# The Relationship between Trust, Value and Loyalty in the Internet Era

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine the role of trust and perceived value in relationships perceived by customers' loyalty tourist services, subject rarely discussed in the academic literature. The literature review sought to contextualize tourism and commerce, trust, perceived value and loyalty in tourism, services marketing, relationship marketing and the following constructs: trust, perceived value and loyalty. In this research we conducted a descriptive research with quantitative variables, through personal survey with a total of 201 valid interviews, through an electronic survey with the adoption of a structured questionnaire formulated in the Likert scale responses. The collected data was analyzed using the Partial Least Squares method and the software used was Smart PLS 2.0 M3 with application techniques to estimate a series of dependence relationships simultaneously and interrelated with Structural Equation Modeling. Moreover, statistically positive values to the relationship of trust were also found in the line staff ahead of the company's perceived value and loyalty. The confidence in the policies and practices of the agency's management of tourism demonstrate statistically positive value on perceived value, however in loyalty the hypothesis was not confirmed. At the end of the paper it is presented the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

**Key words:** trust; value; loyalty and tourism

**JEL code:** M16

## 1. Introduction

Contemporaneously, several changes are observed in the economical, political, social and cultural factors that affect many countries and their populations. One such change is the access to information through the Internet. Advances in technology, particularly information technology, modified the profile of the consumer who now count on tools to make comparisons and research. The influences of these transformations in organizations lead them to revise their operating structures, action strategies and the method they interact with customers. From the standpoint of the consumer, the Internet is a tool for decision making and used to establish comparisons to help their buying decision.

From its diffusion in the nineties during the previous century, the growth of the Internet has created an information-intensive environment: more people use their tools and interact in a virtual form (Suri, Long, Monroe,

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2003; Limeira, 2003). For its growth, with a higher speed than any other innovation (Novaes, 2007), the Internet is changing habits and behaviors, now playing the role of the mediator of human interactions.

All transformations caused by the Internet have direct impacts on organizations that had to and need to adapt to new technologies (Suri, Long, Monroe, 2003; Limeira, 2003; Novaes, 2007). This causes them to interrogate about strategies to survive the changes they're obligated to accept: along the traditional forms of commerce, new forms of electronic commerce or e-commerce (Sheth et al., 2002).

Several sectors of the economy were favored by the facilities provided by e-commerce, especially those who are able to provide more complete information to customers, such as tourism. According to IBOPE survey 2012, the leading sectors of growth in one year were hospitality, cuisine, events, finances and lifestyle. Hotel sites and sites offering hotels and services online had its collective buying increased by 198% in one year.

Another interesting fact of the in survey is the consumer behavior in relation to their sources of information for the trip. One can check that, most clients are seeking traveling information with relatives, friends and reference groups. The second most searched source is the internet. The third source of research is the travel agency, but with less than 10% for both current and to prospects customers. Analyzing why this difference, there are very simple answers: information in a tour agency is not immediate, while also in the Internet; there are numerous information and prices available.

The purchase of a trip to a client is an emotional experience and not just a business. We imagine that when consumers call an agency they have already searched on several sites, specialized blogs and sought information with their network of relationship. For customers of a tourist service provider, the existence of trust in a business partner is extremely important, since there is a high degree of involvement in the purchase; they see more value in the relationship itself. We conclude that the customer contact becomes essential and should be practiced with utmost professionalism.

Crescitelli and Lutch (2008) state that the use of internet jobs, corresponding tools and related information technology (IT) through tourism enterprises, means overcoming a strategic paradigm and an increase in their competitive advantage. According to the authors, many travel agencies are becoming more efficient, productive and profitable with the strategic use of IT resources, saving resources with the creation of technology standards.

Considering the changes wrought by the Internet, whether in a sense of customer behavior, or in a business strategy, with both measured by massive use of IT resources, we must emphasize the need of trust, value and loyalty between companies and customers. It is in this globalized environment, cyber and highly competitive, that constructs trust, loyalty and value will be studied as a differential in the tourism market. This study intends to understand the reasons that lead consumers to purchase travel agencies, ensuring that trust in the organization and the vendor is relevant to the purchase. Instead, check what leads consumers to buy tourist services over the internet. So it is from this that puts the following research question: what is the importance of trust and perceived value on customer loyalty in the acquisition of tourist services?

## 2. Literature Review

According to Di Serio, Maia and Pereira (2004), tourism businesses have realized the importance of the use of information technology (IT) as a catalyst element for integration between suppliers, distributors and customers, providing with information that is more complete, faster and current. According to the authors, e-commerce will add value and bring competitive advantage to the tourism sector. The use of IT causes the sector to acquire tools to meet

the increased demand revealed by the growing number of people with Internet access, who become potential clients.

With the internet and the constant search for low prices, consumers have become more price-sensitive variable. The competition generates low pricing practices in virtual commerce. Variables for purchase on the Internet are: price, reliability and brand. It appears that the variable "trust" is essential when buying via web: consumers buy in online companies that inspire confidence. Therefore, selling through the internet only occurs if the site provides security and credibility. The third variable is the brand: the customer is willing to pay more if you know where you are buying and if the brand (company) is recognized in the market (Clay et al., 2001). In cases where there is great involvement, it is thought, therefore, that trust in the service provider is highlighted.

In the definition of trust, although with differences between disciplines, there are variables in common, like risk-in a trust relationship, the uncertainty of future consequences tends to decrease, and interdependence—a relationship in the interests can be achieved through the collaboration of others involved (Rousseau et al., 1998). Due to various differences in the definition of the construct trust, Rousseau et al. proposed the definition: "Trust is a psychological study comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust leads to a compromised reliability, in other words, the higher levels of fairness. Santos (2001) defines trust as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions and behaviors of the customers.

Yang and Jun (2002), in his research with groups of consumers who buy services or products through the Internet found six dimensions for service quality: reliability, access to the company, ease of use, personalization, security and credibility. According to the authors, customers evaluate the reliability performance of the company by charging the correct values and on time delivery of orders previously promised, plus product and the quantity purchased without any damage.

For Urban, Sultan and Qualls (2000), consumers conduct their research online and make buying decisions based on trust. In exchange relationships with the end consumer, it is necessary that the company has a website that conveys assurance to your customer and have a safe "navigation" (so the customer may fill out their personal information). This becomes a differentiator compared with the market, as these characteristics may determine the success or failure of the company on the web. In recent years, e-commerce has been growing and establishing a new way of purchasing and marketing. According to Urban, Sultan and Qualls (2000, p. 40), trust is the foundation for success in transactions on the Internet, in other words, "The trust-based marketing as the key to success on the Internet". To Gabarino and Johnson (1999), trust mediates the effect of satisfaction on loyalty intentions.

Trust is essential when purchasing online. According to Urban, Sultan and Qualls (2000, p. 40), confidence in e-commerce has three stages: (1) trust in the organization and on its website; (2) reliance on the information contained in the site; (3) trust in services and delivery. Understanding Internet marketing and consequence of trust of users of e-commerce becomes a differentiator and key to success in the Internet.

In shopping relations via web, the transfer of brand value can increase confidence in the site. From the moment a brand transmits security to the site, it shows credibility for consumers. Another way to establish trust, to a website is through the creation of customer communities in which they inform the feedback service. Thus, it decreases the risk perception for the client (Urban, Sultan, Qualls, 2000).

The study of the relationship between company and customer is based on value: the customer will begin to build a relationship with the company when they perceive value in what the organization offers, in other words, strategies and brand retention is not sufficient to customer retention (Rust, Zeithaml, Lemon, 2001). The value is

for the customer, a competitive advantage (Woodruff, 1997). According to Rust, Zeithaml and Lemon (2001, p. 64), value is an "objective assessment made by the customer, for the utility of a brand, based on perceptions of what is given in return for what is received".

In a consumer's perception, value is related to the benefits of a particular product/service, minus the costs of maintaining the relationship with the provider. Therefore, from the point of view of a customer, in this exchange relationship, vendor x consumer confidence transmits the effect on loyalty and trust (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, Sabol, 2002). The value to the consumer is comparative, personal and situational, being linked to the consumption experience that encompasses previous experiences and preferences (Holbrook, 1999). To Woodruff (1997), by combining existing concepts in literature, the proposed definition of value is perceived by the consumer as from the evaluation of the product in its aspects as an attribute, use situation and performance.

The word value is several times associated with perception, hence the origin of the term "perceived value", which is interpreted in different ways by several authors, for example, Goldstein and Toledo (2001, p. 2), to them customer perceived value is the overall evaluation of the product or service and its perceptions.

In this context, there is the definition of Relational Value according to Agustin and Singh (2005), as perceptions of the benefits enjoyed versus the cost incurred in maintaining an exchange relationship: "[...] the trust increases the intentions of loyalty measure that contributes to the relational value."

According to Gremler and Brown (1999), loyalty occurs when the client has a preferential attitude of repurchase, in other words, evaluates whether to buy from the same supplier or service provider when needed. According to Assael (1992) to be fair, the consumer must have a commitment to the brand or supplier and not just a repurchase behavior and continuity in relational exchanges. Loyalty brings feeling of affection in the relationship with the seller or service provider, providing a favorable attitude to repurchase.

As for Spartel (2005), when there is customer loyalty, a commitment is created with the brand even in situations when other brand offers are attractive. This view is corroborated by Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2001) to consider that brand loyalty exists when customers show preference to one brand, which is the first option in the choice of purchase, resisting other offers. In the field of consumer behavior to researchers "repurchase is not sufficient evidence of brand loyalty" (Newman, Werbel, 1973, p. 404).

The affective component is a vital part in building consumer loyalty. The path to loyalty also involves the heart.Consumers become loyal in a cognitive sense first, then in a connotative way and, finally, in a behavioral one" (Oliver, 1999, p. 35).

The affective loyalty is formed, according to McMullan and Gilmore (2003), in the establishment of the commitment, stimulated in the customer's mind as cognition and affection. For Oliver (1997, 1999) at this stage the idea is to develop a love of the brand, or to have a positive attitude towards it. Cognition can be argued.Affection cannot be easily dismissed. Harris and Goode (2004) argue that affective loyalty is less susceptible to substitution of brand loyalty than the cognitive one established.

Prado and Santos (2003) argue that the conceptual definitions of commitment and loyalty are very close, pointing out that both converge to the same concept. To the authors commitment and behavioral intention to repurchase are a reflection of loyalty.

The behavioral commitment, according to Kim and Frazier (1997), is an extension of the activities in which one of the parties offers special help for the others involved suppressing their needs in times of crisis or need. In this case, one of the parties feels co-responsible for the success of the other parties, considered as a partner. This type of commitment is very characteristic in relations between franchisors and franchisees.

The commitment of resistance, also known as psychological impairment, refers, according to Crosby and Taylor (1983), to situations when parties tend to resist change due to conflicting information or experiences. Pritchard, Havitz and Howard (1999) complement this statement suggesting that psychological commitment is best defined by a tendency to resist change in general.

> In summary, Normative Commitment is a moral obligation and is based on internalized norms sometimes predetermined; Commitment is regarded to the psychological expense as well as economic and social status of leaving the relationship, since there are few options for suppliers. Affective commitment is to stay in the relationship because of love. Commitment is linked to the aspects associated with the punishments related to leaving the relationship. Behavioral commitment is the help coming from a situation of need, i.e., behavior aid partner. Finally, Resistance Commitment is a tendency to resist change because of conflicting information or experience. (Vieira & Slongo, 2008, p. 1002)

According to Agustin and Singh (2005), there are three factors that affect the intention of loyalty: a transactional satisfaction, trust and value. For Neal (1999), satisfaction is a necessary component, but not enough for loyalty. Meanwhile, Hart and Johnson (1999, pp. 10-11) argue that "a strategy of trust is the last test of consumer loyalty".

In the service sector, loyalty is related to the consumer's desire and intention to continue a relationship with the company, recommending it and choosing it from the market (Gremler, Brown, 1996; Lovelock, Wirtz, 1996), however situational factors should be considered as a lack of resources for the intention of loyalty (Santos, 2001).

The customer loyalty is also related to the behavioral intention to maintain a relationship with the service provider (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, Sabol, 2002), behaviors such as recommending the services of a company ratify important indicators of repurchase (Zeithaml, Berry, Parasuraman, 1996). The repurchase intention and word of mouth recommendation are given special attention in recent studies of loyalty (Sirdeshmukh; Singh; Sabol, 2002).

Macintosh and Lockshin (1997) believe that the loyal customer who has an interpersonal relationship a shop/organization is more influenced by trust in the seller compared to confidence in the company. However, for consumers who lack interpersonal relationship with the store/organization, trust in the company shall be a determining factor in the time of purchase.

As suggested by Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002), this paper proposes to study of how the value a consumer observes acts being a mediator of the effect of trust on loyalty, verifying also that trust acts directly on loyalty through the consumer's perception of value in relation to the service provider. Due to the asymmetric effect during relational exchanges (supplier holds power), increased trust impacts loyalty by changing consumer perceptions, increasing the similarity of values and hence the relationship between consumer and service provider.

In this study, we sought to examine the construct loyalty as a customer's behavioral intention to maintain a relationship with the service provider. We chose to analyze only the trust and value as antecedents of loyalty in purchasing tourism services.

It is noteworthy that the construct trust in e-commerce relations receives less attention in the literature (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, Sabol, 2002). It is expected that the construct trust and value positively influence loyalty.

Therefore, Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002) propose that the customer feedback regarding the operational competence is an important factor to trust and it's influenced by the competence of frontline employees and the organizational management policies and practices.

Thus, it is proposed:

H1: Customer loyalty is positively and significantly influenced by trust in frontline employees;

H2: Customer loyalty is positively and significantly influenced by trust in management policies and practices;

H3: The perceived value by the customer is positively and significantly influenced by trust in frontline employees;

H4: The perceived value by the customer is positively and significantly influenced by trust in managing policies and practices for online travel agency;

H5: The consumer loyalty over the service provider is positively and significantly influenced by perceived value.

Based on the theoretical foundation and construction of hypotheses established, it then presents the model that summarizes these propositions in Figure 1:
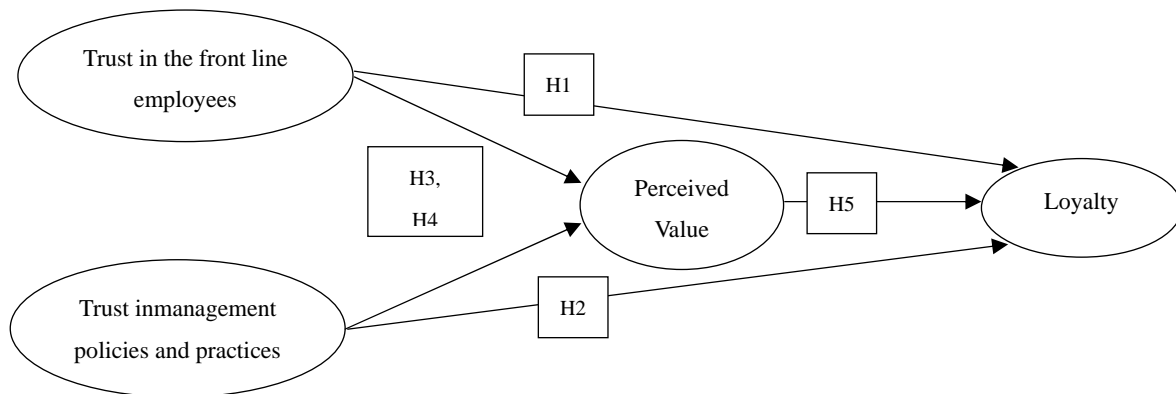


**Figure 1   Theoretical Model of Relationship Trust, Value and Loyalty**
Source: Sirdeshmukh, Singh, Sabol, 2002 (adapted)

## 3. Methodology

Considering the objectives and purposes of this study, we chose to conduct a descriptive and quantitative research. Data were collected through a survey with application questions online to people who buy tourist services in agencies or websites.

Data was collected from customers who buy tourist services, directly on the web or through travel agencies. The questionnaire was sent via the web (Google Docs).

The questionnaire was based on Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002) research, assessing the constructs trust, perceived value and loyalty. The instrument for data collection presented 28 questions distributed to construct trust in frontline employees (8 items), trust in the company's policies and practices (8 items), value (4 items), loyalty (4 items) and sociodemographic questions (4 items). It was used a seven-point interval scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7).

We collected 201 questionnaires. The data for this survey research were treated by means of statistical procedures through structural equation modeling. For data analysis method was used Partial Least Squares (PLS), enabling work with a reduced sample. The software used was Smart PLS 2.0 M3.

## 4. Results

Initially, we present data relating to socio-demographic profile of the sample. More than half of respondents (62.7%) are female. Regarding age, the highest frequency is observed in relation to age over 35 years (46.8%). With regard to educational level, the higher frequency is related to individuals with an incomplete graduate education or

in progress (51.7%). The individual monthly income is more frequent for those making over R$5.0000 (change USD 2,372.00 On December 05, 2012).

Model validation was made through the structural equation modeling. For this purpose the method used was Partial Least Squares (PLS), which does not require multivariate normality of the variables and can work with a smaller sample size, and better fit for exploratory studies that the method used by LISREL (Chin, 1998). The software used was 2.0 SmartPLS M3.

The model was inserted in SmartPLS as it was conceived in the theoretical argument. However, all items that had coefficients below 0.5, were eliminated (item I1.3). Also it was found that the path that connects trust in the management, policies and practices of the company's and loyalty had a very low coefficient (-0.037) and that proved not significant (t-value = 0.927). The resulting model is shown in Figure 2.

Then we proceeded to review the convergent validity of the model. This evaluation is performed based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha. These values, according to Chin (1998) must have a minimum value of 0.5 (AVE) and 0.7 (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha). The Table 1 indicates that for all constructs such validity was confirmed.

**Table 1  Description of the Model Adjusted 2**

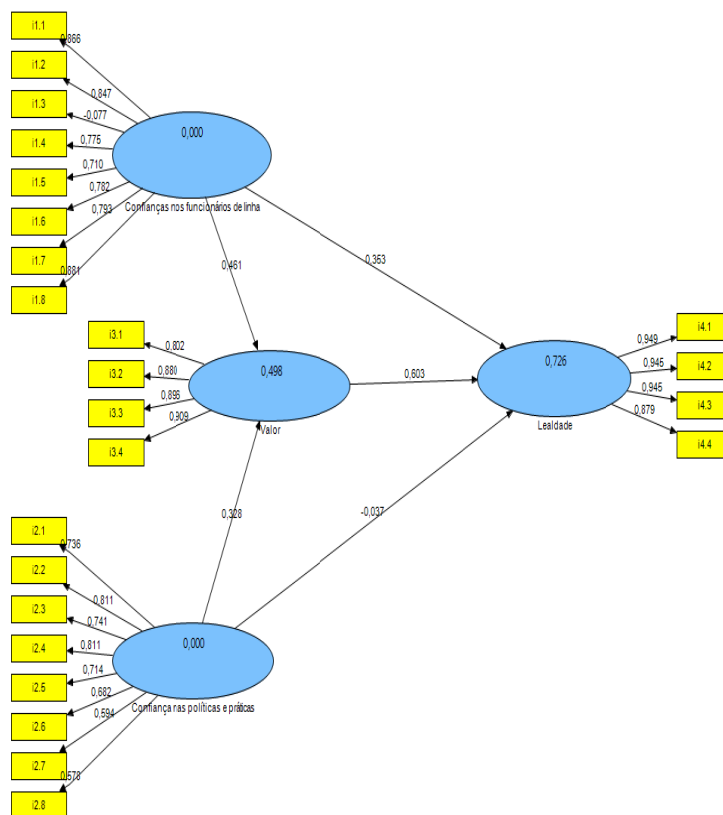|  | AVE | Composite Reliability | $R^2$ | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trust on MPP | 0.509 | 0.891 | – | 0.86 |
| Trust on front line employees | 0.656 | 0.93 | – | 0.911 |
| Loyalty | 0.865 | 0.962 | 0.725 | 0.948 |
| Value | 0.762 | 0.927 | 0.499 | 0.895 |

Source: Elaborated by the Author



**Figure 2  Model Reviewed**

Regarding the assessment of the reliability of the construct, Chin (1998) indicates that it must be evaluated primarily according to composite reliability and that this value must be greater than 0.7. As shown in Table 1, all constructs exceeded this level.

The authors Fornell and Larcker (1981), Apud Chin (1998) suggest a way to assess the discriminant validity for the latent variables. In this method, one obtains the square roots of AVEs and their values are compared with the correlations between the different constructs. When this value is greater than the correlations, it can be stated that there is discriminant validity. The results obtained from the square root of AVE were placed on the main diagonal of the matrix of correlation (indicated in bold). The verification to be performed, then, is between the AVE and the correlations in the same row and same column. The results of Table 2 prove the existence of discriminant validity for all constructs.

Based on the results shown in Table 3, it appears that all hypotheses were validated with the exception of the relationship between trust in management policy and practices and company loyalty; hypothesis H2 appeared weak and not significant when it was analyzed. Such a relationship was not significant, so the H2, was not confirmed.

**Table 2   Loads Crossed the Latent Variables**

|                              | Trust onMPP | Trust on FLE | Loyalty | Value |
| ---------------------------- | ----------- | ------------ | ------- | ----- |
| Trust on MPP                 | 0.714       | -            | -       | -     |
| Trust on front line employees| 0.579       | 0.81         | -       | -     |
| Loyalty                      | 0.526       | 0.724        | 0.93    | -     |
| Value                        | 0.598       | 0.653        | 0.812   | 0.873 |

Source: Elaborated by the Author

**Table 3   Relationship between Constructs Assessed**

|                                          | Relation Type | Coefficient |
| ---------------------------------------- | ------------- | ----------- |
| Trust on front line employees > Loyalty  | Positive      | 0.339       |
| Trust on MPP > Loyalty                   | Not Confirmed | -0.037      |
| Trust on front line employees > Value    | Positive      | 0.461       |
| Trust on MPP > Value                     | Positive      | 0.332       |
| Value > Loyalty                          | Positive      | 0.591       |

Source: Research Analysis of the construct trust, perceived value and loyalty in tourism

The hypothesis H1, customer loyalty is positively influenced by trust in frontline employees of the travel agency, showed a positive relationship strength, therefore H1 was confirmed.

Analyzed together, perceived value, trust in management policies and practices and frontline employees explained 72.5% of customer loyalty as evidenced by the value found in the Table 1.

Since the perceived value has 49.9% of its variance explained by trust in management policies and practices and frontline employees, so the hypothesis H3 and H4 were confirmed.

In hypothesis H5, consumer loyalty over the service provider is positively influenced by perceived value and was confirmed as the strength of the relationship was positive. It should also be noted that the hypotheses H5 had the highest amount reported in research with the greatest impact on loyalty.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, we tested an adaptation of the Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002) research, examining the relationship among trust, perceived value and customer loyalty.

In general, all the hypotheses were supported when comparing the results with the dimensions forming consumer trust in the Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002) study, except for H2, customer loyalty is positively influenced by trust in management policies and practices of the travel agency.

It is thought that the relative value of little significance due to the fact that customers feel that the service providers should possess standard of excellence of practice and management. It is believed that the market itself makes the customers more demanding since most of the companies of the current century, due to high competition, works with a high standard of quality and adapts to technological changes (Suri, Long, Monroe, 2003; Limeira, 2003; Novaes, 2007), acting strategically, analyzing their skills and their competitors (Schoemaker, 1992).

Moreover, according to Macintosh and Lockshin (1997) for the consumer with strong relational ties with the seller, loyalty is more strongly impacted by trust in the frontline employee than trust in the store. As for customers who did not have relational ties with the seller, trust in the company was the prominent drive of loyalty in the organization. Under this view, it is thought that customers of travel agencies, with high degree of involvement in the purchase, devote much of their time on the trip and seek alternatives information for decision making (Reid, Crompton, 1993; Warrington, Shim, 2000; Richard, Zhang, 2012), therefore, seek further service quality as a differentiator for the company's choice (Grönroos, 1995).

As regard to the tourism industry, we believe that customers, when seeking a travel agency, seek also quality service. The way the service is delivered and transferred to the consumer are decisive factors in the choice of service provider. Thus, the image of the service provider influences the evaluation (Grönroos, 1995).

In theoretical terms, the implications appear to be consonant with those presented in the study of Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002), which confirms the impact of trust on consumer loyalty, even if trust in management and policies and practices has not obtained statistically significant and direct influence on consumer loyalty. However, trust in frontline employees showed up with a positive impact on loyalty, confirming the hypothesis H1, customer loyalty is positively influenced by trust in travel agency frontline employees.

According Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002), trust creates perceived value, which is developed in positive relationship with the service provider, reducing uncertainty in relation to the supplier.

Important to note that, just as identified by Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002), the perceived value is positively influenced by customer trust in frontline staff of travel agency and management policies and practices. This fact is consolidated since consumers perceive the cost/benefit relation, maintaining the relationship as it's positive. Therefore, the hypothesis H3, the perceived value is positively influenced by customer trust in frontline employees of travel agency and hypothesis H4, the perceived value is positively influenced by customer trust in management policies and practices of travel agency were confirmed.

For consumers, value is related to the benefits of a particular product/service minus the costs of maintaining the relationship with the provider. Therefore, from the customer point of view, this exchange relationship, seller x consumer, sends trust effect on loyalty (Sirdeshmukh; Singh; Sabol, 2002).

The results obtained by Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002), the relationship of perceived value positively influencing loyalty was significant in sectors surveyed, clothing and airline. Similar to the original study customers' perceived value in the relationship with the tourism agency was significant. Thus the hypothesis H5, consumer

loyalty over the service provider is positively influenced by perceived value, was also accepted.

Therefore, as a final observation, it was found that the model adopted for research with similar characteristics to the Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002), was well succeeded, being applied in other countries with different cultures, we found statistical results similar to confirms the validity of the theory discussed.

Even though it has been found statistical support for this work, this has some limitations. The first limitation refers to the cross-section method for data collection, when a longitudinal study would be more appropriate. Another aspect that affected the analysis was related to the sample of 201 respondents, restricted to a particular market, the city of Belo Horizonte-Brazil, restricting the generalization power, as data and characteristics may be specific to a particular culture.

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