

## **The Moderation Effect of Gender: A Case Study at an International Airport in Malaysia**

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*This study aims to investigate the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in the Malaysian low-cost carriers. A total of 163 completed questionnaires were collected from the passengers at the Sultan Ismail International Airport located in Johor, Malaysia. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the above objective. Findings indicate that customer satisfaction-behavioural intentions relationship was not moderated by customers' gender. Theoretical and managerial implications as well as conclusion are also explored.*

**JEL Codes:** Customer satisfaction, behavioural intentions, gender, low-cost carrier, Malaysia

### **1. Introduction**

Marketing is concerned with the satisfaction of the customers' needs and wants while achieving one's own organisational (or self) goals (Chung & McLarney 2000). The word satisfaction has been fundamental to the marketing concept for over three decades (Parker & Mathews 2001). Outstanding marketing companies go out of their way to keep important customers satisfied (Kotler et al., 2010). Satisfying customer is a key issue for all organisations in both the private and public sectors (Rampersad 2001). For an organisation to remain solvent, information regarding customer satisfaction must be adequately collected and analysed. Knox, Lindsay, and Kolb (1992) used product/ service content and the ability to satisfy customer demands as the basis for customer satisfaction strategies and analysis. As noted by Barsky and Labagh (1992), when analysing customer satisfaction strategies, one must consider the three vital factors, namely expectation and past experience, product and service performance and the factors affecting actual perception.

In contrast, intended behaviour reflects richer diagnostic value and it is more closely related to our actual behaviours (Huang, 2009). According to Soderlund and Ohman (2003), repatronising intentions, repurchasing intentions, and word-of-mouth intentions are

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frequent examples of intentions often appearing as dependent variables in satisfaction research. Undoubtedly, many researchers (e.g., Jen & Lu 2003; Saha 2009) agree that the association between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions has emerged as a topic of significant strategic concern. However, the reviewed literature indicates that marketing researchers seldom relate moderating effect of gender on the customer satisfaction-behavioural intentions relationship, specifically in the Malaysian low-cost carriers' environment. Today, the low-cost carriers have reformed the airline industry competitive environment within liberalised markets and have made major impacts in the world's domestic passenger markets, which had previously been largely controlled by full service network carriers (O'Connell & Williams 2005).

In summary, the current literature dealing with the interaction of gender and customer satisfaction is lacking in depth although it is apparent that gender of low-cost carriers' customers would very likely impact their behaviour intentions in response to their service satisfaction. Furthermore, those customers who were from different walks of life and gone through different stages of life cycle may seem to have different purchasing patterns. Against all these background, this study therefore attempts to provide additional insight into the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions by examining the moderating effect of the domestic passengers' gender of one of the low-cost carriers in Malaysia.

## **2. Literature Review**

Demographic variables, such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status are known as customer characteristic. To a certainty, these individual customer differences (e.g., gender, age and income) are significant determinants of the customer satisfaction (Bryant & Cha 1996; Johnson & Fornell 1991; Soderlund 2002). Gender refers to a set of characteristics differentiating between males and females. Empirical studies conducted by Jaffe (1991) and Jaffe and Berger (1988) found that gender identity plays a significant role. Drawing on social role theory (Archer 1996; Eagly 1987), men are more willing than women to take risks (Powell & Ansic 1997; Garbarino & Strahilevitz 2004) because socially men are expected to engage in risky behaviour. Because it is riskier to switch providers and try something new, if men follow internalised gender roles, they may be less likely to remain loyal when their satisfaction levels change. Conversely, women are expected to react differently to satisfaction level changes (Garbarino & Strahilevitz 2004). As noted by Carlson (1972), females were more communal concerns than males through emphasising a need for personal affiliation and a desire to be at one with others.

In addition to its possible direct effects on outcome variables such as loyalty (e.g., Fournier 1998; Korgaonkar, Lund & Price 1985; Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf & Kleijnen 2001), gender may also serve as a moderator variable for marketing in general and consumer behaviour in particular (Saad & Gill 2000). Empirical studies in the context of loyalty show that gender moderates the relationship between various aspects of satisfaction and selected measures of loyalty. For instance, Mittal and Kamakura (2001) found that the relationship between satisfaction and behaviour intentions is stronger for men than for women: Men who are satisfied with a product are more likely to repurchase it than are women. In another study by Homburg and Giering (2001), by using demographic variables as moderators, they found that only age, income, and variety-seeking were important moderator of customer loyalty. Besides, Cooil et al. (2007) also investigated the moderating role of customer characteristics on the relation between customer satisfaction

and customer loyalty. Their findings suggest that length of relationship and income were negatively moderated the customer satisfaction-loyalty relationship.

As noted by Ndubisi (2006), the marketing literature is still lacking major research into the interaction of gender in services selling-buying situations. Furthermore, Palan (2001) also admitted that gender salience research related to consumer behaviour has been very limited. In view of the limited research on the role of gender in customer satisfaction and customer behavioural intentions in the Malaysian context, this study attempts to enhance the current understanding in this area. The hypothesis, therefore is formulated as follows:

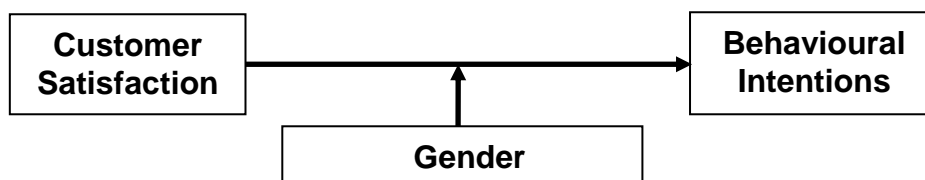
*H1: Gender will significantly moderate the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.*

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants and Instrumentation**

A total of 200 respondents were selected from the passengers of one of the most Malaysian well-known low-cost carriers who were departed or landed at Sultan Ismail International Airport located in Johor state, Malaysia. The return rate for questionnaires was 81.5%, resulting 163 completed and usable responses. The use of convenience sampling was justified by the fact that this study was constrained by time, manpower and cost resources. The questionnaire items were adapted from different researchers. Customer satisfaction was adapted and modified from a study by Lee, Lee, and Yoo (2000). Customer satisfaction was made up of three items including total experience, decision making and personal feeling. Items for customer behavioural intentions were adapted from Lemon, Rust, and Zeithaml (2001), Mittal and Lassar (1998) and Zeithaml Berry, and Parasuraman (1996). Customer behavioural intentions items were three and consisted of personal intention, encouraging others and positive word of mouth. The five-point Likert scale was developed to measure customer satisfaction and customer behavioural intentions. The Likert scale was interval-scale instrument appropriate for measuring the above continuous variables. The conceptual framework has been developed in accordance to the research question generalized for this study, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Research Framework**



#### **3.2 Analysis**

To investigate internal consistency, reliability test was conducted by using the values of Cronbach's Alpha. Consistency in reliability means when tests measure the same thing more than once and the result in terms of the average inter-correlation among the items measuring the concept. The closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the higher the internal consistency reliability (Sekaran 2003). In addition, factor analysis was conducted on the variables of customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Results from the

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factor analysis showed that all the variables were accepted and categorized under one dimension for customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

### 4. Findings

As depicted in Table 1, the male respondents (60.1%) formed the majority. The largest age group responded in this study was from 31 to 40 years old (43.0%). Majority of the respondents worked in private sector (41.1%) and earned RM1000 to RM2000 (35.6%). Approximately, 59.5% of the respondents used the flight monthly, 47.2% of them were travelled for the purpose of visiting family and friends whereby the most popular destination was Penang (46.1%). The internal consistency of the instrument was tested through reliability analysis. The Cronbach's alpha for customer satisfaction and customer behavioural intention were 0.96 and 0.97 respectively, thus providing evidence of statistical reliability. The findings also show that index of skewness and kurtosis for student satisfaction was found not more than 2.5 times of their standard error. Based on these results, we conclude that customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions fulfilled the assumption of normality (Morgan & Griego 1998).

**Table 1:** Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	98	60.1
	Female	65	39.9
Age	Less than 20	8	4.9
	21 – 30	27	16.6
	31 – 40	70	43.0
	41 – 50	49	30.0
	More than 50	9	5.5
Occupation	Private	67	41.1
	Government	33	20.2
	Businesses	18	11.0
	Student	24	14.7
	Unemployed	21	13.0
Income	No income	45	27.6
	Less than RM1000	13	8.0
	RM1000 – RM2000	58	35.6
	RM2000 – RM3000	39	23.9
	RM3000 – RM4000	8	4.9
Frequency of flying	Weekly	30	18.4
	Monthly	97	59.5
	Yearly	36	22.1
Purpose of travelling	Business	14	8.6
	Holiday	68	41.7
	Visiting	77	47.2
	Others	4	2.5
Destination	Kota Kinabalu	20	12.3
	Kuala Lumpur	37	22.7
	Kuching	10	6.1
	Miri	10	6.1
	Penang	75	46.1
	Sibu	11	6.7

Hierarchical regression analysis was then used to assess the moderating effects of gender on customer satisfaction-behavioural intentions relationship. Dummy variable was created for gender in this study, which was introduced into a regression equation (Hair et al. 2009).

In this regard, the female was chosen to serve as the reference category. The results positing the moderating influence of gender on the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions was tested using a 3-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The results are summarized in Table 2. On the whole, the F change values indicated that at the 5% significance level, gender did not interact with the customer satisfaction to modify the form of the relationship between behavioural intentions and customer satisfaction. The moderating effects of gender on the relationships between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions were not supported. Therefore, the *H1* was not substantiated.

**Table 2:** Hierarchical Regression Results of the Moderating Influence of Gender

Dependent variables: Behavioural Intentions	Moderator: Gender <i>Beta</i> ( $\beta$ )+
Customer satisfaction (CS)	0.994***
Dummy for gender (DG)	0.083
CS x DG	-0.090
R <sup>2</sup>	0.919
R <sup>2</sup> change#	0.001
Sig. F change#	0.165

+ standardized coefficients in the third model of the hierarchical regression  
# refers to the change in R<sup>2</sup> upon inclusion of the interaction terms  
\* p-value < .1; \*\* p-value < .05; \*\*\* p-value < .01

## 5. Discussion

Contrary to the conclusions of Mittal and Kamakura (2001), the results showed that gender of low-cost carriers' customer has neither a moderating effect nor a direct effect on behavioural intentions. Possible explanation for this phenomenon can be linked to the specialized nature of respondents. Regardless of males or females, price is still being used as their predominant decision when travelling domestically. Moreover, service quality may not vary much across all low-cost carriers in Malaysia because what is provided in most of the carriers is quite uniform. Consequently, the males and females were not able to differentiate between low-cost carriers. It is therefore, not surprising that gender did not emerge as a moderator of customer satisfaction-behavioural intentions relationship.

The findings may also suggest that a linear relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions is sufficient when investigating customers of low-cost carriers although there may be some studies that indicate other determinants of behavioural intentions besides customer satisfaction. At least in the case of Malaysian low-cost carriers, it is more than enough to examine a linear relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in the marketing research, as a large portion of variance was found to explain in behavioural intentions in the direct relationship study. The discussion implies that theoretically in the Malaysian airline setting and low-cost carriers specifically, the customer satisfaction related to behavioural intentions in a direct or linear fashion. In terms of managerial implications, the non-moderating impact of gender on intended behaviour may suggest that the low-cost carriers in Malaysia may not need to segment their market in accordance to gender since satisfying customers are highly translated into their behavioural intentions. Overall, it signals to this well-known Malaysian low-cost carriers, on one hand, to respond to customer satisfaction, but on the other hand,

it does not necessarily to incorporate customers' gender differences into their market segmentation strategy since it may not serve as an instrumental for forming evaluations of customer satisfaction in response to intended behaviours of passengers of Sultan Ismail International Airport in Johor, Malaysia.

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