISREL program is one of the most suitable means in examining multiple relations (Narasimhan and Jayaram, 1998). In order to test the validity of the measuring model, we have resorted to Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

The measuring model consists of 17 items defining 5 latent variables. These factors are Brand Awareness (Bw) Brand Image (Bi), Perceived Quality (Pq), Brand Loyalty (Loy) and Overall Brand Loyalty (Obe).



CFA is a natural extension of the Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Lee, 2007). CFA is a type of SEM which deals with the measuring models of the relations between particularly latent variables or factors and observed measurements or indicators (test items, test scores, etc.). Another basic feature of CFA is its nature to hypothesize. CFA is used during the scale development process in order to analyze the latent structure of a measuring instrument (Brown, 2006). In applied researches, factor analysis is usually used for the psychometric evaluation of multiple measuring instruments (Floyd and Widaman, 1995).

It is searched via CFA whether the 17 itemed factor structure used in the research has been certified or not and it is determined that the scale has certified the theoretical structure as a whole.

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According to the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis, GFI, AGFI and CFI, which are among the main indicators in examining the goodness of fit, are more than 0.90 and close to 1 (Bentler, 1990; Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996). It should also be checked whether the value of RMSEA, another indicator, is less than 0.10 and as close as possible to 0. (Hair et al: 2006). The statistics, ensued as a result of the analyses performed by using the maximum likelihood estimator, are presented in the Table 1. The main indicators point out that the measuring model is appropriate for the data.

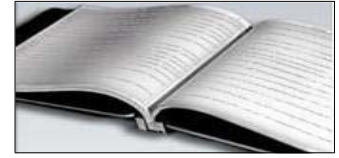


Table 1: Goodness-of-fit measures

Goodness-of-fit measure	Value
Chi-Square Value (X^2)	286.40
P-Value	0.000
Degrees of freedom (df)	129
X^2/df	2.05
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index, (AGFI)	0.88
Goodness of Fit Index, (GFI)	0.91
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.97
Normed Fit Index, (NFI)	0.97
Non-Formed Fit Index (NNFI)	0.98
Relative Fit Index, (RFI)	0.96
Critical N (CN)	121.26
RMSEA	0.055

According to the goodness-of-fit indices from CFA, the measurement model proves parsimonious. More specifically although the the chisquare statistic ($X^2 = 286.40 - df = 129$) is significant, " X^2/df " is determined as 2.22. That the value is less than 3 bears an importance in terms of the validity of the measuring model. Furthermore, other indices such as CFI (0.99), GFI (0.91), NFI (0.97) NNFI (0.98) are more than 0.90 and close to 1. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.055 which is less than 0.10

The internal validity of the measurement model is examined by calculating the construct reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in table 2, the construct reliabilities of the five constructs range (CR) from 78 to 90 and well above the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair et al.2006), The average variance extracted (AVE) of each measures ranges from 0.55 to 0.71 which greater than 50 percent of the variance as suggested by Bogazzi and Yi (1988).

In addition to the global measures of fit, several other assessment criteria were considered. Cronbach's alpha values provided strong evidence of measurement reliability According to Hair et al (1998), Cronbach's alpha values must be 0.70 in order to establish scale reliability. Internal consistency reliability reflects the stability of individual measurement items across replications from the same source of information; it was assessed by computing Cronbach's alpha, whose coefficients for the five construct above 0.70. indicating a reasonable level of internal consistency among the items of which it is constituted. In summary, the fit indices demonstrate a good overall fit between the measurement model and the data. The statistical results indicate that the measurement model



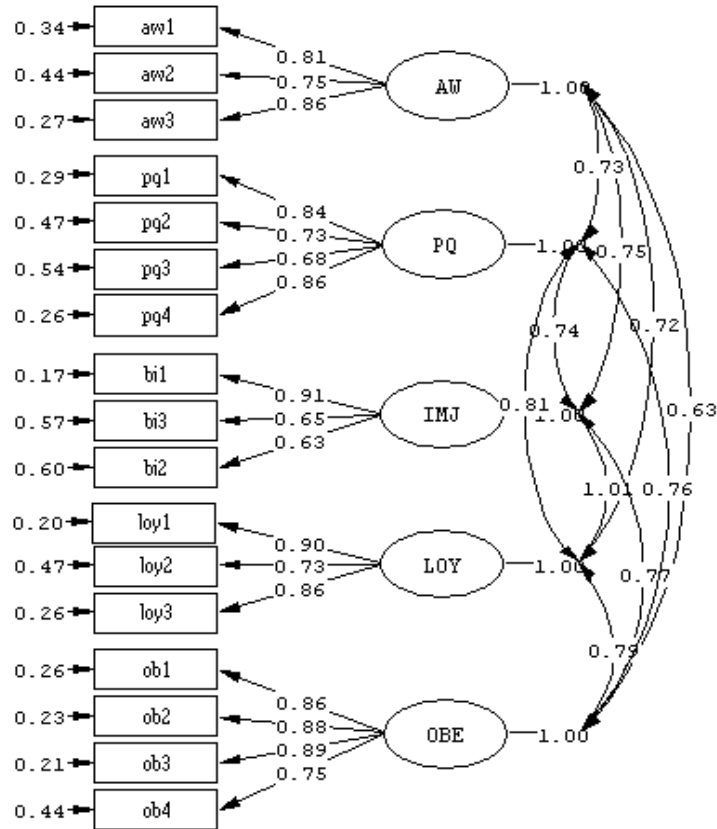
has high reliability and validity and retained items were able to measure the constructs under study. CFA results are given in table 2

Table: 2. Confirmatory factor analysis result

Factor / Item	Mean	Std.Dev.	Standart loading	t-value	Cronbach's α	Construct reliability (CR)	Average variance exrtacted (AVE)
Factor AW					0.932	0.85	0.65
AW1.	4,26	,910	0.81	13.70			
AW 2.	4,11	,934	0.75	12.20			
AW 3.	4,09	1,025	0.86	14.78			
Factor IMJ					0.840	0.78	0.55
B11	4,24	,994	0.91	16.55			
B12.	4,17	,942	0.63	9.91			
B13.	4,28	,843	0.65	10.41			
Factor PQ					0.863	0.85	0.61
PQ 1.	4,08	,940	0.84	14.69			
PQ2.	4,12	,960	0.73	15.22			
PQ3	4,05	1,016	0.68	10.87			
PQ4	4,19	1,012	0.86	15.22			
Factor LOY					0.802	0.86	0.69
Lo 1.	4,14	,965	0.90	14.02			
Lo 2.	4,27	,987	0.73	14.18			
Lo 3.	4,03	,997	0.86	15.32			
Factor OBE					0.892	0.90	0.71
Obe 1.	3,36	1,011	0.86	15.40			
Obe 2.	3,48	1,113	0.88	15.95			
Obe 3.	3,23	1,114	0.89	16.32			
Obe 4.	3,52	,960	0.75	12.50			



Figure: 2. CFA Results



Chi-Square=286.40, df=129, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.055

4. 5. Structural model and hypothesis

It should be recalled that the confirmative factor analysis performed concerning the measuring model in the previous stage represents the results about the validity and credibility of the factors. The question whether the hypothetical paths between latent variables in the research model are supported with a field search brings forward the hypothesis tests about the structural model. It is required to check the parameter estimation and statistical importance of every path to test if 6 hypotheses developed within the framework of this study are approved statistically or not.

The theoretical accuracy of the model has been searched by using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in order to determine the internal relations of the research model presented in the Figure 2 after the confirmative factor analysis.



Table 3. LISREL results for research model

Hypothesis	Causal path	Path coefficient	t-values	R ²	Remarks
H1	AW → PQ	0.68*	10.26	0.46	Supported
H2	AW → IMJ	0.70*	10.93	0.49	Supported
H3	PQ → IMJ	0.75*	11.86	0.56	Supported
H4	PQ → LOY	0.73*	11.04	0.53	Supported
H5	IMJ → LOY	0.81*	12.14	0.66	Supported
H6	Loy → OBE	0.80*	13,35	0.64	Supported

*Denotes significance at the 0.01 level

As a consequence of this analysis test demonstrated a reasonable fit between the data and the proposed structural model. The fit statistics. $X^2 / df = 2.22$, CFI = 0.98, NFI = 0.97, and AGFI = 0.90 were all indicative of a good fit. RMSEA = 0.55 is within accepted standards.

In order to determine the validity of the hypothesised paths, the statistical significance of all structural parameter estimates was examined. The structural parameters estimates and the hypothesis- testing results are shown above in table 3.

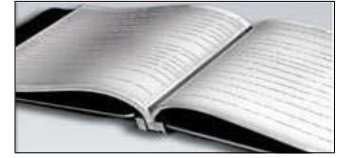
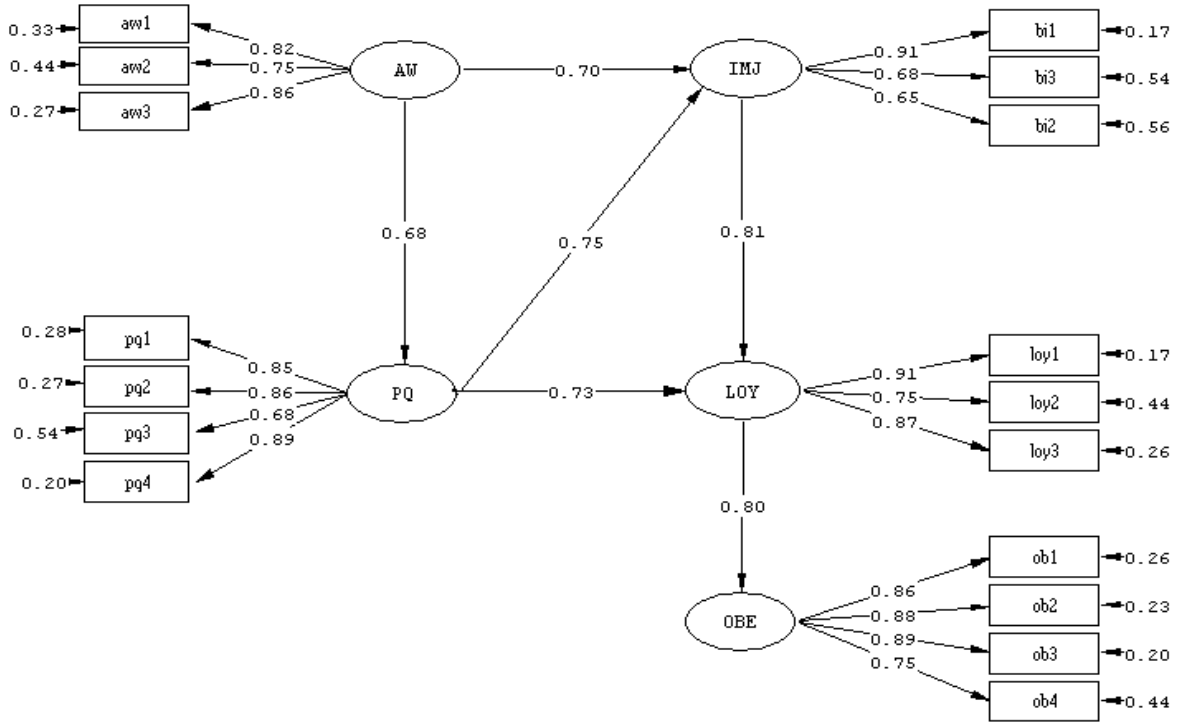


Figure 3: LISREL analysis of the research model showing standardised coefficients



Chi-Square=291.21, df=131, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.055

Hypothesis H(1) was statistically verified ($y=0.68 \quad t=10.26$) a positive impact of Brand awareness on product quality was detected. Hypothesis H₂ which states that brand awareness has positive effect on brand image was also statistically verified ($y=0.70 \quad t= 10.93$) Hypothesis H₁, H₂, predicted the relationship between brand awareness and two dimensions of its consumer based equity. Hypothesis H₃ which states that product quality has positive effect on brand image ($y=0.75 \quad t=11.86$). Hypothesis H₄ which asserts that product quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty was statistically verified and the relation between these two implicit variables was found to be significant ($y=0.73 \quad t=11.04$). Research Hypothesis H₅ which argues that brand Image has a positive impact on brand loyalty was also verified and the relation between these two variables was found to be statistically significant ($y=0.81 \quad t=12.14$). Finally brand loyalty is found to have a significant positive effect on overall brand equity ($y= 0.80 \quad t= 13.35$) and thus H₆ is supported. The result of the path analysis shown above in figure 3.



5. Conclusion

In this study, it is aimed to reveal which factors shape the brand equity perception of consumers and the impact of the brand equity perception on the creation of buying behavior. To that end, the consumer based brand equity model has been adapted to airway industry.

The model of the study has been developed by utilizing Aaker's and Yoo atl al, Consumer Based Brand Equity Model. It has been determined that brand awareness mentioned in the model is influential on the perceived quality and brand image and therefore brand equity contributes to buying behavior. Within this context, it is possible to assert that brand equity is not formed by only one factor, but as a consequence of total interaction of several factors. According to this research, brand image is the most influential factor among the parameters determining brand equity. It is also detected in the model that as brand recognition increases, brand image and perceived service quality increase.

This also demonstrates that there is a positive relationship between brand awareness and buying process and that the brands engraved on the minds of consumers are preferred more intensely in the buying process. When consumers are to buy a product, they incline to buy the brands which they have known in advance or they are familiar with, not the ones they have never heard or seen. Brand recognition is of capital importance for being a strong brand and raises the brand's possibility of being preferred compared to other brands. Thus, data relating the recognized brands are distinguished more easily and contribute to the brand image by creating positive behaviors for the brand.

According to Papu and Quester, (2007) consumers can not have any perception about brand quality and brand image without brand awareness and therefore it is required to maintain brand awareness in order to create brand equity. The research findings are compatible with the findings of other researches carried out previously in several countries.

In the research model, the relationship between brand equity and brand loyalty is also tested and it is determined that there is a positive and powerful relationship between these two parameters. It is a fact that consumers will display loyalty to the brands which they have already known, trusted and perceived as quality and that they will incline to prefer this kind of brands.

Another result of the study is that brand image has a direct and powerful impact on brand loyalty. Brand image contributes to the companies to realize such functions as preparing and conveying data relating the brand, making the brand differentiate from its rivals and generating positive feelings about the brand.



Companies aim to increase the number of consumers with high brand loyalty. The way to achieve this is the strategy to create a brand which has a high awareness level, carries strong and unique associations and which is perceived as quality. The most prominent factor determining the future of companies is not their profitability, but to what extent they satisfy their customers and how valuable they are for their customers. Thus, the companies acting with a modern marketing vision should develop a strategy of creating paramount brand equity by managing well the factors which determine brand equity in order to protect their present customers, to find new ones and to regain the lost ones.

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