Does loyalty moderate the impact of digital marketing on the purchase intention of customers in airlines?

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Abstract

Tourism is being transformed all around the world as a result of digital marketing. It is causing a paradigm change in marketing strategy, changing the tourism sector structure, and creating a slew of new possibilities and threats. Digital marketing has enhanced customer loyalty and his intention to purchase. The study aimed to answer the following question: Does customer loyalty enhance the impact of digital marketing in airlines on purchase intention? To achieve the aim of the study; The researchers developed a questionnaire and distributed it to a random sample of airline customers. Of the 642 forms distributed electronically, only 562 were valid for analysis. The results of the study revealed that applying digital marketing in airlines directly affects both customer loyalty and purchase intention. Also, the loyalty of customers to airlines positively affects the intent to purchase. Finally, the results of the study highlighted that customer loyalty plays a moderator role in increasing the impact of applying digital marketing in airlines on the purchase intention of customers. The study recommended that airlines should continue to expand the adoption of modern marketing strategies that rely on artificial intelligence techniques because of their significant and clear role in increasing customer loyalty, as well as their intention to purchase.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Loyalty, Purchase Intention, Airlines.

Introduction

Modern technologies that have appeared in all fields, especially in the field of communications and information, greatly affect the activities of the human life (Kaur,2017), especially in air transport. Digital marketing opens a new horizon in the tourism marketing by targeting buyers and consumers directly, quickly and individually (Mkwizu, 2019; Park & Namkung, 2022). Digital marketing is one of the contemporary methods of providing of communication between the buyer and the seller to market goods and services and to establish and develop relationships with customers (Lai & Yu,2021).

Digital marketing is a new approach to marketing which are supported by digital elements that have their own characteristics, components and driving forces (Riyadi et al., 2019). So that they are understandable to organizations, and they are able to choose their effective marketing strategies and tactics (Mathew & Soliman, 2020). The study aims to measure the impact of digital marketing on both of the loyalty and the purchase intention of airlines customers, and also aims to assess the effect of customer loyalty on the purchase intention, and finally explore the modified role of customer loyalty in the relationship between digital marketing and purchase intention among the study sample.

Literature review and hypotheses development
Digital marketing definition

Digital marketing is the use of modern technologies such as websites, social media, mobile applications, online advertising and e-mails to deliver goods and services to the customer in a more interactive manner (Dumitriu & Popescu, 2020). A lot of people may confuse between E-marketing and digital marketing as being a direct selling process and include all marketing activities (Smith, 2021), but the difference appears where as digital marketing is the application of interactive digital technology to achieve the company's goals by identifying and meeting the needs and desires of customers, while E-marketing refers to the use of information technology and the internet to achieve marketing objectives and convergence between customers (Carvalho & Carvalho, 2021). Digital marketing has contributed to the transition from mass marketing (one to many) to targeted marketing (one to few), and individual (one to one) or customized marketing has also appeared (Erfiani et al., 2019).

The importance of digital marketing for the airlines is: A) It gives the airlines an opportunity to display its services in various parts of the world 24/7 (Shetty, 2019), B) The company achieves effective communication with travelers, C) Recommend the company to the largest number of travelers, D) Enables the airlines to have a strong customer database, E) speed delivery of marketing messages to customers and target specific segments, and F) small and medium enterprises benefit from it through lower advertising costs (Ramadan & Baeshen,2021). The importance of digital marketing enables tourists to know the services through digital means, allows travelers to participate by viewing the available information and presenting his opinion through direct communication with him and quick and easy access to information about services (Dimitron & Abo elgheit, 2019).

Moreover, characteristics of good digital marketing campaigns are: A) Using high quality websites that the tourists can be accessed on 24/7, B) Social media such as face book, twitter, YouTube and Instagram allows airlines to quickly reach their users, and the presence on these platforms helps the company to identify the purchase intention, C) The classification of the company's activity depends on the best search engine marketing, which are ongoing process based on good team work, D) Sending E-mails to users helps for getting quick answers, E) The customer's participation in the advertising and service content and taking his opinion leads to a quick response and purchase of the product, and participation with colleagues and friends through social media platforms, and F) a large part of digital marketing depends on the use of the mobile phone technology, so the company must display advertising that are corresponded with the way the mobile phone applications.

The Zeisser model is the most accepted and widespread in the dimensions of Digital Marketing, it includes (a) Attract: this dimension refers to the method of attracting the customer to the company's website, as it is the beginning of interaction, and the company follows several means of attracting, including adopting social responsibility programs, using environmentally friendly products, or ranking the site in search engine results (Tranchenko et al., 2020), (B) Engage: the airlines communicate with travelers in order to involve them in the marketing process, and to take their opinions and points of view. To implement this,

the airlines should provide interactive media (Agusten et al., 2018; Smith, 2021), (C) Retain: it means maintaining relationships with the tourists and emphasizing the development of content and repeat purchase, and to traveler retention, the airlines should entrust an innovative programs to preserve customer data and privacy (Carvalho & Carvalho, 2021), (D) Learn: through interactive social media for obtaining data and information about the needs, desires and behaviors of customer's communication (Tiago, 2021; Barua, 2021), (E) Relate: it is a process of transferring information and common understanding from one individual to another. After the company obtains information about the customer, it proceeds to communicate effectively with him, and provides added value (Shetty, 2019).

The relationship between digital marketing and loyalty
The term of loyalty has become more common in the marketing literature, which expresses the strength of the relationship between the organization and the customer (Melović et al., 2020). Loyalty is defined as the implicit commitment of the customer to repeat the purchase on an ongoing basis, despite of the existence of alternatives (Mullatahiri & Ukaj, 2019). Therefore, loyalty according to Pratondo and Ziad (2021) is a concept characterized by bias, the customer has a deliberate and non-random pre-selection, an implicit commitment and undertaking that has a behavioral translation, and repeat the purchase with the intention of staying for a longer period.
Loyalty is one of the most important keys to the success of marketing programs. If the customer is the center of the marketing process, then loyalty will the highest ambition you want in the customer (Khan & Islam, 2017; Aoda et al., 2020) and this is due to two facts. First, the lowest of loyalty with the large number of competitive programs. Second, keeping the current customer is less expensive than obtaining a new customer (Adam et al., 2020).
So that, loyalty increases the company's profits through repeat purchase, reduces marketing costs, and provides effective databases. In digital marketing, specialized communications are responsible for customer retention, by using information, predicting future needs, and making offers to continue communicating with customers (Khan & Islam, 2017). Nowadays, there are many opportunities for customers to subscribe to any digital platforms. In addition, companies have wide areas to communicate with customers such as E-mail marketing, mobile adv, search engine adv and websites (Ceyhan, 2019; Adam et al, 2020). Dastene, (2020) there are a strong relationship between digital marketing and customer loyalty. Therefore, we propose this following hypothesis:
H1: Digital marketing affect positively on customer loyalty in airlines.

The relationship between digital marketing and purchase intention
Purchase intention can be defined as a pattern which are followed by the customer in his behavior to search, purchase, use, or evaluate goods, services, and ideas that are expected to satisfy his desires and needs (Keni et al., 2019; Yang, 2021). Purchase intention stems from the internal variables and factors of the customer, and the external variables which are

surroundings that lead him to make a purchase decision (Takaya, 2016; Zaidi & Shukri, 2022).

Digital marketing provides marketing information easily to the consumer, which helps him to make a purchase decision (Ali et al., 2020; Nisa & Pranesti, 2020). Therefore, studies the internal and external factors which are led to take purchase decision. According to Hassan and Pektas (2020), there is a significant and positive relationships between digital marketing and tourists' purchase intention. Hence, we propose this following hypothesis:

H2: Digital marketing affect positively on purchase intention in airlines.

The relationship between customer loyalty and purchase intention

Purchase intention is one of the most important dimensions of customer loyalty, the loyal customer is the customer who repeats the purchase many times and ready for practicing the electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) with others (Khan et al., 2021). The study of Kaled and Abdel Fattah (2021) results that there are various product categories on digital media platforms, and digital marketing affects student decision-making., Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Customer loyalty has a positively effect on purchase intention.

H4: Customer loyalty moderates the relationship between digital marketing purchase intention in airlines.

Methodology

This study was conceptualized through quantitative analysis and a questionnaire. The questionnaire included 4 main parts. The first part dealt with the demographic characteristics of the study sample (gender, age, nationality, and marital status). The second part dealt with the evaluation of digital marketing through 6 items developed by the study of Sivasankaran (2013); De Pelsmacker et al. (2018) and Yuvaraj and Indumathi (2018). The third part assessed purchase intention through 4 items adopted from Van Reijmersdal et al. (2016). The fourth part evaluated customer loyalty through 3 items developed by Giovanis et al. (2014). With regard to the study sample; a questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of airline customers through social networking sites and various travel groups (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin). There are 642 customers who participated in answering the questionnaire, while 562 questionnaires were analyzed.

Based on the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) parameter, a sample size of 100–200 was deemed optimal for this study. The data were analyzed utilizing the Analysis of Moments Structure (AMOS) by employing the statistical programme IBM - AMOS V. 24. AMOS data analysis is typically shown as a circular graphic with arrows indicating the relationship between the independent, moderator, and dependent variables. The SEM was used to investigate the association between research variables and measurement errors. Each variable was transformed into an indicator, which was quantified by rating replies on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 refers to strongly disagree, and 5 refers to strongly agree). The researchers' causal model must be based on strong theoretical considerations. This path analysis

methodology is appropriate for assessing research hypotheses with direct and indirect links. Descriptive statistics were also examined using SPSS V. 26. The digital platforms were performed by utilizing the Sobel test. Table (1) shows the demographics of the respondents. The majority of respondents in this sample were male (68%) aged from 40 to 49 years (44%), Egyptian (60.9%), and married (80.4%).

Table (1) Respondents' demographic characteristics

Gender		Nationality	
Male	382/68%	Egyptian	342/60.9%
Female	180/32%	Not-Egyptian	220/39.1%
Age		Marital status	
< 30y	17/3%	Single	6711.9%
30 – 39y	241/42.9%	Married	452/80.4%
40-49y	247/44%	widowed	32/5.7%
> 50y	57/10.1%	Divorced	11/2%

Results and Discussion
Descriptive analyses

Table (2) indicates the mean and standard deviation of digital marketing, customer loyalty, and purchase intention. The results highlight the high level of digital marketing, customer loyalty, and purchase intention, as the mean was 3.71 for digital marketing (SD= .87), 3.49 for customer loyalty (SD= .72), and 3.57 for purchase intention (SD= .85).

Table (2) Descriptive analysis of the study variables

Variables	Mean	SD
Digital marketing	3.71	.87
Customer loyalty	3.49	.72
Purchase intention	3.57	.85

Reliability and Validity of the model

Table (3) depicted the model's statistical description. To assess the instrument's reliability and validity, confirmatory factor analysis using SEM was employed. The results of the analysis demonstrated that all constructs were reliable depending on the Cronbach's value, and the composite reliability (CR) value was more than 0.70, as indicated by Hair et al (2021). A Likert scale (1–5) was used to evaluate the instrument's validity. The average variance extracted (AVE), according to Malhotra and Maryam (2010), can be used to

evaluate discriminating validity (Hair et al., 2021). Each construct's AVE value was larger than the required value, demonstrating that the measurement model had sufficient discriminant validity. Convergent validity is shown by an AVE value greater than 0.50.

The degree of freedom (2 /df = 1.674), comparative fit index (CFI =.967), goodness-of-fit index (GFI =.951), Normed Fit Index (NFI =.968), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI =.952), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA =.048) all indicate that the model is statistically fit, proving the construct validity proposed by Hair et al. (2021)(see Table 4).

Table (3) Reliability and Validity of the model

Variables	Items	Factor loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Shared Variance
Digital marketing	DM1	.754	.863	.638	.815	.533
	DM2	.762				
	DM3	.822				
	DM4	.723				
	DM5	.711				
	DM6	.795				
Customer loyalty	CL1	.830	.801	.593	.793	.293
	CL2	.795				
	CL3	.772				
	CL4	.793				
Purchase intention	PI1	.818	.854	.627	.758	.277
	PI2	.834				
	PI3	.771				

Table (4) The threshold of goodness-of-fit indices

Indices	Result
X^2/df	1.674
Comparative fit index (CFI)	.967
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	.951
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	.968
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	.952
RMSEA	.048

Structural model

To analyze the link between the variables and test the study hypotheses, a structural model was utilized. The theoretical model (Fig. 1) was validated using the AMOS SEM program and maximum likelihood estimations of model parameters. These parameters involve

standardized regression weights (β) and p-values for multiple paths. Table (5) and Figure (2) shows the findings of the analysis. The coefficients of standardized regression that describe the direct correlations between the study variables and validate the relationship hypothesis are shown in the findings. First, digital marketing has a significant and positive influence on customer loyalty (Estimate = 0591, t = 6.897, p =.000). This result supports H1, hence it is acceptable. This result is in line with some previous studies (e.g. Afton & Ashto, 2012; Suharyono & Widiyanto, 2021; Ilyas et al., 2021; Bulan & Chandra, 2021; Tobing et al., 2021, and Khan & Islam, 2017). Afton and Ashto (2012) revealed that there is a significant and positive link among digital marketing and customer loyalty. As well, Suharyono and Widiyanto (2021), Ilyas et al. (2021), Bulan and Chandra (2021), Tobing et al. (2021), and Khan and Islam (2017) reported that adopting digital marketing affects significantly and positively customer loyalty.

Second, it was discovered that digital marketing had a significant and positive impact on purchase intention (Estimate =.428, t = 4.107, p = .000). It supports H2, thus it is Acceptable. This result is consistent with the studies of Pathan et al. (2013), Mahalaxmi and Ranjith (2016), Wibisurya (2018), Hasanat et al. (2019), Dastane (2020), Nawaz and Kaldeen (2020), Putri (2021), Al-Azzam and Al-Mizeed (2021), Erlangga (2021), and Busman and Ananda (2022) which pointed out that purchase intention is predicted by digital marketing. Similarly, Jaya et al. (2020) concluded that digital marketing affects positively tourists' intention to purchase.

Third, customer loyalty had a significant and positive impact on purchase intention (Estimate =.374, t = 3.226, p =.006), corroborating H3. This result is agreed with Giovanis et al. (2014), Upamannyu et al. (2015), and Jamil et al. (2017) who demonstrated that there is a positive relationship and influence for customer loyalty on purchase intention.

Fourth, Consumer loyalty is proved to be a moderator variable in the effect of digital marketing on purchase intention as the direct and indirect effects were significant (Estimate= .675, t= 8.164, p= .000). Hence, H4 is accepted. Additionally, table (5) indicated that the effect of digital marketing on purchase intention was .428, which means that digital marketing affects by 42.8% supporting purchase intention. While the effect of both digital marketing and customer loyalty was .675, which explains that digital marketing and customer loyalty effect by 67.5% enhancing purchase intention. This proved that customer loyalty plays a moderator role in increasing the impact of digital marketing on purchase intention.

Table (5) The result of hypotheses testing

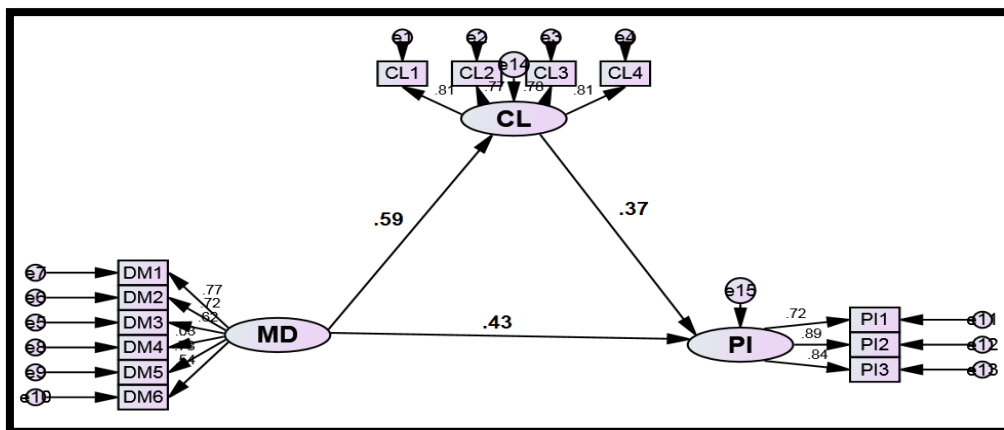| Hypotheses	Estimate	t-test	p-value	Result
H1: digital marketing → customer loyalty	.591	6.897	.000	Supported
H2: digital Marketing → purchase intention	.428	4.107	.018	Supported
H3: customer loyalty → purchase intention	.374	3.226	.006	Supported
H1: digital marketing → customer loyalty → purchase intention	.675	8.164	.000	Supported

Figure (1) Path analysis

The effects of digital marketing on customer loyalty and purchase intention according to demographic characteristics

Table (6) revealed the effects of digital marketing on customer loyalty and purchase intention according to their demographic characteristics. For effect according to the gender; The effect of digital marketing on customer loyalty was higher for females than for males, while the effect of digital marketing on purchase intention was higher for males than females. Regarding the effect according to age; The impact of digital marketing on customer loyalty was highest for the age bracket (40-49y), followed by the age bracket (30-39y), then the age bracket (> 50y), and finally the age bracket (< 30y). While the impact of digital marketing on the intent to purchase was highest for the age bracket (< 30y), followed by the age bracket (40-49y), followed by the age bracket (30 – 39y), and finally the age bracket (> 50y). With regard to the effect according to nationality, the table clarified that the effect of digital marketing on customer loyalty was highest among non-Egyptians, while the impact of digital marketing on purchase intention was higher among Egyptians. As for the effect according to marital status; The impact of digital marketing on customer loyalty was

highest among married, followed by singles, then divorced, and finally widows. While the impact of digital marketing on purchase intention was higher for married as well, followed by singles, then widows, and finally divorced.

Table (6) effects of digital marketing on customer loyalty and purchase intention according to demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics	Digital marketing → customer loyalty	Digital Marketing → purchase intention
Gender		
Male	.398	.521
Female	.644	.400
Age		
< 30y	.357	.588
30 – 39y	.513	.395
40-49y	.600	.422
> 50y	.499	.371
Nationality		
Egyptian	.381	.471
Not-Egyptian	.511	.325
Marital status		
Single	.362	.312
Married	.589	.451
Widowed	.291	.301
Divorced	.300	.246

Conclusion and recommendations

The study aimed to assess whether customer loyalty has a moderate role in the relationship between digital marketing and the purchase intention of airline customers. The study concluded a number of results that may contribute to drawing the attention of airlines to expand the adoption of digital marketing and other marketing strategies and methods that rely on technology and artificial intelligence for their important role in increasing customers' loyalty and pushing them to purchase. The results showed that the level of digital marketing, customer loyalty, and purchase intention among airline customers was relatively high. The results also highlighted the presence of a significant and positive impact of digital marketing on both customer loyalty and purchase intention. In addition; The results depicted that there is a moderate role of customer loyalty in enhancing the impact of digital marketing on the purchase intention of airline customers. With regard to the impact of digital marketing on both customer loyalty and purchase intention according to the demographic characteristics of the study sample; The results indicated that digital marketing

had the highest impact on loyalty among females, age bracket (40-49 years), non-Egyptians, and married, while digital marketing had the highest impact on purchase intention among males, age bracket (<30y), Egyptians, and married.

In light of the findings of the study; airlines should continue to expand the adoption of modern marketing strategies that rely on artificial intelligence techniques because of their significant and clear role in increasing customer loyalty, as well as their intention to purchase. These airlines should also rehabilitate and train the marketing department employees on digital marketing techniques on an ongoing basis, to develop their skills and expertise in the field of digital marketing, which is developing daily thanks to rapid technological innovations, as well as to adequately meet the desires and needs of digital customers. Furthermore, these companies should continuously evaluate the level of loyalty of their customers, and conduct market research, especially with regard to identifying their needs and desires constantly, and providing services and products that comply with these needs, which will lead to an increase in their desire to purchase. The expansion of airlines in adopting modern marketing techniques, constantly evaluating customer loyalty, and market research will be reflected in increasing their market share, increasing their competitiveness, speeding up access to customers, achieving more profits, and ensuring the sustainability of their activities. Finally, airlines should pay attention to the involvement of customers in evaluating their services and products continuously electronically, which may be reflected in an increase in their intention to purchase.

Limitations and future research

This study examined the impact of digital marketing on both customer loyalty and the purchase intention of airline customers. Future studies can evaluate the impact of digital marketing on other variables such as service quality, response speed, and innovation in services. The current study also dealt with digital marketing as one of the modern marketing techniques in light of the rapid and successive technological developments in the field of aviation. Future studies can continue to evaluate the impact of the use of technology in marketing, and its impact on increasing the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of airlines. For example, future studies can assess the impact of artificial intelligence techniques such as forecasting, Chatbot, virtual reality, and augmented reality in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of airline marketing. Moreover, the study examined the moderate role of customer loyalty in the relationship between digital marketing and purchase intention. Future studies may address other moderator variables other than customer loyalty such as pricing policies, environmental reputation, and corporate social responsibility. Finally, the results of the study highlighted that there is a difference in the impact of digital marketing on both customer loyalty and purchase intention according to

demographic characteristics. Future studies can measure the impact of these demographic characteristics on the degree of response to airlines' adoption of digital marketing, and if there is a difference in response levels or not.

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هل يتوسط الولاء علاقة التسويق الرقمي بنية شراء العملاء في شركات الطيران؟

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الملخص العربي

تشهد السياحة تحولاً في جميع أنحاء العالم نتيجة للتسويق الرقمي. إنه يتسبب في تغيير نموذجي في إستراتيجية التسويق، وتغيير هيكل قطاع السياحة، وإيجاد عدد كبير من الاحتمالات والتهديدات الجديدة. يعزز التسويق الرقمي ولاء العملاء ونيته في الشراء. هدفت الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن السؤال التالي: هل يعزز ولاء العملاء من تأثير التسويق الرقمي في شركات الطيران على نية الشراء؟ لتحقيق هدف الدراسة؛ طور الباحثون استبيانا ووزعوه على عينة عشوائية من مسافري الخطوط الجوية. من بين 642 نموذجًا تم توزيعها إلكترونيًا، كان 562 فقط صالحة للتحليل. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن تطبيق التسويق الرقمي في شركات الطيران يؤثر بشكل مباشر على ولاء العملاء ونية الشراء. كما أن ولاء العملاء لشركات الطيران يؤثر بشكل إيجابي على نية الشراء. أخيرًا، أبرزت نتائج الدراسة أن ولاء العملاء يلعب دور الوسيط في زيادة تأثير تطبيق التسويق الرقمي في شركات الطيران على نية الشراء لدى العملاء.

الكلمات الدالة: التسويق الرقمي – ولاء العميل- نية الشراء- شركات الطيران