

الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية
People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education
and Scientific Research

National Higher School of Management
University Pole of Kolea



وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي

المدرسة الوطنية العليا للمناجنت
القلعة

MASTERS'S DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Master's
Degree in
Marketing Management

**The Impact of Strategic Marketing and Inbound Marketing on
Customer Loyalty: Case Study Air Algérie**

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2025/2026

Abstract

In an increasingly competitive and digitized airline industry, passenger loyalty has become a major strategic challenge for carriers worldwide. Strategic marketing represents a fundamental driver in this regard, enabling organizations to create value for customers and build lasting relationships grounded in relevance and trust. At the same time, inbound marketing has progressively established itself as an essential tool for customer engagement in the digital age, built on attraction rather than interruption. Airlines must therefore integrate both dimensions into a coherent sequential framework in order to strengthen passenger loyalty and differentiate themselves in an ever more competitive environment. This study accordingly aims to examine the direct and mediated relationships between strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty in the context of Air Algérie, Algeria's state-owned national carrier. A quantitative approach is adopted through a structured online questionnaire administered to a sample of **284 Air Algérie passengers**. Statistical analysis is conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson and Spearman correlation analyses, simple and multiple linear regression, and PROCESS Model 4 mediation analysis with bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap resamples. The results show that strategic marketing exerts a strong positive direct effect on both customer loyalty and inbound marketing effectiveness, while inbound marketing in turn significantly and positively predicts customer loyalty. Mediation analysis confirms that inbound marketing partially mediates the strategic marketing–loyalty relationship, with approximately one-third of the total effect transmitted through this indirect channel, demonstrating the relay role that digital marketing practices play in translating strategic marketing capabilities into attitudinal and behavioral loyalty

Keywords: strategic marketing, inbound marketing, customer loyalty, mediation analysis, Air Algérie.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans un secteur aérien de plus en plus concurrentiel et numérisé, la fidélisation des passagers constitue un enjeu stratégique majeur pour les compagnies aériennes. Le marketing stratégique représente à cet égard un levier fondamental, en ce qu'il permet aux organisations de créer de la valeur pour leurs clients et de bâtir des relations durables fondées sur la confiance et la pertinence. Parallèlement, le marketing entrant s'impose progressivement comme un outil incontournable de l'engagement client à l'ère numérique, fondé sur l'attraction plutôt que sur l'interruption. C'est pourquoi les compagnies aériennes se doivent d'intégrer ces deux dimensions dans une logique séquentielle cohérente afin de renforcer la fidélité de leurs passagers et de se démarquer dans un environnement de plus en plus compétitif. Notre étude a donc pour objectif d'examiner les relations directes et médiées entre le marketing stratégique, le marketing entrant et la fidélité client dans le contexte d'Air Algérie, compagnie aérienne nationale à capitaux publics. Pour ce faire, nous avons adopté une approche quantitative en administrant un questionnaire structuré en ligne auprès d'un échantillon de **284 passagers d'Air Algérie**. L'analyse statistique a été effectuée avec le logiciel IBM SPSS Statistics, en utilisant les statistiques descriptives, les analyses de corrélation de Pearson et de Spearman, les régressions linéaires simples et multiples, ainsi que l'analyse de médiation via le modèle PROCESS 4 avec ré échantillonnages bootstrap biais-corrigés et accélérés. Les résultats montrent que le marketing stratégique exerce un effet direct positif et significatif sur la fidélité client ainsi que sur l'efficacité du marketing entrant, lequel prédit à son tour de manière significative et positive la fidélité client. L'analyse de médiation confirme que le marketing entrant médiatise partiellement la relation entre le marketing stratégique et la fidélité client, avec environ un tiers de l'effet total transmis par cette voie indirecte, attestant ainsi du rôle de relais que jouent les pratiques numériques dans la traduction des capacités marketing en fidélité comportementale et attitudinale.

Mots-clés : marketing stratégique, marketing entrant, fidélité client, analyse de médiation, Air Algérie

الملخص

في ظل المنافسة المتصاعدة والتحول الرقمي المتسارع الذي يشهده قطاع النقل الجوي، بات ولاء المسافرين تحدياً استراتيجياً محورياً أمام شركات الطيران. ويمثل التسويق الاستراتيجي في هذا الإطار رافعة أساسية تُمكن المنظمات من خلق القيمة لعملائها وبناء علاقات راسخة قائمة على الثقة والملاءمة. وفي الوقت ذاته، يفرض التسويق الجاذب نفسه تدريجياً بوصفه أداة لا غنى عنها لتعزيز تفاعل العملاء في العصر الرقمي، إذ يركز على الاستقطاب بدلاً من الإقحام. ولذا، بات على شركات الطيران دمج هذين البُعدين في منطق تسلسلي متسق يُعزز ولاء المسافرين ويُميّزها في بيئة تنافسية متصاعدة. وتهدف دراستنا إلى فحص العلاقات المباشرة والوسيطية بين التسويق الاستراتيجي والتسويق الجاذب وولاء العملاء في سياق الخطوط الجوية الجزائرية، الناقل الوطني المملوك للدولة.

ولتحقيق ذلك، اعتمدنا مقارنة كمية من خلال توزيع استبيان منظم عبر الإنترنت على عينة مكونة من 284 مسافراً من مسافري الخطوط الجوية الجزائرية. وقد أُجري التحليل الإحصائي ببرنامج IBM SPSS، باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي وتحليل الارتباط لبيرسون وسبيرمان والانحدار الخطي البسيط والمتعدد، وتحليل الوساطة وفق نموذج PROCESS 4 مع عمليات إعادة أخذ العينات بمقاربة التمهيد المصحح المُسرّع. تُظهر النتائج أن التسويق الاستراتيجي يُحدث أثراً مباشراً إيجابياً وذا دلالة إحصائية على ولاء العملاء وعلى فاعلية التسويق الجاذب، في حين يتنبأ هذا الأخير بدوره بولاء العملاء بصورة معنوية وإيجابية. ويؤكد تحليل الوساطة أن التسويق الجاذب يتوسط جزئياً العلاقة بين التسويق الاستراتيجي وولاء العملاء، إذ تُثقل نحو ثلث إجمالي الأثر عبر هذا المسار غير المباشر، مما يُثبت الدور الوسيط الذي تؤديه الممارسات التسويقية الرقمية في ترجمة القدرات التسويقية الاستراتيجية إلى ولاء سلوكي ووجداني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التسويق الاستراتيجي، التسويق الجاذب، ولاء العملاء، تحليل الوساطة، الخطوط الجوية الجزائرية

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to **Allah**, the Most Merciful, for His countless blessings, guidance, and protection throughout this journey. I thank **Allah** for and for reminding me during the most difficult moments:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

So indeed, with hardship comes ease (94:5)

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, **Dr. Bouchetara**, for his guidance, advice, and support throughout the completion of this work.

I dedicate my heartfelt thanks to my beloved parents, who have always believed in me, even in the moments when I struggled to believe in myself. Despite the distance that separated us, they never failed to keep me company through their love, support, and prayers. Their duaas have always been my safeguard and my source of peace.

To my **father**,

The first love of my life, the man who gave everything to make my life easier.

To my **mother**,

The greatest woman I aspire to become one day, the light that illuminates my soul, the reason I find strength when mine fades.

To my siblings,

My little sweethearts, Darene, Islam and Serine, the ones I would give my life for.

To my beloved cats,

Lucky, my sweet little boy, and Sushi, my little heart, whose softness and quiet presence brought me comfort when I needed it the most.

To my lovely girls, Khadidja, Widad, and Kamilia,

Thank you for making this journey so special and unforgettable. You became more than friends; you became the family I hope never to be separated from.

To my dear friends,

with whom I lived some of the most beautiful memories of my life, thank you for your presence, your laughter, and your support. A special thought goes to Yasser, the sweetest soul, whose kindness will always be remembered.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my school and to all the people who have been part of this journey.

*I would also like to sincerely thank **Dr. Barkat**, one of the best teachers I have had, for his help, support, and kindness. My gratitude also goes to **Mr. Bouguerra**, who was present for me during some of my hardest moments and whose support meant a lot.*

Lastly, I would like to thank myself.

***“Show up and do it, no matter what you’re feeling”** is something I told myself countless times throughout this journey. I may not have always been the stellar student, but if there is one thing I learned, it is how to be brave. Brave not because I knew what to do, but because I was made brave by the people I love. As their faith carried me, I was certain I was made brave by love*

I could not be prouder of the person I have become through this experience.

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List of Abbreviations

AH PLUS:	Air Algérie's frequent-flyer / loyalty programme
BCa:	Bias-Corrected and accelerated (bootstrap confidence interval)
CGTA:	Compagnie Générale des Transports Algériens (historical predecessor of Air Algérie)
CI:	Confidence Interval
CL:	Customer Loyalty
CMV:	Common Method Variance
CRM:	Customer Relationship Management
IM:	Inbound Marketing
KMO:	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (measure of sampling adequacy)
KS:	Kolmogorov–Smirnov (test of normality)
NPS:	Net Promoter Score
PCA:	Principal Components Analysis
PDG:	Président Directeur Général
SD:	Standard Deviation
SE:	Standard Error
SEO:	Search Engine Optimization
SM:	Strategic Marketing
SPSS:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 27)
SW:	Shapiro–Wilk (test of normality)
VIF:	Variance Inflation Factor

General Introduction

1.1 Background

The global airline industry has undergone profound structural transformations over the past two decades, driven by market liberalization, the rapid diffusion of digital technologies, and the progressive sophistication of passenger expectations. Customer loyalty, once treated primarily as a function of route coverage and pricing, is now understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing attitudinal commitment, behavioral consistency, trust, and advocacy, outcomes shaped not only by service quality but by the full spectrum of marketing practices through which airlines communicate and engage with their passengers.

Within this context, strategic marketing has emerged as a foundational organizational capability, defined as the systematic process through which firms create value for customers and build profitable customer relationships (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Alongside it, inbound marketing, originally theorized by Halligan and Shah (2010) as a pull-based alternative to interruptive outbound approaches, has attracted growing scholarly attention, with empirical contributions from Erdmann and Ponzio (2021), Waqas et al. (2021), and Salonen et al. (2024) confirming its positive effects on customer engagement and retention across digital service contexts.

Despite the significance of both constructs, their integrated examination within a single empirical framework remains largely absent from the literature, particularly in the aviation sector. Air Algérie, Algeria's state-owned flag carrier, represents a theoretically appropriate context for investigating these relationships, given its dual commercial and public service mandate, its newly institutionalized Brand Management Directorate, and its ongoing digital transformation.

1.2 Problem Discussion

The central research problem addressed in this study concerns the mechanisms through which strategic marketing and inbound marketing practices collectively shape customer loyalty in the context of a national airline. This problem is composed of two interconnected components, each of which identifies a specific explanatory relationship that the existing literature has not yet empirically resolved in the integrated configuration proposed here.

The first component concerns the direct influence of strategic marketing on customer loyalty. While it is theoretically well-established that strategic marketing capabilities generate the

conditions for sustained customer relationships, the magnitude and statistical robustness of this direct effect has been insufficiently examined in service industries with high operational complexity. In the aviation sector specifically, the extent to which passengers' perceptions of an airline's strategic marketing coherence translate into measurable loyalty outcomes remains underexplored.

Air Algérie's institutional position as a state-owned carrier simultaneously pursuing commercial goals and public service obligations introduces additional contextual complexity, since the organizational constraints associated with this dual mandate may moderate the relationship between strategic marketing quality and loyalty in ways that are not captured by studies conducted in purely commercial contexts.

The second component concerns the mediating role of inbound marketing in the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty. This question derives from the theoretical observation that strategic marketing is largely invisible to customers in its raw form: passengers do not directly perceive a firm's segmentation logic or competitive positioning intent; they perceive only the manifestations of these decisions in the communications and interactions they receive.

Inbound marketing increasingly performs the function of translating strategic intent into customer-facing experience through content creation, digital visibility, social media engagement, and personalization. If this theoretical proposition is correct, then inbound marketing should function as a relational interface through which strategic marketing's influence on loyalty is partially transmitted, meaning that the SM → CL relationship should be decomposable into a direct component and an indirect component operating through the mediating variable of inbound marketing.

These two components give rise to the following overarching research problem: to what extent do strategic marketing and inbound marketing contribute to passenger loyalty at Air Algérie, and does inbound marketing mediate the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty?

1.3 Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to empirically examine the direct and mediated relationships between strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty in the context of Air Algérie's passenger base. More specifically, the study pursues four interrelated objectives.

The first objective is to assess the direct effect of strategic marketing initiatives on passenger loyalty at Air Algérie, determining both the magnitude and statistical significance of this relationship. The second objective is to examine whether and to what degree strategic marketing practices influence the effectiveness of the airline's inbound marketing activities, thereby establishing the upstream component of the proposed sequential chain.

The third objective is to evaluate the direct contribution of inbound marketing to customer loyalty, independently of the strategic marketing context in which it is embedded. The fourth and most theoretically consequential objective is to test whether inbound marketing statistically mediates the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty, that is, whether a significant portion of the effect that strategic marketing exerts on loyalty operates through the mechanism of inbound marketing rather than entirely through direct pathways.

At the practical level, the study aims to generate actionable managerial implications for Air Algérie's marketing strategy, organizational priorities, and digital customer engagement architecture, build on the empirical relationships identified in the quantitative analysis.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions of this study derive directly from the research problem and the four objectives formulated above. They are organized around a central question and three subsidiary questions that correspond to the specific relationships tested in the empirical analysis.

The central research question is: **To what extent do strategic marketing and inbound marketing collectively predict customer loyalty at Air Algérie, and does inbound marketing mediate the relationship between strategic marketing and loyalty?**

This central question is operationalized through three subsidiary research questions. The first asks: What is the magnitude and statistical significance of the direct effect of strategic marketing on customer loyalty among Air Algérie passengers? The second asks: To what extent does strategic marketing influence the effectiveness of inbound marketing activities, and does this upstream relationship constitute the first link in a sequential causal chain? The third asks: Is the effect of strategic marketing on customer loyalty partially transmitted through the mechanism of inbound marketing, and if so, what proportion of the total effect operates through this indirect pathway?

Together, these questions structure the analytical progression of the study, moving from bivariate direct effects toward the more complex and theoretically central mediation architecture.

1.5 Hypotheses

Four hypotheses were formulated prior to data collection on the basis of the theoretical framework and the research questions. Each hypothesis posits a directional, measurable relationship between the constructs of the study.

H1: Strategic marketing initiatives have a significant positive impact on passenger loyalty at Air Algérie.

H2: Strategic marketing significantly and positively influences the effectiveness of inbound marketing efforts at Air Algérie.

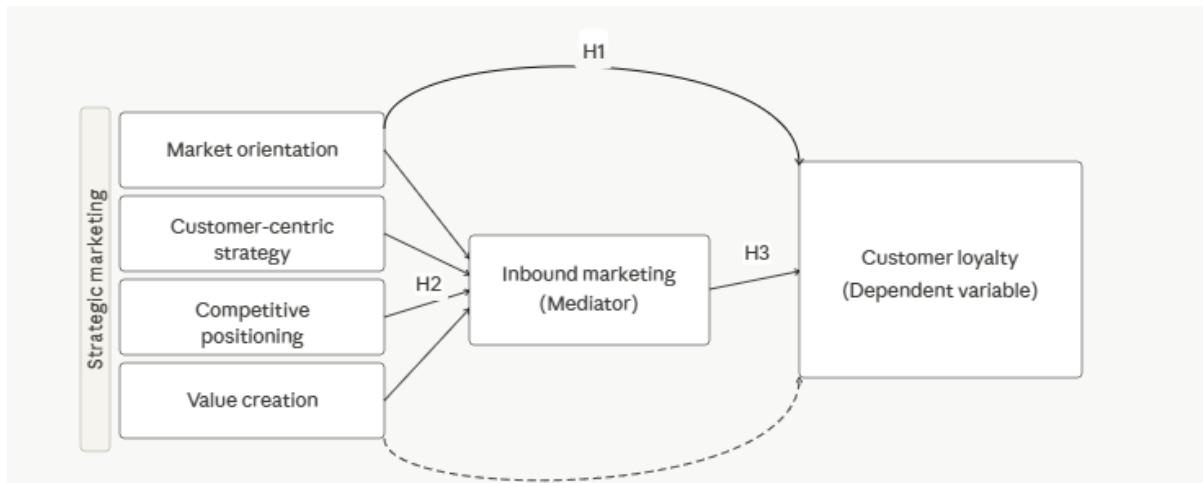
H3: Inbound marketing activities positively and significantly correlate with multidimensional customer loyalty among Air Algérie passengers.

H4: Inbound marketing significantly mediates the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty at Air Algérie.

The first three hypotheses establish the direct effects that structure the mediation model, while the fourth hypothesis constitutes the central theoretical claim of the study: that the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty is meaningfully transmitted through the inbound marketing interface, rather than operating exclusively through direct pathways.

The conceptual model presented below was developed to illustrate the assumed relationships between the variables build on the hypotheses:

Figure 1: Research model



Source: Developed by the researcher

1.6 Method

This study adopts a quantitative research approach grounded in a positivist epistemological orientation. The choice of a quantitative design is methodologically required by the nature of the research problem: each of the four hypotheses posits a directional, measurable relationship between constructs, the testing of which necessitates numerical measurement and inferential statistical analysis. A qualitative approach, while appropriate for exploring the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their experiences, would not produce the statistically grounded conclusions required to evaluate the existence, direction, and magnitude of the relationships specified in the conceptual model.

Primary data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed online via Google Forms over a period of approximately four weeks. The distribution channels included LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

1.7 Research Outline

This thesis is organized into three chapters, each of which corresponds to a distinct stage of the research process.

Chapter One presents the theoretical framework that underpins the study. It opens with a systematic literature review covering the three main variables and the theoretical relationships between them. It then develops the conceptual framework, providing detailed definitions and dimensional analyses of each construct and formalizing the four hypotheses of the study within an integrated sequential model. The chapter is theoretically anchored in

Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Service-Dominant Logic, which provide complementary perspectives on how organizational marketing capabilities generate customer-facing outcomes.

Chapter Two presents the methodological and contextual framework. The first section details and justifies the research design choices made in the study, including the quantitative approach, the survey strategy, the deductive reasoning logic, and the cross-sectional time horizon. It describes the questionnaire structure, the measurement scales, the data collection procedure, the pilot test, and the sample size determination. It also presents the parametric test assumptions and the statistical techniques employed in the analysis. The second section provides an organizational profile of Air Algérie, including its history, governance structure, and Brand Management Directorate, establishing the institutional context in which the empirical investigation is situated.

Chapter Three constitutes the analytical core of the thesis and is divided into two sections. Section One presents the quantitative results in a progressive sequence: sociodemographic description of the sample, item-level descriptive statistics and construct-level reliability, measurement validation through KMO, Bartlett, and principal components analysis, normality diagnostics and Spearman robustness checks, Pearson bivariate correlation analysis, simple and multiple linear regression results for H1 and H3, the a-path regression for H2, and the PROCESS mediation decomposition for H4. Section Two interprets these findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework, answers the research questions, compares results with prior empirical work, and derives managerial implications organized around four strategic priorities for Air Algérie. The chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of the study's limitations and five avenues for future research.

Chapter I: Theoretical Framework

Section 1: Literature review

1.1 Strategic marketing

Strategic marketing has long been recognized as a central pillar of organizational performance, yet the academic conversation has evolved considerably over the past decade, shifting from static planning frameworks toward more dynamic, adaptive, and capability-based perspectives. Early contributions tended to treat strategy as a linear process, formulated at the top and cascaded downward, but contemporary research has substantially complicated this picture.

A foundational tension in the field concerns the relationship between strategy formulation and its implementation. Malshe et al. (2021) identify a series of organizational impediments, particularly at the marketing-sales interface, that prevent well-designed strategies from translating into consistent customer-facing outcomes. The authors argue that organizational silos, misaligned incentives, and poor cross-functional coordination are among the most persistent barriers and that addressing them is essential for sustaining relational coherence with customers. This concern is extended and deepened by Morgan et al. (2025), who argue that the difficulty of strategic marketing lies less in its conception than in its execution. Their work underscores that implementation failures are not accidental but structurally embedded and that organizations that achieve execution consistency are better positioned to deliver stable customer experiences, a prerequisite for loyalty over time.

While this debate carries on, a large body of work has reframed strategic marketing through dynamic capabilities, which Hoque et al. (2022) define as the firm's capacity to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences in response to changing market conditions. Their findings indicate that the continuous reconfiguration of marketing capabilities supports the alignment of organizational offerings with evolving customer expectations, sustaining perceived value and reinforcing the antecedents of customer loyalty over time. Sinkovics et al. (2024a, 2024b) extend this perspective to international markets, demonstrating through a systematic review that firms endowed with strong dynamic marketing capabilities sustain competitive advantage across heterogeneous market environments. The authors associate this adaptive capability with both financial performance and customer retention, arguing that organizations capable of co-evolving with their customer base are more likely to preserve the relational foundations of loyalty.

Theoharakis et al. (2024) provide a more nuanced perspective. They argue that the simultaneous demands of strategic reformulation and operational execution generate organizational tensions that are an intrinsic, rather than incidental, feature of strategic marketing planning. Their empirical work shows, however, that firms capable of managing this paradox, maintaining coherence in execution while remaining open to strategic revision, outperform those that treat planning and implementation as sequential rather than concurrent activities. This finding has direct implications for how firms manage the relationship between strategic agility and relational consistency, two qualities that customers experience as trustworthiness and reliability.

Arslan et al. (2024) explore marketing agility. Although their empirical setting is restricted to entrepreneurial ventures in post-conflict Sub-Saharan African contexts, their qualitative findings carry broader theoretical implications, showing that the firm's ability to detect and respond to shifts in customer expectations contributes to the construction of relational trust. Interpreted in this light, marketing agility constitutes a relevant determinant of customer loyalty in volatile and rapidly evolving environments, functioning as a relational asset rather than as a purely competitive instrument.

Three theoretical and methodological tensions traverse this body of work and remain unresolved. First, there is a persistent debate between capability-based approaches (Hoque et al., 2022; Sinkovics et al., 2024a, 2024b) and execution-based approaches (Malshe et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2025) regarding the principal source of strategic marketing's contribution to performance: the former emphasizes adaptive reconfiguration as the primary mechanism, whereas the latter argues that the binding constraint is implementation consistency.

The two perspectives have not been integrated within a single empirically tested framework, and the present study positions itself at this intersection. Second, the methodological heterogeneity of the cited studies (qualitative case work in Arslan et al., 2024; conceptual review in Sinkovics et al., 2024a; quantitative survey in Theoharakis et al., 2024) limits the cumulability of their findings, and effect-size comparisons across this corpus are inherently approximate. Third, sectoral specificity is largely absent: the studies are conducted in heterogeneous settings (B2B, manufacturing, entrepreneurial ventures, multi-industry samples), and none isolates the particular conditions under which strategic marketing operates in flag-carrier service industries. The convergence of these three limits defines a

clear research gap: an empirical test, in a single service industry, of the integrated capability–execution chain that links strategic marketing to customer loyalty.

Taken together, these studies reveal a field in productive tension. There is broad consensus that strategic marketing creates conditions for customer loyalty through alignment, adaptability, and execution quality, but there is ongoing debate about which capabilities matter most and how they interact. A notable gap in this literature concerns service industries where operational complexity, regulatory constraints, and customer experience are deeply intertwined. The relationship between strategic marketing capabilities and customer loyalty in such contexts, particularly in service industries with high operational complexity and regulatory exposure, remains underexplored. This justifies the choice of a national carrier in an emerging market as the empirical site of the present research, the detailed presentation of which is reserved for Chapter II.

1.2 Inbound marketing

Inbound marketing has emerged over the past two decades as a substantive object of academic inquiry. Given the diminishing effectiveness of outbound communication tools in capturing the attention of digitally empowered consumers, a substantial research stream has examined the conditions under which firms can deploy pull-based approaches to engage their target audiences more effectively. Rather than relying on unsolicited promotional messages, inbound marketing seeks to attract customers through relevant content, personalized communication, and sustained engagement across the firm's digital touchpoints. The academic literature on this variable has developed along several interrelated dimensions, including economic performance, content strategy, social media engagement, and the influence of digital intermediaries on consumer behavior.

One of the earlier empirically grounded contributions in this stream is that of Erdmann and Ponzoa (2021), who examine the economic performance of inbound digital marketing in grocery e-commerce across Europe and the United States. Their findings demonstrate that inbound approaches generate more qualified traffic and produce measurable improvements in conversion and retention metrics. Importantly, the authors argue that by attracting better-targeted customers from the outset, inbound marketing creates a relational foundation that is more conducive to loyalty than acquisition-driven outbound strategies. This economic framing offers a useful counterweight to purely behavioral or attitudinal accounts of inbound effectiveness.

The content dimension of inbound marketing has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Salonen et al. (2024) focuses on the B2B context, demonstrating that the timing of content delivery along the customer journey significantly influences engagement outcomes. Their work demonstrates that the relational impact of content depends substantially on its contextual relevance and on the specific stage of the customer journey at which it is delivered. This finding invites a more process-oriented understanding of inbound marketing, one that accounts for the dynamics of the customer journey rather than treating content exposure as a discrete event. Complementing this, Waqas et al. (2021) develop and validate a scale for branded content experience on social media, showing that when content generates a positive experiential response, it strengthens emotional attachment to the brand and constitutes a meaningful antecedent of loyalty. Their conceptual contribution is notable in that it bridges the experiential and relational dimensions of content marketing, linking what customers feel during a content interaction to what they do in subsequent purchasing decisions.

The question of which specific forms of social media engagement translate into measurable loyalty behaviors is addressed by Halloran and Lutz (2021), who find that not all engagement types carry equal predictive power. Qualitative, high-involvement interactions are more strongly associated with repeat purchase behavior than passive metrics such as likes or impressions. This distinction carries practical and theoretical implications, as it challenges overly broad definitions of engagement and calls for greater precision in how inbound marketing outcomes are measured. Kulikovskaja et al. (2023) extend this line of inquiry, showing that social media-driven engagement improves a range of marketing outcomes, including relational behaviors. Their results confirm that content designed to stimulate genuine involvement, rather than superficial reaction, is more effective in building the kind of customer commitment that underlies loyalty.

Three reservations warrant explicit recognition. First, the operationalization of inbound marketing varies substantially across studies — from "qualified traffic and conversion" (Erdmann and Ponzoa, 2021), through "branded content experience" (Waqas et al., 2021), to "engagement quality" (Halloran and Lutz, 2021; Kulikovskaja et al., 2023) — which complicates direct comparison of effect sizes and obscures whether the construct refers to a marketing strategy, a digital infrastructure, or a customer experience.

Second, the causal direction between inbound activities and loyalty is not always clean: most cited studies are cross-sectional and self-reported, and none rules out the alternative that already-loyal customers are more likely to engage with inbound content. Third, the contextual boundary conditions of the inbound framework are inadequately examined: the studies are predominantly situated in mature digital economies (Europe, North America), and the transferability of the framework to emerging markets with under explored digital infrastructure remains an open empirical question. The present study addresses the first reservation by adopting a multi-dimensional operationalization of IM aligned with the four pillars identified by Halligan and Shah (2010), the second by triangulating bootstrap-based mediation tests with parallel non-parametric correlations, and the third by relocating the empirical site to a North African civil-aviation context.

Across this body of work, a pattern emerges: inbound marketing contributes to customer loyalty primarily through the quality and relevance of the experiences it generates, rather than through exposure volume alone. A recurring debate concerns the generalizability of findings across sectors and cultural contexts, as most studies are conducted in e-commerce, B2B, or retail settings. Service industries with high experiential and trust-based components remain comparatively underrepresented, suggesting that the mechanisms linking inbound marketing to loyalty may operate differently in contexts where the service encounter itself plays a central role.

1.3 Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty occupies a central position in marketing theory and practice, and its conceptualization has grown considerably more sophisticated over time. What was once understood primarily as repeat purchase behavior has been progressively reframed as a multidimensional construct encompassing attitudinal commitment, emotional attachment, and behavioral consistency.

A foundational contribution to the contemporary understanding of loyalty antecedents is provided by Desveaud et al. (2024), whose meta-analysis synthesizes a large body of empirical work to identify the variables most consistently associated with customer brand loyalty. Their findings position satisfaction, trust, perceived value, and emotional attachment as the primary drivers, while also highlighting the moderating role of product category and cultural context. The breadth of this meta-analytic evidence is significant because it confirms that loyalty is not a single-cause outcome but the product of multiple reinforcing

mechanisms, which means that any strategic intervention aiming to build loyalty must address several relational drivers simultaneously.

The satisfaction-loyalty chain is further examined in the context of digital retail by Molinillo et al. (2022), who demonstrate that the quality of the mobile app experience positively influences both satisfaction and loyalty toward the retailer. Their work underscores the growing importance of digital touchpoints as sites where loyalty is actively constructed or eroded, a finding echoed by Weidig et al. (2024), who propose a conceptual synthesis around personalized touchpoints and customer experience. The latter argue that personalization across the customer journey enhances the perceived relevance of each interaction, which in turn supports retention, provided that personalization is experienced as useful rather than intrusive. This nuance is important, as it introduces a conditionality into the personalization-loyalty relationship that earlier, more optimistic accounts tended to overlook.

The role of loyalty programs as managerial instruments has also received sustained scholarly attention. Agarwal et al. (2022) adopt a quantile regression approach to show that the perceived benefits of loyalty programs generate customer happiness, which in turn strengthens the relational bond and increases repurchase probability. Their focus on the emotional dimension of program participation is a notable contribution, as it moves beyond purely transactional accounts of program effectiveness. Lin and Bowman (2022) complement this perspective by examining the impact of introducing a loyalty program on category-level sales and profitability, finding that the effects vary considerably depending on the product category involved. Together, these two studies suggest that loyalty programs are neither universally effective nor uniformly understood by their participants, and that their design must be calibrated to the specific relational and commercial context in which they operate.

Ruvio et al. (2025) adopt a more experience-focused view, showing that experiential rewards lead to higher engagement and stronger loyalty than transactional rewards, mainly because they strengthen the customer's sense of identity connection with the brand. This result reflects a wider shift in the loyalty literature, where customers are seen as seeking meaning rather than simply maximizing utility. This finding suggests that loyalty programs and brand strategies that engage the consumer's self-identity, rather than addressing transactional behavior alone, generate more durable relational outcomes.

The digital interaction context is explored by Li et al. (2025), who examine how the quality of customer interactions during the returns handling process in online retail influences e-loyalty. Their results show that interactions perceived as fair and helpful during this typically friction-heavy phase of the customer journey significantly increase the intention to remain loyal. This contribution is theoretically important because it situates loyalty formation not only in positive peak experiences but also in the firm's capacity to manage service recovery and post-purchase complexity with consistency and care.

In the aviation sector specifically, Leon and Dixon (2023) provide evidence that service quality and trust are the dominant predictors of both satisfaction and behavioral loyalty among airline passengers. Their work reinforces the view that loyalty in high-involvement service contexts is fundamentally relational, built through repeated experiences of reliability and trustworthiness rather than through promotional incentives alone.

The customer loyalty literature reviewed here is converging on a multidimensional definition that integrates attitudinal, behavioral, relational, and community dimensions (Buttle and Maklan, 2015; Desveaud et al., 2024; Ruvio et al., 2025). Three open debates nevertheless persist. First, the theoretical status of loyalty programs remains contested: the meta-analytic evidence (Desveaud et al., 2024) and the experimental evidence (Agarwal et al., 2022; Lin and Bowman, 2022) are not fully consistent regarding whether programs generate genuine attitudinal commitment or merely reinforce repurchase inertia, with Ruvio et al. (2025) suggesting that the answer depends on whether the rewards offered are experiential or transactional. Second, the direction of the personalization–loyalty relationship is conditional rather than monotonic: Weidig et al. (2024) and Hou (2024) establish that personalization enhances loyalty when perceived as useful but erodes it when perceived as intrusive, and the cited literature does not yet specify the threshold beyond which the second effect dominates. Third, service-industry generalizability is constrained: the loyalty literature has been developed primarily in retail and digital-platform contexts, and aviation-specific evidence (Leon and Dixon, 2023) is comparatively scarce. These three open debates jointly motivate the integrated SM → IM → CL test conducted in the present study, in a service-industry context that has been comparatively understudied.

Finally, Lim and Rasul (2022) revisit the relationship between social media engagement and customer loyalty, confirming through a systematic review that engagement constitutes a stable antecedent of loyalty, word-of-mouth, and customer lifetime value. Their work

provides a conceptual bridge between the inbound marketing literature and the loyalty literature, suggesting that the digital relational practices examined in the previous section do not merely attract customers but actively contribute to retaining them.

1.4 Relationships among the three constructs

In this section, we examine the relationship between strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty through the lens of existing research. Numerous studies have explored these connections, shedding light on the different mechanisms through which organizational capabilities and digital relational practices shape long-term customer behavior in competitive service environments.

1.4.1 The relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty

Strategic marketing plays an important role in building and maintaining customer loyalty because it encourages companies to focus on long-term value creation. Firms that systematically analyse their markets and accurately identify the needs of their target customers are better positioned to design services that meet or exceed customer expectations. This alignment between the needs of customers and what a company offers can improve satisfaction, which leads to stronger loyalty. Desveaud et al. (2024) confirm through meta-analytic evidence that satisfaction and perceived value, both of which are shaped by strategic marketing decisions, are among the most robust antecedents of customer brand loyalty across contexts.

In addition, strategic marketing helps companies build a clear and consistent brand position. When customers understand what a company represents and what value it offers compared to its competitors, they are more likely to develop trust in the brand. Malshe et al. (2021) highlight that organizational coherence and cross-functional alignment, both products of sound strategic marketing, are essential for delivering consistent customer experiences that generate this kind of trust over time. Over time, this trust can strengthen the relationship between customers and the company.

This relationship becomes particularly important in service industries such as aviation, where customers have many alternatives when choosing a service provider. Leon and Dixon (2023) demonstrate precisely this dynamic in their study of airline passengers, finding that trust and service quality, both anchored in strategic decisions about positioning and service delivery,

are the dominant predictors of behavioral loyalty in the aviation sector. Airlines that maintain a clear strategic direction and consistently deliver value are more likely to encourage passengers to continue choosing their services.

1.4.2 The relationship between inbound marketing and customer loyalty

Inbound marketing also plays a significant role in shaping customer loyalty, especially in digital environments where customers frequently interact with brands online. By sharing relevant content and maintaining regular communication, companies can create interactions that make customers feel more connected and close to the brand. Saavedra-Azabache et al. (2024) provide direct empirical support for this relationship, finding a significant association between inbound marketing practices and customer loyalty in the tourism sector, driven primarily by the relevance and personalization of the content delivered throughout the customer journey.

Digital engagement activities — such as the consultation of online content, interaction on social media platforms, and the receipt of personalized communications — facilitate the construction of stronger relational bonds between customers and firms. Waqas et al. (2021) show that a positive branded content experience on social media strengthens emotional attachment to the brand, which constitutes a meaningful antecedent of loyalty.

Moreover, inbound marketing encourages continuous communication between companies and their audiences. Instead of relying only on traditional promotional messages, it focuses on delivering information and experiences that are useful for customers. Erdmann and Ponzio (2021) argue that this approach generates more qualified and relationally predisposed customer bases from the outset, while Salonen et al. (2024) add that the timely delivery of content along the customer journey further deepens engagement and increases the probability of sustained loyalty over time.

1.4.3 The mediating role of inbound marketing

The present study advances the theoretical proposition that the two previous relationships are best understood as constituent parts of an integrated sequential chain in which inbound marketing functions as the relational mechanism through which strategic marketing capabilities translate into customer loyalty.

The starting point of this chain is the firm itself. Strategic marketing establishes the conditions of possibility for any subsequent customer-facing activity. However, strategic

marketing is largely invisible to customers in its raw form. Customers do not directly perceive a firm's market orientation, its segmentation logic, or its competitive positioning intent; they perceive only the manifestations of these decisions in the interactions and communications they receive. Strategic marketing therefore requires a relational interface to become visible, and inbound marketing increasingly performs this function in the digital age.

Inbound marketing constitutes this interface in three connected ways. First, the content produced by an organization is the operational expression of its strategic positioning: a clear strategic intent translates into coherent editorial choices, while strategic ambiguity produces fragmented, off-brand content (Halligan & Shah, 2010; Rose, 2023). Second, the personalization and lead-nurturing practices that characterize mature inbound systems are direct outputs of customer-centric strategic decisions; without an upstream commitment to customer-centricity, downstream personalization remains technically possible but strategically empty (Hou, 2024). Third, the search, social, and community-building activities through which customers encounter the brand digitally are the principal stages on which strategic marketing decisions are performed, evaluated, and ultimately validated by customers themselves (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Kingsnorth, 2025).

Customer loyalty, in this sequential view, is not a direct effect of strategic marketing but the cumulative outcome of customer experiences with the inbound interface that strategic marketing produces. When the upstream strategy is sound and the downstream interface faithfully executes it, customers encounter a brand whose communications are relevant, whose personalization feels respectful, and whose digital presence is consistent with its operational reality, and these experiences generate the satisfaction, trust, and emotional attachment that the loyalty literature consistently identifies as the proximal antecedents of behavioral and attitudinal loyalty (Desveaud et al., 2024; Leon & Dixon, 2023). Conversely, when strategic intent and inbound execution diverge, customers encounter dissonance between what the brand says strategically and what it shows digitally, and this dissonance erodes the very trust that loyalty depends upon.

This articulation yields the central theoretical claim that the present study tests: the impact of strategic marketing on customer loyalty is meaningfully transmitted through inbound marketing rather than operating only as a direct effect. Strategic marketing without an effective inbound interface remains an internal organizational asset whose customer-facing returns are under explored ; inbound marketing without a coherent strategic foundation generates activity without alignment.

1.5 Research gap and theoretical anchoring

The literature reviewed across the three variables reveals a body of knowledge that is both rich and, in certain respects, incomplete. While substantial progress has been made in understanding strategic marketing capabilities, inbound marketing practices, and the antecedents of customer loyalty independently, the integrated examination of these three constructs within a single empirical framework remains largely absent from the existing literature.

Studies on strategic marketing, such as those of Morgan et al. (2025), Malshe et al. (2021), and Theoharakis et al. (2024), have advanced the understanding of how organizational capabilities and implementation quality shape marketing outcomes, but they rarely extend their analysis to loyalty as a downstream variable, and they do not account for the mediating role that inbound marketing may play in this relationship. Similarly, the inbound marketing literature, represented by contributions such as Erdmann and Ponzoa (2021) and Saavedra-Azabache et al. (2024), tends to treat inbound practices as independent drivers of engagement and retention without situating them within a broader strategic marketing framework that would explain the organizational conditions under which they are most effective.

The customer loyalty literature, for its part, identifies a well-established set of antecedents including satisfaction, trust, perceived value, and emotional attachment, as confirmed by Desveaud et al. (2024), but it does not systematically examine how these antecedents are generated through the combined and sequential action of strategic marketing and inbound marketing. The pathway linking upstream strategic decisions to downstream loyalty outcomes, with inbound marketing functioning as the relational bridge between the two, has not been empirically tested as an integrated model.

A second and equally significant gap concerns the sectoral context. The vast majority of studies reviewed were conducted in e-commerce, retail, B2B, or general service settings. The aviation sector, despite its distinctive characteristics in terms of service complexity, customer journey length, trust requirements, and competitive dynamics, remains comparatively underrepresented in research that connects marketing strategy to loyalty outcomes. Leon and Dixon (2023) provide a valuable starting point by confirming the centrality of trust and service quality in airline passenger loyalty, but their work does not incorporate the strategic marketing or inbound marketing dimensions that the present study addresses.

Taken together, these observations define a clear and justified research gap: the simultaneous examination of strategic marketing and inbound marketing as sequential determinants of customer loyalty within a service industry context that has received under explored attention in the existing literature. The present study addresses this gap by proposing and testing an integrative framework in which inbound marketing mediates the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty, with the aviation sector serving as the empirical context for this investigation.

Section 2: Conceptual framework

In order to better understand the mechanisms underlying the impact of strategic marketing and inbound marketing on customer loyalty, this section presents the key concepts mobilized in this research and their theoretical articulations. It is structured around three axes: strategic marketing as the organizational foundation of competitive positioning, inbound marketing as the digitally mediated relational bridge between the firm and its customers, and customer loyalty as the behavioral and attitudinal outcome of sustained value-creating interactions. The objective is to construct a coherent and structured theoretical base from which the empirical analysis will subsequently be developed.

2.1 Strategic marketing

Strategic marketing occupies a foundational position in any serious inquiry into how organizations sustain competitive relevance and build lasting relationships with their customers. Before examining its key dimensions, it is necessary to understand what strategic marketing is.

2.1.1 Definition and evolution of strategic marketing

The concept of strategic marketing does not carry a single, universally agreed-upon definition, and this conceptual plurality is itself instructive. Different scholars have emphasized different aspects of the phenomenon depending on the intellectual tradition from which they write and the organizational contexts they have in mind.

Kotler and Armstrong (2018), in *Principles of Marketing*, offer one of the most widely cited and pedagogically influential starting points. They define strategic marketing as the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in

order to capture value from customers in return. This exchange-based framing is significant because it positions marketing not as a one-directional act of promotion but as a bilateral process of value creation and value capture. The firm does not simply push products or services toward passive recipients; it engages in a deliberate and ongoing negotiation with the market over what is worth creating, how it should be communicated, and at what price it should be exchanged.

The entire sequence is held together by a commitment to building profitable customer relationships that, when sustained, generate the customer loyalty that represents the highest return on marketing investment.

Kotler and Keller (2012), in *Marketing Management*, deepen this framework by introducing the concept of holistic marketing, which they define as an approach that recognizes that everything matters in marketing and that a broad, integrated perspective is often necessary.

The evolutionary dimension of strategic marketing is addressed with particular clarity by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), in *Digital Marketing Strategy: Implementation and Practice*, who trace the discipline's trajectory from its roots in mass-market advertising and product-centric thinking toward its contemporary emphasis on customer centricity, data-driven decision-making, and digital integration. They argue that the digital revolution did not create a new form of marketing so much as it accelerated and intensified pre-existing strategic imperatives: the need to understand customers with greater precision, to communicate with them across multiple touchpoints in a coherent and personalized manner and measure the outcomes of marketing investments with greater accountability.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) describe modern strategic marketing planning as a process that moves through situation analysis, objective-setting, strategy formulation, tactical planning, and performance evaluation, a sequence that is recognizable across the classical marketing literature but that now unfolds within a digital environment that vastly expands both the possibilities and the complexities of each stage.

Taken together, these contributions trace an intellectual evolution that moves from a transactional, product-centered understanding of marketing toward a relational, customer-centered, and strategically integrated one. Early marketing theory, as Kotler and Armstrong (2018) describe, was dominated by a production concept, the belief that consumers would prefer products that were widely available and affordable, and by a selling concept that

emphasized aggressive promotion of whatever the organization produced. The marketing concept that emerged in its place holds that achieving organizational goals depends on knowing the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions better than competitors do (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The societal marketing concept, identified as the most newly evolution, adds a further dimension by requiring that marketing decisions balance customer desires, company requirements, and long-term societal welfare.

2.1.2 Key Dimensions of Strategic Marketing

Having established how strategic marketing has been defined and how its conceptualization has evolved, it is now possible to examine the specific dimensions through which it operates in practice. The present study identifies four such dimensions: market orientation, customer-centric strategy, competitive positioning, and value creation and strategic intent.

1. Market orientation:

Market orientation represents the foundational disposition from which all other dimensions of strategic marketing flow. It refers to the extent to which an organization systematically gathers, disseminates, and responds to intelligence about its market, including intelligence about customers, competitors, and the broader forces shaping the environment in which it operates. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) describe market orientation as the marketing management philosophy most consistent with the modern marketing concept: achieving organizational goals depend on knowing the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions better than competitors do. An organization that is genuinely market-oriented does not start with its products or its internal capabilities and work outward toward the market; it starts with the market and works inward to configure its resources and capabilities accordingly.

Kotler and Keller (2012) deepen this understanding by connecting market orientation to the practice of marketing intelligence and the continuous scanning of the marketing environment. They describe the marketing environment as consisting of a task environment, the immediate actors involved in producing, distributing, and promoting the offering, and a broad environment encompassing demographic, economic, physical, technological, political-legal, and social-cultural forces. A market-oriented organization maintains ongoing awareness of developments across both environments, using this awareness to anticipate shifts in customer

needs before they become visible in sales data and to identify competitive threats and opportunities with sufficient lead time to respond strategically rather than reactively.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) extend the concept of market orientation into the digital domain by arguing that the digital environment has fundamentally transformed the nature and scope of market intelligence available to organizations. Digital analytics tools, social listening platforms, search query data, and customer behavioral data from digital touchpoints collectively provide a depth and timeliness of market intelligence that was unavailable to previous generations of marketers. For Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), a market-oriented organization in the contemporary environment is one that not only collects this intelligence but also structures its decision-making processes around it, using data to identify micro-segments, to personalize communications, and to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing investments in near real time.

2. Customer-centric strategy

Customer-centric strategy refers to the organizational practice of placing the customer, rather than the product, the channel, or the internal process, at the center of every significant strategic decision. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) describe customer-centric marketing as a strategy in which the company focuses on building the right relationships with the right customers, recognising that customers contribute differentially to organisational profitability and that sustained growth depends on the appropriate allocation of relational and managerial resources to the most valuable customer relationships.

This selectivity is a defining feature of customer-centric strategy. Rather than treating the entire market as a homogeneous mass to be addressed with uniform messages and standard offerings, a customer-centric organization deliberately differentiates its approach build on a nuanced understanding of the varying needs, behaviors, and lifetime values of different customer segments. Kotler and Keller (2012) describe this process through the lens of customer relationship management, which they define as the process of carefully managing detailed information about individual customers and all customer touchpoints to maximize customer loyalty. The touchpoint concept is particularly significant here: it directs organizational attention to every instance of contact between the customer and the brand and frames each interaction as an opportunity to either strengthen or weaken the relational bond.

Hou (2024), in *Data-Driven Personalization: How to Use Consumer Insights to Generate Customer Loyalty*, provides a rich elaboration of customer-centric strategy in the digital age by arguing that genuine customer centricity now requires the systematic use of consumer data to move beyond segment-level generalizations toward individual-level personalization. She argues that consumers increasingly expect brands to demonstrate that they understand them as individuals, that the communications they receive, the offers they are presented with, and the experiences they encounter are shaped by an accurate and respectful reading of their preferences and history. For Hou (2024), customer-centric strategy is not simply a philosophical orientation but a data infrastructure and analytical capability that must be built and maintained with deliberate organizational investment.

3. Competitive Positioning

Competitive positioning refers to the deliberate process through which an organization defines and communicates a distinctive place for itself in the minds of its target customers relative to competing alternatives. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) describe positioning as arranging for a product to occupy a clear, distinctive, and desirable place relative to competing products in the minds of target consumers, and they treat it as the culminating decision in a strategic sequence that begins with market segmentation and moves through target market selection before arriving at the positioning problem.

The relationship between differentiation and positioning is central to this dimension. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) argue that a brand must identify a set of possible competitive advantages on which to build a position and that these advantages must be grounded in real and sustainable differences in product features, service quality, channel access, personnel, or brand image, rather than in superficial claims that competitors can readily imitate. The credibility gap between positioning promise and operational reality is one of the most damaging sources of customer dissatisfaction and the most direct pathway to the erosion of loyalty.

Kotler and Keller (2012) extend the positioning framework by distinguishing between points of difference, the attributes or benefits that strongly associate a brand with a positive evaluation that consumers believe they could not find to the same degree with a competitive brand, and points of parity, the associations that are not necessarily unique to the brand but are shared with other brands and that establish its legitimacy within the category. This

distinction helps identify which aspects of an organization's offering must meet the baseline expectations of the category and which have the potential to create a genuinely distinctive customer impression.

Kingsnorth (2025) approaches competitive positioning from a digital strategy perspective, arguing that in the contemporary environment, positioning must be expressed and reinforced not only through traditional brand communications but also through the organization's digital presence, its website architecture, its search visibility, its social media voice, and the quality of its digital customer interactions. He contends that a brand's digital behavior is increasingly understood by customers as the most authentic expression of its positioning, since digital interactions are direct, immediate, and difficult to stage-manage in the way that traditional advertising can be (Kingsnorth, 2025).

4. Value creation and strategic intent

Value creation and strategic intent constitute the fourth and most integrative dimension of strategic marketing. Value creation refers to the process through which the organization combines its resources, capabilities, and market knowledge to produce offerings and experiences that customers perceive as meaningfully superior to available alternatives. Strategic intent refers to the long-term directional commitment of the organization to a particular form of value creation, one distinctive enough to sustain competitive advantage and compelling enough to organize the collective efforts of the enterprise around a shared purpose.

Kotler and Armstrong (2018) ground value creation in the customer value proposition, the full mix of benefits upon which a brand is positioned and that answers the customer's fundamental question: why should I choose this brand rather than a competitor's? They argue that a sizeable value proposition is not a list of product features but a promise of value that resonates with the customer's most important needs and that the organization is genuinely equipped to keep. The alignment between what the value proposition promises and what the organization actually delivers is, for Kotler and Armstrong (2018), the single most important driver of customer satisfaction and the foundation upon which loyalty is ultimately constructed.

Kotler and Keller (2012) develop the value creation theme through their treatment of brand equity, which they define as the added value endowed on products and services by the name

and associations of a brand. Brand equity represents the accumulated result of sustained value creation over time: when a brand consistently delivers on its value proposition, customers develop positive associations, beliefs, and feelings about it that increase their willingness to pay a premium, reduce their sensitivity to competitive offers, and motivate them to recommend the brand to others.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) connect value creation to digital strategy by arguing that value is increasingly co-created through interactions between organizations and their customers across digital channels. When a customer engages with a brand's content, participates in an online community, or shares branded content within their network, they are not merely receiving value; they are participating in its production. Halligan and Shah (2010), in *Inbound Marketing: Get Found Using Google, Social Media, and Blogs*, make a closely related point when they argue that the most sustainable form of marketing value in the digital age is earned rather than bought, built through the consistent production of genuinely useful content that attracts customers and gives them reasons to return, engage, and ultimately commit.

Rose (2023), in *Content Marketing Strategy: Harness the Power of Your Brand's Voice*, provides a strategic framework for value creation through content by arguing that a brand's content strategy must be understood as a long-term investment in the development of a brand voice and content capability that generates audience trust over time. The strategic intent expressed in this content investment is not simply to generate short-term leads or conversions but to build a body of work that establishes the brand as a credible, knowledgeable, and genuinely helpful presence in the lives of its target customers (Rose, 2023).

In synthesizing these contributions, it becomes clear that value creation and strategic intent act as the organizing logic of strategic marketing. Market orientation provides the intelligence to understand customer value; customer-centric strategy translates this into relevant offerings and experiences; competitive positioning establishes a credible claim to superiority; and strategic intent ensures long-term direction and coherence. Together, this integrated logic makes strategic marketing not merely a set of techniques but a coherent organizational capability, one whose quality and consistency, as this study argues, directly shape the relational outcomes of inbound marketing and, ultimately, the depth and durability of customer loyalty.

Figure 2: Strategic marketing dimensions



Source: Developed by the researcher build on previous studies

2.2 Inbound marketing

Inbound marketing has emerged over the past two decades as a major shift in how organizations approach communication and customer acquisition. Unlike traditional marketing, build on interruption and mass outreach, it focuses on attracting, engaging, and retaining customers through useful and relevant content that audiences actively seek.

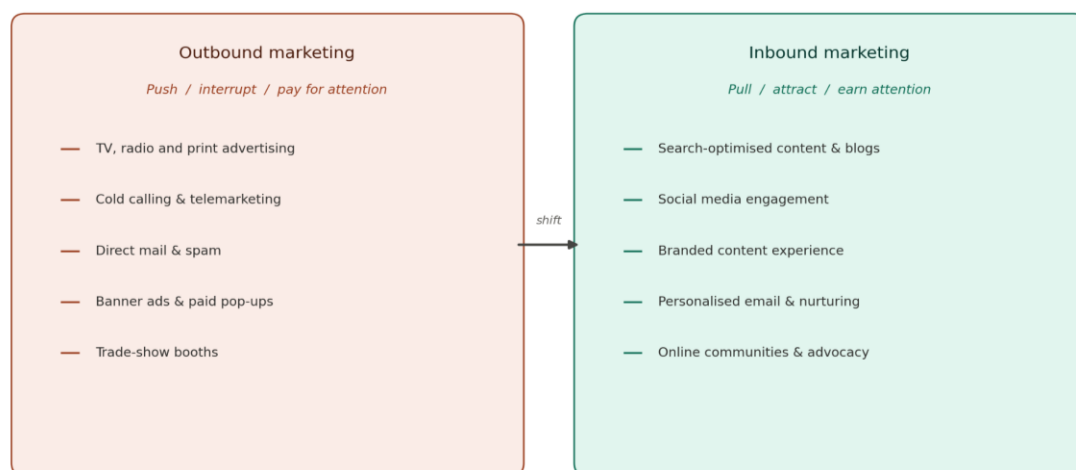
2.2.1 Definitions and Evolution of Inbound Marketing

The term "inbound marketing" was introduced and popularized by Halligan and Shah (2010) in *Inbound Marketing: Get Found Using Google, Social Media, and Blogs*, a text that remains the foundational reference point for the concept in both academic and practitioner literatures. Halligan and Shah (2010) define inbound marketing in direct opposition to what is called outbound marketing, the traditional practice of pushing messages toward audiences through paid channels such as television and radio advertising, cold calling, direct mail, and print media. Their central argument is that the digital revolution has fundamentally altered the conditions under which marketing messages are received. Consumers have developed, through the cumulative adoption of digital technologies, a considerable capacity to filter,

ignore, and actively avoid unsolicited commercial communication. Spam filters, digital video recorders, caller identification systems, and the general fragmentation of media attention have collectively eroded the effectiveness of outbound approaches to the point where organizations can no longer rely on paid interruption as their primary means of reaching potential customers.

In response to this shift, Halligan and Shah (2010) propose a model in which organizations earn the attention of their target audiences rather than buying it. The mechanism through which this is accomplished is the production and distribution of content in the form of blog posts, search-optimized web pages, social media contributions, videos, and other digital materials that potential customers are actively seeking out because it addresses their informational needs, answers their questions, or enriches their experience in some meaningful way. The logic is that an organization which makes itself genuinely findable and genuinely useful in the digital spaces where its target customers spend their time will attract a more qualified, more engaged, and ultimately more loyal customer base than one that relies exclusively on paid interruption to generate awareness and leads. This proposition is the conceptual core of inbound marketing as Halligan and Shah (2010) originally articulate it.

Figure 3: From interruption to attraction: The inbound shift



Source: Developed by the researcher build on previous studies

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), in *Digital Marketing Strategy: Implementation and Practice*, situate inbound marketing within the broader architecture of digital marketing

strategy and extend its conceptualization in several important directions. They describe inbound marketing as a pull-based approach that draws customers toward the organization through the quality of its digital presence, contrasting it with push-based paid media that delivers messages to audiences regardless of their current level of interest or intent. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) are particularly attentive to the role of search engines in the inbound model, arguing that organic search visibility, the degree to which an organization's web content appears prominently in search engine results pages in response to queries from potential customers, is one of the most strategically valuable assets that a digitally mature organization can develop. Unlike paid search advertising, which delivers visibility only for as long as the budget sustains it, organic search visibility built through consistently high-quality content and sound technical optimization compounds over time, generating a durable source of qualified traffic that does not depend on continuous financial investment.

Robert Rose (2023), in *Content Marketing Strategy: Harness the Power of Your Brand's Voice*, highlights a dimension often overlooked in technical views of inbound marketing: the strategic role of brand voice and editorial identity. He argues that effective inbound marketing is not just about producing content but about expressing a coherent and authentic brand perspective that resonates with the audience. This shifts the focus from early approaches centered on distribution and SEO toward the quality and meaning of what is communicated. For Rose, the brands that build the strongest customer loyalty are those whose content identity is trusted, recognizable, and consistently valuable to their audience.

2.2.2 Key dimensions of inbound marketing

Inbound marketing rests on several complementary dimensions that together explain how firms attract and retain customers through non-intrusive means. Among them, content creation and quality stand out as a core element, since the relevance of the content produced conditions the effectiveness of all other inbound activities

1. Content Creation and Quality

Content creation and quality represent the foundational dimension of inbound marketing, since all other inbound activities depend on the existence of content worth finding and returning to. Halligan and Shah (2010) describe content as the primary currency of inbound marketing, the asset through which the organization earns the attention and trust of potential customers, a defined organizational commitment to what it stands for and what value it delivers to its audience on a sustained basis. Without this strategic clarity, even technically

competent content risks becoming fragmented, failing to build the cumulative audience trust that is the primary relational dividend of a disciplined content investment. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) complement this by situating content quality within the customer journey, arguing that effective content must be calibrated to the specific informational needs that arise at each stage of the decision-making process, from initial awareness through post-purchase engagement.

2. Search Engine Optimization and Digital Visibility

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to the practices through which an organization improves the likelihood that its content appears prominently in search engine results in response to queries from potential customers. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) describe SEO as one of the most strategically significant investments available to a digitally active organization, precisely because its effects are cumulative and durable; a well-optimized content library grows in authority over time, generating an expanding stream of organic traffic that does not require continuous financial investment to maintain. Kingsnorth (2025) situates SEO within the broader inbound framework by arguing that search visibility is not merely a technical achievement but a strategic asset reflecting the organization's sustained commitment to producing content that users recognize as authoritative and trustworthy. Halligan and Shah (2010) reinforce this by describing SEO as the infrastructure of inbound marketing, the technical foundation without which even the most compelling content remains largely invisible to the audiences it is designed to serve.

3. Social Media Engagement and Community Building

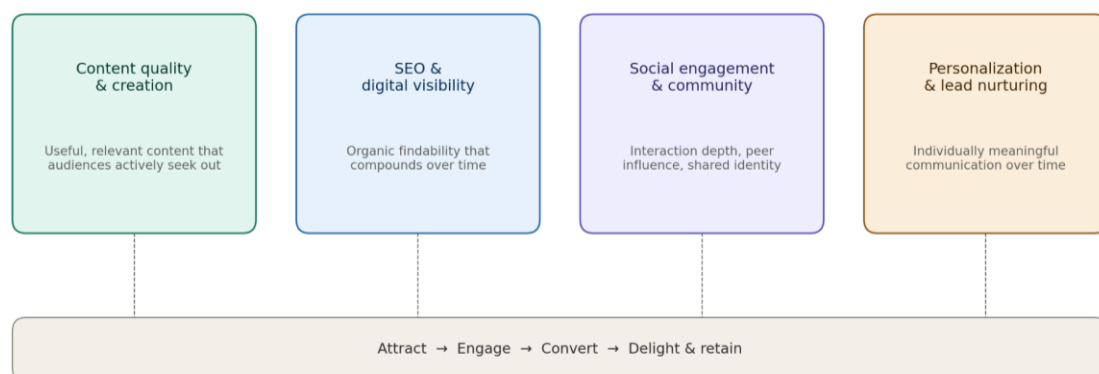
Social media platforms have become central to inbound marketing, functioning not only as content distribution channels but also as spaces in which organizations build communities of engaged followers and develop the relational capital that translates into loyalty over time. Halligan and Shah (2010) identify social media as one of the three foundational pillars of inbound marketing, arguing that the quality of interaction matters as much as the quantity of followers or the frequency of posts. AbuAli (2025), in *Community Building for Marketers: How to Connect, Engage, and Foster Growth*, develops this relational dimension by arguing that the most valuable outcome of a sustained social media investment is community, a group of engaged individuals who share an affinity for the brand and reinforce each other's loyalty through peer influence and shared identity. Kingsnorth (2025) connects social media

engagement to the broader inbound framework by arguing that its value is ultimately determined by the degree to which followers move from passive consumption to active engagement and, from there, to advocacy.

4. Personalization and Lead Nurturing

Personalization refers to the practice of tailoring marketing communications and content experiences to the individual characteristics, behavioral histories, and journey stages of specific customers rather than delivering uniform messages to undifferentiated audiences. Hou (2024), in *Data-Driven Personalization: How to Use Consumer Insights to Generate Customer Loyalty*, argues that effective personalization uses the full range of available consumer data to construct communication experiences that are individually meaningful. She demonstrates that consumers who experience a brand's communications as genuinely personalized report significantly higher levels of satisfaction, trust, and emotional attachment and that these attitudinal differences translate directly into measurable behavioral loyalty outcomes. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) describe lead nurturing as a critical component of the inbound process, arguing that organizations that fail to maintain relevant, personalized contact with potential customers during the consideration phase lose a significant proportion of the relational value that their content investment has generated.

Figure 4: The four pillars of inbound marketing across the customer journey.



Source: Developed by the researcher build on previous studies

2.3 Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty has become a central concern in marketing research, as it directly shapes firms' long-term performance. In the airline industry, where services are often perceived as similar, loyalty plays a decisive role in retaining passengers and securing stable revenues.

2.3.1 Definition and evolution of customer loyalty

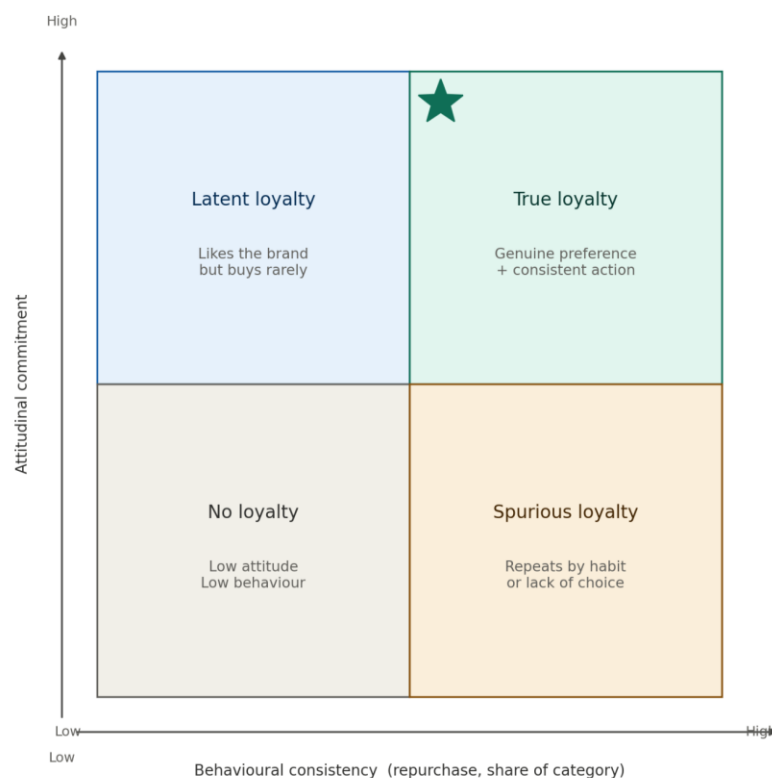
Early treatments of customer loyalty tended to reduce it to its most observable expression, repeat purchase behavior, treating a customer who returned to the same provider on multiple occasions as, by definition, a loyal one. This behavioral definition, while practically convenient, was recognized over time as theoretically insufficient. Repeat patronage, as Buttle and Maklan (2015) observe in *Customer Relationship Management*, can result from habit, inertia, geographic constraints, or the absence of viable alternatives rather than from any genuine preference for or emotional attachment to the brand in question. A customer who flies the same airline repeatedly because it is the only carrier serving their route is not, in any meaningful sense, loyal, and an organization that mistakes structural captivity for earned loyalty is likely to be caught unprepared when competitive alternatives eventually emerge.

The response to this limitation was the progressive broadening of the loyalty concept to incorporate its attitudinal dimension, the cognitive and affective states that distinguish customers who genuinely prefer a brand from those who merely repurchase it by default. Kotler and Armstrong (2018), in *Principles of Marketing*, connect loyalty explicitly to the concept of customer satisfaction, arguing that highly satisfied customers are significantly more likely to repurchase, less likely to switch to competitors, and more likely to recommend the brand to others, behaviors that collectively constitute what they describe as customer delight.

Buttle and Maklan (2015) draw an important and practically consequential distinction between spurious loyalty and true loyalty. Spurious loyalty describes the behavioral pattern of a customer who repurchases without genuine preference, a pattern that appears stable in the short term but is structurally fragile, liable to collapse the moment a competitive alternative becomes available. True loyalty, by contrast, combines behavioral consistency with attitudinal commitment: the truly loyal customer not only returns repeatedly but does so because they genuinely value what the brand offers and trust it to continue delivering that value. This distinction has direct implications for how loyalty is measured and managed, since an organization that optimizes for behavioral metrics alone, repeat purchase rates, churn

statistics, and frequency scores may be systematically overestimating the relational depth of its customer base.

Figure 5: Spurious vs. true loyalty: the behavioral-attitudinal matrix.



Source: Developed by the researcher build on previous studies

Wheeler (2023), in *The Digital-First Customer Experience: Seven Design Strategies from the World's Leading Brands*, introduces a further evolutionary dimension by situating loyalty formation in the context of digital customer experience. He argues that in service industries where physical and digital interactions are deeply intertwined, the quality of each digital touchpoint encountered by the customer, from the initial website visit through the booking process, the post-service follow-up, and the handling of complaints, is a primary determinant of perceived brand value and, consequently, of loyalty. This digital experiential framing represents a meaningful evolution from earlier accounts of loyalty that were developed primarily in physical retail or face-to-face service contexts, and it is theoretically relevant for high-involvement service industries—such as civil aviation—in which the customer journey is composed of an extended sequence of digital and operational interactions whose cumulative quality determines the perceived value of the relationship.

2.3.2 Key Dimensions of Customer Loyalty

The present study operationalizes customer loyalty across four dimensions, attitudinal loyalty, behavioral loyalty, trust and relationship quality, and community and advocacy, each of which is grounded in the scholarly literature reviewed above.

Attitudinal Loyalty

Attitudinal loyalty refers to the cognitive and affective components of a customer's orientation toward a brand: their positive evaluation of it, their sense of preference for it relative to available alternatives, and the emotional attachment they have developed through repeated positive experiences. Kotler and Keller (2012) connect attitudinal loyalty directly to brand equity, arguing that brands that succeed in generating strong, favorable, and unique associations in the minds of their customers cultivate an attitudinal commitment that is considerably more durable than behavioral patterns rooted in habit or convenience. Buttle and Maklan (2015) reinforce this by identifying a positive attitude toward the brand as the distinguishing marker of true loyalty, the internal disposition that sustains behavioral consistency even when competitive alternatives are available and situational pressures might otherwise encourage switching.

Behavioral Loyalty

Behavioral loyalty refers to the observable, measurable expressions of a customer's ongoing commitment to a brand: repurchase frequency, share of category spending directed toward the brand, and resistance to switching under competitive pressure or service disruption. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) connect behavioral loyalty to the concept of customer lifetime value, arguing that the most strategically valuable customers are not necessarily those with the highest individual transaction values but those whose sustained patronage and referral behavior generate disproportionate long-term returns for the organization. Buttle and Maklan (2015) treat behavioral loyalty as the downstream expression of attitudinal loyalty, the point at which internal commitment translates into the kind of consistent, observable action that produces measurable commercial outcomes for the organization.

Trust and Relationship Quality

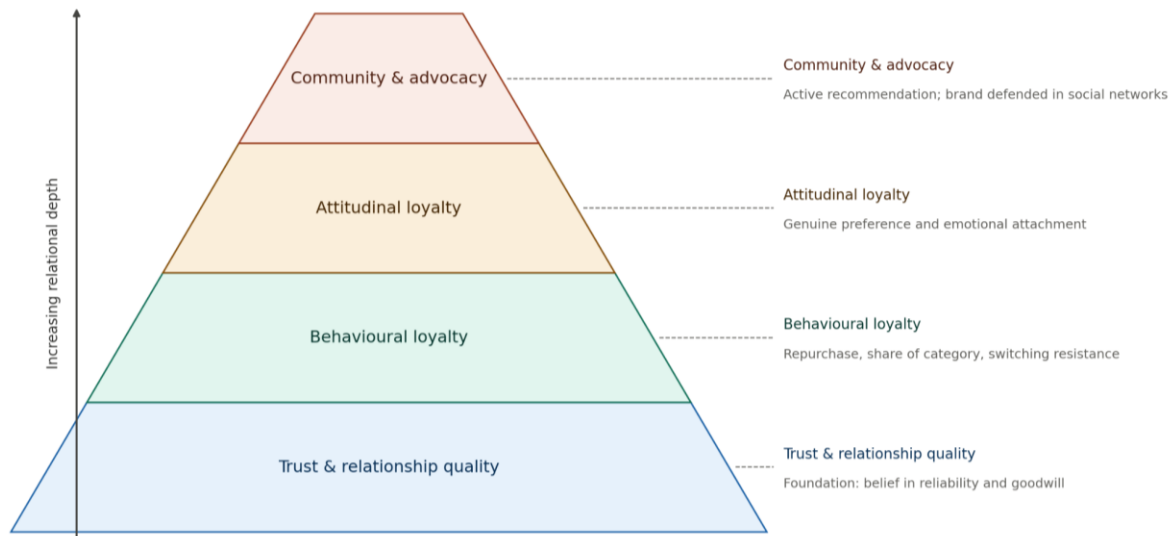
Trust occupies a foundational position in the loyalty literature, and its importance is particularly pronounced in service industries where the customer cannot fully evaluate the

quality of the offering prior to consumption and must therefore rely on the organization's reputation and past behavior as proxies for future reliability. Buttle and Maklan (2015) identify trust as the cornerstone of customer relationship quality, arguing that customers who trust a service provider, in the sense of believing that it will consistently honor its commitments, act in their interests, and respond reliably when things go wrong, are substantially more resilient in their loyalty across negative service experiences than those whose relationship with the provider is purely transactional. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) reinforce this by arguing that building trust requires not only the consistent delivery of promised value but also transparency, responsiveness, and a demonstrated organizational commitment to customer welfare that extends beyond the immediate transaction.

Community and Advocacy

Community and advocacy represent the highest-order expression of customer loyalty, the point at which a customer's commitment to a brand extends beyond their own purchasing behavior to encompass active promotion of the brand within their social networks. Hou (2024) demonstrates that customers who experience a brand as genuinely understanding and responding to their individual preferences are significantly more likely to recommend it to others, to defend it against criticism, and to generate the kind of positive word-of-mouth that constitutes one of the most credible and cost-effective forms of marketing available to an organization. AbuAli (2025), in *Community Building for Marketers: How to Connect, Engage and Foster Growth*, argues that brand communities, groups of customers who share an affinity for a brand and interaction with one another around it represent a particularly durable form of loyalty, since community membership reinforces individual commitment through the social bonds and shared identity that develop among members over time. Wheeler (2023) connects advocacy to the quality of the digital customer experience, arguing that customers who have encountered a brand as consistently helpful, responsive, and easy to engage with across digital channels are considerably more inclined to share that experience with others than those whose digital interactions have been frustrating or indifferent.

Figure 6: The customer loyalty pyramid: four cumulative dimensions



Source: Developed by the researcher build on previous studies

2.4 Proposed conceptual framework

The conceptual model (Figure below) integrates the three constructs developed in previous subsections into a sequential mediation framework. Strategic marketing (SM) is positioned as the upstream organizational capability, inbound marketing (IM) as the digitally mediated relational interface, and customer loyalty (CL) as the cumulative attitudinal and behavioral outcome. The four hypotheses of the study formalize four specific relationships within this framework, each of which is grounded in distinct theoretical reasoning.

H1: Strategic marketing has a positive direct effect on customer loyalty. This hypothesis rests on two complementary theoretical foundations. From the perspective of the resource-based and dynamic capabilities view (Hoque et al., 2022; Sinkovics et al., 2024a), an organization's capacity to systematically gather market intelligence, align its offerings with customer needs, and reconfigure its competitive positioning constitutes a strategic capability whose downstream effects materialize in the form of perceived value, satisfaction, and trust—the proximal antecedents of loyalty identified by Desveaud et al. (2024). From the perspective of service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Wheeler, 2023), strategic marketing creates the organizational conditions under which value can be co-created with customers, and these conditions exert a direct influence on relational outcomes through service quality, pricing

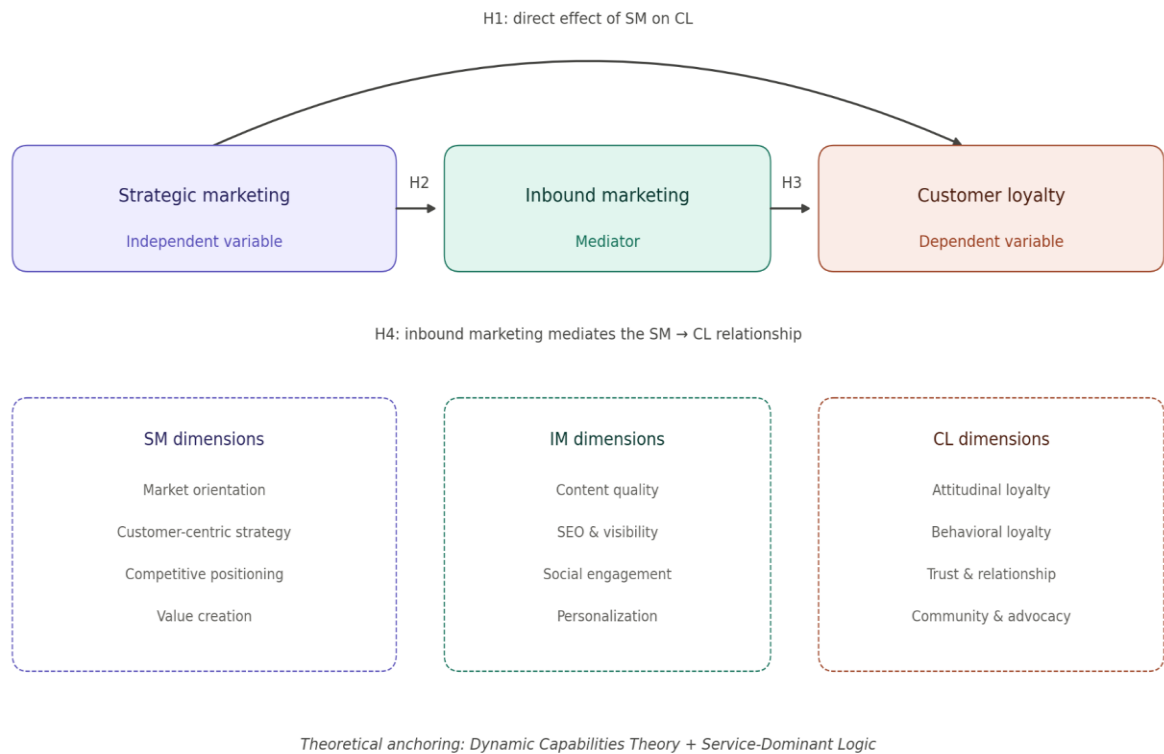
strategy and brand positioning, even in the absence of an explicit digital interface. H1 therefore predicts that even when the inbound marketing channel is not yet operative or is only partially developed, strategic marketing will exert a measurable direct influence on loyalty through these residual organizational pathways. This is the theoretical justification for testing H1 as a stand-alone direct effect.

H2: Strategic marketing has a positive direct effect on inbound marketing effectiveness. This hypothesis is grounded in the proposition, advanced by Halligan and Shah (2010), Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) and Rose (2023), that the operational quality of inbound activities (content, SEO, social engagement, personalization) is the downstream expression of upstream strategic clarity. A coherent strategic intent is theorized to translate into coherent editorial choices, accurate audience targeting and consistent brand voice, whereas strategic ambiguity is theorized to produce fragmented and off-brand inbound execution. H2 therefore predicts a strong positive a-path in the mediation model.

H3: Inbound marketing has a positive direct effect on customer loyalty. The empirical literature converges on the proposition that pull-based digital communication generates more relationally predisposed customer bases than outbound communication (Erdmann and Ponzoa, 2021; Saavedra-Azabache et al., 2024) and that contextually relevant content, qualitative engagement and personalization strengthen the antecedents of loyalty (Salonen et al., 2024; Waqas et al., 2021; Hou, 2024). H3 therefore predicts a substantial positive b-path.

H4: Inbound marketing partially mediates the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty. The mediation hypothesis combines the theoretical reasoning of H2 and H3: if strategic marketing shapes inbound marketing (a-path) and inbound marketing shapes loyalty (b-path), then a portion of the SM → CL effect must transit through the IM channel. The mediation is theorized as partial rather than full, for two reasons. First, the residual organizational pathways identified in the justification of H1 (service quality, pricing, network reliability, institutional brand trust) are not captured by the IM construct and therefore cannot be transmitted through it. Second, the service-dominant-logic argument that value is co-created across multiple sites of interaction (Wheeler, 2023; Kotler and Keller, 2012) implies that inbound marketing is one — but not the only — vehicle of relational value formation. Partial mediation is therefore the theoretically correct prediction for H4.

Figure 7: Conceptual model of the study



Source: Developed by the researcher

Chapter II:

Methodological Framework and Organizational Context

Methodological framework

This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted to study the relationships between strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty at Air Algérie.

Research design

This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted to conduct this study. It details the research approach selected, the data collection strategy and instrument employed, the sampling design, and the statistical techniques used to analyze the relationships between variables and test the proposed hypotheses.

1.1 Quantitative Research Approach: Justification

The present study adopts a quantitative research approach. This choice is grounded in the nature of the research problem, the structure of the conceptual framework, and the analytical requirements of the hypotheses that the study seeks to test. Each of these considerations is addressed in turn.

The research problem concerns the relationships between three variables: strategic marketing as the independent variable, inbound marketing as the mediating variable, and customer loyalty as the dependent variable, within the specific organizational and sectoral context of Air Algérie. The four hypotheses that structure the empirical investigation each assert a directional, measurable relationship between these variables. H1 posits that strategic marketing initiatives have a significant positive impact on passenger loyalty at Air Algérie. H2 posits that strategic marketing significantly influences the effectiveness of inbound marketing efforts. H3 posits that inbound marketing activities positively correlate with multidimensional customer loyalty. H4 posits that inbound marketing significantly mediates the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty. Each of these hypotheses is, by construction, a claim about the direction, strength, and statistical significance of a relationship, claims that can only be evaluated through the application of numerical measurement and inferential statistical analysis. A quantitative approach is therefore not simply appropriate for this study; it is methodologically required by the form of the research questions themselves.

The epistemological foundation of this choice rests on a positivist orientation, which holds that social phenomena can be studied through methods analogous to those of the natural sciences through systematic observation, measurement, and the testing of hypotheses against empirical evidence. This orientation is well-suited to a study that seeks to establish the existence and magnitude of associative relationships between marketing constructs, rather

than to explore the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their experiences. While interpretive and qualitative approaches offer genuine insights into the lived experience of customers, they are not designed to produce the kind of generalizable, statistically grounded conclusions that the present study requires. The aim here is not to understand what loyalty means to individual Air Algérie passengers in a deeply personal sense but to determine whether and to what degree specific organizational marketing practices are associated with measurable differences in loyalty outcomes across a representative sample of passengers, a question that is fundamentally quantitative in character.

A further justification for the quantitative approach lies in the structure of the mediation model that the study tests. H4, which posits that inbound marketing mediates the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty, requires a formal mediation analysis, a statistical procedure that decomposes the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable into a direct component and an indirect component operating through the mediator. This kind of analysis presupposes interval-level measurement of all three variables and is inherently quantitative in its logic and execution. The adoption of a quantitative approach is therefore a prerequisite for testing the most theoretically consequential hypothesis in the study.

Concretely, the mediation analysis required by H4 will be conducted using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro for SPSS, Model 4 (simple mediation), with bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals build on 5,000 resamples. This approach was selected over the older causal-steps procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986) for three reasons. First, it does not require the indirect effect to be normally distributed, an assumption rarely satisfied in practice. Second, bootstrap confidence intervals provide a more powerful test of indirect effects in samples of moderate size. Third, Model 4 produces a direct estimate of the indirect effect of strategic marketing on customer loyalty through inbound marketing, together with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval, allowing a clean inferential decision: if the confidence interval excludes zero, the mediation is statistically significant. The total effect (c), the direct effect (c'), the indirect effect ($a \times b$), and the proportion of the total effect transmitted through inbound marketing will all be reported, in line with current standards for mediation reporting (Hayes, 2018; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Where appropriate, the mediation will be classified as full (when c' is non-significant after introducing the mediator) or partial (when c' remains significant but is reduced).

The quantitative approach also carries practical advantages that are relevant in the Air Algérie context. The airline's passenger base is large, geographically dispersed, and demographically diverse, and the study's conclusions are intended to carry generalizable implications for the organization's marketing practice. Quantitative methods, by enabling the collection of standardized data from a sufficiently large and representative sample, allow for statistical inferences that extend beyond the specific individuals surveyed to the broader population of Air Algérie passengers. This generalizability is a necessary condition for the study's findings to be of practical utility to the organization, a property that qualitative approaches, however rich in contextual insight, are not designed to produce.

1.2 Research Strategy: The Survey

Among the available strategies for conducting quantitative research, namely experiments, quasi-experiments, secondary data analysis, and observational studies, the survey was selected as the primary research strategy for this study. This choice reflects the alignment between the survey's defining characteristics and the specific requirements of the research design.

A survey is a strategy for collecting standardized primary data from a defined population through the administration of a structured instrument, typically a questionnaire, to a sample of that population. Its defining feature is standardization: every respondent is presented with the same questions in the same format, which ensures that the data collected are comparable across individuals and suitable for aggregation and statistical analysis. This standardization is precisely what the present study requires, given that the three constructs it investigates must each be measured consistently across all respondents in order for the relationships between them to be estimated with any validity or reliability.

The survey strategy is also particularly well-suited to the measurement of attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions, which constitute the core substance of the variables examined in this study. These constructs are not directly observable in the field; they are accessible only through the subjective evaluations that passengers form on the basis of their experience with the airline. A structured questionnaire, administered under standardized conditions, provides the most systematic and replicable means of capturing this kind of attitudinal and perceptual data across a large and diverse sample. The specific

operationalization of each construct, as well as the measurement scale employed, is detailed in the following section.

1.3 Methodological Choice: A Deductive and Structured Approach

The methodological choices made in this study are consistent with the overall epistemological and theoretical orientation described in the preceding sections. At the level of reasoning, this research follows a deductive logic: the conceptual model and the four hypotheses were formulated prior to data collection, drawing on established theories and prior empirical work in the fields of strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty. The purpose of the empirical investigation is therefore to test these pre-specified hypotheses against observed data, rather than to generate new theory inductively from emerging patterns.

This deductive orientation distinguishes the present study from exploratory research designs, in which the researcher enters the field with minimal prior theoretical commitments and allows the data to shape the conceptual framework. In contrast, the theoretical model underlying this study was fully specified before any data were collected. The research process thus moves from the general to the particular: from theoretical propositions to empirical verification.

At the level of data nature, this study relies exclusively on primary data, collected directly from Air Algérie passengers through a structured self-administered questionnaire. Primary data collection was not merely a preference but a methodological necessity, dictated by the perceptual character of the variables: no existing secondary dataset captures passenger evaluations of Air Algérie's strategic and inbound marketing practices in the specific terms that this study requires.

1.4 Time Horizon: A Cross-Sectional Design

With regard to the time horizon, this study adopts a **cross-sectional design**, whereby data are collected from the sample at a single point in time. This approach is standard in quantitative marketing research when the objective is to examine the relationships between variables at a given moment, rather than to track changes in those variables over an extended period.

A cross-sectional design is appropriate here for several reasons. First, the study aims to establish whether and to what degree strategic marketing and inbound marketing practices are associated with passenger loyalty at the present time; it does not seek to model the evolution of these relationships over months or years. Second, practical and institutional constraints, including time limitations and resource availability, make a longitudinal design unfeasible within the scope of this work. Third, the use of a cross-sectional survey is well-established in the literature examining similar mediation models in service marketing contexts, providing a methodologically coherent precedent for this choice.

It should be acknowledged that a cross-sectional design, by capturing perceptions at a single moment, does not allow for causal inference in the strict experimental sense. However, within the framework of structural and mediation analysis grounded in a theoretically motivated model, the relationships identified can be interpreted as meaningful associations that are consistent with the causal logic of the proposed hypotheses, even if definitive causal claims require longitudinal or experimental confirmation.

1.5 Data Collection

Data collection is a decisive stage of the research, as the reliability of the results depends on the quality of the information gathered. Given the quantitative nature of the study, a structured questionnaire was retained, allowing standardized items to be administered to a large number of respondents.

1.5.1 Questionnaire design and structure

A self-administered questionnaire was developed and distributed to a sample of Air Algérie passengers. The instrument is structured into four main sections corresponding to the variables of the study. The complete questionnaire, including the introductory note presented to respondents, the four sections, the 24 Likert-scale items in their final wording is reproduced in **Appendix A**. The eight items measuring strategic marketing (Q101–Q108, hereafter SM1–SM8), the eight items measuring inbound marketing (Q201–Q208, hereafter IM1–IM8), and the eight items measuring customer loyalty (Q301–Q308, hereafter CL1–CL8) are referenced by their numerical codes throughout Chapters II and III.

The first section gathers sociodemographic and travel-related information, including gender, age, travel frequency, purpose of travel, and membership in the AH PLUS program, allowing for descriptive analysis and subgroup comparisons.

The second section measures passengers' perceptions of Air Algérie's strategic marketing practices, focusing on aspects such as understanding of customer needs, service adaptation, coherence of actions, positioning, and value creation. The third section examines inbound marketing activities, capturing perceptions of digital content, online interaction, accessibility of information, and customer engagement through digital channels. The fourth section assesses customer loyalty, incorporating behavioral intentions, attitudinal evaluations, emotional attachment, and resistance to switching.

The decision to use a self-administered questionnaire rather than an interviewer-administered format reflects both practical and methodological considerations. Practically, the self-administered format allows for wider geographic coverage at lower cost and greater speed, which is important given the dispersed nature of Air Algérie's passenger base. Methodologically, it reduces the risk of interviewer bias, the possibility that the presence or behavior of an interviewer might influence respondents' answers, particularly on questions relating to perceptions of service quality and brand trust where social desirability pressures can distort responses. By allowing respondents to complete the questionnaire at their own pace and without an interviewer present, this format encourages more candid and considered responses, which strengthens the validity of the data collected.

1.5.2 Measurement scales (Likert 5-point)

The measurement of the different constructs was carried out using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). This type of scale is widely used in marketing research due to its simplicity, reliability, and ability to capture variations in respondents' attitudes and perceptions.

The use of a Likert scale allows respondents to express varying degrees of agreement with each statement, thereby providing more nuanced data compared to binary response formats. It is particularly appropriate in this study, where the objective is to assess subjective perceptions related to marketing practices and loyalty.

All items were formulated in a clear and concise manner to ensure comprehension across different respondent profiles.

1.5.3 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online via a self-distribution approach, using a digital form created through Google Forms. This platform was selected for its accessibility, ease of use for respondents, and capacity to automatically compile responses into a structured dataset, thereby facilitating subsequent data entry and processing.

The distribution of the questionnaire was carried out through several digital channels in order to maximize reach and diversify the respondent profile. These channels included LinkedIn, where the questionnaire was shared on the researcher's personal profile and within relevant professional groups; WhatsApp, through which the form was circulated among personal and professional contact networks; and Facebook, particularly through Algerian travel and aviation-related community pages and groups, which provided access to individuals likely to have prior experience with Air Algérie's services.

The data collection phase spanned a period of approximately four weeks, during which the researcher actively monitored response rates and periodically re-shared the questionnaire link to encourage participation and maintain momentum. Respondents were provided with a brief introductory note explaining the academic purpose of the study, emphasizing the strictly confidential nature of their responses, and clarifying that participation was entirely voluntary. No incentives were offered for completion.

Upon closure of the data collection period, the raw responses were exported from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel for an initial review and data cleaning process.

1.5.4 Pilot test and validity check

Prior to the large-scale distribution of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with a convenience sample of **n = 20 respondents** drawn from the target population. The composition of the pilot sample reflected the demographic and behavioral diversity of the eligible population.

The pilot test pursued three explicit objectives: to evaluate the *clarity* of the wording of every item, particularly the technical terms used in the strategic and inbound marketing scales; to verify the content validity of each construct, in the sense that the eight items intended to measure each variable adequately covered its theoretical dimensions identified in Chapter I;

and to estimate the average completion time of the questionnaire and identify any item that pilot respondents found ambiguous, redundant, or burdensome.

The pilot results led to two concrete adjustments to the instrument:

(a) Wording simplification of three Strategic Marketing items (SM3, SM5, SM7), in which the original formulation included specialized terms ("market orientation", "competitive positioning", "value proposition") that several pilot respondents reported as unclear. These items were rephrased into operational language describing observable airline practices.

(b) Reorganization of the order of the Inbound Marketing items, so that the items relating to general digital presence (Q201–Q204) precede those relating to personalized communication and lead nurturing (Q205–Q208), reflecting the cognitive sequence by which respondents reported engaging with the construct.

2.5 Scale validation and reliability assessment

The validation of the measurement instrument followed the four-step procedure recommended by Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2019) for reflective scales used in survey-based research.

Step 1: Content validity. Each of the three constructs was operationalized through eight items adapted from previously validated scales. The selection of items was guided by the four theoretical dimensions of each construct identified in Chapter I (e.g., for SM: market orientation, customer-centric strategy, competitive positioning, value creation). The pilot test provided expert and respondent feedback on the wording and coverage of each item.

Step 2: Construct validity. Construct validity was assessed in Chapter III through the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity, followed by Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The KMO value and the highly significant Bartlett's test confirmed that the inter-item correlation matrix was suitable for factor extraction.

Step 3 — Internal consistency reliability. Internal consistency was assessed using *Cronbach's alpha*, computed separately for each construct through the SPSS Reliability Analysis procedure. Following Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) and Hair et al. (2019), the

threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was retained as the criterion of acceptable internal consistency, with $\alpha \geq 0.80$ considered good and $\alpha \geq 0.90$ excellent. The empirical alpha values reported in Chapter III, Table 4 exceed the most demanding of these thresholds for two of the three constructs and are very close to it for the third, providing strong evidence of internal-consistency reliability. The corrected item-total correlations and the alpha-if-item-deleted statistics were inspected for each scale, and no item produced a deletion-induced increase in alpha that would have justified its removal.

Step 4 — Convergent validity. Convergent validity was inferred from the loading pattern of the four-component PCA reported in Chapter III, where each item loaded primarily on its theoretically intended component, supporting the convergent grouping of the items within each construct.

1.6 Sample size determination

Defining the sample size and the target population is an essential step in any quantitative study, since these choices directly affect the representativeness of the results. A clearly deunder explored population and an adequate sample size are needed to ensure the statistical validity of the hypothesis testing.

1.6.1 Target population (Air Algérie passengers)

The target population of this study consists of passengers of Air Algérie who have used the airline's services within a newly time frame. More specifically, the study focuses on individuals who have flown with Air Algérie at least once during the last 12 to 24 months. This criterion ensures that respondents have a relatively new and relevant experience with the company, enabling them to provide informed evaluations of its marketing practices and service quality.

This population is particularly appropriate for the objectives of the study, as it allows for the examination of perceptions related to strategic marketing and inbound marketing activities, as well as their influence on customer loyalty. Given the experiential nature of air travel services, only individuals with direct experience are considered capable of accurately assessing these dimensions.

1.6.2 Sampling method

Due to practical constraints related to time, accessibility, and the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame of Air Algérie passengers, a non-probability sampling method was adopted. More specifically, a convenience sampling approach was used, targeting individuals who were readily accessible through online distribution channels such as social media platforms and professional networks.

This method allows for efficient data collection within a under explored time frame and is commonly used in exploratory and explanatory research in marketing. While it does not allow for full generalization of the results to the entire population, it remains appropriate for testing relationships between variables and examining the proposed conceptual model.

Efforts were nevertheless made to reach a diverse range of respondents in terms of age, travel frequency, and purpose of travel in order to enhance the variability and representativeness of the sample.

1.6.3 Sample size determination

The determination of an appropriate sample size constitutes a fundamental requirement in quantitative research, as it directly influences the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings. An adequately sized sample ensures that the statistical analyses performed are sufficiently robust to detect significant relationships between variables and to support the testing of the proposed hypotheses.

In the context of this study, the target population is composed of Air Algérie passengers who have used the airline's services within the last 12 to 24 months. However, due to the absence of an accessible and clearly defined sampling frame, it was not possible to determine the exact size of the population. For this reason, the Cochran formula for large or unknown populations was considered the most appropriate method for estimating the minimum required sample size.

The Cochran formula is expressed as follows:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times q}{e^2}$$

Where:

1. n_0 represents the required sample size.
2. Z^2 is the z-value corresponding to the selected confidence level,
3. p is the estimated proportion of the population possessing the characteristic under study
4. $q = 1 - p$
5. e is the acceptable margin of error.

In line with standard practice in social sciences research, a confidence level of 95% was adopted, corresponding to a z-value of 1.96. In the absence of prior empirical evidence regarding the proportion of the population exhibiting the characteristics of interest, a conservative estimate of $p=0.5$ was used. This choice maximizes the variability and, consequently, the required sample size, thereby ensuring a more rigorous estimation. The margin of error was set at 6% ($e = 0.06$), which represents an acceptable level of precision for this type of study.

Substituting these values into the Cochran formula yields:

$$n = \frac{1,96^2 \times 0,5(0,5)}{0,06^2} = 267$$

Rounded upward to the nearest integer, the minimum required sample size is therefore **267 respondents**. As the target population (Air Algérie passengers having flown within the last 12–24 months) substantially exceeds 100 000 individuals, no finite-population correction was applied to n_0 . During the data collection phase, 285 responses were obtained through the online distribution of the questionnaire. After the data cleaning and filtering procedure described in 2.3, 284 responses were retained for the analysis. The final sample ($N = 284$) therefore exceeds the minimum required sample size of 267 by 17 respondents (+6.4%), satisfying the threshold required to detect, at the 95% confidence level and with a 6% margin of error, the relationships specified by the four hypotheses of the study. The size of the obtained sample also exceeds the benchmark of $N = 200$ recommended by Hayes (2018) for bootstrap mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 BCa resamples, providing an additional safeguard for the inferential robustness of the mediation tests reported in Chapter III.

It should be noted that this value represents an ideal threshold under probabilistic sampling conditions. In the present study, however, a non-probability convenience sampling method was employed due to practical constraints related to accessibility and time. As a result, the final sample size corresponds to the number of valid responses retained after data cleaning and filtering. Specifically, the raw responses collected through the online questionnaire were screened for eligibility (only respondents having flown with Air Algérie within the last 12 to 24 months were retained), completeness (questionnaires with one or more missing items on the core measurement scales were removed). Out of the 285 responses initially collected, 284 were retained as valid for inferential analysis.

Despite these limitations, efforts were made to collect a sufficiently large and diverse sample in order to enhance the reliability of the results and support the application of statistical techniques such as correlation analysis, linear regression, and mediation analysis. Ensuring an adequate sample size remains essential for producing meaningful insights into the relationships between strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty within the context of Air Algérie.

1.6.4 Parametric Test Assumptions

The statistical analyses employed in this study are parametric techniques and therefore rest on a set of distributional and structural assumptions. These assumptions were verified during the preliminary phase of data analysis prior to the testing of the four hypotheses, and the corresponding diagnostics are reported in Chapter III. The following paragraphs describe the procedures applied; the resulting evidence is presented and discussed in Chapter III.

- **Normality** of the three composite scores (SM, IM, CL) was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors correction and the Shapiro–Wilk test, supplemented by skewness and kurtosis coefficients and visual inspection of histograms and Q–Q plots. Where formal tests rejected normality, the diagnosis was complemented by skewness/kurtosis criteria (Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2019: $|\text{skewness}| < 2.0$; $|\text{kurtosis}| < 7.0$) and by a Spearman rank-order robustness check. In addition, all inferential tests were re-estimated with bias-corrected accelerated (BCa) bootstrap confidence intervals build on 5,000 resamples, ensuring distribution-free inferential robustness regardless of the residual departures from normality.

- **Linearity** of the relationships between the independent, mediator, and dependent variables was evaluated through the inspection of standardized-residuals-versus-predicted-values scatter plots and through the bivariate scatter plots between each pair of constructs.
- **Homoscedasticity** was assessed through the absence of funnel-shaped patterns in the standardized-residuals scatter plots produced for each regression model.
- **Multicollinearity** between SM and IM in the multiple regression of CL was evaluated using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance statistics. Following Hair et al. (2019), VIF values below 5.0 and Tolerance values above 0.20 were retained as the criterion of acceptable collinearity. The corresponding values are reported in Chapter III, Table 10.

The systematic verification of these assumptions, together with the bootstrap-based inference adopted for all hypothesis tests, ensures that the conclusions drawn from the regression and mediation analyses presented in Chapter III are statistically valid and methodologically defensible.

3.5 Methodological biases and mitigation strategies

Three categories of bias are recognized as potentially affecting the conclusions drawn from a cross-sectional self-report survey. The corresponding mitigation strategies adopted in this study are described below.

3.5.1 Common method bias. Since the three constructs (SM, IM and CL) were measured from the same source (the respondent), through the same instrument (a self-administered questionnaire) and within the same temporal frame, common method variance (CMV) constitutes a potential threat to the validity of the structural relationships estimated in the regression and mediation models (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Two procedural remedies were implemented at the questionnaire-design stage: 1. The four sections of the instrument were ordered such that the dependent variable (CL) followed rather than preceded the independent and mediating variables, attenuating the priming risk; 2. The cover note guaranteed the strict confidentiality of responses and emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, mitigating social desirability pressure.

3.5.2 Sampling bias. The non-probability convenience sampling method adopted in this study restricts the strict probabilistic generalization of the findings to the entire Air Algérie passenger population. Two structural sources of sampling bias are recognized. First, the recruitment of respondents through online social media channels. Second, the four-week data collection window may not capture seasonal variation in passenger composition. The mitigation strategies adopted include the diversification of recruitment channels to maximize demographic and behavioral variability of the sample; the explicit eligibility criterion (having flown with Air Algérie within the last 12–24 months) to restrict the sample to genuinely informed respondents; and the obtaining of a final sample ($N = 284$) that exceeds the minimum required by the Cochran formula by 6.4%, which strengthens the inferential robustness of the analyses without claiming probabilistic representativeness.

3.5.3 Non-response and self-selection bias. As participation in the survey was strictly voluntary, the final sample necessarily reflects a degree of self-selection: passengers with stronger opinions about Air Algérie — favorable or unfavorable — may have been more likely to respond. The dispersion of responses observed in Chapter III is inconsistent with the polarized response pattern that would be diagnostic of severe self-selection, suggesting that the sample contains both critical and supportive voices in approximately balanced proportions.

Section 2: **Organizational Context: Air Algérie**

Air Algérie, officially designated as the Société Nationale de Transport Aérien, is a joint stock company whose shares are 100% owned by the Algerian state, making it the country's flag carrier and its dominant actor in civil aviation. The airline operates on four continents, Africa, Europe, Asia, and North America, using Algiers International Airport as its central hub. As an entirely state-owned enterprise, Air Algérie operates within a framework that combines commercial objectives with public service obligations, a duality that shapes its strategic positioning and its relationship with its passenger base.

In July 2024, Air Algérie inaugurated its new headquarters, located in Algiers' business center, near Algiers' International Airport, a move that reflects the organization's ongoing modernization trajectory.

2.1 History and organization of the company

Air Algérie's roots extend back to the Compagnie Générale de Transports Aériens (CGTA), established in 1947 by the French colonial government to provide air transport between Algeria and metropolitan France. CGTA later merged with Compagnie Air Transport (CAT), a subsidiary of Air France, to form Air Algérie in 1953.

Following Algeria's independence, the airline underwent progressive nationalization. In March 1963, the Algerian government acquired 51% of the company's capital, granting it official flag carrier status. This process was completed in 1972, when Air France relinquished its remaining stake, making the airline 100% government-owned.

Over the following decades, the carrier steadily expanded its operations. In June 2007, Air Algérie inaugurated the Algiers–Montreal route, and flights to Beijing were launched in February 2009. These route openings reflect the airline's long-term ambition to position itself as a genuine intercontinental carrier, bridging Algeria with key markets across Europe, North America, and Asia.

2.2 Organizational structure

Since its transition to an autonomous enterprise, Air Algérie has organized its activities around several specialized directorates. Each of these entities fulfills a precise role in the smooth functioning of the company, both at the national and international levels.

Air Algérie operates under a centralized governance structure headed by a président-directeur général (PDG), to whom all strategic and operational divisions report directly. Four staff units are attached to the PDG's office: Direction de la Surveillance de la Conformité, the Direction Audit Interne, the Direction Prospective et Développement, and the Direction de la Communication, alongside a Cellule Filiale et Participation. The organization is structured around four main operational divisions.

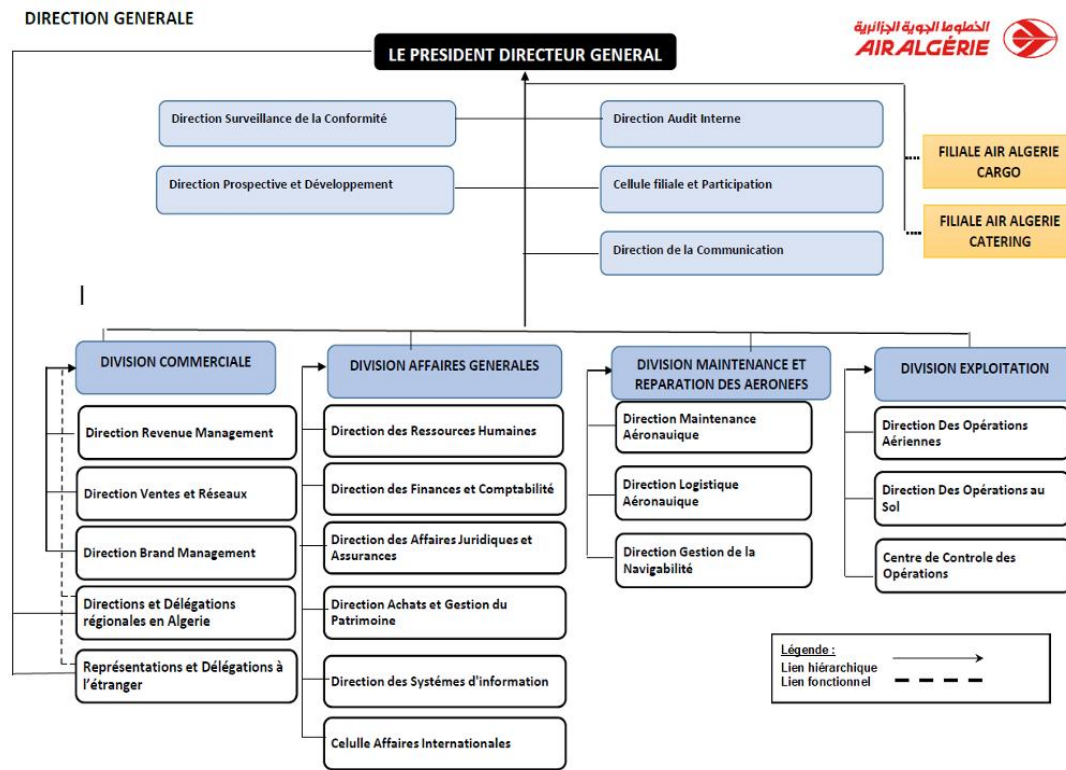
- **Commercial Division:** This division constitutes the commercial engine of the airline and is most directly relevant to the marketing dimensions examined in the present study. It encompasses the Revenue Management Directorate, the Sales and Network Directorate, the Brand Management Directorate, the Regional Directorates and Delegations within Algeria, and the International Representations and Delegations. The presence of a dedicated Brand Management Directorate within this division

signals an institutional recognition of brand strategy as a distinct organizational priority.

- **General Affairs Division:** This division oversees the administrative and support functions of the organization, grouping together the Human Resources Directorate, the Finance and Accounting Directorate, the Legal Affairs and Insurance Directorate, the Procurement and Asset Management Directorate, the Information Systems Directorate, and the International Affairs Unit.
- **Aircraft Maintenance and Repair Division:** This division is responsible for the technical integrity and airworthiness of the fleet, operating through three directorates: The Aeronautical Maintenance Directorate, the Aeronautical Logistics Directorate, and the Airworthiness Management Directorate.
- **Operations Division:** This division manages the airline's day-to-day operational activities, encompassing the Flight Operations Directorate, the Ground Operations Directorate, and the Operations Control Center, which coordinates the overall flow of flight and ground activities across the network.

Finally, Air Algérie operates three subsidiaries: Air Algérie Catering, Air Algérie Cargo, and Amadeus Algérie. This subsidiary structure reflects a deliberate strategic choice to refocus the parent company on its core air transport activity while entrusting peripheral functions to specialized entities, thereby improving overall operational efficiency.

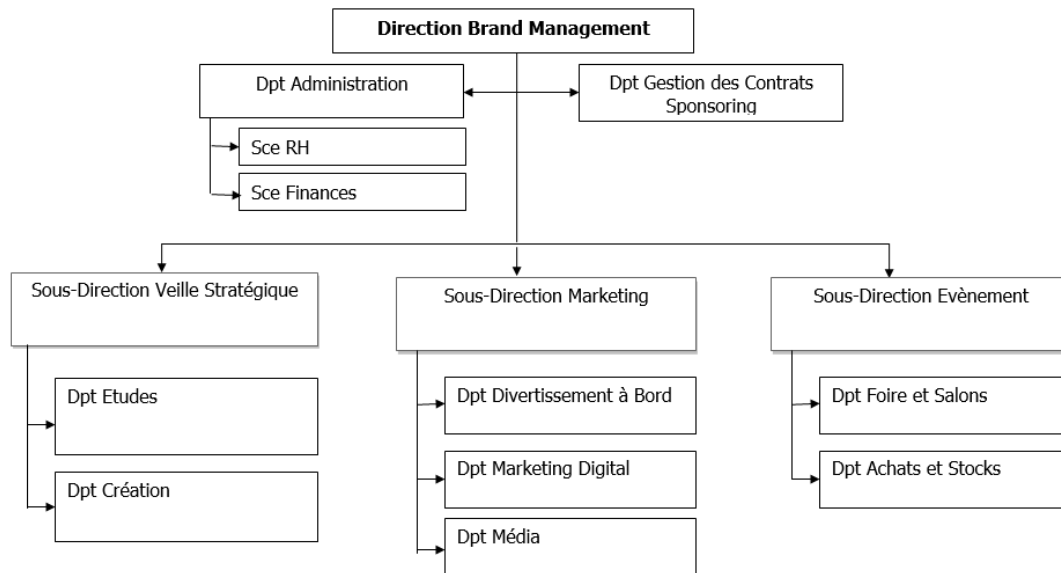
Figure 8: Organizational Chart of the Company



Source: Internal data provided by the Air Algérie Directorate (2026).

To better understand Air Algérie's internal organization, particularly the directorate involved in marketing and customer engagement, the organizational chart of the brand management directorate is presented below. It illustrates its hierarchical structure and the distribution of departments directly linked to the strategic and inbound marketing practices examined in this study.

Figure 9: Organizational Chart of the Brand Management Directorate



Source: Internal data provided by the Air Algérie Directorate (2026).

2.3 Study Context and Relevance

The choice of Air Algérie as the empirical site of the present study is grounded in three structural characteristics of the airline that are directly relevant to the three variables of the conceptual model: strategic marketing (SM), inbound marketing (IM) and customer loyalty (CL).

Air Algérie as a strategic-marketing case. Air Algérie operates under a hybrid mandate that combines commercial objectives with public service obligations as the wholly state-owned national carrier. This dual mandate generates a structurally distinctive strategic-marketing context: market orientation, customer-centric strategy, competitive positioning, and value creation — the four dimensions that operationalize SM in this study (see Chapter I)— must be articulated under constraints (route obligations, public-service pricing, institutional governance) that purely commercial competitors do not face. The presence within the airline's organizational chart of a dedicated Brand Management Directorate under the Commercial Division is institutional evidence that strategic marketing is recognized as a distinct organizational priority. This makes Air Algérie a particularly informative case for examining how strategic marketing capabilities are constructed and translated into customer-facing outcomes under hybrid commercial / public-service constraints.

Air Algérie as an inbound-marketing case. The airline is currently undergoing a digital and commercial transformation that maps directly onto the four operational dimensions of IM (content quality, SEO/digital visibility, social media engagement, and personalization/lead-nurturing). The deployment of the airline's mobile application, online check-in, real-time flight tracking and active social media channels constitutes an empirically observable inbound-marketing infrastructure whose perceived effectiveness can be measured through the IM scale (Q201–Q208). The fact that this infrastructure is being built in a market with relatively under explored digital maturity, compared with the European or North American settings in which the inbound marketing literature has predominantly been developed (Erdmann and Ponzoa, 2021; Salonen et al., 2024), enables a transferability test of the inbound-marketing framework to an emerging-market context, thereby addressing one of the gaps identified in Chapter I, "Research gap and theoretical anchoring".

Air Algérie as a customer-loyalty case. The airline's loyalty program, AH PLUS, formalizes the institutional commitment to passenger retention and represents an observable expression of the four CL dimensions retained in this study. The program's stated objective of competing with international benchmarks (Air France's Flying Blue, Lufthansa's Miles & More) makes Air Algérie a meaningful site for examining how loyalty mechanisms operate within a flag carrier whose passenger base — comprising domestic, diaspora, professional and tourist segments — exhibits the demographic and behavioral variability required for statistically reliable testing. The annual passenger volume of the airline (close to 8.5 million passengers according to Air Algérie's 2025 annual report) provides the population scale necessary for the present study's sample-size requirements.

Taken together, these three structural features — a hybrid strategic mandate, an active inbound-marketing transformation, and an institutionalized loyalty program — make Air Algérie an analytically coherent setting for testing the integrated SM → IM → CL chain proposed by the conceptual model. The airline simultaneously embodies the upstream

strategic capability, the relational interface, and the downstream loyalty outcome that the four hypotheses of the study seek to relate empirically.

Chapter III: **Results and Discussion**

Section 1: **Presentation of quantitative results**

This section presents the descriptive profile of the sample, the psychometric quality of the three constructs, and the inferential tests of the four hypotheses.

1.1 **Sample Description, Dataset and Presentation of Figures and Tables**

The empirical analyses in this chapter are build on the final cleaned dataset of 284 valid respondents collected from Air Algérie passengers, as described in Chapter 2. The unit of analysis is the individual respondent, each representing his or her own perceptions of Air Algérie's strategic marketing and inbound marketing practices, as well as his or her own level of customer loyalty toward the airline. All cases with missing values on the Likert-scale items were identified and handled during the data preparation stage in SPSS, and only respondents who had flown with Air Algérie at least once within the previous 12 to 24 months were included in the final analytical dataset, in accordance with the eligibility criteria defined in Chapter 2.

1.1.1 **Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents**

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 1, which reports the distributions of gender and age groups. This table is build on the demographic items in Chapter II, Section 1 of the questionnaire (variables GENRE and AGE) and provides the foundational characteristics of the sample used in the subsequent analyses.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of respondents (gender, age group)

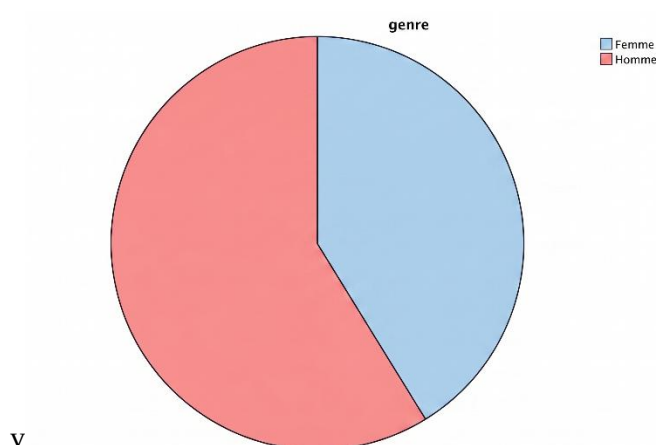
Variable / Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male (Homme)	167	58.8
Female (Femme)	117	41.2
Age Group		
Under 20 years (Moins de 20 ans)	20	7.0
20–29 years	113	39.8

30–39 years	79	27.8
40–49 years	40	14.1
50 years and above	32	11.3
Total	284	100.0

Source: Author's own computation, SPSS output (IBM SPSS Statistics 27)

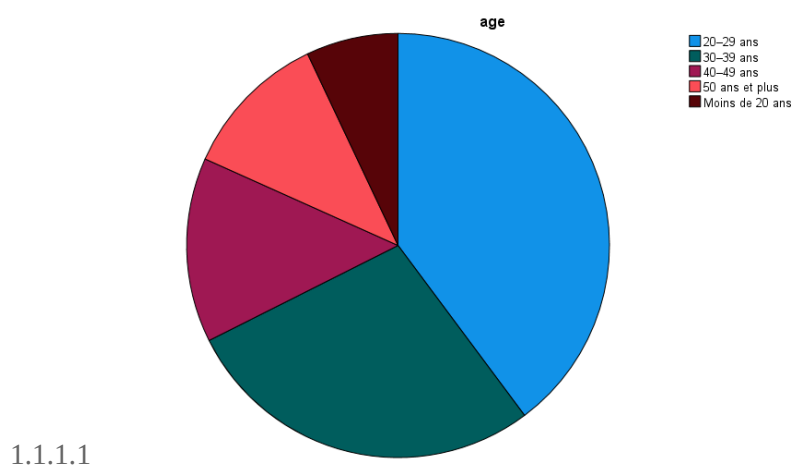
To complement Table 1 and to make the composition of the sample more visually intuitive, two charts generated from the SPSS frequency outputs are to be inserted at this point.

Figure 10: Gender distribution of respondents



Source: Author's own computation, SPSS output

Figure 11: Age distribution of respondents



Source: Author's own computation, SPSS output

The sample is male-skewed (58.8%) and concentrated in the 20–39 age bracket (67.6%) —a profile typical of digitally active Algerian air travelers and a relevant target for an inbound-marketing-led loyalty strategy, though it limits inference about older diaspora and pilgrimage segments.

1.1.2 Travel Behavior and Air Algérie Service Profile

Beyond socio-demographic characteristics, the questionnaire collected information on respondents' travel behavior with Air Algérie and their membership status in the AH Plus loyalty program.

Table 2: Travel behavior and Air Algérie service profile (travel frequency, travel purpose, AH Plus membership)

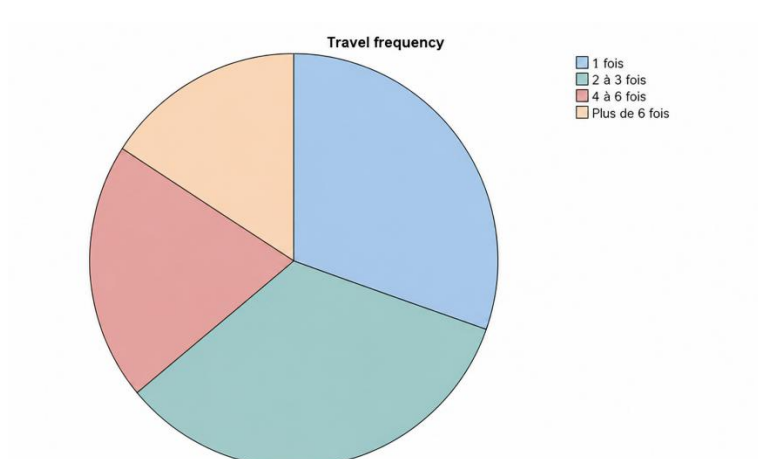
Variable / Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Q001 – Annual travel frequency with Air Algérie		
1 time per year (1 fois)	86	30.3
2 to 3 times per year (2 à 3 fois)	96	33.8
4 to 6 times per year (4 à 6 fois)	57	20.1
More than 6 times per year (Plus de 6 fois)	45	15.8
Total	284	100.0
Q002 – Main purpose of travel		
Studies (Études)	32	11.3
Leisure (Loisirs)	99	34.9
Professional / Business (Professionnel)	69	24.3
Family visit (Visite familiale)	84	29.6
Total	284	100.0
Q003 – AH Plus loyalty program membership		

Non-member (Non)	164	57.7
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Source: Author's own computation, SPSS output

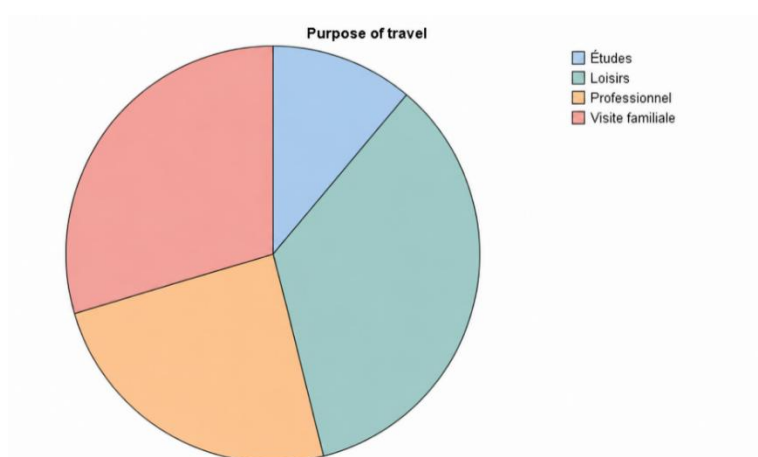
Two-thirds of respondents (69.7%) fly with Air Algérie at least twice a year, yet 57.7% remain outside the AH Plus program.

Figure 12: Annual travel frequency with Air Algérie (Q001)



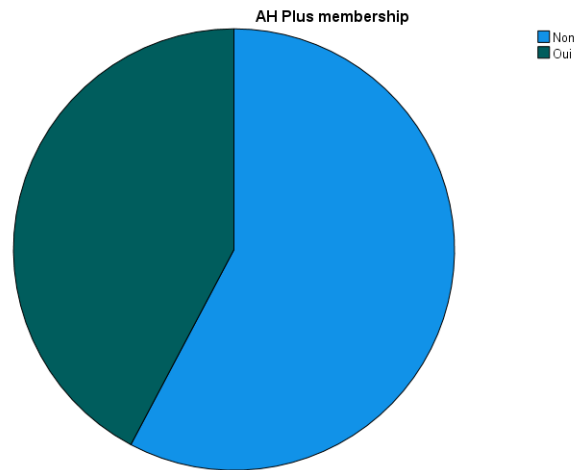
Source: Author's own computation

Figure 13: Main purpose of travel (Q002)



Source: Author's own computation

Figure 14: AH Plus loyalty program membership distribution (Q003)



Source: Author's own computation, SPSS output

Concerning travel frequency, the largest group consists of respondents who travel 2 to 3 times per year ($n = 96$, 33.8%), followed by those who travel once a year ($n = 86$, 30.3%). Respondents who travel 4 to 6 times per year account for 20.1% ($n = 57$), and the most frequent travelers, flying more than 6 times per year, represent 15.8% of the sample ($n = 45$). With respect to travel purposes, leisure travel is the most frequently cited reason ($n = 99$, 34.9%), followed by family visits ($n = 84$, 29.6%), professional or business travel ($n = 69$, 24.3%), and academic travel ($n = 32$, 11.3%). Finally, regarding AH Plus program membership, 57.7% of respondents ($n = 164$) are not enrolled in the program, while 42.3% ($n = 120$) are current members. This profile indicates that the sample contains a substantial share of active travelers across multiple trip purposes, while also revealing that a majority of respondents have not yet been formally integrated into Air Algérie's structured loyalty infrastructure.

1.2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of the Main Constructs

Before assessing the regression and mediation models, it is necessary to examine the basic distributional properties and internal consistency of the three main constructs used in the analysis. This section summarizes the item-level descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) and the construct-level Cronbach's alpha coefficients for Strategic Marketing (SM), Inbound Marketing (IM), and Customer Loyalty (CL).

1.2.1 Item-level Descriptive Statistics

Item-level descriptive statistics were computed in SPSS using the Descriptive procedure for all twenty-four Likert-scale items included in the model: eight items measuring Strategic Marketing (SM1–SM8, corresponding to questionnaire items Q101–Q108), eight items

measuring Inbound Marketing (IM1–IM8, Q201–Q208), and eight items measuring Customer Loyalty (CL1–CL8, Q301–Q308). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Item-level descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum) for the strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty items

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Construct
SM – Strategic Marketing						
SM1 (Q101)	284	1	5	3.30	1.033	SM
SM2 (Q102)	284	1	5	3.30	1.117	SM
SM3 (Q103)	284	1	5	3.17	1.211	SM
SM4 (Q104)	284	1	5	3.40	1.086	SM
SM5 (Q105)	284	1	5	3.47	1.126	SM
SM6 (Q106)	284	1	5	3.24	1.137	SM
SM7 (Q107)	284	1	5	3.28	1.173	SM
SM8 (Q108)	284	1	5	3.45	1.129	SM
IM – Inbound Marketing						
IM1 (Q201)	284	1	5	3.51	1.088	IM
IM2 (Q202)	284	1	5	3.57	1.099	IM
IM3 (Q203)	284	1	5	3.21	1.171	IM
IM4 (Q204)	284	1	5	3.31	1.107	IM

IM5 (Q205)	284	1	5	3.83	1.134	IM
IM6 (Q206)	284	1	5	3.93	1.036	IM
IM7 (Q207)	284	1	5	3.48	1.021	IM
IM8 (Q208)	284	1	5	3.26	1.106	IM
CL – Customer Loyalty						
CL1 (Q301)	284	1	5	3.91	1.123	CL
CL2 (Q302)	284	1	5	3.90	1.178	CL
CL3 (Q303)	284	1	5	3.64	1.257	CL
CL4 (Q304)	284	1	5	3.73	1.191	CL
CL5 (Q305)	284	1	5	3.55	1.239	CL
CL6 (Q306)	284	1	5	3.19	1.307	CL
CL7 (Q307)	284	1	5	3.29	1.407	CL
CL8 (Q308)	284	1	5	3.33	1.222	CL

Source: Author's own computation, SPSS output

All 24 items return means above the 3.0 midpoint, with no floor or ceiling effects (SDs 1.02–1.41). Item IM6 (3.93) and CL1 (3.91) are the highest-rated, while SM3 (3.17) and CL6 (3.19) are the weakest, a first indication that respondents view the airline's communication efforts more positively than its strategic value proposition.

1.2.2 Construct-level Means and Internal Consistency

To assess internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha was computed in SPSS using the Reliability Analysis procedure separately for each of the three constructs. Construct-level composite means were calculated as the arithmetic average of the scores across the eight items for each respondent using the SPSS Compute procedure, and their descriptive properties (mean and standard deviation) were then extracted from the Explore procedure alongside normality indicators. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Construct-level descriptive statistics and internal consistency reliability (N = 284)

Construct	N Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's α	N Valid
Strategic Marketing (SM)	8	3.326	0.878	0.907	284
Inbound Marketing (IM)	8	3.514	0.822	0.889	284
Customer Loyalty (CL)	8	3.569	1.008	0.926	284

Source: Author's own computation — SPSS Statistics 27, Reliability

All three Cronbach's α exceed 0.88, confirming reliability well above conventional thresholds. Construct means rank IM (3.51) and CL (3.57) above SM (3.33) passengers perceive the airline's digital touchpoints and their own loyalty more favorably than its underlying strategic posture, a tension that recurs throughout the structural results.

1.3 Validation of the Measurement Instrument, Normality, and Bivariate Associations

1.3.1 KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Before conducting a Principal Components Analysis (PCA), two preliminary diagnostics were computed to verify that the inter-item correlation matrix was suitable for factor extraction: the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity for the 24-item measurement battery

Diagnostic	Value
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.957
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity — χ^2 statistic	4 643.13
— df	276
— p	< .001

Source: Author's own computation — SPSS Statistics 27

The KMO coefficient of 0.957 substantially exceeds the threshold of 0.80, indicating that the patterns of correlations among the 24 items are sufficiently compact to yield distinct and reliable factors. Bartlett's test of sphericity produces a chi-square value of 4,643.13 on 276 degrees of freedom, which is statistically significant at $p < .001$, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. Taken together, these two diagnostics confirm that the measurement battery is well-suited for principal components analysis and that the items share enough common variance to justify the extraction of underlying dimensions.

1.3.2 Tests of Normality

The normality of the three composite scores was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors correction (KS) and the Shapiro–Wilk test (SW), supplemented by skewness and kurtosis coefficients. The results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6: Normality diagnostics for composite construct scores (SM, IM, CL; N = 284)

Construct	Kolmogorov–Smirnov (Lilliefors)			Shapiro–Wilk			Shape coefficients	
	D	df	p	W	df	p	Skewness	Kurtosis
SM	0.086	284	< .001	0.980	284	< .001	–0.324	–0.455
IM	0.085	284	< .001	0.976	284	< .001	–0.512	–0.025

CL	0.093	284	< .001	0.953	284	< .001	−0.497	−0.626
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Source: Author's own computation

Both KS and SW reject normality ($p < .001$), but skewness ($|\leq 0.51|$) and kurtosis ($|\leq 0.63|$) remain well within Hair et al.'s (2019) bounds for parametric inference. Given the well-documented oversensitivity of these tests at $N = 284$ (Rochon et al., 2012), the parametric strategy is retained, with bootstrap confidence intervals as a distributional safeguard

1.3.3 Bivariate Correlations Between the Constructs

Before testing the hypothesized causal relationships, it is necessary to examine the bivariate associations between the three constructs of the study. The Pearson correlation matrix presented below provides a first overview of the strength and direction of these relationships.

1.3.3.1 Pearson Correlation Matrix

Table 7 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation matrix for the three composite scores.

Table 7: Pearson correlation matrix — SM, IM, CL (N = 284)

	SM	IM	CL	N
Strategic Marketing (SM)	1.000	0.760**	0.769**	284
Inbound Marketing (IM)	0.760**	1.000	0.719**	284
Customer Loyalty (CL)	0.769**	0.719**	1.000	284

Source: Author's own computation

All three bivariate correlations are positive and statistically significant at $p < .001$. The SM–CL correlation ($r = 0.769$) and the SM–IM correlation ($r = 0.760$) are nearly identical in magnitude, while the IM–CL correlation ($r = 0.719$) is marginally smaller. By Cohen's (1988) classification, all three coefficients qualify as large effects ($r > 0.50$), confirming that the three constructs are strongly and positively associated at the bivariate level. The observed relationships are consistent with the theoretical chain proposed in Chapter 2: organizations that adopt stronger strategic marketing practices tend to score higher on both inbound marketing effectiveness and customer loyalty.

All three correlations exceed 0.71 (Cohen's large effect), with $r(\text{SM}, \text{IM}) = 0.760$ signaling enough overlap to require collinearity diagnostics and prefiguring the partial mediation pattern that emerges below.

A Spearman robustness check yielded virtually identical coefficients (ρ ranging from 0.713–0.766), confirming the relationships are not driven by distributional artifacts.

1.3.4 Hypothesis Testing — Direct Effects (H1 and H3)

This section assesses the direct effects predicted by the conceptual model, namely the influence of strategic marketing and of inbound marketing on customer loyalty. The first hypothesis tested concerns the direct impact of strategic marketing on passengers' loyalty toward Air Algérie.

1.3.4.1 H1 — Strategic Marketing on Customer Loyalty

H1 predicted that strategic marketing initiatives have a significant positive impact on passenger loyalty at Air Algérie. To test this hypothesis, a simple linear regression was estimated with Customer Loyalty (CL) as the dependent variable and Strategic Marketing (SM) as the sole predictor. The model summary and coefficient table are presented in Table 8

Table 8: Simple regression: $\text{CL} \leftarrow \text{SM}$ — Model Summary and Coefficients (N = 284)

Model Summary							
	R ²	Adj. R ²	Std. Error	F	df1	df2	p
	0.769	0.591	0.590	0.645	408.17	1	282
Coefficients							
Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
(Constant)	0.633	0.150	—	4.21	< .001	0.337	0.929
Strategic Marketing (SM)	0.883	0.044	0.769	20.20	< .001	0.797	0.969

Source: Author's own computation — SPSS Statistics 27

Strategic marketing alone explains 59.1% of loyalty variance ($\beta = 0.769$, $p < .001$), supporting H1.

The unstandardized coefficient for SM is $B = 0.883$ ($SE = 0.044$), and the standardized coefficient is $\beta = 0.769$ ($t = 20.20$, $p < .001$). The 95% confidence interval $[0.797; 0.969]$ is entirely above zero, confirming the positive direction and statistical reliability of the effect. For each one-unit increase on the five-point Strategic Marketing scale, Customer Loyalty increases by approximately 0.883 units on the same scale. These results provide unambiguous support for H1: strategic marketing initiatives exert a strong, positive, and statistically significant direct effect on Air Algérie passenger loyalty.

1.3.4.2 H3 — Inbound Marketing on Customer Loyalty

H3 predicted that inbound marketing activities positively correlate with customer loyalty. The simple regression of CL on IM is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Simple regression: $CL \leftarrow IM$ — Model Summary and Coefficients with BCa bootstrap CIs ($N = 284$)

Model Summary							
	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	Std. Error	F	df1	df2
	0.719	0.516	0.515	0.702	301.09	1	282
							< .001
Coefficients							
Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	BCa Lower	BCa Upper
(Constant)	0.472	0.183	—	2.67	.011	0.146	0.796
Inbound Marketing (IM)	0.881	0.051	0.719	17.35	< .001	0.795	0.965

Source: Author's own computation — SPSS Statistics 27

Inbound marketing is also a powerful predictor in isolation ($\beta = 0.719$, $R^2 = 0.516$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. The unstandardized slopes for SM and IM are nearly identical ($B = 0.883$ vs. 0.881) despite a 7.5-point R^2 gap, a textbook signature of overlapping predictors that the multiple regression below will decompose. These results fully support H3: inbound

marketing activities are a strong and statistically significant positive predictor of passenger loyalty.

1.3.5 Multiple Regression and Multicollinearity Diagnostics

To evaluate the joint effect of SM and IM on CL and to diagnose the collinearity structure, a multiple linear regression was estimated with both SM and IM as predictors. The results, including Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistics, are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Multiple regression: $CL \leftarrow SM + IM$ — Model Summary and Coefficients with collinearity diagnostics (N = 284)

Model Summary — $CL \leftarrow SM + IM$								
	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	ΔR^2	Std. Error	F	df	p
	0.796	0.634	0.631	0.043	0.612	243.40	2, 281	< .001
Coefficients with Collinearity Diagnostics								
Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	BCa 95% CI	Tol.	VIF
(Constant)	0.186	0.163	—	1.14	.254	[−0.098; 0.465]	—	—
Strategic Marketing (SM)	0.606	0.064	0.528	9.50	< .001	[0.479; 0.722]	0.422	2.367
Inbound Marketing (IM)	0.390	0.068	0.318	5.72	< .001	[0.263; 0.521]	0.422	2.367

Source: Author's own computation — SPSS Statistics 27

Entering both SM and IM jointly produces $R^2 = 0.634$, $F(2, 281) = 243.40$, $p < .001$. The incremental gain over the SM-only simple regression is $\Delta R^2 = 0.043$, meaning that Inbound Marketing contributes an additional 4.3 percentage points of explained variance once Strategic Marketing is already in the model. While this increment is statistically significant, its modest magnitude — relative to the 51.6% that IM explains alone — confirms that the two predictors share a large common component. The total model explains 63.4% of the

variance in passenger loyalty, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.631, indicating minimal capitalization on chance.

A comparison of the standardized coefficients between the simple and multiple regressions reveals a characteristic mediation signature. When SM is the sole predictor, its standardized coefficient is $\beta = 0.769$; when IM is added to the model, this coefficient drops to $\beta = 0.528$ — a reduction of 0.241 units, representing a 31.4% attenuation of the total effect. Similarly, the unstandardized coefficient for SM falls from $B = 0.883$ to $B = 0.606$. Inbound Marketing, with $B = 0.390$ ($\beta = 0.318$, $t = 5.72$, $p < .001$), retains a significant independent contribution to loyalty beyond SM, confirming that it operates both as a partial channel for SM's effect and as a direct driver in its own right. The BCa confidence intervals for both coefficients entirely exclude zero, reinforcing the statistical reliability of each partial effect.

Collinearity diagnostics confirm that the level of multicollinearity is manageable. Both SM and IM exhibit a Tolerance value of 0.422, corresponding to a VIF of 2.367. This value is comfortably below the conservative threshold of $VIF \leq 5.0$ recommended by Hair et al. (2019), and well below the more lenient ceiling of 10.0 applied in some fields. The shared variance between SM and IM ($1 - \text{Tolerance} = 0.578$, equivalent to $r^2(\text{SM}, \text{IM}) = 0.578$) is inherent to the sequential causal structure of the theoretical model and does not distort the estimation of partial regression coefficients beyond acceptable bounds.

1.3.6 Hypothesis Testing — Mediation (H2 and H4)

The mediation hypothesis requires testing whether Inbound Marketing statistically transmits the effect of Strategic Marketing on Customer Loyalty. Following Hayes (2018), the mediation model was estimated with the SM composite as the independent variable (X), the IM composite as the mediator (M), and the CL composite as the dependent variable (Y). Inference was built on bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrap confidence intervals computed over 5,000 resamples at the 95% confidence level.

1.3.6.1 H2 — Strategic Marketing on Inbound Marketing

H2 proposed that strategic marketing significantly influences the effectiveness of inbound marketing efforts. The equation predicting IM from SM constitutes the a-path of the mediation model and is presented in Table 11.

Table 11: PROCESS path a: $\text{IM} \leftarrow \text{SM}$ — Model Summary and Coefficients with BCa bootstrap CIs (N = 284)

Model Summary — IM ← SM							
	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	Std. Error	F	df	p
	0.760	0.577	0.576	0.535	385.45	1, 282	< .001
Coefficients							
Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	BCa Lower	BCa Upper
(Constant)	1.148	0.138	—	8.33	< .001	0.889	1.415
Strategic Marketing (SM) — path a	0.711	0.036	0.760	19.63	< .001	0.637	0.784

Source: Author's own computation — SPSS Statistics 27

Strategic Marketing is a strong and significant predictor of Inbound Marketing: $B = 0.711$ ($SE = 0.036$), $\beta = 0.760$, $t = 19.63$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.577$, $F(1, 282) = 385.45$, $p < .001$. The BCa 95% confidence interval for the path-a coefficient $[0.637; 0.784]$ entirely excludes zero, confirming the reliability of the estimate under the bootstrap distribution. For each one-unit increase on the SM scale, the predicted IM score increases by 0.711 units. These results fully support H2: Air Algérie's strategic marketing orientation and practices are a strong upstream driver of the quality and effectiveness of its inbound marketing activities.

1.3.6.2 H4 — Decomposition of the Total Effect

H4 proposed that inbound marketing significantly mediates the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty. Table 12 presents the full decomposition of the total effect c into its direct component c' and its indirect component $a \cdot b$.

Table 12: PROCESS mediation decomposition — $SM \rightarrow IM \rightarrow CL$: total, direct, and indirect effects ($N = 284$)

Mediation Decomposition — $SM \rightarrow (IM) \rightarrow CL$				
Effect	Coefficient (B)	SE	p	BCa 95% CI
Total effect (c): $SM \rightarrow CL$	0.883	0.044	< .001	[0.797; 0.969]

Direct effect (c'): SM → CL IM controlled	0.606	0.064	< .001	[0.479; 0.722]
Indirect effect (a×b): SM → IM → CL	0.277	0.050	< .001	[0.182; 0.374]
Proportion of total effect mediated: $0.277 / 0.883 = 31.4\%$ Mediation type: Partial (c' significant; H4 supported).				

Source: Author's own computation — SPSS Statistics 27

The indirect effect of SM on CL transmitted through IM amounts to $a \cdot b = 0.711 \times 0.390 = 0.277$. The BCa 95% bootstrap confidence interval for this indirect effect is [0.182; 0.374], which entirely excludes zero. H4 is therefore supported: Inbound Marketing significantly mediates the effect of Strategic Marketing on Customer Loyalty.

The mediation is partial rather than full: the direct effect $c' = 0.606$ ($p < .001$) remains significant once IM is included in the model, indicating that SM retains an independent influence on CL beyond its indirect channel through IM. The proportion of the total effect transmitted through the mediator is $0.277 / 0.883 = 31.4\%$. This means that approximately one-third of Strategic Marketing's impact on Customer Loyalty operates through the mechanism of Inbound Marketing, while the remaining two thirds reflect direct pathways not captured by the mediator — likely including tangible service quality dimensions and operational factors that have a direct bearing on loyalty but lie outside the scope of digital and content-based marketing.

1.3.6.3 Substantive Interpretation of the Mediation

The 31.4% mediated proportion has a clear theoretical reading: roughly one-third of strategic marketing's loyalty impact reaches the passenger through visible digital touchpoints, content, search, social, and personalization, while two-thirds operate through channels the model does not capture. In the Air Algérie context, those unobserved channels almost certainly include punctuality, fleet reliability, fare structure, ground service, and the institutional reputation of a flag carrier, operational dimensions that shape loyalty regardless of how well or poorly the airline communicates digitally.

The partial mediation is therefore not a weakness of the model but a faithful representation of a service industry in which digital and operational values are co-produced. It also implies a managerial ceiling: no inbound marketing program, however sophisticated, can compensate for operational underperformance.

1.3.7 Synthesis of Hypothesis Tests

Table 13 provides a consolidated summary of the four hypotheses, their key statistics, and the empirical decisions reached on the basis of the regression and mediation analyses reported in Sections 3.7 through 3.9.

Table 13: Summary of hypothesis testing results — H1 to H4

H	Hypothesized relationship	Key statistic	p	R ² / BCa CI	BCa 95% CI	Decision
H1	Strategic marketing → Customer loyalty (direct)	$\beta = 0.769$, $t = 20.20$	< .001	R ² = 0.591	[0.797; 0.969]	✓
H2	Strategic marketing → Inbound marketing (path a)	$\beta = 0.760$, $t = 19.63$	< .001	R ² = 0.577	[0.637; 0.784]	✓
H3	Inbound marketing → Customer loyalty (direct)	$\beta = 0.719$, $t = 17.35$	< .001	R ² = 0.516	[0.795; 0.965]	✓
H4	IM mediates SM → CL (partial mediation; indirect = 0.277)	$a \times b = 0.277$	< .001	31.4% mediated	[0.182; 0.374]	✓

Source: Author's own compilation build on SPSS Statistics 27 and PROCESS v4 (Hayes, 2018) outputs

All four hypotheses receive empirical support from the data. H1 and H3 establish that both strategic marketing ($\beta = 0.769$) and inbound marketing ($\beta = 0.719$) are individually strong predictors of customer loyalty, each explaining more than half of the variance in CL when modeled separately. H2 confirms the upstream influence of strategic marketing on inbound marketing effectiveness ($\beta = 0.760$, $R^2 = 0.577$), providing the empirical basis for the mediating role of IM. H4 demonstrates that this mediation is statistically significant and partial, with 31.4% of the SM–CL total effect transmitted through the inbound marketing channel and a direct effect of $c' = 0.606$ persisting after mediation is accounted for.

Together, these results trace a coherent empirical picture of how marketing strategy, digital engagement, and passenger loyalty are interconnected at Air Algérie. The four supported hypotheses translate directly into the managerial and theoretical discussion developed in Section 2, which examines the implications of these findings in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 1 and proposes concrete strategic recommendations for the airline.

Section 2: **Discussion and Managerial Implications**

Section 2 interprets the empirical findings of the study considering the research problem, the conceptual framework, and the literature reviewed in Chapter 1. It synthesizes quantitative results across the four hypotheses to answer the research questions, compares the findings with prior strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty studies, and draws implications for theory and practice. The section also formulates managerial recommendations for Air Algérie and acknowledges the study's limitations while proposing avenues for future research.

The four hypotheses are supported, but the analytically interesting result is not their confirmation — it is the asymmetry between them. Strategic marketing dominates the model both directly and as the upstream driver of inbound marketing, while inbound marketing operates as a partial transmission channel rather than a sufficient driver. The discussion that follows interprets this asymmetry rather than re-reporting the coefficients.

2.1 Integrated Interpretation of Results

The systematic confrontation of descriptive evidence, measurement quality indicators, and structural model results generates a coherent picture of the mechanisms linking marketing strategy, digital engagement, and passenger loyalty at Air Algérie.

At the descriptive level, the sample is composed predominantly of young, active travelers: 67.6% of respondents fall within the 20–39 age bracket, 69.7% report flying with Air Algérie at least twice per year, and 34.9% cite leisure travel as their primary motivation, followed by family visits at 29.6%. Despite this engagement profile, 57.7% of respondents are not enrolled in the AH Plus loyalty program, which suggests that the airline's formal retention infrastructure has not yet captured a majority of its active passenger base. The construct level means reinforcing this reading: while all three composites register above the scale midpoint, SM at 3.326, IM at 3.514, and CL at 3.569, none exceeds 4.0, indicating moderate rather than strong perceptions across the three dimensions. This combination of active travel behavior and moderately positive perceptions creates an empirical context in which the structural relationships between constructs are unlikely to be artificially inflated by floor effects or disengaged respondents.

At the measurement level, the three reflective scales demonstrate excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α ranging from 0.889 to 0.926), satisfactory KMO sampling

adequacy (0.957), and a four-component factor structure that accounts for 66.41% of total variance. These psychometric properties confirm that the constructs are operationalized with sufficient precision to support substantive causal interpretation of the structural coefficients.

At the structural level, the hierarchy of effects is empirically clear. Strategic marketing exerts the strongest direct effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.769$) and nearly as strong an effect on inbound marketing ($\beta = 0.760$). Inbound marketing, in turn, has a substantial direct effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.719$) and a significant mediating effect ($a \cdot b = 0.277$). When both predictors are entered jointly in the multiple regression, the standardized coefficient of strategic marketing drops from 0.769 to 0.528, a 31.4% reduction that is precisely consistent with partial mediation, while the IM coefficient retains a significant independent contribution of $\beta = 0.318$. This pattern confirms that the theoretical chain $SM \rightarrow IM \rightarrow CL$ is empirically operative and that inbound marketing functions as a genuine, if partial, relational interface between the airline's strategic marketing capabilities and its passengers' loyalty orientations.

2.2 Answer to the Research Problem and Research Questions

The empirical results allow for a structured answer to the twofold research problem defined in the general introduction and to the central research question on the contribution of strategic marketing and inbound marketing to customer loyalty at Air Algérie.

2.2.1 First Component: The Direct Influence of Strategic Marketing on Customer Loyalty

The first component of the research problem asked what extent strategic marketing initiatives have a measurable positive impact on passenger loyalty at Air Algérie. The simple regression analysis provides a precise empirical answer: strategic marketing, operationalized through eight items capturing market orientation, customer-centric strategy, competitive positioning, and value creation, explains 59.1% of the variance in customer loyalty. This effect is large by any conventional benchmark and statistically robust under bootstrap inference, with a BCa confidence interval for the unstandardized coefficient that excludes zero by a wide margin.

This result demonstrates that, in the context of Air Algérie, passengers' perceptions of the airline's strategic marketing quality—their sense that the company understands their needs, offers a coherent value proposition, and positions itself credibly relative to competitors—are closely and positively associated with their attitudinal commitment, behavioral consistency, trust, and advocacy toward the carrier. The relationship is monotonic, linear, and consistent

with a direct loyalty-building mechanism that does not depend on any intermediate variable to be operative.

2.2.2 Second Component: The Mediating Role of Inbound Marketing

The second component of the research problem asked to what extent inbound marketing activities mediate the relationship between strategic marketing and customer loyalty. The mediation analysis provides a three-element decomposition that answers this question quantitatively. The total effect of strategic marketing on loyalty is $c = 0.883$ ($p < .001$). When inbound marketing is introduced as a mediator, this total effect is decomposed into a direct component and an indirect component. The indirect effect is statistically significant and represents 31.4% of the total effect of strategic marketing on loyalty.

These figures establish that inbound marketing performs a significant but partial mediating function. The a-path ($SM \rightarrow IM$, $\beta = 0.760$) establishes that passengers who perceive Air Algérie's strategic marketing as coherent and customer-oriented also assigns higher quality ratings to the airline's digital content, search visibility, social engagement, and personalization—the four operational dimensions of inbound marketing captured in the IM scale. The b-path establishes that this enhanced inbound marketing perception then translates into incrementally higher loyalty scores. The chain is therefore empirically operative and statistically significant at each of its two links.

At the same time, the significance of the direct effect confirms that strategic marketing also influences loyalty through pathways that do not involve inbound marketing as a vehicle. These residual direct pathways plausibly include operational service quality, pricing strategy, network decisions, fleet reliability, and the institutional trust associated with a flag carrier, none of which are captured by the IM composite but all of which are consistent with the theoretical account of how strategic marketing creates value for passengers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018; Morgan et al., 2025).

2.2.3 Answer to the Central Research Question

The central research question asked to what extent strategic marketing and inbound marketing collectively predict Air Algérie passenger loyalty and whether inbound marketing mediates the strategic marketing–loyalty relationship. On the basis of the quantitative results, the answer can be stated as follows.

First, strategic marketing and inbound marketing are, individually and jointly, strong positive predictors of passenger loyalty. Second, inbound marketing partially mediates the strategic marketing–loyalty relationship, transmitting 31.4% of the total SM effect on CL through the SM → IM → CL indirect pathway. The bootstrap BCa confidence interval for this indirect effect entirely excludes zero, providing probabilistically robust evidence of mediation under a distribution-free inference framework. Third, the mediation is partial and not full, implying that strategic marketing exerts a substantial direct influence on loyalty that inbound marketing does not fully explain. The theoretical implication is that strategic marketing and inbound marketing are complementary rather than substitutable loyalty drivers: the former creates the organizational conditions for loyal passenger relationships, and the latter constitutes one—but not the only—channel through which those conditions translate into actual loyalty.

2.3 Comparison with the Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section positions the empirical results in relation to the literature and theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1, examining the extent to which the findings align with, extend, or qualify prior work on strategic marketing, inbound marketing, customer loyalty, and mediation-based models in service and aviation contexts.

2.3.1 Alignment with the Strategic Marketing–Loyalty Literature

The strong direct effect of strategic marketing on customer loyalty is consistent with the convergent findings of Desveaud et al. (2024), whose meta-analysis identifies market orientation, perceived value, and satisfaction—all three of which are embedded in the SM construct operationalized in this study—as the most robust cross-contextual antecedents of customer brand loyalty. The magnitude of the effect observed in the present study falls at the upper range of effect sizes reported in prior empirical work on the SM–loyalty link, which Desveaud et al. (2024) locate in the moderate-to-large region across diverse product and service settings.

Where Desveaud et al. aggregate effect sizes across mature retail and service contexts, the present study isolates the effect in a state-owned flag carrier operating under public-service obligations, a context in which the SM–loyalty link is structurally harder to produce, making the magnitude observed here ($\beta = 0.769$) particularly notable.

In the aviation context specifically, the finding is consistent with Leon and Dixon (2023), who demonstrate that service quality and trust are the dominant predictors of behavioral loyalty among airline passengers. The present study extends Leon and Dixon's work by operationalizing strategic marketing more comprehensively and by embedding it within a mediation model that reveals the additional pathway through which its loyalty effects are transmitted.

More importantly, where Leon and Dixon analyse loyalty in competitive private-carrier markets in which strategic marketing is operationally free to follow customer signals, the present study tests the same relationship inside a state-owned flag carrier whose route network, fleet composition, and pricing latitude are partly determined by public-service obligations rather than by passenger demand. The fact that strategic marketing nonetheless produces a coefficient of $\beta = 0.769$ in this constrained setting suggests that perceived market orientation can be a meaningful loyalty driver even when the underlying organizational autonomy to act on it is under explored, a finding that nuances the implicit free-market assumption in much of the existing aviation-loyalty literature.

The result also resonates with Morgan et al. (2025), who argue that marketing strategy's impact on customer-facing outcomes depends critically on execution consistency: firms that achieve alignment between strategic intent and operational delivery generate more stable customer relationships. In the Air Algérie context, the SM scale taps precisely this dimension — passengers' assessments of how coherently and customer-centrally the airline translates its strategic positioning into visible service attributes. The significant positive coefficient confirms that this perceived coherence is a meaningful predictor of loyalty even in a state-owned, obligation-constrained carrier where market orientation and customer-centricity are structurally harder to achieve than in purely commercial competitors.

2.3.2 Alignment with the Inbound Marketing–Loyalty Literature

The direct effect of inbound marketing on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.719$, $R^2 = 0.516$) is consistent with Erdmann and Ponzoa (2021), who demonstrate that inbound approaches generate more relationally predisposed customer bases from the outset, producing measurable improvements in retention and loyalty metrics in digital service contexts. The present study provides empirical confirmation that this relationship extends to the civil aviation sector in an emerging market, a context that had not previously been examined in the inbound marketing literature.

This extension is non-trivial. Erdmann and Ponzoa's evidence base is drawn from digitally mature European service contexts where inbound infrastructure—search ecosystems, content platforms, and marketing automation—is taken for granted. The Algerian aviation market presents the opposite starting conditions: under explored domestic SEO competition; a bilingual French-Arabic content environment; fragmented social media usage centered on Facebook and WhatsApp rather than on Western-style content platforms; and a passenger base in which a substantial diaspora segment consumes the airline's digital touchpoints from outside the country. That inbound marketing still explains 51.6% of loyalty variance under these conditions indicates that the mechanism is not contingent on a fully developed digital ecosystem, a boundary condition that the prior literature, dominated by mature-market evidence, had not been able to test.

The finding is also consistent with Waqas et al. (2021), who show that a positive branded content experience on social media strengthens emotional attachment to the brand and constitutes a meaningful antecedent of loyalty. In the present sample, the IM composite captures passengers' perceptions of content quality, digital visibility, social engagement, and personalization, and its significant coefficient confirms that these perceptions translate into loyalty outcomes at Air Algérie. This is consistent with Lim and Rasul (2022), whose systematic review confirms social media engagement as a robust antecedent of loyalty, word-of-mouth, and customer lifetime value.

The slightly smaller variance explained by IM alone (51.6%) relative to SM alone (59.1%) is theoretically interpretable rather than anomalous. Saavedra-Azabache et al. (2024) observe a comparable ordering in the tourism sector, where brand strategy effects on loyalty exceed digital engagement effects in magnitude because brand strategy encompasses a broader set of consumer perceptions that digital content alone cannot fully substitute. The IM–CL relationship in the present study should therefore be read as capturing a genuine and substantial, but bounded, contribution of digital engagement to loyalty outcomes.

2.3.3 The Mediation Finding in Light of the Theoretical Propositions

The partial mediation result (H4 supported; indirect effect = 0.277, 31.4% of total effect) directly validates the central theoretical proposition advanced in Chapter 1, which argued that the impact of strategic marketing on customer loyalty is meaningfully transmitted through inbound marketing rather than operating solely as a direct effect. This proposition was grounded in the conceptual claim that inbound marketing constitutes the relational interface

through which strategic marketing becomes visible to customers: coherent strategic intent produces coherent editorial choices; customer-centric strategy enables genuinely personalized communications; and competitive positioning is performed and validated through digital channels (Halligan and Shah, 2010; Rose, 2023; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

The 31.4% indirect proportion observed empirically is consistent with the theoretical framing of inbound marketing as one important but not exclusive mediating mechanism. The remaining 68.6% of the SM–CL total effect that operates through the direct pathway ($c' = 0.606$) reflects the fact that strategic marketing shapes loyalty through multiple channels, of which the inbound marketing interface is only one. This finding empirically supports the nuanced version of the mediation proposition articulated in Chapter 1: inbound marketing without a coherent strategic foundation generates activity without alignment, but strategic marketing without an effective inbound interface also reaches passengers through other channels—service delivery, pricing, and network reliability—that the IM construct does not capture.

The partial rather than full nature of the mediation also has a methodological implication. Baron and Kenny's (1986) full-mediation criterion, which required the direct effect to become non-significant after the mediator is introduced, would have led to a theoretically inappropriate rejection of the mediation here, since c' remains significant at $p < .001$. The adoption of Hayes' (2018) PROCESS framework with bootstrap inference, which focuses on the indirect effect itself rather than the significance pattern of the direct effect is, therefore, not merely a methodological refinement but a substantively important choice that prevents an incorrect conclusion about the role of inbound marketing in the SM–CL relationship.

2.3.4 Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Service-Dominant Logic

The theoretical anchoring of the conceptual model in Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Service-Dominant Logic provides two complementary lenses through which the empirical findings can be interpreted.

From the perspective of Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Hoque et al., 2022; Sinkovics et al., 2024a), the strategic marketing construct captures the airline's capacity to systematically gather market intelligence, align its offerings with passenger needs, and reconfigure its competitive positioning in response to environmental shifts. The large coefficient linking this capability to loyalty outcomes ($\beta = 0.769$) is consistent with the theoretical prediction that dynamic marketing capabilities sustain perceived value and reinforce the antecedents of

loyalty over time. The mediation finding adds a further implication from this perspective: inbound marketing effectiveness is itself a dynamic marketing capability that is generated and sustained by the quality of the upstream strategic marketing capability. The a-path (SM → IM, $\beta = 0.760$) confirms that organizations with stronger strategic marketing competencies are better positioned to execute inbound marketing activities of higher quality, suggesting a capability hierarchy in which strategic marketing is the meta-capability that enables and shapes downstream operational capabilities such as content creation, search visibility, and personalization.

From the perspective of Service-Dominant Logic, value is co-created through interactions between the firm and its customers, and loyalty emerges from the cumulative quality of those interactions rather than from any single transaction (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Wheeler, 2023). The partial mediation result is consistent with this framework: strategic marketing creates the conditions of possibility for value co-creation by establishing a coherent brand identity and customer-centric orientation; inbound marketing operationalizes that orientation through digital interactions that passengers experience as relevant, personalized, and trustworthy; and customer loyalty is the attitudinal and behavioral outcome of sustained positive interactions across both dimensions. The fact that 31.4% of the total SM effect operates through the IM mechanism confirms that digital customer interactions are a significant, quantifiable site of value co-creation in the Air Algérie context.

2.3.5 Research Gaps Addressed

The present study addresses three specific gaps identified in the literature review in Chapter 1. First, it provides the first empirical test of an integrated sequential model in which inbound marketing mediates the strategic marketing–customer loyalty relationship, a chain that Morgan et al. (2025), Malshe et al. (2021), and Theoharakis et al. (2024) theorize but do not empirically test in this configuration. Second, it brings the aviation sector — specifically a state-owned national carrier in an emerging market — into a research tradition dominated by retail, e-commerce, and B2B contexts, addressing the sectoral gap noted by Leon and Dixon (2023) and Erdmann and Ponzio (2021).

Third, it tests the inbound marketing framework in a setting that diverges from the digitally mature European and North American contexts in which Halloran and Lutz (2021), Kulikovskaja et al. (2023), and Salonen et al. (2024) established its effectiveness. The Algerian context combines a bilingual French–Arabic communication environment; a

substantial diaspora segment whose consumption of the airline's digital touchpoints occurs from outside the national territory; a regulatory mandate that mixes commercial objectives with public-service obligations on subsidized domestic and Saharan routes; and a digital ecosystem dominated by Facebook and WhatsApp rather than by mature search and content platforms. The empirical operativeness of the SM → IM → CL chain under these conditions extends the boundary of the inbound marketing literature in a theoretically meaningful direction: the mechanism does not require a fully developed digital infrastructure to produce loyalty effects, though its absolute magnitude may be expected to grow as that infrastructure matures.

2.4 Managerial Implications for Air Algérie

The empirical findings carry several concrete implications for Air Algérie's marketing strategy, organizational priorities, and customer engagement architecture. These implications follow the hierarchy identified in the structural model: strategic marketing upstream, inbound marketing as the relational interface, and loyalty program integration as the downstream reinforcement mechanism.

2.4.1 Strengthen the Strategic Marketing Foundation

Given that strategic marketing explains 59.1% of the variance in passenger loyalty independently of inbound marketing, the most structurally impactful driver available to Air Algérie is the quality and coherence of its strategic marketing orientation. The SM composite mean of 3.326 — which, while above the scale midpoint, falls nearly 0.25 units below the IM mean of 3.514 — indicates that passengers perceive the airline's market orientation, competitive positioning, and value creation logic somewhat less favorably than its digital engagement activities. This ordering is consistent with the structural difficulty of operationalizing genuine customer-centricity in a state-owned organization subject to public service obligations that may conflict with purely market-driven decisions (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Three concrete actions follow these findings. First, the Brand Management Directorate should establish a quarterly route-level passenger intelligence review combining AH Plus CRM data, post-flight NPS, and bilingual French–Arabic social listening and feed its outputs directly into the Network Planning committee so that intelligence translates into scheduling, fleet, and pricing decisions rather than remaining diagnostic. Second, the airline should build segment-specific value propositions for the three dominant traveler types observed in this

sample—the family-visit passenger (29.6%), the leisure passenger (34.9%), and the diaspora professional—each with distinct ancillary, baggage, and schedule sensitivities that a uniform positioning cannot address. Third, a route-level NPS tracker disaggregated by cabin class should be introduced, with publicly committed quarterly improvement targets, so that the alignment between strategic intent and operational delivery identified by Morgan et al. (2025) becomes auditable rather than aspirational

2.4.2 Develop Inbound Marketing as a Structured Capability

The mediation analysis demonstrates that 31.4% of strategic marketing's effect on loyalty is transmitted through inbound marketing. This finding implies that improvements in inbound marketing effectiveness generate loyalty returns both directly (path $b = 0.390$) and indirectly by amplifying the downstream impact of strategic marketing investments. The IM composite mean of 3.514 — the highest of the three constructs — suggests that passengers already hold moderately positive inbound marketing perceptions, but the variance in this composite ($SD = 0.822$) indicates meaningful differentiation across respondents that has not yet been fully captured.

The four inbound dimensions translate into four named deliverables for Air Algérie.

1. **Content.** A bilingual French–Arabic editorial calendar centered on a destination-content hub for the twelve most-flown intra-Algerian and Mediterranean routes, calibrated to the three peak demand windows of the Algerian aviation calendar, summer diaspora returns, Ramadan, and the Hajj/Umrah period. Salonen et al. (2024) show that content timing is itself a loyalty driver; in the Algerian case, calendar relevance is not optional."
2. **Search visibility.** Sustained organic SEO investment on Algerian-French and Algerian-Arabic search queries, where domestic competition is comparatively low and the cost-per-acquisition advantage over paid channels is consequently larger than in mature markets (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).
3. **Social engagement.** A WhatsApp Business channel for booking confirmations, schedule changes, and disruption notifications, the channel that the Algerian traveler already uses for every other transactional communication, paired with an annual user-generated-content campaign anchored on the diaspora summer returns. AbuAli (2025) and Kingsnorth (2025) argue that peer and community influence generate the most

durable loyalty effects from social engagement; in the Algerian context, that community is the diaspora, and WhatsApp is its venue.

4. **Personalization.** Direct exploitation of the AH Plus CRM database for individually relevant offers—re-booking routes, cabin upgrade probabilities, and family-fare bundles for visiting-relatives' travelers—which Hou (2024) identifies as the inbound dimension most directly convertible into loyalty."

2.4.3 Align the AH Plus Program with the Inbound Marketing Architecture

The finding that 57.7% of the sampled passengers are not enrolled in the AH Plus loyalty program, despite 64.4% reporting that they fly with Air Algérie at least twice per year, constitutes a structural underutilization of the airline's formal retention infrastructure. The mediation model provides a direct explanatory mechanism: if strategic marketing perceptions shape inbound marketing perceptions ($a = 0.711$) and inbound marketing perceptions drive loyalty ($b = 0.390$), then passengers who have not been exposed to the inbound marketing interface—including program communications, personalized offers, and community engagement—are receiving only the direct strategic marketing effect ($c' = 0.606$) and forgoing the additional 0.277-unit indirect loyalty premium associated with the mediated pathway.

Closing this gap requires integrating program enrollment incentives into every digital touchpoint of the inbound marketing architecture: booking confirmation emails should include enrollment calls-to-action; post-flight NPS surveys should be conditioned on program membership with personalized enrollment offers for non-members; and content marketing should feature member-exclusive benefits as part of the editorial calendar. Agarwal et al. (2022) demonstrate that perceived program benefits generate customer happiness, which reinforces the relational bond; Ruvio et al. (2025) show that experiential rewards produce stronger identity connection with the brand than transactional rewards. These findings suggest that the AH Plus program's future development should shift toward experience-based benefits—priority boarding, exclusive lounge access, and personalized destination recommendations—rather than relying primarily on points accumulation.

2.4.4 Monitor Operational Consistency as the Residual Direct Pathway

The significance of the direct effect $c' = 0.606$ implies that, even after accounting for inbound marketing, strategic marketing retains a substantial direct influence on loyalty that operates through channels not captured in the model. These residual pathways most plausibly include

in-flight service quality, on-time performance, check-in efficiency, and complaint resolution, dimensions of the service encounter that shape loyalty independently of any digital communication. Wheeler (2023) argues that the quality of each operational touchpoint encountered by the customer is a primary determinant of perceived brand value and consequently of loyalty, particularly in service industries where physical and digital interactions are deeply intertwined.

The structural constraints that shape Air Algérie's operational performance are well known and largely outside the marketing function's authority: an aging fleet whose dispatch reliability has fallen below regional benchmarks, on-time performance pressured by maintenance and slot constraints, a fare structure that remains opaque relative to Gulf and European competitors, under explored online self-service for refunds and itinerary changes, and a residual public perception of the carrier as an administrative rather than a commercial entity. These constraints almost certainly account for the bulk of the 68.6% direct effect of strategic marketing on loyalty that the inbound channel does not transmit. The implication is analytically uncomfortable but managerially honest: a substantial share of the loyalty gap that this study quantifies cannot be closed by marketing reform alone, and a credible loyalty strategy must therefore include fleet, network, and service-delivery decisions that lie upstream of any marketing investment.

This implies that inbound marketing investments cannot substitute for operational quality improvements. An airline that communicates strategically and engages passengers digitally but under delivers service reliability will generate the inbound marketing perceptions captured by the b-path without the operational quality that sustains the direct c'-path. Both drivers must be developed in parallel for the full loyalty potential of the strategic marketing capability to be realized.

2.4.5 Boundary of the Marketing driver

The structural model isolates the marketing-driven antecedents of loyalty but cannot capture three forces that operate outside the marketing perimeter and yet shape passenger behavior. The first is price elasticity in a market where domestic fares are partly administered, and international fares are constrained by bilateral air-service agreements rather than by competitive optimization. The second is the political-economy environment of a state-owned flag carrier whose strategic latitude is bounded by ministerial oversight, public service obligations on Saharan routes, and the broader policy of national connectivity. The third is

the macroeconomic context—currency volatility, dual exchange-rate dynamics, and constraints on outbound foreign-currency spending—which conditions discretionary travel independently of any marketing variable. The recommendations developed above should therefore be read as the upper bound of what strategic and inbound marketing can deliver, not as a substitute for the structural reforms that govern the rest of the loyalty determinants

2.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged and that define avenues for future research.

First, the study relies on a non-probability convenience sample of 284 respondents recruited primarily through online social media channels. Although this sample size is consistent with the minimum threshold estimated by the Cochran formula and exceeds the benchmarks recommended for mediation analysis by Hayes (2018), it does not permit strict probabilistic generalization to the entire Air Algérie passenger population. The sample is skewed toward younger, more digitally active passengers: 67.6% fall in the 20–39 age bracket, and the recruitment through LinkedIn, Facebook, and WhatsApp systematically excludes less digitally connected travelers. Future research should use stratified probability sampling to ensure representation of older, less digitally engaged, and more rural segments of the Air Algérie passenger base and should compare loyalty dynamics across these sub-populations through multi-group analysis.

Second, all three constructs are measured from a single source at a single point in time through self-reported perceptual scales, which raises two methodological concerns. The first is common method variance: although Harman's single-factor test was not formally conducted in this study, the structural reliance on a cross-sectional single-source design constitutes an acknowledged limitation. The second is the gap between perceptual and behavioral measurement: the CL composite captures passengers' attitudinal commitment, behavioral intentions, and reported loyalty behaviors but does not include objective behavioral data such as booking frequency, revenue share, or churn rates drawn from Air Algérie's operational records. Future studies should complement perception-based measurement with CRM behavioral data to validate whether the $SM \rightarrow IM \rightarrow CL$ chain established here translates into measurable differences in actual repurchase patterns and revenue contribution.

Third, the mediation model tested in this study is a simple three-variable chain in which inbound marketing is the sole mediator. The 68.6% of the SM–CL total effect that operates through the direct pathway ($c' = 0.606$) remains theoretically underspecified in the current model. Future research should test extended models that incorporate additional mediators—service quality, customer satisfaction, and perceived value—to identify which specific mechanisms account for the residual direct effect and to produce a more complete causal map of how strategic marketing generates loyalty in airline contexts.

A further limitation concerns model specification. The structural model does not include direct measures of objective service quality, on-time performance, perceived price fairness, or institutional reputation. Their absence is the most plausible explanation for the residual 68.6% direct effect of strategic marketing on customer loyalty, and integrating them is the highest-priority extension of this model. Replicating the analysis with these additional mediators would test whether the inbound marketing pathway retains its 31.4% share when alternative transmission channels are explicitly modeled or whether part of that share is currently absorbed by the omission of the operational variables.

Fourth, the study is conducted at a single airline and in a specific regulatory, cultural, and competitive environment: a state-owned carrier operating under both commercial and public service obligations in an emerging market with under explored digital infrastructure. The applicability of the SM → IM → CL chain in other organizational contexts — private low-cost carriers, Gulf-state flag carriers, or European full-service airlines — remains untested. Cross-industry and cross-national comparative studies using the measurement scales developed here would clarify which elements of the mediation model are context-specific and which are more universal.

Fifth, the present study does not model potential moderators of the mediation pathway. Variables such as passenger segment (leisure versus professional versus diaspora), AH Plus membership status, travel frequency, and digital literacy may condition the strength of both the a-path and the b-path. Future research could apply moderated mediation frameworks (Hayes, 2018, Models 7, 8, or 14) to test whether the inbound marketing mediation mechanism is stronger for frequent than for occasional travelers or for enrolled than for non-enrolled AH Plus members—questions with direct implications for targeted marketing investment decisions at Air Algérie.

Conclusion of the Chapter

The analysis establishes that strategic marketing is the dominant antecedent of passenger loyalty at Air Algérie, with inbound marketing functioning as a partial — and in this sample, secondary — transmission mechanism. The 31.4% mediated proportion suggests that digital communication is necessary but not sufficient to convert strategic intent into passenger commitment and that the remaining two-thirds of the effect reside in operational and institutional dimensions that lie beyond the digital marketing perimeter.

For Air Algérie, the practical implication is uncomfortable but clear: investing in inbound marketing without simultaneously addressing punctuality, fleet renewal, and service consistency will produce well-communicated loyalty rather than experienced loyalty. The model's principal contribution is therefore not the confirmation of a sequential chain but the empirical identification of where the marketing driver ends and where operational reform must begin.

General Conclusion

The present research investigated the impact of strategic marketing and inbound marketing on customer loyalty in the airline industry, with Air Algérie as the case study. The central question—to what extent does inbound marketing mediate the relationship between strategic marketing and passenger loyalty in the context of an Algerian state-owned flag carrier—was addressed through a sequential conceptual model in which strategic marketing was theorized as the upstream organizational capability, inbound marketing as the relational interface through which that capability becomes visible to the passenger, and customer loyalty as the cumulative attitudinal and behavioral outcome of that translation. The model was tested empirically on a sample of 284 Air Algérie passengers using regression analysis and bootstrap-based mediation procedures.

The theoretical chapter established that strategic marketing, inbound marketing, and customer loyalty are conceptually distinct but causally interconnected constructs whose articulation has been only partially examined in the existing literature and almost never tested in the civil aviation sector of an emerging market. The methodological chapter operationalized the three constructs through validated multi-item scales, justified the choice of a quantitative cross-sectional design, and specified the inferential strategy that would allow the four hypotheses to be tested simultaneously and the mediation pathway to be quantified. The empirical chapter then produced four converging results: strategic marketing exerts a substantial direct effect on customer loyalty; strategic marketing is also a strong upstream determinant of how passengers perceive the airline's inbound marketing activities; inbound marketing exerts an independent direct effect on loyalty in its own right; and inbound marketing partially mediates the strategic-marketing–loyalty relationship, transmitting roughly one-third of the total effect.

The theoretical contribution of this work lies in the empirical specification of a sequential mechanism that the literature had so far theorized but rarely tested in this configuration. By demonstrating that inbound marketing functions as a partial rather than full mediator, the study refines the dominant assumption that digital engagement is the principal vehicle through which strategic marketing reaches the customer. Two-thirds of the effects that operate outside the inbound channel mark an empirical boundary of digital marketing, perspective and reposition operational service delivery, network reliability, and institutional reputation as legitimate co-determinants of loyalty that no inbound program can substitute for. The Algerian context adds a second contribution: the mediation mechanism remains

operative under conditions, a bilingual communication environment, fragmented social platforms, a mixed commercial and public-service mandate, and under explored domestic digital infrastructure that the prior literature had not had the opportunity to examine. This extends the external validity of the inbound marketing framework beyond the digitally mature European and North American settings in which it was originally developed.

The practical contribution speaks directly to Air Algérie. The findings indicate that the airline's loyalty outcomes are not constrained by an absence of digital activity; they are constrained by the coherence between strategic intent and operational delivery, by the under enrollment of frequent travelers in the AH Plus program, and by structural service-quality dimensions that lie outside the marketing function's authority. The recommendations developed in the discussion — segmented value propositions, bilingual editorial calendars, WhatsApp-based transactional engagement, AH Plus integration into every digital touchpoint, and the parallel pursuit of operational consistency — are presented as the upper bound of what the marketing function can deliver, not as a substitute for the fleet, network, and service-delivery reforms that govern the remainder of the loyalty equation. This honesty about the limits of the marketing driver is itself part of the contribution.

The study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single moment; the convenience sample over-represents younger digitally active travelers, the model omits service quality, on-time performance, price fairness, and institutional reputation as direct measures, and the single-airline, single-country focus limits inferential generalization. Each limitation, however, is a future research opportunity. Longitudinal designs would clarify how loyalty perceptions evolve as the airline's digital and operational profile changes; probabilistic and stratified samples would test whether the mediation mechanism varies by traveler segment, by AH Plus enrolment status, or between domestic and diaspora passengers; extended models incorporating service quality and perceived value would quantify how much of the residual direct effect can be reattributed to operational variables; and comparative designs across Maghreb, Gulf, and European carriers would test which elements of the SM → IM → CL chain are context-specific and which are structural features of the aviation industry itself.

Beyond Air Algérie, the broader implication of this research is that customer loyalty in service industries is produced at the intersection of strategic intent, digital interface, and operational reality and that any attempt to engineer it through one of these channels alone—

however sophisticated the underlying capability—will encounter the diminishing returns that this study has empirically located. For an Algerian carrier whose competitive environment is intensifying and whose passenger base is increasingly digitally informed and internationally mobile, the analytical message is straightforward: marketing strategy and inbound marketing are necessary, mutually reinforcing, and jointly insufficient. The remaining work belongs to operations, governance, and the long horizon of institutional reform.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Questionnaire

A.1 — Conditions of Administration

- Channel: online self-administered questionnaire distributed via Google Forms (URL provided to respondents).
- Language of administration: French.
- Eligibility filter: respondent must have travelled with Air Algérie at least once in the previous 12–24 months.
- Length: 24 substantive items + 5 sociodemographic items = 29 items.
- Response format for SM, IM and CL items : 5-point Likert scale (1 = Pas du tout d'accord ; 5 = Tout à fait d'accord).
- Pilot test: see Chapter II Data collection period and dataset characteristics: see Chapter III.

Bonjour,

Ce questionnaire s'inscrit dans le cadre d'un mémoire de master en marketing management. Il vise à analyser les perceptions des passagers d'Air Algérie concernant les actions marketing de la compagnie et son influence sur la fidélité.

Ce questionnaire est **anonyme** et les réponses seront utilisées uniquement à des **fins académiques**.

Merci de répondre en toute sincérité

Nous vous remercions sincèrement pour votre temps et votre participation

Section A : Profil du répondant (questionnaire administré, FR)

Q1. Vous êtes :

- ☐ Homme
- ☐ Femme

Q2. Votre âge :

- ☐ Moins de 20 ans
- ☐ 20–29 ans ·
- ☐ 30–39 ans ·
- ☐ 40–49 ans ·
- ☐ 50 ans et plus

Q3. Combien de fois avez-vous voyagé avec Air Algérie au cours des 12 à 24 derniers mois ?

- ☐ 1 fois
- ☐ 2 à 3 fois
- ☐ 4 à 6 fois
- ☐ Plus de 6 fois

Q4. Quel est le motif principal de vos voyages avec Air Algérie ?

- ☐ Loisirs
- ☐ Professionnel
- ☐ Visite familiale
- ☐ Études

Q5. Êtes-vous membre du programme AH PLUS ?

- ☐ Oui
- ☐ Non

A.4 — Section B: Marketing stratégique (FR)

Échelle de Likert à 5 points : 1 = Pas du tout d'accord ; 5 = Tout à fait d'accord.

SM01. Air Algérie comprend les besoins de ses passagers.

SM02. Air Algérie adapte ses services aux attentes des clients.

SM03. Air Algérie prend en compte les avis des clients.

SM04. Les offres proposées correspondent à différents types de passagers.

SM05. Air Algérie a une position claire par rapport aux autres compagnies.

SM06. La communication d'Air Algérie correspond à ce que je vis réellement.

SM07. Les actions d'Air Algérie sont cohérentes entre elles.

SM08. Les services proposés apportent une réelle valeur aux clients.

A.5 — Section C: Marketing inbound (FR)

Échelle de Likert à 5 points : 1 = Pas du tout d'accord ; 5 = Tout à fait d'accord.

IM01. Air Algérie publie du contenu utile pour les voyageurs.

IM02. Les contenus sont informatifs et pas seulement promotionnels.

IM03. Air Algérie interagit avec ses clients en ligne.

IM04. Air Algérie répond aux messages et commentaires en ligne.

IM05. Il est facile de trouver des informations sur Air Algérie.

IM06. Les plateformes digitales sont simples à utiliser.

IM07. Les contenus proposés correspondent à mes besoins.

IM08. Je me sens engagé(e) avec Air Algérie via ses canaux digitaux.

.6 — Section D: Fidélité client (FR)

Échelle de Likert à 5 points : 1 = Pas du tout d'accord ; 5 = Tout à fait d'accord. Aucun item à codage inversé n'est présent dans la version finale administrée.

CL01. Je pense voyager à nouveau avec Air Algérie.

CL02. Air Algérie fait partie de mes choix lors de la réservation.

CL03. Je recommanderais Air Algérie à mon entourage.

CL04. J'ai confiance en Air Algérie.

CL05. J'ai une image positive de la compagnie.

CL06. Je me sens attaché(e) à Air Algérie.

CL07. Même en présence d'autres options, je préférerais choisir Air Algérie.

CL08. Le programme AH PLUS ou les avantages de fidélité renforcent mon intention de rester fidèle à Air Algérie.

Merci pour votre participation

Votre contribution est très importante pour cette étude.

