

## The Effect of Social Factors on Service Encounters Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the direct effect of social factors (namely, social regard social comfort, and friendship) on customer satisfaction, and the indirect effect of these factors on customer loyalty, through the mediating effect of customers' satisfaction, in hair salons in Jordan. In addition, the study analyzed the moderating role of customers' gender and age on the effects of social factors on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Quantitative data was collected, through a questionnaire instrument, from a convenience sample of 528 customers while they are in hair salons. Statistical analysis of the study's model was conducted using structural equation modeling technique (AMOS software). Empirical test of the model's hypotheses has indicated that customers' satisfaction toward hair salons services is depend on friendship, social comfort, and social regard respectively, while customers' loyalty to service provider depend on customer satisfaction. The effect of social regard on customer satisfaction was significant for younger customers, while social comfort was significant for older customers. The findings of this study provide several recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:** social factors, friendship, social comfort, social regard, satisfaction, loyalty.

### INTRODUCTION

The loyalty of customers is one of the most urgent problems that must be solved in marketing literature framework. Oliver (1999) indicated to the need for do more research efforts in this area. There is a consensus among many researchers that customer loyalty is vital to the performance of the business, especially service activities, where the presence of a base of loyal customers will lead to generate more predictable sales and continuing cash flows which improve profit levels (Aaker, 1991). Loyal customers become an advocate for the service, provide positive word-of-mouth (Lam and Burton, 2006), recommend the service to other, encourage others to use service, defend the service provider, generate higher corporate profits (Reichheld

and Schefter, 2000), spend extra money and less costly to serve (Ladhari, Brun, and Morales, 2008). The customer is hard to attract and difficult to retain because it is not relatively easy for customer to switch his/her traditional service providers (Philip, 2002). Customer loyalty enables service providers to reduce marketing costs and increase profits (Bowen and Chen, 2001). Based on this, customer loyalty to the service provider received an increasing amount of attention by many researchers.

Several previous studies indicated to the vital role played by social factors on the results of service, such as loyalty, as well as to the need for service companies to emphasize personalized service in order to maintain their individuality (Mattila, 2001; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Butcher, 2005; Butcher et al., 2001; Sabiote and Roma'n, 2009). Therefore, the subject of social factors in service encounters and its impact on customer loyalty found much attention by researchers in

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order to understand which social variables are more important and which have the greatest influence on service evaluation by customers and their loyalty to the service, where previous studies indicated to the need for further studies in this area (Verhoef et al., 2002). Marketing literature refers to the important role played by social factors in service encounters between service provider and customers and the consequent reversal of this role on the outcome of service (Price and Arnould, 1999). The importance of social factors in service encounters is more pronounced in the case of services that require high levels of interaction between provider and customer, as is the case in the health services, hotels, hair salons, cafes, restaurants and other services (Butcher, 2005). Bowen (1990) categorized hair salon services into the high contact customized groups because it directed at people and individually customized. Therefore, social factors expected to play a vital role in achieving customer loyalty to hair salons. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the effect of social factors in service encounters on customer loyalty and the mediating role of service encounter satisfaction in hair salons in Jordan. This study builds on Butcher et al.'s (2003) findings and extends it by analyzing the moderating effect of age and gender on the relationship between customer satisfaction/loyalty and its antecedents, and the mediating effect of customer satisfaction between customer loyalty and social factors (social regard, social comfort, friendship).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

According to association of hair salons in Jordan, the number of hair salons for women approximately 5000-6000 salon employs about 15000-20000 male and female employees, mostly women. The number of hair salons for men exceeded 5000 salon employs about 5000-10000 employee at a rate of two employees per salon. This large number of hair salons has intensified

the competition for customers among these salons.

In light of the intense competition it's easy to lose customers, where price is not a differentiator (Srikanth, Saravanakumar, and Srividhya, 2013), service quality is hard to evaluate because of its intangibility (Eshghi et al., 2008), customers are smarter, more price conscious, more demanding, less forgiving, and they are approached by many more competitors with equal or better offers (Kotler and Keller, 2012), so customers are becoming harder to please. From a purely economic point of view, firms learnt that it is less costly to retain a customer than to find a new one and the negative effects of lost customers on the company's profitability (Gray and Byun, 2001). Thus service providers have focused on achieving customer loyalty by delivering superior value by identifying and enhancing the important factors that determine loyalty (Yang and Peterson, 2004).

Also, it turned out to the researcher, and after a comprehensive review of previous studies conducted in the service industry, the research conducted on hair salons services were very limited in Jordan. The researcher found that the majority of previous studies were focused mainly on telecommunications, hospitality, banking or airline. Also, there is a lack of studies that have addressed the social factors and its effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty. It seems that despite the importance of this topic, it has received little attention by researchers and practitioners in recent years. The most, and only, recent study considered the social factors in the field of services conducted by Butcher (2005), who investigating the effect of social factors on customer satisfaction and loyalty within small hospitality businesses context. The concept of relational outcomes remains relatively untapped by service researchers (Sabiote and. Román, 2009). Further research into this area has been suggested generally by Verhoef et al. (2002). Hence, the current study tries to investigate the

effect of social factors (social regard, social comfort, friendship) on service encounter satisfaction in hair salon in Jordan. It is expected that the results of this study will provide insights for service providers to understand the role of such variables to satisfy customers and retain them loyal in hair salon sector.

### **Study Objectives**

The primary objective of this research is to examine the effect of social factors (social regard, social comfort, friendship) on customer loyalty in hair salon industry through service encounter satisfaction. In other words, this study tries to achieve the following objectives:

1. Investigate the ability of social factors in explaining the variation in customers' satisfaction and loyalty.
2. Investigate the mediating role of service encounter satisfaction between social factors and customer loyalty in hair salon sector.
3. Investigate the moderating effect of gender and age on the relationship between customer satisfaction/loyalty and social factors.

### **Theoretical Background**

Person-oriented behaviors typically do not focus on the core task, such as delivering the restaurant meal or processing the airline ticket, but deal with the customer in a warm, understanding, and personable manner (Butcher, 2005). Aaker (1991) suggested that one key to keeping customers is to avoid rude, unresponsive, and disrespectful behavior. Therefore, Contact employees are the organization in the customer's eyes and, in many cases, they are the service - there is nothing else (Zeithaml and Bitner 2000). Customer perceptions of contact employees will affect their perceptions of the company (Ganesh et al. 2000). Thus the interaction between customer and provider will likely influence customer experience which leads to satisfaction and

hence fostering customer loyalty. Social factors are defined here as the feelings, thoughts, and perceived relationships arising from the social interaction with the service employee (Butcher et al., 2001). In this study, social factors have been used as possible predictors of loyalty in services. These are friendship, social comfort and social regard which are result of relational outcomes.

### **Social regard**

Social regard can be defined as the genuine respect, deference, and interest shown to the customer by the service provider, such that the customer feels valued or important in the social interaction (Butcher, 2005). Also, it is defined as making the customers feel important and took an interesting and respecting to the customer (Barnes, 1997). Several researchers have indicated the importance of social regard concept in the service encounter, particularly services that have high levels of customer-employee contact (Sabiote and Roma'n, 2009). This concept means that the service providers should make the customer feel important, take an interest in the customer, respect the customer, show deference – referred to the courtesy, politeness and thoughtfulness displayed by employees, implement genuine behaviors, and treated with respect (Mohr and Bitner, 1995; Dotson and Patton, 1992; Barnes, 1997; Blodgett et al., 1995; Iacobucci, 1998), otherwise customers may feel insulted and consequently take their business elsewhere (Dubinsky, 1994; Goodwin and Smith, 1990). The aim of any business should be to treat the customer as any person would like to be treated and with respect (Aaker, 1991). Bitner et al, (1990) indicated that a substantial amount of both satisfactory and dissatisfactory service evaluations arise from not the quality of the core service but the manner in which the customer was treated, so when the customers perceived that the employees take care of them, or respect them the relationship strength

increases (Barnes, 1997). Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1: Social regard has a significant direct positive effect on service encounter satisfaction.*

*H1a: Social regard has a significant indirect positive effect on customer loyalty through service encounter satisfaction*

#### **Social comfort**

Social comfort can be defined as the customer's feeling of anxiety or relaxation arising from the social interaction with an individual service employee (Butcher, 2005). These feelings of comfort arise from the behavior of others (Butcher et al., 2001). Customers' role expectations exist generally for many service situations. For example, the person at the counter is often expected to acknowledge the customer's presence, smile, and be pleasant, but also accomplish the task. Where services have closer personal contact with the customer, the provider's role includes making the customer feel at ease (Singh, 2009). If the salesperson clicked with the customer at the initial contact, then this was the prompt to consider establishing a relationship (Beatty et al, 1996). Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H2: Social comfort has a significant direct positive effect on service encounter satisfaction.*

*H2a: Social comfort has a significant indirect positive effect on customer loyalty through service encounter satisfaction.*

#### **Friendship**

Friendship can be defined as the customer's perceptions of social closeness to a service employee, as evidenced by the degree of familiarity, self-disclosure and rapport (Butcher, 2005). Social benefits were associated with personal recognition by employees, customer familiarity with employees and the development of friendship (Gwinner et al., 1998). Customer retention can be increased

by building positive relationships with customers (Barnes, 1997). Personal friendship between customers and individual services impacts customer loyalty (Bove and Johnson, 2000; Kokko and Moilanen, 1997). When the employees are able to recognize the customers and build up a good relationship with them, it is actually an advantage for the firm to increase customer satisfaction level and to retain the customers. Social benefits, which pertain to the emotional part of the relationships and focus on personal recognition of customers by employees and the development of friendships between customers and employees, are obtained by customers who have long-term relationships with service firms (Hu and Chen, 2010). Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H3: Friendship has a significant direct positive effect on service encounter satisfaction.*

*H3a: Friendship has a significant indirect positive effect on customer loyalty through service encounter satisfaction.*

#### **Customer loyalty and satisfaction**

Customer loyalty is described as customer's willingness to continue patronizing a firm over a long period of time and recommending the firm's products and services to friends and associates (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004). Lim et al. (2006) defined customer loyalty as consumers' overall attachment or commitment to service provider. These definitions concentrated on the repurchase behavior combined with an attitudinal component of loyalty (Liljander and Strandvik, 1993). Other researchers (e.g. Oliver, 1999) have argued that loyalty should be treated as a psychological construct, where the psychological strategies are needed to achieve ultimate loyalty. Accordingly, loyalty will be treated here as an enduring psychological attachment of a customer to a particular service provider (Butcher, 2001).

Customer satisfaction has been widely studied as an outcome variable in the marketing literature (Clark and

Melancon, 2013). Researchers of social science and psychology have made at least 20 definitions about satisfaction during the last 30 years (Nayebzadeh, Jalaly and Shamsi, 2013). Service encounter satisfaction reflects the consumer's feelings about a particular interaction with the service company and depends upon how the customer evaluates the events and activities that occurred during a discrete period of time (Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler, 2009). There are numerous studies conducted about the relationship of satisfaction and loyalty (Nayebzadeh et al., 2013). Several previous studies indicated to the positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Lin, 2010; Curtis, 2009; Deng et al., 2010; Nayebzadeh et al., 2013). Bolton and Lemon (1999) stated that customer satisfaction positively influence customer loyalty in the service context. Oliver (1999) explains that loyalty and satisfaction have a connection, meaning that loyal customers tend to typically be satisfied. In addition, satisfaction strength plays a key role in the translation of satisfaction into loyalty (Chandrashekaram Rotte, Tax, and Grewal, 2007). Customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are very closely related and customer satisfaction functions as an antecedent of customer loyalty (Fornell, 1992). Higher level of customer satisfaction is more likely to have greater customer loyalty (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml, 1993). Customer loyalty depends largely on customer satisfaction (Ladhari et al., 2008), hence there are many research that focus on identifying factors that enhance customer satisfaction level. Gwinner et al. (1998) pointed out that customer satisfaction and loyalty strategies can be built around relational benefits. Researchers strongly equate respect or lack of respect for customers with service quality evaluations, dissatisfaction, relationship strength, and loyalty

(Butcher, 2005). Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H4: service encounters satisfaction has a significant direct positive effect on customer loyalty.*

#### **Moderating effects**

Moderating effects on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables have attracted many researchers' interest. Researchers argue that the contribution to marketing theory development will be larger if moderating variables are included in the research model (Dabholkar and Bagozzi, 2002). Age and gender are found as key modifiers of an individual's perception and activity (Deng et al., 2010; Venkatesh, Brown, Maruping, and Bala, 2008; Chang and Chen, 2008; Ha, Yoon, and Choi, 2007). Homburg and Giering (2001) found that gender, age, and income moderated the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty for German automobile customers. Mittal and Kamakura (2001) showed that Gender has a moderating effect on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. Patterson (2007) studied three service industries (dental, hairdressing and travel agents), and found age and occupation associated with service loyalty (i.e. repurchase intention and loyalty behavior) but gender was not. Accordingly, the researcher will investigate the following hypotheses:

*H1b: The effect of social regard on service encounters satisfaction moderated by age and gender of customer.*

*H2b: The effect of social comfort on service encounters satisfaction moderated by age and gender.*

*H3b: The effect of friendship on service encounters satisfaction moderated by age and gender.*

*H4a: The effect of service encounters satisfaction on customer loyalty moderated by age and gender.*

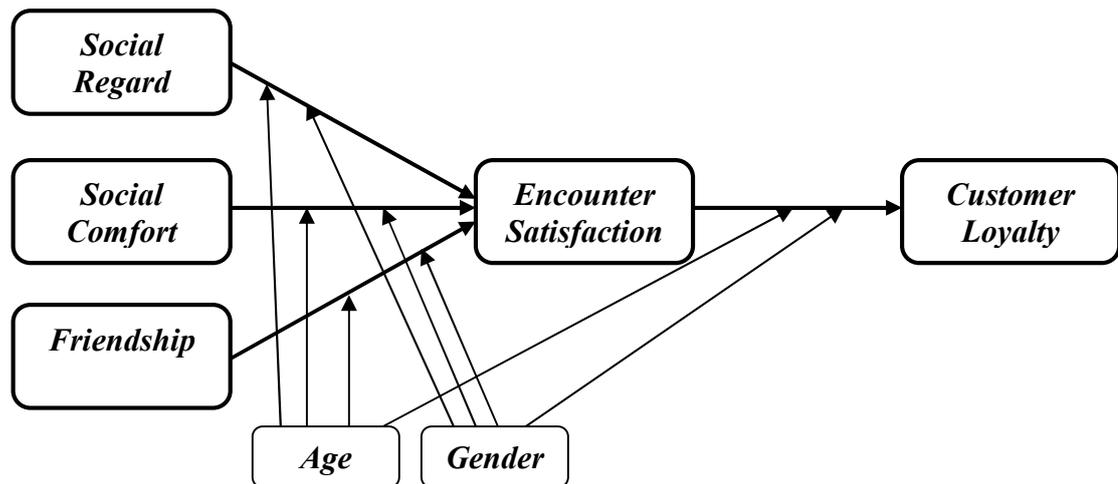


Figure 1: Study Model

### Research Methodology

#### Sampling Design and Data Collection

This study was conducted on the customers of hair salons in Amman, Jordan. Because of the large size of study population, time and cost constraints and the lack of a sampling frame, a convenience sample of those customers was chosen. Questionnaire was distributed to customers while they are at beauty salons, since those customers can base their evaluations and responses upon their immediate experiences with hair salons services. A total of 600 copies were distributed. 540 from administered questionnaires were returned but only 528 customers provided valid survey responses, which represent 88% response rate.

Previous studies indicated that the appropriate sample size to use structural equations model analysis is 10 observations per indicator or item (observed variables) used to measure the latent variables (Barclay, et al. 1995; Kahai and Cooper 2003; Chin and Newsted 1999). Since the current study model

contains 25 indicators (item), the minimum sample size is  $(10 \times 25 = 250)$ . The sample size of this study ( $n = 528$ ) is verified because this size met this criterion.

#### Constructs Measurement

Measures of all the constructs in study model were adopted from previous studies (Butcher et al. 2001; Butcher et al., 2001; Butcher, 2005). The study survey consisted of two sections. First section related to the gender and age, second section related to the model constructs: Social Regard (SR), Social Comfort (SC), Friendship (FS), Encounter Satisfaction (ES), and Loyalty (LO). Table (2) presents the model constructs, their associated items, operational definitions. The items were modified, and rephrased, in order to suite the special context of hair salons services. The constructs of research model are defined according to items proposed by Butcher et al. (2001) (Table 1). All of these variables were measured with five Likert scale: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), see appendix (1).

**Table 1. Model Constructs Definition and Related Items\***

Construct	Operational Definition	Items	Source
Social Regard	The genuine respect, deference, and interest shown to the customer by the service provider, such that the customer feels valued or important in the social interaction.	1-5	Butcher et al. (2001); Butcher (2005), Singh, (2009).
Social Comfort	The customer's feeling of anxiety or relaxation arising from the social interaction with an individual service employee.	6-10	Butcher et al. (2001); Butcher (2005), Singh, (2009).
Friendship	The customer's perceptions of social closeness to a service employee, as evidenced by the degree of familiarity, self-disclosure and rapport.	11-15	Butcher et al. (2001); Butcher (2005), Singh, (2009).
Encounter Satisfaction	The satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a discrete service encounter.	16-20	Butcher et al. (2001); Butcher (2005).
Loyalty	The enduring psychological attachment of a customer to a particular service provider.	21-25	Butcher et al. (2001); Butcher (2005).

#### **Instrument Reliability and Validity**

The reliability of questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient (Table 2), the reliability of each construct have alpha indexes greater than the suggested value (0.70), which is considered acceptable and indicating that the questionnaire was developed with good internal consistency (Hair et al. 2010). Composite reliability (CR) was used as an alternative measurement of reliability (Werts et al., 1974), which represents the proportion of measure variance attributable to the underlying trait. The composite reliability of each construct exceeds the recommended level of 0.70 (Hair

et al. 2010).

To verify the construct validity, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has been used. If the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds the squared correlations, then discriminate validity is established (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As shown in table (3), Discriminate validity is verified because all the constructs met this criterion, where the average variance extracted (AVE) scores (diagonal elements) are all higher than the squared correlations among the constructs (off-diagonal elements).

**Table 2. Results for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)\***

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Loadings</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>MSV</b>	<b>ASV</b>	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Social Regard (SR)</b>							
SR1	0.784						
SR2	0.830						
SR3	0.743	0.875	0.584	0.557	0.390	0.87	
SR4	0.719						
SR5	0.648						
<b>Social Comfort (SC)</b>							
SC1	0.741						
SC2	0.794						
SC3	0.741	0.878	0.590	0.557	0.470	0.88	
SC4	0.649						
SC5	0.716						
<b>Friendship (FS)</b>							
FS1	0.653						
FS2	0.810						
FS3	0.786	0.866	0.566	0.540	0.460	0.86	
FS4	0.820						
FS5	0.734						
<b>Encounter Satisfaction (ES)</b>							
ES1	0.753						
ES2	0.754						
ES3	0.759	0.879	0.592	0.545	0.480	0.89	0.55
ES4	0.735						
ES5	0.674						
<b>Loyalty (LO)</b>							
LO1	0.845						
LO2	0.672						
LO3	0.773	0.879	0.594	0.545	0.392	0.88	0.54
LO4	0.633						
LO5	0.763						

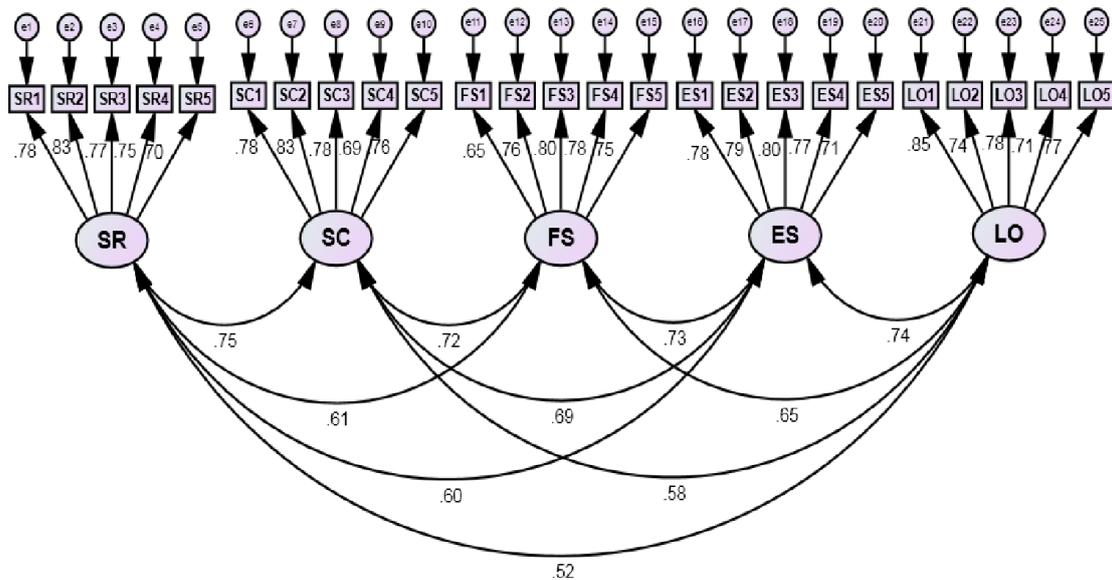
\*AVR: Average Variance Extracted; CR: Composite Reliability; MSV: Maximum Shared Variance; ASV: Average Shared Variance.

**Table 3. Correlations and Average Variance Extracted**

	ES	SR	SC	FS	LO
<b>ES</b>	<b>0.879</b>				
<b>SR</b>	0.364	<b>0.875</b>			
<b>SC</b>	0.472	0.557	<b>0.878</b>		
<b>FS</b>	0.540	0.368	0.516	<b>0.866</b>	
<b>LO</b>	0.545	0.270	0.338	0.417	<b>0.879</b>

As shown in table (2), maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) is less than average variance extracted (AVE), which provides additional support for discriminate validity (Hair et al. 2010). For all constructs, the values of average variance extracted (AVE) were all higher than the recommended minimum of 0.50, indicating high convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity also is

shown when each measurement item correlates strongly with its assumed theoretical construct. The ideal level of standardized loadings for reflective indicators is 0.70 or higher, but 0.60 was considered to be an acceptable level (Barclay et al., 1995). For all the constructs all items have high loadings above 0.60, therefore, demonstrating good convergent validity.



**Figure 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)**

**Table 4. Goodness-of-fit Indices for Structural Model**

Fit Indices	Threshold	Value
CMIN ( $\chi^2$ )/DF	< 3	2.593
GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	> 0.9	0.905
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	< 0.08	0.055
SRMR(Standardized Root Mean square Residual)	< 0.09	0.040
RMR (Root Mean Square Residual)	< 0.08	0.041
AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index)	> 0.80	0.883
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.915
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.946
IFI (Incremental Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.946
RFI (Relative Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.904

Source: Hair et al. (2010); Hair et al., (2006); Browne and Cudeck, (1993).

### Model Fit

Table (4) show that all of the model-fit indices exceed the respective common acceptance levels suggested by previous studies (Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2006; Browne and Cudeck, 1993), demonstrating that the model exhibited a good fit with the data collected.

### Data Analysis and Findings

A number of statistical techniques were applied to test and interpret the results of the data analysis. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique, using AMOS 20.0, was used to determine the interactions between the various constructs (namely social regard, social comfort, friendship, encounter satisfaction, and loyalty).

### Customers' Characteristics

A detailed descriptive statistics of customers' characteristics are shown in Table (5). The results indicate that the percentages of male (60.8%) and female (39.2%). More than half customers (55.3%) less than 25 years old and the smallest percentage were customers more than 45 years old.

### Predictive Power of Model

The predictive power of a model can be assessed by  $R^2$  values, which indicates the amount of variance in the construct that is explained by the model (Hair et al., 2010). As shown in Table (3), the model can explain 54% of the variance in encounter satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.54$ ) and 55% of the variance in loyalty ( $R^2 = 0.55$ ). Thus, the resulting  $R^2$  underlines the fact that encounter satisfaction and loyalty could be influenced by other factors in addition to those in the model. The structural model results are shown in Figure (3).

**Table 5. Sample characteristics**

	Characteristic	Frequency	% Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	321	60.8
	Female	207	39.2
<b>Age</b>	Less than 25	292	55.3
	25-35	120	22.7
	36-45	70	13.3
	More than 45	40	8.7

### Hypotheses Testing

Table (6) and Figure (3) represents the results of

testing the structural links of study model. Multi-group structural equation within AMOS was used to assess the moderating effects of gender and age on the structural model. For each of the moderation tests, the dataset was split into two subgroups. Age divided into two groups: younger customers (24 or less) and older customers (25 or more), where Ha et al. (2007) defined old users as older than 25 years. In order to examine the effect of the difference in moderators' groups on the relationship

between social factors and customer satisfaction/loyalty, the researcher conducted two multi-sample tests. In each of the two analyses, one path coefficient was constrained to be equal across the two groups for each moderator. Using Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) difference test, the resulting model fit was then compared to a base model in which all path coefficients were freely estimated. Table (7) represents the results of testing the moderating effect.

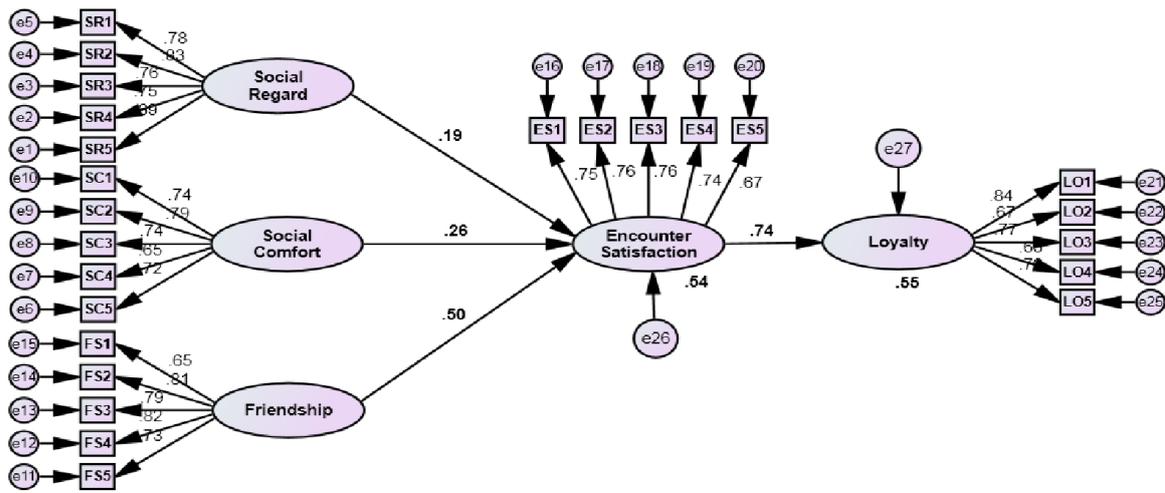


Figure 3. Structural Model Results

Table 6. Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects

Direct Effect				$\beta$	t-value
H1	Social Regard	→	Encounter Satisfaction	0.19	2.95**
H2	Social Comfort	→	Encounter Satisfaction	0.26	3.80***
H3	Friendship	→	Encounter Satisfaction	0.50	9.42***
H4	Encounter Satisfaction	→	Loyalty	0.74	29.68***
Indirect Effect				$\beta$	t-value
H1a	Social Regard	→	Loyalty	0.14	2.92**
H2a	Social Comfort	→	Loyalty	0.20	3.82***
H3a	Friendship	→	Loyalty	0.37	8.60***

\*t-value greater than 1.96 ( $p < 0.05$ ); \*\* t-value greater than 2.58, ( $p < 0.01$ ); \*\*\* t-value greater than 3.29 ( $p < 0.001$ ).  $\beta$ : Path Coefficients

**Social Regard**

Hypothesis (H1) was supported, since the statistical result indicate that there is a direct significant effect of social regard on customers' encounter satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.19$ ;  $t = 2.95$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Hypothesis (H1a) was supported, since statistical result indicate that encounter satisfaction mediate the effect of social regard on customers' loyalty ( $\beta = 0.14$ ;  $t = 2.92$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

Hypothesis (H1b), which predicted that gender and age will moderate the effect of social regard on customers' encounter satisfaction, was partially

supported as the differences between groups of age ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 13.6$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ) were significant, but the differences between groups of gender ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.46$ ;  $P > 0.10$ ) were not. In other words, age has a significant effect on the relationship between social regard and encounter satisfaction for younger customers ( $\beta_{24\text{and less}} = 0.39$ ;  $t = 5.3$ ) but not for older customers ( $\beta_{25\text{and more}} = -.10$ ;  $t = -.94$ ). As for the gender, both groups (male and female) pay equal attention to social regard ( $\beta_{\text{Male}} = .17$ ,  $t = 2.0$ ;  $\beta_{\text{Female}} = .23$ ,  $t = 2.9$ ).

**Table 7. Multi-sample Comparison of Gender and Age Groups**

<b>Gender</b>							
<b>Model Fit</b>		<i>CMIN/DF = 2.04; CFI = .93; IFI = .930; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .044</i>					
<b>Path</b>			<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		$\Delta\chi^2$
			$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	
Social Regard	→	Encounter Satisfaction	.17	2.0*	.23	2.9*	0.46
Social Comfort	→	Encounter Satisfaction	.26	2.6**	.26	2.8**	0.002
Friendship	→	Encounter Satisfaction	.48	5.8***	.53	6.5***	0.02
Encounter Satisfaction	→	Loyalty	.77	11.2***	.70	8.9***	0.19
<b>Age</b>							
<b>Model Fit</b>		<i>CMIN/DF = 2.20; CFI = .920; IFI = .92; TLI = .91; RMSEA = .0048</i>					
<b>Path</b>			<b>24 or less</b>		<b>25 or more</b>		$\Delta\chi^2$
			$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	
Social Regard	→	Encounter Satisfaction	.39	5.3***	-.10	-.94	13.6***
Social Comfort	→	Encounter Satisfaction	.19	2.3*	.40	5.1***	3.5*
Friendship	→	Encounter Satisfaction	.55	7.3***	.44	3.3***	0.00
Encounter Satisfaction	→	Loyalty	.69	9.8***	.82	11.1***	1.74

\**t*-value greater than 1.96 ( $p < 0.05$ ); \*\* *t*-value greater than 2.58, ( $p < 0.01$ ); \*\*\* *t*-value greater than 3.29 ( $p < 0.001$ ).  $\Delta\chi^2$ : \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Social Comfort**

Hypothesis (H2) was supported, since the statistical result indicate that there is a direct significant effect of

social comfort on customers' encounter satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.26$ ;  $t = 3.80$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Hypothesis (H1a) was supported, since statistical result indicate that encounter

satisfaction mediate the effect of social comfort on customers' loyalty ( $\beta = 0.20$ ;  $t = 3.82$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Hypothesis (H1b), which predicted that gender and age will moderate the effect of social comfort on customers' encounter satisfaction, was partially supported as the differences between groups of age ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 3.5$ ;  $P < 0.10$ ) were significant, but the differences between groups of gender ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.002$ ;  $P > 0.10$ ) were not. In other words, age has a high significant effect on the relationship between social comfort and encounter satisfaction for older customers ( $\beta_{25\text{and more}} = .40$ ;  $t = 5.1$ ) but low significant effect for younger customers ( $\beta_{24\text{and less}} = 0.19$ ;  $t = 2.3$ ). As for the gender, both groups (male and female) pay equal attention to social regard ( $\beta_{\text{Male}} = .26$ ,  $t = 2.6$ ;  $\beta_{\text{Female}} = .26$ ,  $t = 2.8$ ).

**Friendship**

Hypothesis (H3) was supported, since the statistical result indicate that there is a direct significant effect of friendship on customers' encounter satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.50$ ;  $t = 9.42$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Hypothesis (H1a) was supported, since statistical result indicate that encounter satisfaction mediate the effect of friendship on customers' loyalty ( $\beta = 0.37$ ;  $t = 8.60$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Hypothesis (H3b), which predicted that gender and age will moderate the effect of friendship on encounter satisfaction, was not supported where the differences between groups of gender ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.02$ ;  $P > 0.10$ ) and age ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.00$ ;  $P > 0.10$ ) were not significant. This means that gender groups ( $\beta_{\text{Male}} = 0.48$ ,  $t = 5.8$ ;  $\beta_{\text{Female}} = 0.53$ ,  $t = 6.5$ ) and age groups ( $\beta_{24\text{or less}} = 0.55$ ,  $t = 7.3$ ;  $\beta_{25\text{or more}} = 0.44$ ,  $t = 3.3$ ) pay equal attention to social influence.

**Encounter Satisfaction**

Hypothesis (H4) was supported, since the statistical result indicate that there is a direct significant effect of encounter satisfaction on customers loyalty ( $\beta = 0.74$ ;  $t = 29.68$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Hypothesis (H4a), which predicted that gender and age will moderate the effect of encounter satisfaction on customer loyalty, was not supported where the differences between groups of gender ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.19$   $P > 0.10$ ) and age ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.74$ ;  $P > 0.10$ ) were not significant. This means that gender groups ( $\beta_{\text{Male}} = 0.77$ ,  $t = 11.2$ ;  $\beta_{\text{Female}} = 0.70$ ,  $t = 8.9$ ) and age groups ( $\beta_{24\text{or less}} = 0.69$ ,  $t = 9.8$ ;  $\beta_{25\text{or more}} = 0.82$ ,  $t = 11.1$ ) pay equal attention to social influence.

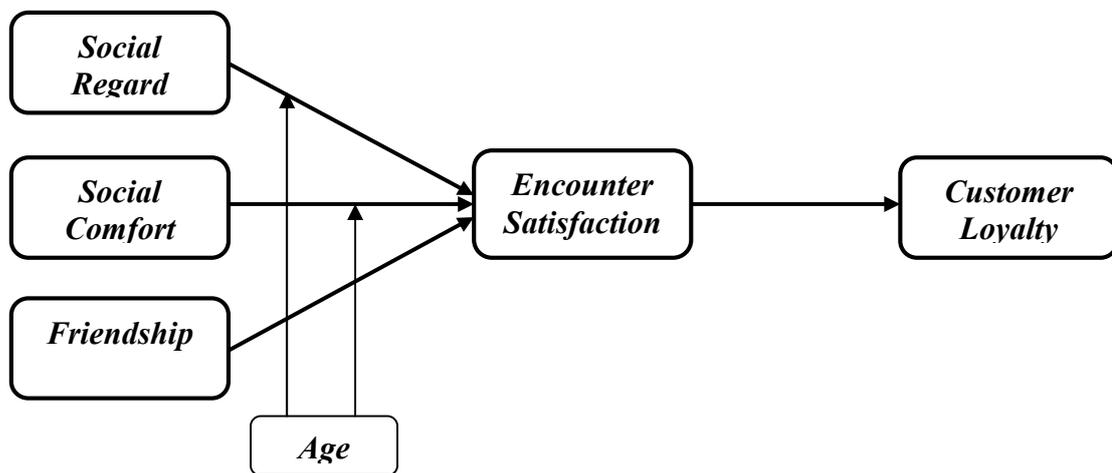


Figure 4. Resulted Model

**Table 9. Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results**

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>H1: Social regard has a significant direct positive effect on service encounter satisfaction.</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Supported</i>
<i>H1a: Social regard has a significant indirect positive effect on customer loyalty through service encounter satisfaction.</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Supported</i>
<i>H1b: The effect of social regard on service encounters satisfaction moderated by age and gender of customer.</i>	<i>Moderating</i>	<i>Partially Supported</i>
<i>H2: Social comfort has a significant direct positive effect on service encounter satisfaction.</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Supported</i>
<i>H2a: Social comfort has a significant indirect positive effect on customer loyalty through service encounter satisfaction.</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Supported</i>
<i>H2b: The effect of social comfort on service encounters satisfaction moderated by age and gender.</i>	<i>Moderating</i>	<i>Partially Supported</i>
<i>H3: Friendship has a significant direct positive effect on service encounter satisfaction.</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Supported</i>
<i>H3a: Friendship has a significant indirect positive effect on customer loyalty through service encounter satisfaction.</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Supported</i>
<i>H3b: The effect of friendship on service encounters satisfaction moderated by age and gender.</i>	<i>Moderating</i>	<i>Not Supported</i>
<i>H4: service encounters satisfaction has a significant direct positive effect on customer loyalty.</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Supported</i>
<i>H4a: The effect of service encounters satisfaction on customer loyalty moderated by age and gender.</i>	<i>Moderating</i>	<i>Not Supported</i>

### Discussion and Recommendations

This study attempts to investigate the direct effects of social factors (social comfort, social regard, and friendship) on customer satisfaction, the direct effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty, and the indirect effect of social factors on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. In addition, the study attempts to investigate the moderating effects of gender and age on the relationships between these constructs.

As hypothesized, social comfort, social regard, and friendship significantly affect customer satisfaction of hair salons. Specifically, friendship is found to have the greatest effect directly on customer satisfaction and indirectly on customer loyalty through satisfaction. The second important factor affects hair salons customers' satisfaction directly and customers' loyalty indirectly was social comfort. Finally, social comfort was the third important factor affecting customers' satisfaction

directly and customers' loyalty indirectly.

This implies that customer satisfaction and loyalty will be most significantly influenced by the customer's perceptions of social closeness to a service employee, where Liljander and Strandvik (1995) confirmed that customers who have developed a friendship with service provider employees will be more committed to the organization. This means that when customers perceive a high degree of familiarity, self-disclosure, and rapport with hair salon service provider, they will form a high degree of satisfaction and loyalty toward the service provider. This result is consistent with the results of several previous studies which indicated that the personal friendship between customer and service provider plays an important role in influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty to service provider (e.g. Singh, 2009; Butcher et al., 2001; Butcher et al., 2003; Elbert, 2013; Bove and Johnson, 2000; Price and Arnould,

1999; Kokko and Moilanen, 1997).

The results of this study proved that social factors enhance customer satisfaction, which means that the human element in service delivery is the center of cultivating these benefits. More importantly, the study also showed that satisfaction with service encounter is critical to loyalty formation. These results support the idea that social factors lead to loyalty which is a must for sustained customer retention (Singh, 2009). Many services are difficult to evaluate and the way the customer is treated is the main driver of satisfaction (Sharma and Patterson 1999). These relationships will be greater for those services with higher levels of personal interaction between customer and service provider (Price and Arnould, 1999), as is the case in hair salons services which have been classified as experience services (Powpaka, 1996), so the responsive, courteous, and caring behavior of the service provider is likely to have a direct effect on satisfaction (Sabiote and Roma'n, 2009).

The results showed that age have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between social regard and customer satisfaction and on the relationship between social comfort and customer satisfaction. The moderating effect of age on the relationship between friendship and customer satisfaction are not supported, which implies that male and female's perceptions are not significantly different regarding friendship with service provider. Social regard was more important factor for younger customers (24 and less), while social comfort was more important to older customers (25 and more) in forming satisfaction with service provider at hair salons. This result can be explained by the theory of homophily, which says that customers are more comfortable dealing with salespersons similar to themselves, where individuals enjoy the comfort of interacting with others who are similar to themselves (Jamal and Adelowore, 2008). Thus, customers may feel comfortable if they

interact with someone who is similar their self-concept (Cunningham and Sagas, 2006). Since most of the workers in the hair salons in Jordan are younger people, whether for men or women, thus younger customers seek the genuine respect, deference, and interest shown to them by the service provider, who is similar to them in most often, such that the customer feels valued or important in the social interaction. On the other hand, older customers prefer to interact with service provider similar to themselves to enjoy the comfort and relaxation of interacting, so older customers pay much attention to social comfort unlike younger ones who pay greater attention to social regard. The findings of this study emphasized the importance of dealing with someone similar to oneself.

The results of testing the mediating effect showed that customer satisfaction has significant mediation effects for relationships from social regard, social comfort, and friendship on loyalty. These results demonstrate that satisfaction has great mediating effect between its determinants and customer loyalty, which is probably because that customers who feels highly satisfied with feelings of relaxation, social closeness, familiarity, self-disclosure, and rapport, respect, and interest arising from the social interaction with an individual service employee may overemphasize the impact of these determinants, which are closely related to their satisfaction, on loyalty (Lai et al., 2009), where customer satisfaction can significantly mediate the effects of other factors on customer loyalty (Caruana, 2002; Heung & Ngai, 2008).

The results showed that customer satisfaction have a significant effect on customer loyalty, which means that satisfied customers are more likely to possess a stronger continuous intention and to recommend the hair salon to their friends or relatives (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). In other words, If a service

provider can satisfy the needs of the customer better than its competitors, it is easier to create loyalty (Oliver, 1999), where high customer loyalty is mainly caused by high customer satisfaction (Clarke, 2001). This result was supported by several researchers (Lin, 2010; Curtis, 2009; Choi, Seol, Lee, Cho, and Park, 2008; Walsh, Dinnie, and Wiedmann, 2006). In other words, once a customer feels lack of respect, interest, familiarity, and anxiety arising from the social interaction with an individual service employee, then he/she will be much more likely to change the service provider.

### **Contributions and Implications**

One of the most important contributions of this study is that it revealed the moderating effect of customer age on the relationship between social factors and customer satisfaction, especially for social regard and social comfort. The second contribution is that it confirmed that the customer satisfaction is one of most important antecedent to customer loyalty and play a significant role in mediating the effect of other variables on customer loyalty. Finally, this study explores customers' perceptions of social factors in hair salons services in Jordan, which is seldom concerned by other researchers yet.

The findings of this study present important implications for hair salons services providers:

1. Hair salons owners need to match the profile of their employees with their target market. Similarities in age, gender, and economic status between the service provider and the customer, encourage better social relationships.
2. Hair salon owners should look into the antecedents of customer dis/satisfaction and not only how customer satisfaction alone can contribute to customer loyalty.
3. Interpersonal skills of employees confirmed as a key component of consumer satisfaction with the service experience. Hair salon service providers

need to have excellent interpersonal skills for them to provide social benefits to win the loyalty of the customers. Also, service providers need to be experts in their fields for them to effectively provide social benefits to their customers

4. Hair salons owners should provide training for the employees on interpersonal communication skills and service delivery knowledge as communication takes part in the whole process and without good interpersonal communication skills may affect the customer satisfaction level.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although the present study makes important contributions, it has some limitations that need to be taken into account, which limits the generalizability of its findings:

1. The cross sectional design used in this study may not yield accurate associations between predictors and customer satisfaction/loyalty. Also, while Likert scales are popular in marketing research, they also have weaknesses and may produce overstated correlations (Butcher et al., 2001). In addition, a convenience sample was drawn for this study; accordingly, no claims for generalizability can be made beyond the sample. Future researches should avoid these general limitations.
2. This study was specific to the hair salons sector within the specific culture of Jordan. Researchers could consider testing the relationships investigated in this study in different service contexts, such as banks, hospitals... etc, and also with different cultures.
3. This study investigated the moderating effect of gender and age on the relationship between social factors and customer satisfaction/loyalty. Future research could investigate other

moderating effect such as income, education level, length of relationship... etc.

4. This study investigated the effect of three social factors (namely, social regard, social comfort, and friendship) on the customer satisfaction/loyalty, and accordingly the variance

explained was 54% for satisfaction and 55% for loyalty. Hence, important influencing factors remain unspecified. Future research could investigate other social factors effect such as liking, understanding, recognition, self-disclosure, and reciprocity...etc.

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## أثر العوامل الاجتماعية على الرضا عن مواجهات الخدمة وولاء العملاء

محمد سليمان عواد \*

### ملخص

اختبرت هذه الدراسة الأثر المباشر للعوامل الاجتماعية (الاحترام الاجتماعي والراحة الاجتماعية والصدقة) على رضا العملاء، والأثر غير المباشر لهذه العوامل على ولاء العملاء، من خلال الأثر الوسيط لرضا العملاء، في صالونات الحلاقة في الأردن. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، قامت هذه الدراسة بتحليل الدور المعدل للنوع الاجتماعي والعمر للعملاء في أثر العوامل الاجتماعية على رضا وولاء العملاء. تم جمع البيانات الكمية باستخدام الاستبانة من عينة ملائمة بلغت 528 عميلاً أثناء تواجدهم في صالونات الحلاقة. تم استخدام نموذج المعادلات البنائية كأسلوب لتحليل نموذج الدراسة باستخدام برمجة (AMOS). وقد أشارت نتائج الاختبار العملي للفرضيات إلى أن رضا العملاء عن خدمات صالونات الحلاقة يعتمد على الصدقة والراحة الاجتماعية والاحترام الاجتماعي على الترتيب، بينما يعتمد ولاء العملاء لمزود الخدمة على رضا العملاء. كما أشارت النتائج إلى أن أثر الاحترام الاجتماعي على رضا العملاء كان مهماً بالنسبة للعملاء الأصغر سناً، بينما كانت الراحة الاجتماعية مهمة بالنسبة لكبار السن. وقد قدمت هذه الدراسة عدد من التوصيات المهمة بالنسبة للبحوث المستقبلية في هذا المجال.

**الكلمات الدالة:** العوامل الاجتماعية، الصدقة، الراحة الاجتماعية، الاحترام الاجتماعي، الرضا، الولاء.

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