The Impact of E-Satisfaction on E-Loyalty in Travel Agencies: A Research on Travel Agencies in Turkey

Ali KOÇAK[1]

Abstract

In today's world, the widespread influence of the internet on every aspect of life has had its impact on the tourism sector, just like in many other industries. Travel agencies traditionally operating in the tourism sector have also adapted to technological advancements and shifted their operations to the online environment. Online travel agencies are gaining increasing demand in the tourism sector, and accordingly, they continue their activities in this direction. However, like many businesses, online travel agencies must provide quality service to their customers and ensure their satisfaction with the transactions they make. Consumer satisfaction, both in the traditional and online environments, is crucial for the long-term sustainability of a business. To survive in the industry, businesses must ensure the satisfaction, continuity, and loyalty of their consumers. This study aims to examine how e-satisfaction in online travel agencies affects e-loyalty, as evaluated by customers who have made purchases from online travel agencies in Turkey.

Key words: E-satisfaction, E-loyalty, Online travel agencies

JEL Code: L83, M31, O33

1. Introduction

The increasing prevalence of internet usage due to advancing technological developments has had a significant impact on the lives of numerous individuals. Smartphones, emails, and online shopping platforms, which are now frequently used in everyday life, have begun to occupy a significant place in individuals' lives. People have started to effortlessly perform a significant portion of their daily tasks through the virtual environment. Individuals with busy and demanding work schedules have turned to technologies that can make their lives easier during these busy periods. These technologies have impacted not only individuals' lives but have also manifested in the operational processes of businesses and affected numerous sectors. The tourism sector is among the industries influenced by these technological developments and shifted towards the virtual environment. Being aware of these developments and implementing innovations in this field have become necessary to meet consumer demands. In a world where workloads and

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[1] Akdeniz University, Türkiye, alikocak@akdeniz.edu.tr

responsibilities have increased, individuals who want to dedicate time to activities such as vacations, relaxation, and entertainment, but do not wish to exert too much effort, opt for methods that make this process easier. Online travel agencies are businesses established to deliver the desired services to consumers in this regard. Due to the ongoing advancements, the demand for online travel agency services is growing, and the number of such businesses is also on the rise. Many consumers prefer these businesses that provide a shopping experience in a convenient, easily accessible, fast, and reliable environment. For these businesses to have a long-lasting presence in the market, they must be trustworthy and capable of meeting their customers' desires and requests. The satisfaction of the consumers who prefer the business is one of the primary factors at this point.

Companies providing e-services are diligent in maintaining service quality and aim to attain customer satisfaction, ultimately establishing a loyalty atmosphere (Faiz, 2018). The attainment of this satisfaction and the subsequent establishment of loyalty becomes a competition that businesses engage in against their competitors. Ensuring e-satisfaction and becoming the first choice in the next purchase is of utmost importance for businesses.

This study was conducted to examine the satisfaction of customers who purchase travel services online and its influence on their loyalty to businesses in the virtual environment, in response to the growing presence of online travel agencies and their increasing transactions in Turkey.

2. Literature Review

Online Travel Agencies

Life conditions that continuously evolve and the ongoing advancements in technology have made it possible for most transactions to be carried out through the Internet. In today's world, to satisfy consumer desires and needs, utilizing these new technologies has become a mandatory requirement for companies (Bayram and Şahbaz, 2015). With smartphones, emails, all forms of audio, written, and visual communication over the internet, and technological devices with connected applications, among other innovations, there is a rapid shift toward the electronic environment in the world we live in. This transition towards the online environment has also affected the thoughts and participation styles of consumers and businesses in their working lives (Faiz, 2018).

The tourism sector, in the face of these transformative changes driven by advancing information technologies and the internet, is one of the most impacted industries in the world. For companies continuing their operations in this sector, the only way to sustain their existence and maintain a strong presence in this competitive environment is by closely tracking the changes and trends in their surroundings has become imperative (Davies and Cahill, 2000; Kaynama and Black, 2000). The increasing rate of individuals planning their trips and vacations using online travel agencies in the virtual realm, along with the growth of the sector (Chen and Kao, 2010), has prompted touristic service-providing travel agencies to quickly adapt to this change and offer their services in the virtual environment

(Bayram and Şahbaz, 2017). Many travel agencies have realized that a significant portion of travel plans and reservations are made via the Internet in recent times and consequently, they have started to operate in online environments under the name "online travel agencies" and provide services to customers online (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). Delving into this concept, online travel agencies are defined as businesses that facilitate the sale of services provided by tourism establishments in various destinations around the world from a single centre by conducting their sales over the Internet (Kütük, 2021). Online travel agencies provide customers with the opportunity to make reservations related to services such as hotels, cars, and plane tickets, from any location and at any time of day. They also offer information about travel destinations and the chance to compare and evaluate the most suitable accommodation options in those destinations (Kim et al., 2007). In line with this, with the advancement of communication technologies and the internet network, the desires and requests of consumers have also started to change. In comparison to past times, consumers in the travel sector who consistently utilize the Internet have evolved into more conscious and highly aware consumers in the present day (Kutlu et al., 2019).

E-Satisfaction

Satisfaction can be described as the result of the experiences shared between the customer and the company, and these experiences being positively received by the customer (Pamukçu and Gündoğdu, 2021). Customer satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which the performance of the purchased product or service meets the expectations of the customers (Gülmez and Dörtyol, 2009). According to Sandıkçı (2007), customer satisfaction can be described as the customer's contentment when firms meet their desires and requests through their performance in a satisfactory manner. According to Oliver (1997), customer satisfaction is the perception of experiencing pleasure and contentment in the consumer, that arises when a function or the entirety of a purchased product or service is fulfilled (Çetinsöz, 2016). The possibility of consumers being satisfied or dissatisfied with a product or service they obtain for a certain price is also important as a result of the increase in the competitive environment and the fact that consumers prefer a competing business in a very short time (Faiz, 2018). Particularly in today's environment where the internet rapidly and easily conveys information and personal assessments, businesses providing services must prioritize customer satisfaction (Bozbay et al. 2016).

The ever-evolving and advancing technological innovations, as in every sector, have made their presence known in the service sector, enabling numerous products and services to reach consumers rapidly and at reasonable prices in the virtual realm. The services provided to customers have set the stage for the emergence of the concept of e-satisfaction in the literature (Faiz, 2018). E-satisfaction is defined as the contentment and peace of mind that consumers feel regarding their previous purchasing experience in any virtual store (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003). Yapraklı and Yılmaz (2008) defined e-customer satisfaction as

the state of being satisfied and experiencing contentment with previous purchases related to a business that provides services in virtual environments. Akbar and Parvez (2009) defined e-satisfaction as a positive perspective provided in response to the connection between consumers and the shopping platform. Alternatively, e-satisfaction is described as consumers completing their purchases from online stores, satisfying their desires and expectations, and subsequently considering using the same online store for shopping one or more times (Bayram and Şahbaz, 2017).

In the context of online shopping, situations that consumers traditionally encounter during shopping are often transforming into technology-based phenomena (Çallı, 2010). Recent studies indicate a noticeable rise in the e-satisfaction rate in online shopping. It has been observed that 80% of customers satisfied with online shopping make another purchase from the same virtual store within two months, and more than 90% of them recommend the store to people in their social circle (Koçak, 2010). In online shopping, factors such as website design, ease of use, financial security, and the ability to interact with different customers are among the factors that influence e-customer satisfaction in the online system (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003; Chang and Chen, 2008).

E-Loyalty

When the term "loyalty," when used in the sense of genuine commitment is considered more broadly, it encompasses meanings such as sincere and trustworthy friendship, a sense of authenticity in experienced emotions and thoughts, and the absence of deception (Koç, 2002). The concept of customer loyalty has taken on a new dimension with the establishment of various marketing relationships between businesses and customers. Customer loyalty is described as the presence of continuous relationships established and maintained with a business from which services are received (Sarı and Kulualp, 2019) or as the psychological attachment of customers to a brand or provider despite various alternatives (Helm and Höser, 1995). Oliver (1999) defines it as a consumer's desire and behaviour to make future purchases based on their preference for a product or service they have previously preferred. Even though the concept of customer loyalty has been approached from different dimensions by numerous researchers, it is noticeable that the definitions often revolve around customers' repeating their purchases (Varinli and Acar, 2011).

Customer loyalty has evolved into a crucial and vital element for companies due to changing circumstances, marked by the ease of acquiring customers and, conversely, the ease of losing them (Bayuk and Küçük, 2007). Due to the increasing competition driven by digitization in our world, what businesses desire the most has become to have loyal customers (Güllü, Uyar, and Sargın, 2021). Having loyal customers is an indispensable condition for companies (Faiz, 2018). Nevertheless, as the competitive environment intensifies and consumer needs and demands continually evolve, achieving customer loyalty has become notably more difficult (Çatı and Koçoğlu, 2008).

Options that provide advantages such as time, cost, accessibility, and speed to both customers and companies (Eng and Kim, 2006), along with e-business models, have transformed the concept of customer loyalty into an electronic loyalty form, adapting to online platforms. The concept of e-loyalty, while similar to the

traditional customer loyalty concept, is a concept influenced by different elements due to its relevance to services and business processes in virtual environments (Koçak, 2023). In today's rapidly progressing shift of businesses from the traditional business environment to the online environment (Sevim, 2018), capturing e-loyalty can be considered of utmost importance. Loyalty in the traditional market has transformed into e-loyalty with digital change (Toufaily, Ricard, and Perrien, 2013) and has been attempted to be explained through various definitions in the literature. The concept of e-loyalty has been a subject of research since the 2000s to the present day. Srinivasan et al. (2002) define the concept of e-loyalty as the repeat purchase behaviour that arises from the customer's positive attitude towards the e-retailer and customers continually examining business websites and spending time on these websites (Gommans, Krishman, and Scheffold, 2001). In another definition, e-loyalty is explained as customers not switching the website they use during their shopping and favouring this site over others. Jin, Park, and Kim (2008) described e-loyalty as the behavioural and emotional desire of customers to repurchase the products or services offered by companies. Customers' pleasure and satisfaction levels during online processes are considered a factor influencing the formation of e-loyalty.

The Relationship between E-Satisfaction and E-Loyalty

The relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty is a significant topic that has been investigated in various research. The reason for the significance of this relationship is that e-satisfaction lies in e-satisfaction being a decisive factor driving e-loyalty and one of the primary dimensions for assessing consumer loyalty (Bayuk and Küçük, 2007: 287). A consumer who is satisfied with the service received has very few reasons to switch to a different business. It has been observed that increasing customer satisfaction leads to emotional loyalty and an intention to make repeat purchases (Methlie-Nysveen, 1999).

Examining research on e-loyalty, it becomes apparent that trust and satisfaction concepts are the most prominent among the prerequisites of e-loyalty (Güllü, Uyar, and Sargın, 2021). Upon further review of the literature, it is evident in many studies that e-satisfaction has a positive impact on e-loyalty (Gounaris, Dimitriadis, and Stathakopoulos, 2010; Ladhari and Leclerc, 2013; Li, Aham-Anyanwu, Tevrizci, and Luo, 2015; Pappas, Pateli, Giannakos, and Chrissikopoulos, 2014; Yaşin et al., 2017; Güllü, Uyar, and Sargın, 2021). In the research by Moriuchi and Takahashi (2016) on Japanese customers, it was concluded that e-satisfaction has an impact on e-loyalty. In the study conducted by Tsang et al. (2010) in the tourism industry, it was revealed that online service quality has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction.

3. Methods And Hypotheses

This study aims to determine the relationship between changing travel habits and the increasing importance of e-customer satisfaction levels offered by online travel agencies and e-customer loyalty. The population of this study consists of

individuals in Turkey who have the potential to engage in online shopping activities for personal use through the Internet, which involves purchasing products or services (e-commerce). According to the results of the address-based population registration system announced by the TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute), the population residing in Turkey as of December 31, 2022, is 85,279,553 individuals. The rate of individuals with internet access who purchased products or services for personal use via the internet, as announced by TUIK, was 46.2% in the year 2022. In light of these data, 39,399,153 individuals constitute the population of the research.

In this study conducted using a quantitative research method, a convenience sampling approach was employed, and surveys were administered to 604 individuals and 405 surveys were included in the study. The obtained data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), presenting significant findings regarding the relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty among those who make purchases from online travel agencies.

In this research, it was assumed that the participant responses to the research questions were sincere and accurate and that the participants have the knowledge and experience to evaluate the services they receive from online travel agencies. Furthermore, this study, conducted nationwide in Turkey, is limited to Turkish customers who purchased services from online travel agencies that were accessible based on the sample determined in February and March 2023, when data were collected.

The hypothesis has been stated as follows within the context of the research.

H1: E-satisfaction has an impact on e-loyalty.

4. Findings

Data analysis for the research was conducted using SPSS for Windows 25.0 and AMOS 23.0 software. To assess the reliability of the study, a "Reliability Analysis" was conducted, and to examine the structural validity, a "Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)" was applied using the AMOS program. Path analyses were carried out on the obtained analytical models.

For the research to be conducted, the analyzed dataset should be suitable for multivariate normal distribution (Byrne, 2001). Thus, the existence of multivariate outliers was investigated using Mahalanobis distance values. Especially for multivariate and high-dimensional datasets, the Mahalanobis criterion, which is based on relationships between observations, is recommended for outlier detection (Johnson and Wichern, 2002). Since the outliers can potentially influence the outcomes of statistical tests, the presence of such values in the datasets was examined before the analyses and corrected if necessary.

The conformity of the used data to the normal distribution was assessed using Q-Q Plot graphs (Chan, 2003). Furthermore, the normality of the used data is contingent on the skewness and kurtosis values being within the range of ±3 (Shao,

2002). Pearson correlation analysis was employed to evaluate the relationship between variables.

Table 1: The distribution of research participants' socio-demographic characteristics

Variables		n	%
Age	Between the ages of 18-27	219	54.1
	Between the ages of 28-37	93	23.0
	Between the ages of 38-47	62	15.3
	Between the ages of 48-57	22	5.4
	Between the ages of 58-67	9	2.2
Gender	Female	194	47.9
	Male	211	52.1
Marital status	Married	139	34.3
	Single	266	65.7
Educational background	Primary School	22	5.4
	High School	85	21.0
	University	247	61
	Graduate Degree	51	12.6
Monthly level of income	Between 0-11.500	166	41.0
	Between 11.501-23.000	123	30.4
	Between 23.001-34.500	51	12.6
	34.501-46.000	21	5.2
	Between 46.001-57.500	13	3.2
	57,501 and above	31	7.7
Occupational group	Public employee	43	10.6
	Private Sector Employee	182	44.9
	Business owner/independent business/self-employed	45	11.1
	Student	103	25.4
	Retired	5	1.2

	Other	27	6.7
Total		**405**	**100.0**

Upon analyzing the distribution concerning participants' age, it's evident that more than half, with a 54% ratio, are in the 18-27 age range. Regarding gender distribution, it is noted that 47.9% are female, and 52.1% are male. Additionally, the majority, accounting for 65.7%, are single. Examining the distribution related to participants' educational status, it is observed that more than half, with a 61% ratio, are university graduates. It is observed that 41% of the participants have an income level at or below the minimum wage (between 0-11,500 TL) during the period of the study, while 30.4% have a monthly income level in the range above the minimum wage and up to twice the minimum wage (11,501 TL - 23,000 TL). When examining the occupational groups of the participants, it is observed that the highest proportions are formed by private sector employees (44.9%) and students (25.4%).

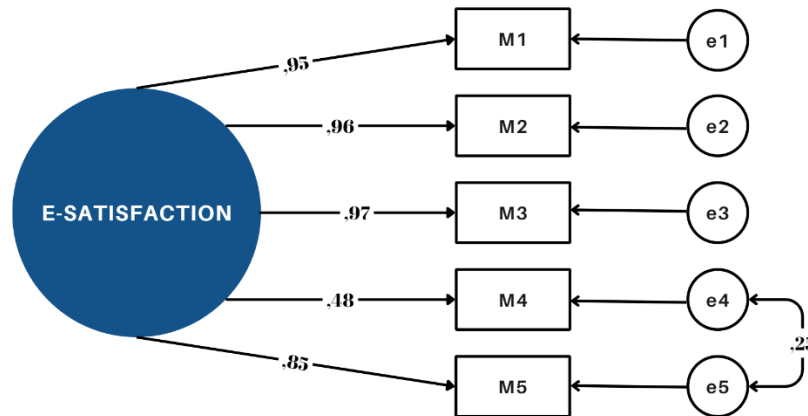The factor analysis model and results for the e-satisfaction scale are provided below.

Figure 1: The model for the one-factor confirmatory factor analysis of the e-satisfaction scale

Table 2: Results regarding the measurement model of the e-satisfaction scale

Factors	Statements	Factor Loadings	Standard Error	t Values
F1: E-Satisfaction	I1	0.947	-	-
	I2	0.958	0.023	43.110
	I3	0.970	0.022	45.831
	I4	0.478	0.067	10.607
	I5	0.845	0.035	27.510
Total Reliability α= 0.905				

*Each of the factor loading scores is significant at p<0.05 level.

Upon examining the correlations between variables, it is observed that the factor loadings of the measurement items are 0.40 or higher, and all correlation relationships are statistically significant. Additionally, the reliability analysis results of the scale used in the research are provided in the table, and these findings indicate that the scale is highly reliable.

Table 3: Goodness of fit values of the structural model of the e-satisfaction scale

	The Values of the Structural Model	**Recommended Values***
CMIN/DF	3.447	≤5
RMSEA	0.078	≤0.10
CFI	0.996	≥0.80
TLI	0.989	≥0.80
IFI	0.996	≥0.80
RFI	0.985	≥0.80
NFI	0.994	≥0.80
SRMR	0.009	≤0.10

*Schermelleh-Engel, 2003

Based on the outcomes of the confirmatory factor analysis, five items have been associated with a single dimension. Based on the analysis results, some adjustments have been made to the model. Following these adjustments, the results that the fit index values are within acceptable ranges were presented in the table.

The factor analysis model and results for the e-loyalty scale are provided below.
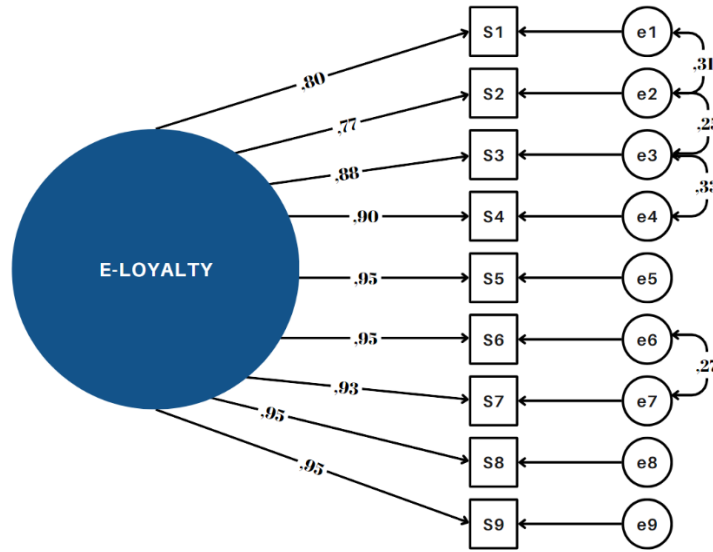
Figure 2: The model for the one-factor confirmatory factor analysis of the e-loyalty scale

Table 4: Results regarding the measurement model of the e-loyalty scale

Factors	Statements	Factor Loadings	Standard Error	t Values
F1: E-Loyalty	R1	0.800	-	-
	R2	0.770	0.047	21.394
	R3	0.882	0.051	21.594
	R4	0.899	0.052	22.214
	R5	0.947	0.048	24.135
	R6	0.946	0.046	24.103
	R7	0.932	0.046	23.491
	R8	0.950	0.047	24.260
	R9	0.948	0.047	24.169
Total Reliability α= 0.975				

*Each of the factor loading scores is significant at p<0.05 level

The analysis of relationships between variables has revealed that the factor loadings of the measurement items are above 0.40, and all correlation relationships are statistically significant. Similarly, the results of the reliability analysis of the scale used in the study have been presented in the table, and these findings indicate that the scale has high reliability.

Table 5: Goodness of fit values of the structural model of the e-loyalty scale

	The Values of the Structural Model	**Recommended Values***
CMIN/DF	4.519	≤5
RMSEA	0.093	≤0.10
CFI	0.985	≥0.80
TLI	0.976	≥0.80
IFI	0.985	≥0.80
RFI	0.969	≥0.80
NFI	0.980	≥0.80
SRMR	0.015	≤0.10

*Schermelleh-Engel, 2003

Based on the outcomes of the confirmatory factor analysis, nine items have been associated with a single dimension (indicated in the Table). Necessary improvements have been made in this model. In subsequent fit index calculations, it has been demonstrated that the fit index values are within acceptable ranges.

Table 6: Normality analysis results of variables

	Skewness	**Kurtosis**	**Status**
1- E-Satisfaction	-0.834	-0.009	Normal
2- E-Loyalty	-0.985	0.170	Normal

*$p<0.05$

The results of the normality analysis of the scale used in the research are presented in the table, and it has been determined that the data's skewness and kurtosis values fall within the ±3 range, indicating that it conforms to a normal distribution.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of the variables

	Minimum	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
1- E -Satisfaction	5.00	25.00	19.28	5.62
2- E- Loyalty	9.00	45.00	35.16	10.30

*$p<0.05$

The descriptive statistics of the variables are provided in the table. The mean value for e- satisfaction is 19.28, while the mean value for e-loyalty is 35.16.

Table 8: The relationship between variables

		1	**2**
1- E-Satisfaction	r	1.000	0.835
	p	-	0.000*
2- E- Loyalty	r		1.000
	p		-

*p<0.05

Pearson correlation analysis was employed to evaluate the relationship between the variables. As a result of this analysis, a positive and statistically significant relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty has been observed (r=0.835, p<0.05).

Table 9: The impact of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty

Impact	**Estimation (β)**	**Standard Error**	**t**	**p**	**Conclusion**
E-Satisfaction-E- Loyalty	0.879	0.047	17.828	***	Acceptance
Fit Indices					
CMIN/DF	4.624				
RMSEA	0.095				
CFI	0.968				
TLI	0.959				
IFI	0.968				
RFI	0.949				
NFI	0.960				
SRMR	0.026				

***p<0.05

When the impact of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty is examined, it is observed that it has a statistically significant and positive effect (β=0.879, p<0.05). In this case, it can be said that Hypothesis H1 is accepted.

Conclusion and Suggestions

With the rapid growth of technology and internet usage in today's world, people can now conveniently take care of many of their daily tasks online. The speed and convenience provided by the online environment are increasingly preferred by individuals, particularly those with busy schedules, as it simplifies their daily routines. Especially during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic period, online shopping has significantly simplified the lives of individuals and it has become an indispensable option. People now prefer to purchase their everyday needs such as groceries, clothing, technological products, travel etc. through online channels. Consequently, many companies strive to adapt to the changing shopping preferences and work to conduct sales on online platforms. Businesses need to keep track of developments and innovations to meet the demands of individuals and sustain themselves in the market. Similar to many other sectors, the tourism industry must monitor and keep pace with the ever-changing technologies. In the tourism sector, many businesses have adapted to these advancements, and many transactions are now utilized online by consumers. Travel agencies providing tourism services have also adapted to this evolution and have begun to continue their services in virtual environments. Delivering these services, which are traditionally provided, in an online environment with the same emphasis on quality and trust is of great importance. Consumers making purchases on online travel websites should be able to conduct their transactions easily and securely on the site. The quality of the provided service should be conveyed to the consumer, ensuring the e-satisfaction of the consumer with the purchase. In this e-satisfaction, elements such as the consumer's ease of use of the website, its reliability, the availability of customer services that can be reached and relied upon when needed, the approach of these customer services, being solution-oriented, and the existence of a system where requests and complaints can be easily communicated are highly important from the consumer's perspective. The high quality of the purchased service leads to consumer e-satisfaction, which then transforms into e-loyalty. A satisfied consumer with the service obtained from online travel agencies that efficiently employ these factors is likely to make the same agency their first choice for another purchase of a tourism service. Similar to other traditionally provided services, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty are considered highly important criteria in businesses that offer virtual services. Traditional businesses aim to reach a specific loyal customer base, whereas for online service providers, achieving and sustaining a certain level of service quality is influential in building loyalty.

A review of studies in the literature reveals that in the research conducted by Elvir Kondo (2023), e-loyalty was found to have a positive impact on e-satisfaction. Furthermore, when examining the study by Bayram and Şahbaz (2016), which examines the impact of travel agencies' practices on service quality, e-satisfaction, and e-loyalty, it is possible to reach similar conclusions. In the study carried out by Yaşin et al. (2017) on an online retail shopping site, it was revealed that e-loyalty is shaped based on consumers' satisfaction, trust, and perceptions of quality.

This study has conducted an in-depth examination of the impact of e-satisfaction in travel agencies on e-loyalty. The findings reveal that e-satisfaction

has a statistically significant and positive impact on e-loyalty. This shows that customer satisfaction with travel agencies' online platforms can increase the likelihood of customers preferring the same agency again. The obtained value of β=0.879 indicates not only the presence of this relationship but also its substantial strength. The statistical significance value of p<0.05 confirms that these results were not obtained by chance and are scientifically reliable.

Based on the results obtained, some suggestions can be made for travel agencies. When devising strategies to increase e-satisfaction, travel agencies should actively take customer feedback into account. Customer satisfaction surveys or feedback forms can offer crucial data for agencies to enhance their services and online platforms. Considering the significant impact of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty, it is also crucial for agencies to direct their technological investments and digital transformation projects in this direction. Making online booking and information processes smoother and user-friendly can be one of the key factors in increasing e-satisfaction. Additionally, agencies should continuously update and optimize their websites and mobile applications. The staff of travel agencies should fully grasp the significance of e-satisfaction and provide services in line with it. In this context, organizing training sessions and workshops can be beneficial for agencies. Lastly, the evident impact of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty examined in this study demonstrates its critical importance for digital marketing, customer relationship management, and service quality strategies.

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