



# The influences of airline brand credibility on consumer purchase intentions



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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how brand credibility affects consumer purchase intention in the airline sector. Based on signaling theory and relationship marketing theory, it explores the relationships among four constructs: brand credibility, decision convenience, affective commitment and purchase intention. A structural equation model applied to consumer survey data supports the argument. The results indicate that airline brand credibility increases consumer purchase intention by increasing consumers' decision convenience and enhancing affective commitment. Decision convenience can be considered a new mediator of a causal relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. The results offer implications for airline marketers and directions for future research.

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## 1. Introduction

Brands play a critical role in consumer decision making and choice behavior (Erdem and Swait, 2004). In markets where quality is not easily observable, consumers generally make their purchase decisions amid feelings of uncertainty (Kim et al., 2008), which can make them reluctant to buy. To solve this problem, companies may use brands as signals to effectively convey information about quality to consumers (Erdem et al., 2002). The credibility signaled by a brand is considered important because it decreases consumer uncertainty and economizes decision-making cost (Akdeniz et al., 2013). As such, credibility is considered the most important characteristic of a brand signal (Erdem and Swait, 1998; Spry et al., 2011). Brand credibility refers to the believability of product or service position information contained in a brand (Erdem and Swait, 2004).

The constructs of consistency, brand investment and clarity are antecedents of brand credibility (Erdem and Swait, 1998). The credibility of a brand is established through consumers' past experiences with it, either directly or indirectly (Kim et al., 2008). Thus, brand credibility can be created and shaped by marketing mix consistency over time, by brand investment (e.g., brand image advertising), and through the clarity (i.e., lack of ambiguity) of the information contained in a brand (Erdem et al., 2006).

Despite its acknowledged importance, brand credibility and its effect on consumer response has received little attention in service literature (Baek and King, 2011), including literature on airline service. Because services are often intangible, there may be a high level of uncertainty surrounding them, and thus consumers cannot readily evaluate service quality before making a purchase (Berry, 2000), indicating the key role brand credibility plays in service purchase. This issue is particularly relevant for airline companies because of the high level of consumer uncertainty involved in airline service purchases (Boksberger et al., 2007). Consumers of airline services usually experience uncertainty around the safety and reliability of the airline, the punctuality of flights, the reliability and safety of baggage handling, or the speed of baggage transport (Wu and Cheng, 2013). Given the strong impact of brand credibility on consumer choice when there is high uncertainty (Erdem and Swait, 2004), the credibility of a brand can provide significant benefits to both consumers and airline companies. For consumers, purchasing services from a credible airline brand assures quality. For airline companies, a credible brand means that marketing efforts will be more cost effective because of the high likelihood of message acceptance, thus bringing companies increased sales.

This paper aims to investigate the impact of brand credibility on purchase intention in the airline sector. By integrating different theoretical perspectives (i.e., signaling theory and relationship marketing theory), this study demonstrates that brand credibility has both signaling and relationship marketing roles in consumer decisions. More specifically, this study investigates the

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relationships among four constructs: brand credibility, decision convenience (consumers' perceived time and effort expenditure to make service purchase decisions), affective commitment and purchase intention. Research into airline management has indicated the impact of convenience (e.g., convenience in making reservations) on consumers in selecting airlines (e.g., [Chen and Chao, 2015](#)). Affective commitment has also been shown to be an important determinant of consumer loyalty in the airline industry ([Moghadam et al., 2014](#)).

This study contributes to existing research in several ways. First, it is the first in airline management research to empirically investigate the effect of brand credibility on consumer response. Brand credibility is the cornerstone of brand management in the airline sector ([Balmer, 2012](#); [Keller, 2001](#)), but has been discussed only theoretically. This study highlights the importance of brand credibility in the airline sector by demonstrating that brand credibility has both signaling and relationship marketing roles in consumer decisions. From an academic perspective, we enhance the theoretical basis by explaining the influences of airline brand credibility on purchase intention. Understanding how brand credibility influences consumer purchases can aid airline companies in executing marketing decisions.

Second, this study is the first to investigate the role of decision convenience as a mediator in the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. Making decisions about intangible and variable services can be difficult for consumers ([Berry et al., 2002](#)). Based on signaling theory, this study indicates that a credible brand may reduce the difficulty (i.e., increase decision convenience) by providing clear and accessible information, thus increasing purchase intention. Service convenience has been shown to be a key factor used by consumers in selecting airlines ([Chen and Chao, 2015](#)). This study contributes to airline management literature by demonstrating the importance of a new dimension of service convenience—decision convenience—to consumer choice.

Third, this study extends previous research on brand credibility that has focused on its effect as signals (e.g., [Baek et al., 2010](#)). This study incorporates relationship marketing views of brand credibility into its model. Investigating the relationship marketing effect of brand credibility is important because brands influence consumer decision making through social and psychological processes ([Hoeffler and Keller, 2002](#)), but limited attention has been paid to analyzing the role of commitment in the airline industry ([Erkmen and Hancer, 2015](#)). Brands embody the long-term experience that a consumer has with a service provider ([Sweeney and Swait, 2008](#)). Investigating signaling and relationship marketing views simultaneously provides more theoretical plausibility to airline literature.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Brand credibility

Brand credibility is the believability of the product position information embedded in a brand, depending on consumers' perceptions of whether the brand has the ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised ([Erdem and Swait, 1998](#)). Brand credibility is a latent multidimensional construct ([Law et al., 1998](#)). Expertise and trustworthiness are considered sub-dimensions of a higher order brand credibility construct, based on past research ([Erdem and Swait, 1998, 2004](#); [Spry et al., 2011](#)). Trustworthiness refers to the *willingness* of a firm to deliver what it has promised while expertise refers to the *ability* of a firm to deliver what it has promised. Brand credibility represents the summary of brand-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand communication over time ([Sweeney and Swait, 2008](#)), and embraces the personal

history of brand experience ([Erdem et al., 2002](#)). Thus, brand credibility increases the consumer-expected utility of a brand and the probability of brand choice ([Erdem and Swait, 2004](#)).

Since a brand's trustworthiness and expertise are based on the cumulative impact of all its previous marketing strategies and actions ([Erdem and Swait, 1998](#)), research suggests the constructs of consistency, brand investment and clarity are antecedents of brand credibility ([Erdem et al., 2006](#)). Consistency represents the degree of harmony and convergence among marketing actions and the stability of marketing mix strategies over time ([Erdem et al., 2006](#)). Brand investment represents a firm's spending on brands (e.g., advertising, sponsorships, and social responsibility actions) in order to demonstrate long-term brand commitment and to assure consumers that brand promises will be kept ([Erdem and Swait, 2004](#); [Sweeney and Swait, 2008](#)). Clarity represents a lack of ambiguity in the product information contained in a brand ([Erdem et al., 2002](#)). Thus, brand credibility can be created by increased consistency, clarity, and brand investment over time, through all practices and aspects of marketing communications such as brand image advertising, sponsorship, or sales promotion.

### 2.2. Signaling theory

Signaling theory provides theoretical insights into the mechanism through which a brand influences consumer purchase behavior when consumers are uncertain about product quality. From an information economics perspective, signaling theory assumes that consumers are uncertain about the quality of the product or service provided by sellers. This uncertainty arises from information asymmetry (i.e., sellers are more informed about their own products or services than consumers are) ([Kirmani and Rao, 2000](#); [San Martín and Camarero, 2005](#)).

Previous research has argued that brands are the most widely used signal when considering unobservable qualities ([Baek and King, 2011](#); [Erdem et al., 2006](#)). Brands can be an effective signal because of a company's vulnerability to consumer sanctions: If it does not deliver the promised quality, the company will hurt its brand. Because a strong brand requires significant investment, companies are unlikely to jeopardize their brand by acting opportunistically ([Kirmani and Rao, 2000](#)). Signaling theory also suggests that credibility is a key determinant of a brand signal to convey information effectively ([Tirole, 1988](#)). Thus, at the heart of brands as signals is brand credibility ([Erdem et al., 2002](#)).

### 2.3. Relationship marketing theory

Relationship marketing theory holds that brand is an important relational tool in a firm's consumer relationship management. Relationship marketing "refers to all marketing activities directed towards establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" ([Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p.22](#)). Relationship marketing theory posits that consumer perceptions of the strength of the relationship (e.g., commitment) shape consumers' behavior in that relationship ([Hunt et al., 2006](#)). The most prominent perception representing the strength of the relationship is affective commitment ([Morgan and Hunt, 1994](#); [Verhoef, 2003](#)), which refers to the psychological attachment to the relationship partner and is based on feelings of loyalty and affiliation ([Bolton et al., 2004](#)). Consumers with strong affective commitment are more emotionally connected to the brand than non-committed consumers ([Evanschitzky et al., 2006](#)). Since affectively committed consumers feel attached to the brand because of positive feelings, these consumers display positive behavior towards the brand ([Verhoef et al., 2002](#)), and increase brand loyalty ([Iglesias et al., 2011](#)).

## 2.4. Decision convenience

Seiders et al. (2007) suggest that service convenience plays a significant role in the perceived time and effort that a consumer must invest in a service purchase. Among the various service convenience evaluations during different stages of service experiences (Service Convenience Model, Berry et al., 2002), this research focuses on one type that is most related to brand credibility: decision convenience. Decision convenience refers to consumers' perceived time and effort associated with the decision to purchase or use services, and to make choices between competing services (Berry et al., 2002).

Consumers who have recognized the need for a service are immediately faced with the decision of which supplier and offering to choose, and thus perceive time and effort costs associated with service purchase. The availability and quality of information about the service provider and its competitors determines decision convenience (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Consumers tend to have a higher convenience threshold when their purchase decisions involve services that are complex or difficult to evaluate (Seiders et al., 2007).

On the basis of previous research, this study formulates a brand credibility-purchase framework (Fig. 1). In our proposed model, brand credibility serves as a signaling and relationship marketing tool that increases purchase intention.

## 3. Theoretical framework

### 3.1. The signaling effect of brand credibility on purchase intention

We propose that brand credibility is a signaling tool that increases consumer decision convenience, which in turn increases their purchase intention. Because of service intangibility, consumers tend to search for information about a service before making decisions (Baek et al., 2010). According to signaling theory, brands can serve as credible signals because they embody the cumulative efforts of prior marketing communication strategies (Baek and King, 2011) and can serve as a source of knowledge (Erdem et al., 2006). As such, credible brands enjoy lower information-gathering and information-processing costs, and lower perceived uncertainty (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Because brand credibility can diminish the cognitive effort required to evaluate a service provider, it should enhance consumer decision convenience.

**H1.** Brand credibility positively affects decision convenience.

Past research suggests that decision convenience is positively related to consumers' purchase behavior (Seiders et al., 2007). Decision convenience is an important aspect of consumer

satisfaction with the service provider and its offering (Colwell et al., 2008). Since decision convenience increases the value of services by saving consumers' time and energy (Farquhar and Rowley, 2009), we propose that decision convenience enhances consumer purchase intention.

**H2.** Decision convenience positively affects a consumer's purchase intention.

### 3.2. The relationship marketing effect of brand credibility on purchase intention

We propose that brand credibility is a relationship marketing tool that fosters consumer affective commitment, thereby increasing their purchase intention. As proposed in prior sections, brand credibility has two components: trustworthiness and expertise. Relationship marketing theory suggests that trust leads to affective commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). If consumers believe that the company can deliver on its promise of service quality (i.e., high trustworthiness), they tend to have higher affective commitment, since trust in a company justifies consumers' positive feelings towards and reliance on the firm (Erkmen and Hancer, 2015; Hunt et al., 2006). Additionally, as affective commitment involves potential vulnerability and sacrifice, consumers do not commit to a company unless they trust it (Verhoef, 2003). Wang (2014b) found support for the effect of trustworthiness on affective commitment to an airline company. Service provider expertise—including technical knowledge, the ability to demonstrate knowledge and competence, and proof of expertise in the field—has also been found to increase affective commitment (Sweeney and Swait, 2008).

**H3.** Brand credibility positively affects consumers' affective commitment.

Relationship marketing theory suggests that affectively committed consumers believe they are connected to the company (Bolton et al., 2004; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Such consumers desire to continue their relationship because they like the company and enjoy the partnership (Verhoef et al., 2002), and are unlikely to buy from other companies (Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Verhoef, 2003). Moghadam et al. (2014) also show that committed consumers tend to be more loyal in the airline sector. Therefore, we propose that affectively committed consumers are likely to purchase from the airplane company.

**H4.** Affective commitment positively affects a consumer's purchase intention.

### 3.3. The direct effect of brand credibility on purchase intention

We establish a direct relationship between airline brand credibility and consumer purchase intention. A consumer who believes the airline company is *willing* to deliver on its promises (high trustworthiness) has a positive feeling toward the company, and should be more likely to purchase the service from the company. Similarly, a consumer who believes the airline company is *capable* of delivering on its promises (high expertise) should be more willing to purchase the service from the company. Thus, airline brand credibility has a direct, positive effect on purchase intention that is not mediated by decision convenience or affective commitment. Considering the effects of brand credibility also enables us to test whether the effects of decision convenience and affective commitment hold in the presence of direct effect. Thus,

**H5.** Brand credibility positively affects a consumer's purchase

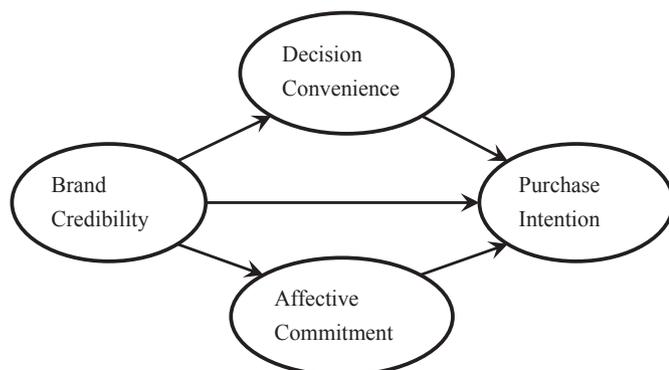


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

intention.

#### 4. Methods

The sample comprised international passengers at Taoyuan International Airport in Taiwan during May 2014. Taiwan was chosen for two reasons: First, given its central location in East Asia, the fastest-growing region for aviation in the world, Taiwan has high hopes of becoming a hub for regional travel. The total value of Taiwan's aviation industry rose from US\$1.87 billion to US\$2.67 billion, or 42%, from 2008 to 2014 (Taiwan Business Topics, 2015), suggesting the importance of the aviation industry to Taiwan. Second, air transportation across the Taiwan Strait has been liberalized since 2008. The liberalization and deregulation in the airline industry has increased competition in Taiwan's airline industry (Chen and Chao, 2015). As many carriers have entered the market and are competing against each other, consumers are frequently required to evaluate new airline brands. Thus airline brands and their credibility should play a key role in their decision-making process.

A self-administered questionnaire—which had been pre-tested and revised—was used to collect data. This study used convenience sampling techniques because a complete list of the study's population was unavailable. Only one questionnaire was completed per family or couple due to the possible bias that cohabitants could have on each other. In total, 700 people were approached and 420 valid questionnaires were obtained, for a response rate of 60%.

The study's scales were developed using standard psychometric procedures (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), and are based both on previous research and on scale development work conducted prior to final data collection. Multi-item scales were used to measure the model constructs and to demonstrate the specific items for each construct (Table 1). A seven-point rating scale was used to obtain responses for all items. The operational definitions of the study constructs are shown below. Brand credibility encompasses expertise and trustworthiness (Erdem et al., 2006). An airline brand is credible if consumers perceive this brand as having both the

ability (i.e. expertise) and the willingness (i.e. trustworthiness) to consistently deliver what has been promised. Measures of airline brand credibility were adapted from Baek and King (2011) and Erdem and Swait (1998) for this study using a pre-test. Five items encompassing expertise and trustworthiness of the airline company were used for measuring airline brand credibility. The decision convenience scale measures consumers' perceived time and effort associated with the decision to purchase from an airline company, and was adapted from Seiders et al. (2007), with minor modifications to suit this study's context. Measures of affective commitment, adapted from Garbarino and Johnson (1999), captured the psychological attachment of consumers to the airline company. Finally, respondents were instructed to rate the probability that they would choose the airline company, and measures of purchase intention were adapted from Baek and King (2011).

Assuming that brand credibility requires long-term effort and is hard to create in a short-term experimental setting, the term "favourite brand" was applied to all items. This particular design was chosen for two reasons. First, brand credibility embraces the personal history of brand experience, and a favourite brand can be seen as an individual's own impression of the company's credibility (Baek and King, 2011). Second, this design can help induce and measure the participants' brand-specific responses (Kim et al., 2008), which may reduce retrospective bias and increase the validity of the data. Although respondents' opinions of their favourite airlines might increase the absolute levels of study constructs, the study hypotheses concern relationships among constructs, rather than the absolute levels of the constructs. Thus, the results should still hold despite this problem.

All participants were asked to select their favourite airline brand name (one that they have purchased from or would be most likely to purchase from in the near future) from a list of airline brands. The following list of brand names of airline companies was included: EVA Airways, China Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Japan Asia Airways, Singapore Airlines, and "Other". After choosing their favourite airline brand, participants proceeded to the survey questions about their selected brand (e.g., "My favourite brand of airline company delivers what it promises").

**Table 1**  
Measurement model evaluation.

Constructs and measurement items	Standardized loading	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	$\alpha$
<i>Brand credibility</i>				
1. My favourite brand of ____ delivers what it promises	0.89*	0.94	0.76	0.93
2. Service claims from my favourite brand of ____ are believable	0.92*			
3. My favourite brand of ____ is committed to delivering on its claim, no more and no less	0.82*			
4. My favourite brand of ____ has a name I can trust	0.85*			
5. My favourite brand of ____ has the ability to deliver what it promises	0.88*			
<i>Decision convenience</i>				
1. I can easily determine prior to purchase whether my favourite brand of ____ will offer what I need	0.89*	0.91	0.78	0.91
2. Deciding to purchase from my favourite brand of ____ is quick and easy	0.91*			
3. It was easy to get the information I needed to decide which airline company to purchase from	0.85*			
<i>Affective commitment</i>				
1. I am a loyal consumer of my favourite brand of ____	0.84*	0.93	0.82	0.87
2. Because I feel a strong attachment to my favourite brand of ____, I remain a consumer of my favourite brand of ____	0.95*			
3. I have positive feelings about my favourite brand of ____ and therefore plan to remain a consumer of my favourite brand of ____	0.93*			
<i>Purchase intention</i>				
1. In general, I would never choose my favourite brand of ____ (R)	0.86*	0.92	0.75	0.88
2. I would seriously consider choosing my favourite brand of ____	0.95*			
3. How likely would you be to choose your favourite brand of ____	0.85*			

Notes: We measured all items on a seven-point "strongly disagree/strongly agree" scale, except Item 3 of purchase intention ("very unlikely/very likely" scale); (R) after an item indicates that we reversed it for inclusion in the model; \* $p < 0.05$ .

The number of recent interactions was a control variable. According to Hui and Tse (1996), as consumers engage in more service interactions, their increased experiences positively influence their assessment of the service. Thus, this study accounts for the potential impact of the number of recent interactions on purchase intention.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Measure validation

This study used the maximum likelihood estimation for the models. To assess the quality of the measurement model for the study's variables, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. This oblique factor model was found to provide a reasonably good fit for the input data, with a goodness of fit index (GFI) of 0.91, a root-mean-square residual index (RMR) of 0.04, a root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.04, a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.95, and  $\chi^2 = 356.31$ ,  $df = 71$ , and  $p < 0.01$ . All indices exceeded the recommended thresholds (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Table 1 lists composite reliabilities (CR), average variances extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . The analytical results indicate that the items measuring each construct had Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values exceeding 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Additionally, the CR coefficients exceeded 0.70 and AVE exceeded 0.50, satisfying the criteria developed by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and therefore indicating adequate reliability. Regarding construct validity, all of the factor loadings were high and significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$ , supporting the convergent validity of the scale items (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

Table 2 lists the correlations of the study constructs. The maximum squared correlation for each pair of constructs was 0.44 ( $0.67^2 = 0.47$ ), which is below the minimum AVE (0.75), demonstrating the discriminant validity of the items (Bearden et al., 2001; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

To further confirm the absence of common method variance (CMV), this study adopted the suggestion of Podsakoff et al. (2003) to use a CMV construct to explain the variance for all items. The fit indices were degraded ( $\chi^2 = 1465.93$ ,  $df = 77$ ,  $CFI = 0.56$ ,  $IFI = 0.76$ ,  $NFI = 0.75$ ,  $GFI = 0.59$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.20$ ,  $SRMR = 0.13$ ). A chi-square difference test confirmed that the proposed measure significantly outperforms the CMV model in explaining item variance ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1465.93 - 356.31 = 1109.62 > \chi^2(\Delta df = 6, \alpha = 0.05) = 12.59$ ). Thus, the confounding effects of CMV were minimal in this study.

### 5.2. Structural model results and examination of hypothesized relationships

Using Amos 17.0, a structural equation model was fitted to the study's dataset. This model achieved identification, and the fit indices suggested that the model adequately represents the input data ( $GFI = 0.93$ ,  $AGFI = 0.91$ ,  $NNFI = 0.95$ ,  $CFI = 0.97$ ,  $RMR = 0.05$ ,

$RMSEA = 0.04$ ,  $\chi^2 = 234.55$ ,  $df = 82$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.86$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). All indices exceeded the recommended thresholds (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Structural equation modeling is the recommended means of testing mediation (Iacobucci et al., 2007; Zhao et al., 2010). Thus, hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. Table 3 presents the results of these hypotheses.

Brand credibility positively affects decision convenience (path coefficient = 0.83,  $p < 0.01$ ); thus H1 holds. Brand credibility positively affects affective commitment (path coefficient = 0.67,  $p < 0.01$ ), which supports H2. Decision convenience positively affects purchase intentions (path coefficient = 0.49,  $p < 0.01$ ), which is consistent with H3. Affective commitment positively affects purchase intention (path coefficient = 0.47,  $p < 0.01$ ), thus H4 holds. Brand credibility did not affect purchase intention (path coefficient = 0.05,  $p > 0.05$ ), thus H5 was not supported. Finally, with regards to the control variables, the number of interactions was positively related to purchase intention (path coefficient = 0.08,  $p < 0.05$ ).

To provide additional insights into how brand credibility influences purchase intention, the indirect effect of brand credibility was calculated. The indirect effect of brand credibility through decision convenience (signaling effect) (0.41) was slightly stronger than the indirect effect of brand credibility through affective commitment (relationship marketing) (0.30). Thus, both signaling and relationship effects were significant, while the signaling effect of brand credibility played a more important role in increasing purchase intention. Moreover, the total indirect effect of brand credibility on purchase intentions was 0.71. The strength of the indirect effect (0.71) exceeded that of the direct effect (0.05,  $p > 0.05$ ). The results indicate that decision convenience and affective commitment fully mediate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. The results are presented in Table 3.

Though the proposed model proposed that brand credibility was an antecedent of decision convenience, an additional structural model that included an interaction effect between brand credibility and decision convenience was estimated. The results show that the effect of the interaction was insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, brand credibility was not a moderator of decision convenience.

## 6. Discussion and implications

### 6.1. Main findings and contributions

This study examines how brand credibility affects consumer purchase intentions in the airline sector, and demonstrates that brand credibility contributes to consumer purchase intention through both signaling and relationship marketing mechanisms. On the one hand, brand credibility has a signaling role by increasing decision convenience, thereby increasing purchase intention. While on the other, it is a relationship marketing tool that fosters consumer affective commitment, which is important to maintaining consumer-company relationships. Decision convenience and affective commitment fully mediate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. The indirect effect of brand credibility through decision convenience was slightly stronger than the indirect effect of brand credibility through affective commitment.

### 6.2. Theoretical implications

The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the effect of brands by considering credibility. Brand research in the airline industry needs more attention (Wang, 2014a). Past research into airline management has focused mainly on brand image (e.g.,

**Table 2**  
Means, standard deviations and correlation matrix.

	1	2	3	4
1. Brand credibility	1.00			
2. Decision convenience	0.67**	1.00		
3. Affective commitment	0.52**	0.43**	1.00	
4. Purchase intention	0.55**	0.63**	0.65**	1.00
Mean	5.25	5.06	4.62	5.22
S.D.	1.12	1.14	1.30	1.17

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3**  
Summary results for hypotheses and indirect effects.

Hypothesis	Standardized Parameter estimate	Conclusion
H1: Brand credibility → Decision convenience	0.83**	Supported
H2: Brand credibility → Affective commitment	0.67**	Supported
H3: Decision convenience → Purchase intention	0.49**	Supported
H4: Affective commitment → Purchase intention	0.47**	Supported
H5: Brand credibility → Purchase intention	0.05	Rejected
Effect of brand credibility on purchase intentions		Indirect effect
Brand credibility → decision convenience → purchase intention		0.41
Brand credibility → affective commitment → purchase intention		0.30
Total effects of brand credibility		0.71

Note: \*\*p < 0.01.

Chang and Hung, 2013; Yang et al., 2012) or brand association (e.g., Chen and Chang, 2008). We extend knowledge in this area by examining a largely ignored aspect, brand credibility. By finding consumer response to brand credibility, we provide a deeper understanding of the effects of airline brands. This study also provides empirical support for previous theoretical studies that stressed the credibility of brand in the airline sector (Balmer, 2012).

Drawing on signaling theory, this study examined the signaling effect of brand credibility on consumer purchase intention and found that decision convenience could be considered a new mediator of the causal relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. Numerous studies of airline management (e.g., Chen and Chao, 2015; Lin and Huang, 2015) have indicated the important effect of service convenience (e.g., a convenient flight schedule or convenient booking channel) on consumer choice of airlines. As the degree of competition among service providers increases, consumers need additional time and effort to evaluate offerings and make decisions (i.e., perceive lower decision convenience) (Seiders et al., 2007). Our results broaden understanding of service convenience in the airline sector by proposing the importance of decision convenience, which has been rarely discussed in airline management or brand credibility studies despite its theoretical plausibility. Our results show that brand credibility is an additional airline company cue for positively influencing service convenience.

Additionally, this study suggests that airline brand credibility can strengthen the relational bond between consumers and an airline company. Erkmen and Hancer (2015) noticed that limited attention had been given to empirically analyzing the role of commitment in the airline industry. Based on relationship marketing theory, this study extends knowledge in brand credibility literature that has traditionally concentrated on the signaling role of brand credibility (e.g., Erdem et al., 2006). Our results extend previous studies by showing the positive impact of airline brand credibility on affective commitment. By considering both the relationship marketing and signaling effects of brand credibility, this study provides additional insights into why brand credibility positively affects consumer response.

This study also increases understanding of how airline brand credibility affects consumers' purchase decisions. Previous research (e.g., Lin and Huang, 2015; Wang, 2014a) has investigated the factors that increase consumer airline purchase intention. This study extends their research by demonstrating the influence of airline brand credibility on consumer purchase intention. Note that airline brand credibility does not increase purchase intention directly, but rather indirectly through decision convenience and affective commitment. Decision convenience and affective commitment fully mediate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention.

### 6.3. Managerial implications

The sustainability of airline companies depends mainly on consumer purchase intention (Lin and Huang, 2015). As the airline industry becomes more competitive, many airline companies compete on price or frequent flyer programs, yet consumers see no difference between airline companies (Erkmen and Hancer, 2015). From a practical perspective, airline companies should differentiate themselves by not only competing on price and offering frequent flyer programs, but also by finding strategies to strengthen their competitive position.

Our findings show that airline managers should recognize the key role airline brand credibility plays in the consumer decision-making process. Decision convenience and affective commitment generated by airline credibility are important for increasing purchase intention. Our results can be generalized to both traditional full-service carriers and low cost carriers in different countries. By understanding how brand credibility works in the airline sector, airline managers can refine their brand messages in advertising and other marketing executions.

Since our framework suggests the central importance of brand credibility to consumer purchase decisions, it is important to clarify how brand credibility can itself be managed. First, credibility can be increased by ensuring the clarity of the brand message (Erdem and Swait, 1998). The brand should be clear in its focus and what it stands for, as well as reveal the culture of the organization, thus capturing the link between organizational values and the brand's positioning. For example, AirAsia's slogan "Now everyone can fly" positions the company as a regional low-cost airline but also conveys that the airline will not neglect its safety and services as it places great emphasis on flight safety, staff training, and consumer services (Temporal, 2006). AirAsia often appears in the media as a participant in charitable endeavors, positioning itself as a compassionate, cheerful, efficient, and innovative brand.

Second, the brand should be consistent in its marketing mix decisions (e.g., service quality, pricing, promotion), including communication with the consumer. This emphasizes in particular the role of human resources (Sweeney and Swait, 2008). For example, Southwest Airlines' competitive advantage is based on positioning its brand in the minds of consumers through its employees' behavior (Miles and Mangold, 2005). Moreover, Singapore Airlines owes its success to positioning its employees as representatives of the company brand through their brand-supporting behavior (Chong, 2007). What constitutes success for these two airline companies is that they deliver a consistent brand promise through employee behavior (Erkmen and Hancer, 2015).

Brand credibility is also enhanced through brand investment, such as advertising, logos and sponsorship, and socially responsible corporate action, showing that the company believes in and is

committed to the brand. Advertising can be used to convey the tangible information and meaning attached to the brand name in order to establish brand credibility (Baek and King, 2011). For example, Emirates is synonymous with Dubai and has positioned itself as an elite brand providing low-cost, high-value packages. Celebrity endorsement is an effective tool for building brand credibility (Spry et al., 2011). Airline companies such as Air New Zealand, British Airways, Emirates and Turkish Airlines have used celebrity endorsements and are successful. Airline companies can refer to the results of this study in developing brand credibility and formulating marketing strategies.

#### 6.4. Limitation

This study offers significant insights into the effects of brand credibility in the airline sector, but has several limitations. It focuses on investigating the effect of airline brand credibility on purchase intention, rather than other consumer-related outcomes. For instance, as an airplane company sells a variety of services and products, it would be valuable for it to understand the influence of brand credibility on consumers' cross-buying intentions.

The rise of e-business also raises the question of the importance of brand credibility in an online situation. Consumers usually perceive higher uncertainty when they purchase online than when purchasing offline, suggesting the importance of airline brand credibility in the online context. However, it has also been suggested that there is more information available in an online situation, which may make brand credibility less important in online environments than in other markets (Sweeney and Swait, 2008). Additional research that accounts for e-commerce can improve the generalizability of the current study's results.

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