

The determinants of online loyalty intention as part of the e-shopping experience

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Abstract

Nowadays, merchant websites represent new opportunities for both consumers and businesses seeking to promote a shopping experience worth living again. However, despite the importance of online loyalty, very little marketing research has been done to examine it. Then, this study aims to measure the intention of Internet users to be loyal to merchant websites and identify some of the factors explaining this phenomenon. A questionnaire-based survey carried out on 200 Internet users found that perceived quality of a merchant website positively affects its perceived value and Internet user satisfaction with it. This is likely to increase their intention to remain loyal online.

Key words: *Loyalty intention, satisfaction, perceived quality, perceived value, online shopping experience.*

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I. Introduction

Digitization has certainly revolutionized consumer behaviour by offering multiple interaction possibilities with brands. In this regard, consumer demands are growing and consumers no longer seem to be looking for just information to particular requests, but rather for full and enjoyable shopping experiences. This motivation, which is increasingly and significantly dominating the practices of Internet users, is probably a fundamental element that conditions how the value of their online shopping experience is appreciated. In a rapidly evolving digital context, consumers are not in a brick-and-mortar shopping environment, but are immersed in a virtual universe with huge amounts of information. This makes it easy for them to switch to alternative offers provided by competing sites. Consequently, the challenge now is to understand how cyber-consumers perceive and evaluate this online experience and what impact this has on their loyalty intent in the future. In line with this, the literature puts an emphasis on the importance of the perceived quality of the merchant website to loyalty. However, to our knowledge, there is little research that has looked specifically at loyalty intention and its determinants in a web context. However, it seems that during successive logins, Internet users are exposed to several elements of the site that directly affect their judgments of the value of their online shopping experience (author). Similarly, perception of the general layout and the set of benefits derived from the site seem to be able to amplify behavioral intentions in terms of future positive word-of-mouth purchases and recommendations of the site to other Internet users. Under this perspective, this study assumes that perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction act as determinants of loyalty intent. In particular, we attempt to explore, simultaneously, these links in an online shopping context presenting new parameters of perception. Then, our interest lies in designing a model that takes into account a web context. Specifically, we try to answer the following research question:

What is the impact of the perception of a merchant website on consumer satisfaction and loyalty intent?

II. Literature review

The literature indicates that Internet users' loyalty to merchant websites is essentially promoted by the way with which they perceive the different benefits derived from the site and their satisfaction with it. Then, in order to establish the theoretical links inherent to our research problem, it seems essential to shed light on some fundamental concepts that bear on an online shopping experience, namely: perceived quality, perceived value, e-satisfaction and online loyalty intent.

2.1. The e-shopping experience: between quality and perceived value

An online experience reflects 'the virtual contact with a brand or company that takes place in its website and all the positive and negative outcomes that the consumer derives from the use of this website' (Charfi, 2006). In this regard, online shopping seems to stimulate interactions that produce a set of benefits which value the experience and its value in the eyes of Internet users.

2.1.1. Perceived value of the shopping experience

Perceived value has been extensively studied in the literature. Two approaches can be distinguished, one that focused on the purchase value and another which highlighted the consumption value (Abdellatif and Chtioui, 2014). With regard to the e-shopping experience as a whole, we opt for the approach that focused on the consumption value (Holbrook, 1999). This value reflects '*a preference and evaluation of the attributes of the product or experience, its performance and the outcomes of its use or experience*' (Woodruff, 1997). However, despite its importance, research on the perceived value of an online customer experience remains very limited, although some studies have started to address this issue, exploring hedonic and experiential dimensions of enjoyment, fascination, the nature of orientation or the interactions that are derived from it (Filsler, 2010; Kalboussi and Ktari, 2012; Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Habib, 2012; Amraoui, 2005). However, the fact remains that the presence of other concepts underlying perceived value leads one to consider a network of relationships. Then, it is necessary to point out some confusing areas pertaining to perceived quality.

2.1.2. Perceived quality of the browsing experience

In a context of fierce competition, a company's success does not depend only on the traffic it generates on its website, but on its ability to attract volatile targets and convert them into loyal consumers. To this end, perceived quality seems to be an essential component of shaping the online shopping experience (Bressolles et al (2012). The perceived quality of a website reflects '*the degree to which a website facilitates effective and efficient shopping, purchasing and delivery of products*' (Zeithaml et al., 2002). This highlights many intrinsic and extrinsic attributes related to the immediate, rational and subjective perception of navigational quality such as information, reliability, design, usability, security, interaction etc. (Giordano, 2006; Gallen and Boudier-Pailler (2010). Accordingly, if the theoretical relationship between perceived value and perceived quality seems blurred, the attributes inherent to these two notions can probably be used to distinguish between them. Indeed, perceived value bears on the notion of preference whereas perceived quality simply reports to the sacrifice/benefit ratio (Rivière and Mincarelli, 2012). Furthermore, perceived quality has been considered as a determinant of perceived value in an e-shopping experience (Cronin et al, 2000). In this regard, cyber-consumers derive the value of their experience from the quality they perceive when they assess the different elements inherent to the site. Then, if these elements are positively perceived, the benefits derived from the browsing experience are more likely to outweigh the sacrifices made by consumers. The result is a more positive value of the e-shopping experience as a whole. With this in mind, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceived quality of a website positively influences the perceived value of the e-shopping experience.

2.2. From the perception of the e-shopping experience to online satisfaction

Several studies describe online satisfaction as an unobservable construct indirectly measurable (Evanschitzky et al, 2004), resulting from a global assessment of the experience lived in a digital environment (Bressol et al, 2011). Such a view is likely to cast some confusion about the concepts of perceived value and satisfaction. Indeed, if satisfaction results from a divergence between the performance actually perceived and the consumer's expectations, value results from a gap between the total benefits received by the consumer and the costs (sacrifices) perceived through this experience. Additionally, it is likely that perceived value has an effect on Internet users' judgment of their own online satisfaction. Moreover, in order to increase satisfaction, retailers are constantly creating value by offering Internet users the opportunity to live a rewarding and an exceptional experience. In this line of thought, Charfi and Volle (2011) believe that perceiving an attractive atmosphere and attributes that accurately meet queries are probably reasons to positively judge the online experience. Therefore, satisfaction has been considered as the first outcome of the perceived value of the e-shopping experience (Cronin et al, 2000; Yoon et al, 2010). This leads us to formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived value of the e-shopping experience positively affects the online satisfaction of cyber-consumers.

If perceived value of an experience lived in a merchant website can promote the satisfaction of online consumers, many studies present it as the direct result of perceived quality (Parasuraman et alii, 1994). Indeed, a merchant website presents an interface between the brand and the consumer, hence, the more its quality is perceived as important the greater the satisfaction of Internet users (Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2003). The different components of the site are therefore able to promote satisfaction of Internet user during a shopping experience (Bressoud et al, 2011). Then, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived quality of a merchant website positively affects online satisfaction of cyber-consumers.

2.3. Online loyalty intent: a theoretical outline of a less studied concept in marketing

Online loyalty is in some ways different from loyalty in traditional business in that it is defined as '*maintaining a stable relationship, based on a positive rational assessment of the online business, accompanied*

by an emotional attachment and a willingness to continue the relationship' (Toufaily, 2011). This definition captures online loyalty by assessing its attitudinal dimension reflected in the intention to revisit a website, to purchase from it or to recommend it to others (Mathwick, 2002) and the behavioral outcome of the actual purchase on the site (Parasuraman et al, 2005). In this study, we focus theoretically on the notion of attitudinal loyalty, which is akin to 'loyalty intent', which in turn reflects the emotional engagement of consumers and their intention to purchase from the company's website. However, loyalty intent probably depends on the perceived value of the experience that consumers had while browsing the site. Then, it seems that perception of the superiority of the website's atmosphere and more generally preferring to shop in the site contribute to creating positive effects, both cognitive and emotional (Bressolles and Durrier, 2011). This is likely to boost the desire to revisit the site and relive the shopping experience once again, hence, the intention to commit to the brand in the long-term. Bearing on these assumptions, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H4: perceived value of the shopping experience positively influences the intention to remain loyal online.

If it has been accepted that satisfaction increases and stabilizes during positive browsing experiences on a brand website (Boyer and Nefzi, 2008), this is likely to be a prerequisite for the intention to revisit, re-purchase or recommend the site. Indeed, the formation of habits and the reinforcement of the intention to revisit seem to depend on the degree of satisfaction with a given website (Mittal and Alii, 1999). Furthermore, a consumer who is satisfied with a website is more likely to engage in word of mouth in favor of that site and more generally of the brand. Then, it is relevant to examine the extent to which e-satisfaction determines online loyalty intent. In this regard, some studies propose that satisfaction with the browsing experience amplifies commitment to the brand's site in the future (Anderson and Alii, 1994). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5. Online satisfaction has a positive effect on the intention to remain loyal to the website.

2.4. Research model

After having presented the different concepts and research hypotheses, we propose the following research model:



III. Methodology

In this section, we describe our research methodology we used to estimate our model.

3.1. Sample

A questionnaire was sent to a sample of 200 consumers selected for convenience. The selection criterion was the use of a website specializing in online travel sales. To sample our respondents, we proceeded by including a filter question at the beginning of the survey on the use of the travel site 'Tunisie Booking'. It should be noted that our interest in this sector is justified by its rapid growth as an e-commerce lever in terms of value and volume (Nefzi, 2008).

3.2 Measurement of the independent variable

The questionnaire measures the quality of a merchant website using the Yoo and Donthu's (2001) scale (SITEQUAL), consisting of 9 items and 4 dimensions, namely; ease of use, design, speed of the process and security. This scale, initially designed to measure a site's attributes, allows for an appreciation of the benefits able to forge the browsing experience. This meets the specificity of our research problem.

3.3 Measurement of the dependent variables

In order to measure perceived value of the online shopping experience, following Cottet and Vibert (1999), we opted for an adapted version of Babin et al's (1994) scale. This scale simultaneously examines the utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of value. This is in line with our theoretical proposals. Similarly, we used the one-dimension satisfaction scale of Bitner and Hubbert (1994) adopted by Mosaheb et al (2010).

For loyalty intent, we adopted Mathtwick's (2002) one-dimension scale consisting of 3 items measuring successively; positive word-of-mouth, intention to revisit and intention to purchase on the site. All the scales use the 5-point Likert layout and are distinguished by their psychometric qualities in terms of reliability and content validity in their original context.

3.4. Questionnaire administration and testing

The questionnaire was administered on the Internet using 'Google docs'. Following the pre-test of the questionnaire, some slight modifications were made to make it easier for respondents to understand some items. This allowed us to assess its accuracy and improve its psychometric quality.

IV. Hypothesis testing and discussion of results

The aim of this study is to determine the factors determining online loyalty intent. To this end, it is necessary to examine the effects of the elements that shape website quality on the perceived value of the e-shopping experience as well as the impact of this value on users' satisfaction and loyalty intent.

To test our hypotheses, we made recourse to structural equation modeling using the AMOS software since all the variables are metric in nature. Then, it is important to test the measurement models on the one hand and to validate the structural model on the other hand. An exploratory factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation) is used to determine the structure of the measurement scales. Reliability is checked for each dimension using Cronbach's alpha (Appendix 1).

The obtained results indicate that the indices globally show acceptable coefficients and testify for the unidimensionality of the studied constructs. Factor loadings of items on the extracted dimensions are for the most part significant. The measurement scales are reliable with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging between 0.7 and 0.9. However, for the perceived quality variable, the overall reliability can be improved by purification (appendix 2). The results of the second factor analysis show a good stability of the measurement scales. Explained variances represent acceptable values and all items have representation qualities exceeding the recommended threshold. Concerning multicollinearity, it should be noted that skewness coefficients are negative and close to 0, skewed to the left whatever the item. As for Kurtosis, coefficients vary between -1 and 1 indicating a distribution that is either more concentrated or flatter than the normal distribution. Then, we can conclude that normality of data in our sample is significant.

Table 1: Multinormality test of data

Variables	Item	Skewness)	Kurtosis)
Perceived quality	Qualperçu1	-,574	-,536
	Qualperçu2	-,530	-,419
	Qualperçu3	-,351	-,550
	Qualperçu4	-,069	-,275
	Qualperçu5	-,318	-,654
	Qualperçu6	-,636	-,457
	Qualperçu8	-,286	-,641
Perceived value	Valperçue1	-,427	-,028
	Valperçue2	-,539	-,285
	Valperçue3	-,503	-,454
	Valperçue5	-,704	-,284
	Valperçue6	-,738	-,072
Online satisfaction	Satisfac1	-,825	,429
	Satisfac2	-,578	-,273
	Satisfac3	-,543	-,554
	Satisfac4	-,443	-,597
Online loyaltyintent	Intenfidell	-,344	-,838

	Intenfidel2	-.633	-.411
	Intenfidel3	-.653	-.155

The confirmatory factor analysis applied to the measurement models shows acceptable results. In fact, factor loadings exceed the threshold of 0.7 and reliability is therefore good for the model as a whole. The same applies to the SMC significance indicators with values > 0.5. Concerning the fit indices, these are quite satisfactory. The Chi-square test is significant with a standardized value < 3. The IFI, TLI and CFI indices are close or exceed the recommended threshold. The RMSEA index is within acceptable levels. We can therefore conclude that the data from the measurement models fit the theoretical model (Appendices 3 and 4).

Now that the factor structure of the different constructs has been confirmed, we can proceed to test our structural model. The results obtained for the structural model are globally satisfactory. Fit quality is considered acceptable. The Chi-square test is significant with a standardized value < 3. Our model therefore meets the conditions of parsimony. Moreover, RMSEA is close to generally accepted standards. Similarly, the TLI index, although it is <0.9, remains acceptable. Moreover, the CFI and IFI indicators, although sensitive to the complexity of the model, are globally within the standards. We can then conclude that the model's goodness of fit is acceptable as shown by the main estimated indicators.

Table 2: Analysis of goodness of fit of the structural model

Fit indices	Estimates
Chi-square:	Chi-2= 398,650 df= 147 P= 0,000 Chi-2 /df= 2,712
RMSEA	0,100 RMSEALO= 0,088 RMSEAHl= 0,112
TLI	0,890
IFI	0,916
CFI	0,915

Once fit of the structural model has been checked, the research hypotheses should then be tested. This involves examining the significance and sign of the relationships between the variables in our model (Appendix 5). The results show that our model explains 0.834% of the perceived value of the site, 0.816% of the satisfaction with the online experience and 0.840% of loyalty intent. In order to check the significance of relationships between these variables, some indicators should be examined. These are regression or standardized structural coefficients which should be different from 0 to reflect the presence of a relationship between the studied variables. T-Student is also examined, which should be greater than 1.96. The recommended error probability does not exceed the 5% threshold as shown by the outputs of the AMOS software (Appendix 6). The results of the test of our research model can be summarized in the following table:

Table 3: Hypothesis testing results

The relationship tested	Regression	CR	p<5%	Result
H1 perceived quality → perceived value	0,820	t= 11,551	p=0,000	Retained
H2 perceived quality → e-satisfaction	0,320	t= 2,200	p= 0,028	Retained
H3 perceived value → e-satisfaction	0,647	t= -3,895	P= 0,000	Retained
H4 perceived value → loyalty intent	0,6	t= 4,053	p= 0,000	Retained
H5 e-satisfaction → loyalty intent	0,422	t = 3,138	p= 0,002	Retained

The first hypothesis assumes a significant and a positive relationship between perceived online quality and perceived value of the site. The results show a significant positive relationship with a regression coefficient of 0.82 and a t-value of 11.551 (p=0.000). These results therefore support this hypothesis. This is in line with previous studies, which found that perceived quality of the website increases shopping experience value on a merchant website (Bressolles et al, 2012). As for the second hypothesis, it assumes a significant positive relationship between perceived quality and online satisfaction. This hypothesis is retained, with a structural of 0.320 and a t= 2.2 (p= 0.02). We can therefore conclude that the higher perceived quality of the site, the better the satisfaction with the online experience. In this regard, our results are in line with those of Charfi and Volle (2011) who found that the experiential components of the site, in particular the speed and relevance of the data

collected, favor the hedonic value of the visit. These are reasons for positively judging the online experience and promoting the process of confirming expectations (Charfi, 2006).

For the third hypothesis, which states that perceived value of the site has a positive effect on the satisfaction with the online experience, the structural link between these two variables is 0.647 with a $t = -3.895$ ($P = 0.000$). Then, the relationship is confirmed. Therefore, perceived value of the shopping experience is illustrated on the one hand, as the result of the perceived quality of the web interface and on the other hand, as a determinant of user satisfaction (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003). Those who perceive a positive value of their browsing, and more generally of their e-shopping experience, tend to show more satisfaction.

As for the fourth hypothesis, which assumes a positive relationship between perceived value and online loyalty intent, the structural link is 0.600 with a $t = 4.053$ ($p = 0.000$). This implies that perceived value predicts the online loyalty intent of cyber-consumers. It follows then that perceived value of the shopping experience positively affects the intention to recontact the brand online (Charfi, 2006). This finding is consistent with the literature which underlines the idea that the valuation of the utilitarian and hedonic benefits perceived during an e-shopping experience contributes to promoting positive user judgments (Bressolles and Durrier, 2011). Then, perceived value therefore significantly contributes to reinforcing satisfaction during browsing experiences (Boyer and Nefzi, 2008).

For hypothesis five, which assumes a positive link between e-satisfaction with the online experience and consumer loyalty intent, is confirmed. The structural link between these two variables is 0.422 and t is 3.138 ($p = 0.002$). This finding is quite expected given that previous research considers, more globally, satisfaction as a prerequisite for consumer loyalty in its attitudinal and behavioral dimensions (Anderson and Alii, 1994).

V. Conclusion

This study examined the factors that influence loyalty intent in a web context. In particular, our model estimates the relationship between perception of the quality of shopping experience by Internet users through a set of benefits linked to the site. Our results indicate that the latter positively influences perceived value of the online shopping experience, which in turn acts on user satisfaction and loyalty intent. The results show that evaluation of the website's attributes generates a shopping experience in which consumers will perceive more value. These findings thus highlight the importance of the performance of the virtual interface that the merchant website provides to the interaction between the Internet user and the brand. More specifically, the impression produced by the site can be considered a critical element able to trigger the intention to revisit the site and re-purchase from it. Accordingly, Internet users who positively perceive the quality of a website, in terms of its design, speed, ease of use and security, tend more to value the benefits delivered by the site, thus optimizing the utilitarian and hedonic values of their e-shopping experience. Therefore, this positive value positively activates a process of confirming expectations to lead to higher satisfaction levels. As far as online satisfaction is concerned, this relates more to the relationship with the brand, the services offered on the site and, more generally, the atmosphere of the site. However, this evaluation process has effects on cyber-consumer's future intentions. The latter may now wish to revisit the site and re-purchase on it. Further down the line, they will likely recommend the site to their social circle.

VI. Managerial implications

While digitization seems to strengthen customer-business interactions, the challenge for relationship marketing today is no longer just about maintaining profitable relationships but about creating customer experiences that ensure online loyalty. Faced with this challenge, companies operating on the web seem to have new roles to play. In this regard, our study presents a set of managerial implications that can improve the e-shopping experience, in particular by promoting sites capable of attracting and retaining web users. Then, companies should consider the effects of the different site attributes on the value of the e-shopping experience as a whole. Our study also highlights the importance of site ergonomics and reliability of information to satisfaction of Internet users. Then, we believe it is particularly essential for managers to reinforce these elements to ensure full and unforgettable online experiences. Such experiences are a powerful spearhead for triggering the intention to revisit, purchase or positive word-of-mouth.

VII. Limitations and future research

Like all research, our study has limitations that should be considered in future research. In particular, our model does not take into account the variables of individual differences. As each individual is different in terms of personality traits, involvement in the shopping experience or Internet expertise, the perception of the quality and value of the site may be different. Therefore, jointly studying these variables could, possibly, enrich our results.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 :Exploratory factor analysis

Items	Perceived quality of the site	Perceived value of the site	Online satisfaction	Online loyalty intent	Alpha if item deleted
Qualperçu1	0,826				0,706
Qualperçu2	0,840				0,708
Qualperçu3	0,779				0,719
Qualperçu4	0,789				0,721
Qualperçu5	0,822				0,706
Qualperçu6	0,888				0,699
Qualperçu7	0,404				0,917
Qualperçu8	0,767				0,716
Valperçue1		0,857			0,901
Valperçue2		0,890			0,895
Valperçue3		0,879			0,896
Valperçue4		0,682			0,927
Valperçue5		0,868			0,897
Valperçue6		0,870			0,896
Satisfac1			,875		0,900
Satisfac2			,914		0,878
Satisfac3			,895		0,889
Satisfac4			,891		0,890
Intenfidel1				,884	0,885
Intenfidel2				,933	0,805
Intenfidel3				,907	0,851
KMO	0,890	0,865	0,853	0,729	
Bartlett	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	
Variance explained (VE)	60,420 %	71,254 %	79,907 %	82,481 %	
Eigen values	4,834	4,275	3,196	2,474	
Cronbach's Alpha	0,754	0,917	0,915	0,893	

Appendix 2: Final exploratory factor analysis

Items	Perceived quality of the site	Perceived value of the site	Online satisfaction	Online loyalty intent	Alpha if item deleted
Qualperçu1	0,828				0,904
Qualperçu2	0,842				0,902
Qualperçu3	0,784				0,909
Qualperçu4	0,796				0,908
Qualperçu5	0,821				0,905
Qualperçu6	0,888				0,895
Qualperçu8	0,771				0,911
Valperçue1		0,889			0,908
Valperçue2		0,908			0,903
Valperçue3		0,896			0,906
Valperçue5		0,855			0,916
Valperçue6		0,853			0,916
Satisfac1			0,875		0,900
Satisfac2			0,914		0,878
Satisfac3			0,895		0,889
Satisfac4			0,891		0,890
Intenfidel1				,884	0,885
Intenfidel2				,933	0,805
Intenfidel3				,907	0,851

KMO	0,884	0,845	0,853	0,729
Bartlett	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Variance Explained	67,117 %	77,537 %	79,907 %	82,481 %
Eigen values	4,698	3,877	3,196	2,474
Alpha	0,917	0,927	0,915	0,893

Appendix 3 : Model fit

Fit Indices	Estimates
Chi-square test:	Chi-2= 390,906 df= 146 P= 0,000 Chi-2 /df= 2,677
RMSEA	0,099 RMSEALO= 0,087 RMSEAHl= 0,111
TLI	0,893
IFI	0,919
CFI	0,917

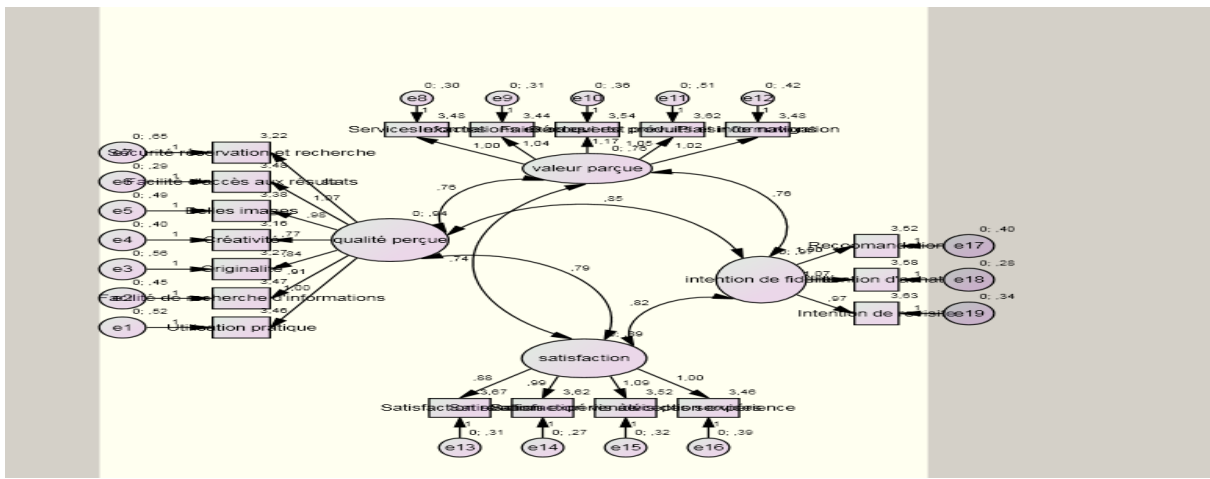
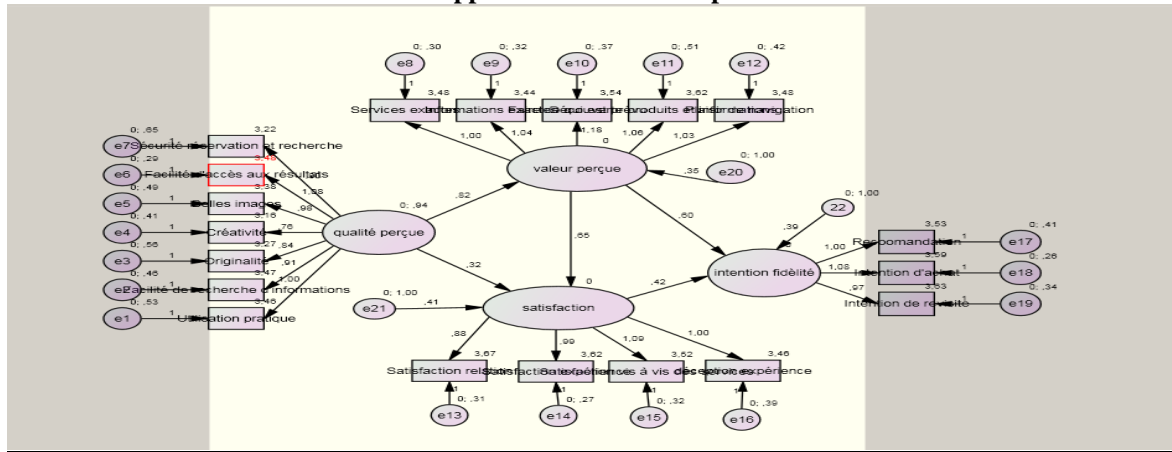
Appendix 4: Confirmatory factor analysis

Item			Factor Loadings λ	SMC
Qualperçu1	← - -	perceived quality	0,803	0,693
Qualperçu2	← - -	perceived quality	0,794	0,768
Qualperçu3	← - -	perceived quality	0,737	0,770
Qualperçu4	← - -	perceived quality	0,760	0,698
Qualperçu5	← - -	perceived quality	0,804	0,724
Qualperçu6	← - -	perceived quality	0,887	0,799
Qualperçu8	← - -	perceived quality	0,729	0,707
Valperçue1	← - -	Perceived value	0,849	0,655
Valperçue2	← - -	Perceived value	0,851	0,621
Valperçue3	← - -	Perceived value	0,863	0,745
Valperçue5	← - -	Perceived value	0,788	0,725
Valperçue6	← - -	Perceived value	0,810	0,721
Satisfac1	← - -	Satisfaction	0,841	0,532
Satisfac2	← - -	Satisfaction	0,894	0,788
Satisfac3	← - -	Satisfaction	0,851	0,646
Satisfac4	← - -	Satisfaction	0,835	0,577
Intenfidel1	← - -	Loyalty intent	0,877	0,543
Intenfidel2	← - -	Loyalty intent	0,876	0,631
Intenfidel3	← - -	Loyalty intent	0,832	0,644

Appendix 5: Significance of the dependent variables

Variables	SMC
Perceived value	0,834
Satisfaction	0,816
Loyalty intent	0,840

Appendix 6 : AMOS output



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