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Challenges in Building Trust and Loyalty in Airline Branding

This paper explores the critical role of trust and loyalty in the competitive airline industry. A strong brand image and customer satisfaction are key drivers of loyalty. Prioritizing safety, transparent pricing, and proactive customer engagement are crucial for airlines to build enduring relationships with passengers, ensuring long-term success.

The critical role of trust and loyalty in the airline industry cannot be overstated. In an industry characterized by high stakes and inherent risks, passengers rely heavily on airlines to deliver safe, reliable, and efficient services. Trust is the bedrock upon which strong customer relationships are built, while loyalty is the ultimate goal. By consistently delivering on promises, exceeding expectations, and fostering a sense of security, airlines can cultivate a loyal customer base and gain a competitive edge in the market.

The significance of trust and loyalty in constructing robust airline brands has been a focal point of numerous academic investigations. For example, a study featured in the *Journal of Air Transport Management* [1] underscored the pivotal role of customer trust in driving brand loyalty within the airline industry. The research emphasized that consistent service delivery and transparent communication strategies are instrumental in cultivating trust, which ultimately translates into sustained customer allegiance. Developing transparent communication strategies is possible with the help of digital marketing, which was born as a new field of marketing science that could provide more and more new ways and opportunities for various businesses to establish two-way communication with their customers [2].

Furthermore, an examination of the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty in the airline sector, published in the *Management Science Letters* [3], revealed that service quality and customer satisfaction are integral to developing trust in airlines. The study highlights that consistent service delivery and responsiveness to customer needs are essential for fostering trust among passengers. It is also necessary to perform the following actions: think through the concept of advertising; find a suitable thought leader; agree on cooperation; discuss the nuances of advertising; monitor work performance [4].

Additionally, research published in the *Future Transportation* [5] delved into the impact of emotional branding on customer loyalty within the airline context. The findings indicated that airlines capable of forging emotional connections with their clientele can significantly enhance brand loyalty. This suggests that customers are more inclined to select brands that resonate with their personal values and experiences.

Overall, these studies underscore the necessity of a multifaceted approach to building trust and loyalty in airline branding. Prioritizing service quality, cultivating

a strong brand image, and fostering emotional connections with customers are essential components of this endeavor.

After researching the mentioned studies, it would be appropriate to create a conceptual framework (fig. 1). The scheme illustrates the interconnectedness of customer trust, brand image, emotional connection, and customer loyalty in the airline industry.

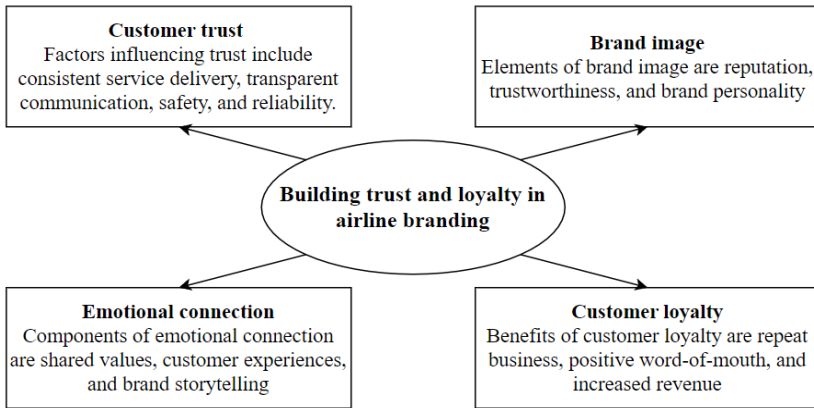


Fig 1 .Conceptual framework of building trust and loyalty in the aviation sphere. Developed based on processing source 1.

As we can see, trust and loyalty are foundational to sustained success in the highly competitive airline industry. They are intricate constructs, deeply intertwined with passenger perceptions and experiences. Trust, in this context, represents the belief that an airline will consistently prioritize passenger safety, deliver on its promises, and act with integrity. It is the cornerstone upon which enduring customer relationships are built. Loyalty, conversely, is a deeper commitment characterized by repeat patronage, advocacy, and a resistance to switching to competing airlines.

The relationship between trust and loyalty is undeniable. Airlines that successfully cultivate trust are more likely to engender loyalty among their customers. Conversely, a lack of trust can erode loyalty and lead to customer attrition. High levels of trust and loyalty translate into tangible business benefits, including increased customer retention, positive word-of-mouth referrals, premium pricing opportunities, and ultimately, enhanced profitability.

Several key factors underpin the development of trust in the airline industry. At the core lies transparency, as effective communication is the cornerstone of trust. Airlines must prioritize clear, honest, and timely information sharing with passengers. This includes transparently addressing flight delays, cancellations, and disruptions, as well as providing proactive updates on travel advisories and safety measures. Effective crisis management strategies are crucial for maintaining trust during challenging situations. Leveraging social media platforms can be

instrumental in reaching a wide audience and fostering open dialogue with passengers.

Demonstrating an unwavering commitment to passenger safety is paramount for building trust. Airlines must invest in robust safety protocols, cutting-edge technology, and rigorous employee training. Cultivating a strong safety culture within the organization is essential for creating a shared sense of responsibility among all employees. Effectively communicating safety measures to passengers, such as highlighting security procedures and emergency protocols, can further enhance trust.

Moreover, airlines should strive for consistency in service delivery across all touchpoints, from booking to arrival. Empowering employees to make decisions and resolve customer issues promptly can significantly enhance passenger satisfaction. Investing in employee training programs focused on customer service excellence is essential for creating a culture of service orientation.

Finally, hidden fees and unexpected charges erode trust. Airlines must adopt transparent pricing practices, clearly communicating all costs associated with a flight. Implementing fair pricing strategies, such as avoiding discriminatory pricing practices, can foster a sense of equity among passengers. By providing clear and upfront information about fees, airlines can build trust and enhance customer loyalty.

Thus, trust, a cornerstone in the airline industry, is intricately linked to various operational and strategic elements. The following table outlines key factors that significantly impact passenger trust.

Table 1

Key factors impacting passenger trust	
Factor	Key components
Transparency and communication	Effective crisis management, proactive communication, clear and honest messaging, social media engagement, passenger feedback mechanisms
Safety and security	Robust safety protocols, cutting-edge technology, employee training, transparent safety communication, emergency preparedness
Service excellence	Consistent service delivery, employee empowerment, personalized customer experiences, efficient complaint resolution, service recovery
Pricing transparency	Clear and upfront pricing, avoidance of hidden fees, fair fare structures, price consistency, value perception
Reliability and punctuality	On-time performance, schedule adherence, operational efficiency, proactive communication of delays

Developed based on processing source 3.

However, several challenges can impede these objectives. Inconsistency in service delivery across various touchpoints, breaches of trust resulting from incidents such as data breaches or overbooking, economic downturns necessitating

service reductions, negative publicity, and intense competition all pose significant threats to building and maintaining strong customer relationships.

To address these challenges, airlines must adopt a proactive and strategic approach. Prioritizing a customer-centric culture, coupled with robust crisis management plans, is essential. Consistent employee training, fostering open communication channels, and leveraging data analytics to understand customer preferences are critical components of this strategy. Building a strong brand identity, emphasizing sustainability, and continuously innovating loyalty programs can further enhance customer loyalty. By investing in employee well-being and fostering a positive work environment, airlines can improve service quality and ultimately strengthen their position in the market. Overall, this comprehensive approach, encompassing both defensive and proactive measures, is vital for overcoming obstacles and establishing enduring customer relationships in the highly competitive airline industry.

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