# THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOSITY IMPRESSION AS A MEDIATOR ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN THE AIRLINES INDUSTRY

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore customer loyalty based on corporate image, customer trust, and emotional intimacy through customer experiences of religious impressions in the airline industry. This research uses SEM ANOVA v 25 and the unit of analysis was conducted on the number of 223 passengers who flew overseas with flights longer than 6 hours. Primary data were obtained from the field results through a questionnaire. The findings suggest that customer experience of religiosity impression as mediator on the settings and forming airline customer loyalty and were an effective strategy for attracting passengers more satisfied and more loyal. The evidence documented in this paper is first known to measure the role of mediator between corporate image, customer trust, emotional intimacy, and customer loyalty. The findings are based on small passenger and small areas, only focused on overseas flight from Indonesia international Airport. This research indicates that airlines need to focus on strengthening customer trust, emotional intimacy and company values practices and closely monitor customer negative impression sentiment. This original piece of research explores the mediating role of Customer Experience of Religious Impression between corporate image, customer trust, emotional intimacy.

**Keywords**: Customer Loyalty, Corporate Image, Customer Trust, Emotional Intimacy, Customer Experience of Religiosity Impression.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Customer loyalty is a fundamental concept that is widely discussed in a variety of marketing literature that is closely related to company performance. Managing customer relationships and increasing customer loyalty are important strategic topics for the company (Zhang et al., 2014). Building customer loyalty can provide value in developing competitive advantage (Rai & Medha, 2013), key strategies (Prentice & Loureiro, 2017). Two decades ago, research on loyalty centered on identifying and analyzing the antecedents of customer loyalty and examining the structural relationships of each predictor which includes service quality and customer satisfaction. Understanding how customers become loyal is a very fundamental factor for the company, because customer loyalty provides instructions for companies how to maintain and improve competitive advantage in a very tight competitive environment (Ha & Park, 2013). We suggest that the role of customer loyalty in high competition, low market growth, and retaining loyal customers is very important for the survival of the company. While Bhat et al.

(2018) viewed from a different perspective that customer loyalty is crucial for the company or organization and for the customers themselves.

Customer loyalty is influenced by various factors including corporate image, corporate brand, service quality, customer trust, emotional intimacy, emotional closeness, customer experience and customer satisfaction. Here the author sees and analyzes unfixed variables. Research about customer experience of religiosity impression as mediator in forming customer loyalty is still rarely done, specifically in airlines industry. Thus, the novelty in this study is the customer experience of religiosity impression can form customer loyalty strengthen.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Corporate Image**

The value of customer loyalty for the service industry had a potential effect on developing competitive advantage for service organizations or companies (Rai & Medha, 2013). And customer loyalty plays an important role in attracting and retaining customers, good words from customers are reliable information for other customers to make decisions, and ultimately customer retention can reduce marketing and operational costs, thereby increasing company's competitive advantage Ha & Park (2013). Consumer behavior (Jacoby & Chesnut, 1978; Tucker, 1964), Invalid source specified. Nguyen & Leblanc (2001) Explain that corporate image is a picture of the overall impression that is created in the minds of the public towards the company. All planned and unplanned verbal and visual elements that come from the company leave an impression on the observing individual (Shee & Abratt, 1989). Tangibles, empathy, and assurance of service quality are not significant antecedents of corporate image and customer trust (Song et al., 2019). Chien & Chi (2019) state that corporate image plays an important role for service-oriented companies in maintaining customer loyalty. National flight image, price, and reputation have a positive and significant effect on flight user loyalty (Dolnicar et al., 2011). There is a positive relationship between Corporate Image and customer loyalty, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, and service quality and customer loyalty (Aboul-Ela, 2015). Corporate Image has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty (Siitonen, 2017).

#### **Customer Trust**

Trust is a catalysator that connecting customer satisfaction in accordance with expectations in various transactions between sellers and buyers. According to other researchers that trust drives increased of purchases, basic considerations of attitudes and actions in the business world, characteristics related to integrity and competence, often faced with uncertainty, reduce opportunism and building long-term partnership relationships. This trust cannot be easily recognized and accepted by other parties but must be built from scratch and can be proven, so that studies on customer trust are important. Every individual has understood of trust related to trust in people or other subjects, such as the behavior of mutual trust during a certain interdependent time process (Paparoidamis et al., 2019). A set of expectations that are socially studied and socially confirmed as well as those of other people or organizational entities (Park et al., 2004). Individual similarity, social exchange, and personal conditions (Akhtar et al., 2019). Trust develops a result of a strong belief that trustees are reliable, honest, and kind. And according to Mayer et al. (1995) that trust is a multidimensional concept that has three dimensions: ability, benevolence, and integrity. Correspondingly Park et al. (2004) state that

customer trust can be defined in three dimensions, namely expertise, integrity, and social benevolence. Trust is the customer's belief that the company has the competence or technical skills to produce and provide specific services and be able to perform according to business functions effectively. Customers expect that companies have the skills needed to produce products and services to satisfy consumer needs. Trust, satisfaction, and customer-company identification have a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty (Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013). And it can be stated that customer trust is a consumer perspective as consumer confidence that the company will perform consistently with expectations related to the ability/expertise, integrity, and goodwill to adjust to customer expectations. Research questions based on these descriptions:

# **Emotional Intimacy**

Research in psychology and marketing shows that ordinary bonding theory outperforms person-to-person relationships (Thomson & Johnson, 2006) whereas for ownership relationships (Kleine & Baker, 2004) relationship with places (Williams & Vaske, 2003), firm relationships company or brands with consumers according to Ahuvia et al. (2006); Park et al. (2006). Fournier & Alvarez (2012) provide empirical evidence that the behavior of commercial relationships is actually similar with personal relationships. Human relations through brand personification (Xie & Heung, 2012). Brock & Zhou (2012) state that the concept of emotional closeness to customers is a concept that can be different from the constructs of trust and commitment. The impact of emotional attachment and product quality on customer loyalty is partly through strengthening customer satisfaction (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Customer intimacy have a significant relationship with customer loyalty (Tabrani et al., 2018) The concept of emotional intimacy is a metamorphosis of the concept of brand relationships based on the relationship between marketing theory and interpersonal psychology, which is considered superior in providing insight into the role of brands in consumers' lives and understanding consumer needs.

# **Customer Experience of Religiosity Impression and Customer Loyalty**

Human memory always stores and contains emotional aspects. Bond theory has a tendency to investigate humans to form, maintain and cause bonds of affection with certain people according to Laming & Mason (2014) say that customer experience is a physical and emotional experience that occurs through interactions with product and/or brand service offerings from the first direct and conscious point of contact, through a total journey to the postconsumption stage. Cognitive recognition or perception that arises from stimulated customer motivation after observing or engaging in event (Chen & Lin, 2015). The more emotional aspects in one memory, then the attention will usually be more significant to an event related to these emotions. If the emotions are positive, then the interest in relevant events will be stronger. Customer experience has a positive effect on customer loyalty (Nobar & Rostamzadeh, 2018). Customer experience which includes sense, feel, act, think, and relate is an important element in the process of forming customer satisfaction (Pozza, 2014). Tang & Li (2015) said that just like cultural factors, religious belief has a direct and indirect influence on psychology and consumer behavior. Choi (2010) States that religiosity can limit or direct behavior, including responses to marketing. Religiosity is a significant antecedent of Muslim-friendly tourism, customer engagement and tourist satisfaction (Abror et al., 2020). Minton et al. (2019) emphasize that consumer behavior is driven by the beliefs and values that have an impact on consumption preferences and experiences in consuming. Religiosity may be positively related to life satisfaction through the enjoyment of attending services and positive attributions (Idler & George, 1998). The results also provided empirical evidence that there was an indirect influence of religiosity on taxpayer compliance (Nazaruddin, 2019). And it can be stated that the customer experience of religiosity impression is a cognitive and emotional reaction of consumers to interactions with products/services received based on religious values held. Previously there have been several studies on religiosity toward customer loyalty in other industries such as manufacturing, hospitality, banking, cooperation, culinary, and tourism, but not in the airlines industry. Customer perceptions in determining a choice can be described as follows (Figure 1):



FIGURE 1 THE FLOW OF LOYALTY

H1 Customer Experience of Religiosity Impression mediates the relationship between corporate image, customer trust, emotional intimacy, and customer loyalty

And the structural model as shown below (Figure 2)



FIGURE 2 THE STRUCTURAL MODE

#### METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted to test the hypotheses that had been presented. Researcher determines the source data criteria in this study are as follows: passenger aircraft with a flight time of more than 6 hour, passenger aircraft more than 3 times with a flight time of more than 6 hour, international airport used, and passenger aircraft over 17 years old. The sampling technique followed the steps recommended for studies utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (Blunch, 2012). A rule of thumb for studies employing SEM is a recommended sample of 200 as fair and 300 as good (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The cut-off factor loading of 5% and AMOS exceeded the threshold value of 0.05, confirming the high reliability of results (Iacobucci, 2010). And sample of passenger airplane was selected from 223 respondents from 3 international airports in Indonesia. A questionnaire was designed to assess each indicator of variables. Participants involved at this stage in the data collection process reflected a cross section of passenger from number of functional areas on site, e.g., Soekarno-Hatta International airport, Juanda International airport, and Adi Sucipto Airport. Participants were asked to indicate their perceptions with each of the 18 items included of corporate image, customer trust, emotional intimacy, customer experience of religiosity impression, and customer loyalty. Emotional attachment is measured by seven items (Levy & Hino, 2016; Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012). Religiosity scale is measured by seven items and was developed from a number of previous studies (Suhartanto et al., 2020; Wahyuni & Fitriani, 2017), and adjusted after expert interviews. Customer satisfaction is measured by two items (Suhartanto et al., 2018); while customer loyalty is measured by three items (Abd Rahman et al. 2015; Aisyah, 2016) and questionnaire was assessed using seven-point Likert scale (1=worse to 7=excellent).

#### RESULTS

An exploratory factor analysis was carried out to uncover the structure of the variables. Items with low factor loadings were removed resulting in 5 factors, because they loaded above 0.5. 1 item (values) from corporate image, 1 item (trusted) from customer trust, 1 item (bonding) from emotional intimacy, 1 item (feel) from customer experience of religiosity impression, and 1 item (primer) from customer loyalty. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the overall measurement model and to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. To effectively assess the validity of the measurement model, discriminant and convergent validity were assessed. Discriminant validity measures the degree to which factors that are supposed to measure a specific construct are actually unrelated (Wang & Wang, 2012). In this research, convergent validity was assessed using composite reliability and average variance explained (AVE). Using these measures, composite reliability (CR) should be above 0.6 and AVE should be above 0.5 for all constructs. These results show that the model meets the criteria for assessing convergent validity or better fit (Table 1).

Table 1 shows the results of the test of hypotheses of the structural relationship between the research variables. For hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 5 both are not- significant influence, because *p*-values > 0.05, hence, hypotheses are not supported. The finding reveals that hypothesis 7, which examined the mediation of customer experience of religiosity impression between corporate image, customer trust, emotional intimacy are significants and supported ( $\beta$ = 0.375; *p* < 0.05).

Table 1 STANDARDIZED PATH COEFFICIENTS								
	Hyp.	Estimate	S.E.	t-values	P	Label		
Customer Experience of RI								
<	H2	-0.061	0.075	-0.805	0.421	Not Supported		
Customer trust								
Customer Experience of RI								
<	H6	0.524	0.088	5.976	***	Supported		
Emotional Intimacy								
Customer Experience of RI								
<	H4	0.260	0.059	4.423	***	Supported		
Corporate Image								
Customer Loyalty								
<	H7	0.375	0.072	5.184	***	Supported		
Customer Experience of RI								
Customer Loyalty								
<	H3	0.180	0.049	3.650	***	Supported		
Corporate Image								
Customer Loyalty								
<	H5	0.071	0.078	0.910	0.363	Not Supported		
Emotiional Intimacy								
Customer Loyalty								
<	H1	0.266	0.061	4.376	***	Supported		
Customer trust								

Table 2   DEFAULT MODEL CMIN								
Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	Р	CMIN/DF			
Default model	30	38,281	25	0.043	1,531			
Saturated model	55	0.000	0					
Independence model	10	1,537,963	45	0.000	34,177			

As shown in Table 2, the measurement construct model chi-square 1,531 < 2.0 and p-value 0,043 > 0.05 that means the construct model is fit and significant. The measurement model fit was assessed by evaluating the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), absolute fit measures including observed normed  $X^2$  ( $X^2$ /df), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual(SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness of fit (GFI), and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI). As shown in Table 3, all the fit indices met the recommended thresholds for evaluating model fit. It can therefore be concluded that the model fits the data well and can thus be used to explain the research hypotheses (Table 3).

Table 3 FIT INDICES OF CFA MODEL							
Measure	<b>Recommended threshold</b>	Scores					
Chi-square/df (CMIN/df	< 2.0	1.531					
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	>0.90	0.991					
Goodness of Fit (GFI)	>0.90	0.967					
Adjusted Goodness of Fit (AGFI)	>0.90	0.927					
TLI	>0.95	0.989					
Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation	< 0.08	0.049					

Based on the hypothesis test, there are 2 correlation models that are removed because

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they do not form a fit model, namely the direct effect of customer trust on customer experience of religiosity impression and the direct effect of emotional intimacy on customer loyalty, so a fit structural model is obtained. Thus, it can be stated that the mediating role of customer experience of religiosity impression between corporate image, customer trust, emotional intimacy and customer loyalty in the international route airline industry is proven. Then this hypothesis can be accepted (Figure 3).



# FIGURE 3 THE STRUCTURAL MODEL

#### DISCUSSION

Based on the result of this research, implies that indicator of customer trust such as honesty, customer experience of religiosity impression, integrity, responsibility, on-time, and rarely delay of flight are gave direct effect on customer loyalty. In line with (Rai & Srivastava, 2013) that service quality, customer satisfaction, customer trust, commitment, Corporate Image, and communication have positive effect on customer loyalty. And trust as mediator between procedural justice and customer loyalty (Hapsari et al., 2020).

So for customer experience of religiosity impression, Its indicates all groups of religiosity impression customer experience such as passenger awareness of religious displays on the plane, attention of passenger to cabin crew, safe inner feeling fly with religious airline, positive emotional feeling, religious experience, and surprise experience are more of positive outlook. On the other hand, customer loyalty shown from their awareness will make the first choice for that airline, will prioritize the airline as air transportation, will recommend to others, a friend, and family, so they promote the airline direct or indirect to others. This result contrary to Forgas et al. (2010) has studied of traditional and low cost; argue that perceived value has no effect on customer loyalty. And for religiosity impression customer experience, most of them have inner feeling good flying with that airline. And dominant affect to the customer loyalty is that they should be promoting the airline to the others. Everyone who will travel by airplane always has a special impression as a personal experience with an airline. And always want the best service,

comfortable, and safe, so that you can safely reach your destination. Vice versa, every airline, has provided excellent service to its customers, in the form of various services; friendliness, punctuality of flying both takeoff and landing. This means that all services are maximized to provide customer satisfaction. However, this service is a *"standard service"* in the aviation world because all airlines provide almost the same service. In fact, many consumers who will board the plane are traumatized by the various tragedies that have happened to an airline, or have heard about poor service, etc. which makes them reluctant to choose the airline (Curry, 2003). The sense of trauma, many risks, the passenger plane during the flight may be at risk. This could be due to the effects of human error on the ship or on the ground, due to various types of weather conditions, due to engine failure or by the use of weapons on the aircraft and the discomfort with its services and aircraft, will continue to remain in his mind as an experiential lesson (Hub & Komenda, 2017). The reason is that passenger like airline service such as honesty, customer experience of religiosity impression, integrity, responsibility, on time, and rarely delay. But passengers needed about religiosity service such as awareness, attention, inner feeling, emotional, religious experience, and sense of surprise.

There are many facts that airplane passengers who travel far more than 6 hours, when already on the plane, their activities are sleeping, playing cell phones, watching videos, chatting, etc. so that they do not pay attention to the conditions and environment of the aircraft room (instructions from flight attendants, announcements from pilot, other written instructions) because they feel familiar and experienced. Of course, from this description, there is one gap in the form of service that does not exist or has not been carried out by an airline, except for transporting groups of Umrah or Haj pilgrims, namely religious services, because indeed the situation and conditions must support religion with the aim of forming a religious experience for passengers on an airline.

But what if that religious service is served to conventional passengers? And it is novelty in service that shapes a religious experience for airplane passengers. Two important boundary conditions residing in the selling situation: purchase importance and relationship length (Guenzi et al., 2016). Therefore, it becomes important to apply and shape religious experiences for passengers. Then things that can be designed to shape religious experience are:

- 1. Airline performance with religious slogans and tag lines ("only prayer saves us") (Figueiredoa & Castro, 2019)
- 2. Starting from booking tickets online, always starting with greetings (for all beliefs)
- 3. Ticket inspection (always with greetings)
- 4. Dress modestly, do not invite negative thoughts
- 5. Invitation to pray which is direcustomer trustly led by the pilot or stewardess before takeoff
- 6. Slogans or writing in the cabin of a religious aircraft, are to remind him of his power
- 7. Presenting a religious specustomer trustacle; movies, songs, religious or other lecustomer trustures
- 8. Reminding us to pray while eating or sleeping
- 9. Remind the Muslim prayer time when it's time
- 10. Always give the best impression and service with an emotional approach to passengers (Chen et al., 2014)
- 11. Always maintain ethics in serving passengers
- 12. Inviting to pray when landing for the safety of all
- 13. Giving farewells and prayers of gratitude for flight safety
- 14. Providing the airline mascot as a souvenir

Because experiences can be shaped, and passengers do not just get on the plane by paying for the ticket, but they also buy a very valuable experience and will always be remembered, will

tell the experience they had, maybe even recommend to family, friends, or others to choose the airline. Thus, an airline with a service that is unique, different, and beyond service standards, will be a special action for prospective passengers and can make passengers loyal to the airline. Customer-oriented has to engage in the often difficult process of discovering their clients' needs and designing products and services that provide the ultimate benefit to the buyer (Keillor et al., 2000). Based on the result of the data description of the customer trust, it is known that airline passengers state that responsibility service is a factor that makes them loyal. The most dominant factor of each variable can be seen in see Figure 3.

And researcher suggests that strategic key to develop customer loyalty of passenger for airline is a maintaining customer trust and give religious customer experience. Where the hypothesis assumes that customer trust significantly affects in shaping customer loyalty.

These findings contrary to the research that has been done with (Dolnicar et al., 2011) who have identified the key factor driving and test the loyalty of the airline in Austria for flight to the Middle East and North America. It's contrary with Paitcika et al. (2020) they argue that responsiveness dimension failed to be extracted. That variables identified include image of companies, reputation, ticket, and frequency of flight. Geraldine (2013) support and have identified 600 respondents in Nigeria that Corporate Image has affect to loyalty behavior of passenger. While Briliana (2018) Consumer satisfaction on airline passenger loyalty: Antecedents and outcomes state that customer satisfaction, brand image, and customer involvement have effect to customer loyalty in Indonesia. Srivastava & Rai (2018) explained that customer loyalty has seen as a dual concept which has two main dimensions, namely the desire to repurchase and a positive customer attitude. Therefore, airlines had to provide service excellent to increase customer awareness, attention, inner feeling, emotional, religious experience, and sense of surprise. In line with Weismueller et al. (2020) state that to communicate valuable and accurate information and whether they are expected to have appropriate experience with a product or general expertise.

#### **Conclusion, Limitation, Implication and Further Research**

There are several limitations that can be identified for current research. First, generalize these results to a wider population problematic because the findings are based on small passenger and small areas, only focused on overseas flight from Indonesia international Airport. This study should be replicated with larger and more samples. Secondly, only passengers who have a minimum experience of 3 times flight more than 6 hours were observed. The last limitation, other variables of emotional closeness and customer involvement has not been identified. Future studies should seek to expand and deeply analysis the unidentified variables (emotional closeness and customer involvement) that affect a customer loyalty of airplane passenger.

This study provides empirical evidence showing that the customer trust is not only a key aspect of the case, but if it is described to support the developing of customer loyalty significantly for airline industry. Nevertheless, in other hand, that religiosity impression customer experience has the role to form customer loyalty as mediates between customer trust and customer loyalty.

This is an important implication because it supports stronger customer trust of passengers, that every airline must understand the need of passengers on their flight. According to Belobaba et al. (2009) that government policy, news media, millions of passengers should tell their unusual flight experience, whether it's fun or not fun, safe or unsafe, comfortable or uncomfortable, which eventually lead to loyalty.

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