

St. Petersburg University
Graduate School of Management

Master in Management

**BUILDING LOYALTY THROUGH CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT
AMONG AIRLINE PASSENGERS**

Master's Thesis by the 2nd year student Daria Andreevna Vikulova

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St. Petersburg
2021

ЗАЯВЛЕНИЕ О САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНОМ ХАРАКТЕРЕ ВЫПОЛНЕНИЯ ВЫПУСКНОЙ КВАЛИФИКАЦИОННОЙ РАБОТЫ

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July 8, 2021

АННОТАЦИЯ

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Образовательная программа	Master in Management
Направление подготовки	Менеджмент
Год	2021
Научный руководитель	Мустафа Дениз Далман Доцент кафедры маркетинга
Описание цели, задач и основных результатов	<p>Цель данного исследования – в выявлении осуществимых действий, которые могут предпринять авиакомпании с целью разработки и осуществления стратегии маркетинга социальных сетей, направленную на поощрение позитивной вовлеченности пассажиров и последующего повышения их лояльности. В связи с этим, практическая направленность работы обусловлена разработкой рекомендаций для авиакомпаний относительно выбора стратегии маркетинга социальных сетей.</p> <p>В ходе работы было определено, что лояльность потребителей в большой степени обусловлена, в числе прочих факторов, вовлеченностью потребителей, которую авиакомпании могут поощрять в рамках стратегии маркетинга социальных сетей. Экспериментальный подход был применен с целью выявления оптимальной стратегии маркетинга социальных сетей в отношении масштаба их использования в зависимости от типа индивидуальности бренда авиакомпании.</p> <p>В результате проведенного анализа было выявлено, что, в отличие от использования социальных сетей а качестве одностороннего источника информации о бренде и предлагаемом им продуктах, в случае использования социальных сетей как многофункционального инструмента для взаимодействия с пассажирами наблюдается более высокий уровень вовлеченности потребителей, в частности, в ее когнитивном аспекте, вне зависимости от типа индивидуальности бренда. Также были выявлены конкретные шаги, которые авиакомпании могут предпринять для реализации описанных в эксперименте стратегий, направленных на повышение вовлеченности пассажиров.</p>
Ключевые слова	Взаимоотношения между потребителем и брендом, индивидуальность бренда, лояльность бренду, вовлечение потребителей, маркетинг социальных сетей

ABSTRACT

Master Student's Name	Daria Andreevna Vikulova
Master Thesis Title	Building Loyalty through Customer Engagement among Airline Passengers
Educational Program	Master in Management
Main field of study	Management
Year	2021
Academic Advisor's Name	Mustafa Deniz Dalman, Associate Professor Marketing Department
Description of the goal, tasks and main results	<p>The aim of the given thesis is to identify feasible actions airline brands can take in building their social media marketing strategy to encourage positive customer engagement behaviors with the view of building loyalty among their passengers. Therefore, the practical aspect of the research is devoted to the elaboration of recommendations to airline brands with regards to the choice of a social media marketing strategy.</p> <p>Throughout the course of the work, it was identified that brand loyalty is determined, among other factors, by customer engagement, which airlines can encourage through their social media marketing strategy. An experimental approach was applied to identify the optimal social media marketing strategy with regards to its scope depending on the brand personality type.</p> <p>As a result of the analysis, it was found that, unlike using social media as a one-way communication tool ("defender" strategy dimension), treating social media as a multi-faceted communication and collaboration platform ("explorer" strategy dimension) produces stronger customer engagement among passengers, particularly in its cognitive aspect, regardless of the airline brand personality. Furthermore, specific steps airlines can take in order to implement the strategies aimed at encouraging customer engagement were identified.</p>
Keywords	Consumer-brand relationships, brand personality, brand loyalty, customer engagement, social media marketing

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INTRODUCTION

Civil aviation is an integral part of modern society, infrastructure, and lifestyle. Prior to COVID-19 that put aviation into the deepest crisis in history, it was a fast-developing industry with the number of destinations, passengers, and the volume of traffic increasing every year (World Bank, 2020), contributing to the connectivity, speed of goods turnover, tourism industry, quality and easiness of negotiations. As of 2018, the industry supported over 65 million jobs and 3.6% of global economic activity, carrying 35% of world trade by value and 57% of world tourists (ATAG, 2018). Furthermore, access to travel significantly contributes to the equality of opportunity, facilitating connectivity of remote areas and providing opportunities for education, work, and leisure for those living away from busy metropolitan areas and transportation hubs. It is a highly concentrated, investment-heavy industry with low profit margins, intense competition, and high risks, which makes it especially vulnerable to sudden disruptions in the market conditions (PWC, 2018). Furthermore, the switching costs for passengers are rather low and the current steps that airlines take to retain customers and encourage repeated purchases, notably frequent flyer programs, are ineffective and potentially disruptive (Budd, 2020; Voorhees et al, 2015).

In late 2019, the pandemic of COVID-19 emerged, drastically and swiftly changing the global landscape of passenger air travel. In April of 2020, the global air passenger traffic comprised only 20% of the flights held in January, with the flights across Europe barely hitting the 10% benchmark (Pearce, 2020). Although hopes were set high for the uplift of the traffic with the development of the vaccine, even in April of 2021 a number of world's busiest airports have been operating at a fraction of their capacity compared to the traffic of April, 2019.

Such a drastic hit on the industry resulted in a liquidity crisis with the unprecedented number of flights cancelled and refund requests flooding the airlines' offices, and although substantial financial aid has been offered by governments to their national carriers, it still represents a significant debt burden, not to mention the mounting idle costs airlines incur. Therefore, it will be those airlines that are able to quickly build up traffic as the restrictions are lifted that will be able to recover from the unprecedented crisis sooner.

To understand the ways in which airlines can facilitate the rebound in the context of restricted travel, the airline industry is examined through the lens of the consumer-brand relationship framework. In particular, the notion of personality, i.e., a brand possessing human character traits (Aaker, 1997), is applied to airline brands. Accepting airline brands as full-fledged relationship partners, specific communication practices most effective in retaining passengers and turning them into loyal and fully-connected customers are elaborated. A base of loyal consumers will help carriers come out from the crisis quicker and in a smoother manner, driving attention away from competition and more towards the needs of consumers who are willing to fly more with

a particular airline, thus increasing the market share of the company and allowing for more freedom in their pricing policy. Not only loyal customers are valuable to a brand through their own willingness to pay a premium and make repeated purchases, but also through their engagement in advocacy and word-of-mouth, attracting new customers with a positive bias to engage with a brand.

Loyalty is a complex relationship (Chaudhuri et al., 2001) which in part is achieved through regular positive customer engagement with a brand that goes beyond regular purchases alone. Different in their strength, degree of publicity, scope, goals, and valence, consumer engagement behaviors provide valuable insights about the consumers, their pains, wishes, and goals. A company willing to nourish such behavior and navigate the impact of negative and positive consumer engagement can facilitate the appropriate channels and, as an active partner in a relationship, initiate communication on the part of a brand.

While loyalty itself is one of the most researched notions in the context of consumer-brand relationships, little relevant research is done specific to the industry and none focuses on specific communication strategies with travelers on social media, resulting in a *research gap*. Taking into account the pivotal role passenger air travel plays in the world economy and the drastic drop in the number of in-person interactions with the passengers due to the significant decrease in the air passenger traffic facing the COVID-19 pandemic, elaborating efficient consumer engagement practices and positive customer engagement strategies aimed at retaining loyal customers and expanding their base outside of flight purchase and experience is of paramount importance. One way to do so is to explore the existing frameworks for identifying an appropriate strategy for a brand and evaluate their application to the airline industry, keeping in mind the peculiarities of consumer-brand relationships characteristic to carriers and their passengers.

Despite the drastic drop in passenger air traffic due to both the decrease in demand and restrictions imposed by the officials, the COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity for airline brands to introduce and/or develop engagement practices to foster loyalty through increasing positive consumer engagement behaviors that would facilitate overcoming the crisis.

The *aim* of the present master thesis is to identify feasible actions airline brands can take in building their social media marketing strategy to encourage positive customer engagement behaviors with the view of building loyalty among their passengers. It is achieved through fulfilling the following *research objectives*:

- (a) to identify, through literature review, tools available for airlines to engage with passengers beyond purchase;
- (b) to execute specific strategies with different brand personalities so as to identify effective strategies depending on the personality type;

(c) to elaborate a list of “good practices” for fostering customer engagement among airline passengers.

As the research objectives are fulfilled, the following *research questions* are answered:

- How can an airline engage with their customers?
- What social media marketing strategies depending on the airline’s brand personality are most effective?
- What social media strategies are effective in fostering customer engagement among airline passengers and building strong emotional bonds beyond transaction?

A roadmap consisting of particular strategies with proven efficiency that would enable airline brands develop and nurture brand loyalty through regular customer engagement among passengers is expected as the end product of the thesis.

The *subject* of the given research is “Social media marketing strategies for airline brands with different personalities”.

The *object* of the given research is “Airline passengers”.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Passenger Air Travel

1.1.1 Market Outlook and COVID-19 Implications

The passenger air travel is one of the industries most affected by the pandemic of COVID-19. In April of 2020, the global air passenger traffic comprised only 20% of the flights held in January, with the flights across Europe barely hitting the 10% benchmark (Pearce, 2020). Overall, the full-year passenger demand in 2020 was expected to be only a half of that in 2019 (IATA, 2020). In reality, even such a pessimistic outlook was underestimating the actual global decline in passenger air travel, eventually amounting to a 65,9% drop in 2020, with the international passenger demand being 75,6% below 2019 levels (IATA, 2021). The major reasons for such a drop and, at the same time, for the little chance of a quick rebound, as IATA puts it, lie in the travel restrictions imposed by governments to fight the spread of the virus as well as the expected global economic recession provoked by the pandemic with the slump in aggregate demand and the forced drop in production capacities.

Even with the introduction of the vaccine against COVID-19, the traffic in the world's largest airports has not yet picked up. For example, London's Heathrow only serviced 8% of passengers compared to April, 2019. Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport is operating at a 14% capacity and Amsterdam's Schiphol – at 13%. In Russia, Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport serviced only 47% of the passenger traffic compared to April, 2019 (ACI Europe, 2021). Such low levels of passenger traffic indicate that the recovery is likely to be slow and airline brands will face challenges along the way.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the industry harder than 9/11 (LeBeau, 2020), the most severe crisis to date, which in itself led to numerous changes in both the attitude of the flyers as well as in the security procedures in airports and on board. IATA (2021) even named 2020 “the worst year in history for air travel demand” and a “catastrophe”. To put into perspective the scale of the losses that airlines suffer as a result of both border closures and slump in demand for air travel, every hour of the crisis Lufthansa loses 1 million euro (Pallini, 2020). The cancellation of the overwhelming majority of the flights led to a drastic increase in refund demands which provoked a liquidity crisis.

The liquidity crisis forced airlines to seek help from their governments, with many announcing corporate bailouts, including substantial financial aid programs for airlines. The major examples, among others, include the US with 25 billion of federal financial aid, part of it in loans, available for the carriers upon a list of conditions, starting from the ban on dividend payment through 2021 as well as stock buybacks, ban on major staff cuts and the targeted use of the funds intended for wages payment only. Major European examples include a 7-billion-euro bailout for

Air France on condition that it becomes the world's most eco-friendly airline by 2030 (Air France-KLM, 2020)., and a 9-billion record-breaking financial aid to the afore-mentioned Lufthansa (Pallini, 2020). However, even though airlines received temporary relief to stay afloat during the time of forced demurrage, the financial aid was largely loan-based, meaning that once the aircraft is back in the air, airlines will still struggle with a financial strain of increased debt load.

At the same time, cash shortage led airlines to find new ways of refunding passengers whose flights were cancelled due to the changes in the travel landscape, be it for the ban on international travel or for the passengers' fears for personal safety. While some companies (e.g., Lufthansa, UTair, S7) chose to respect the bonds they built with their passengers by offering cash compensations – a preferable means of refund for many passengers – the liquidity crisis only allowed them to do so if airlines would take up to 60 days to arrive. Another commonly adopted option was to offer immediate vouchers, often for the amounts higher than passengers paid for their tickets or flexible rebooking options for all tariffs: both of these options were still taking passengers' interests into account. Other airlines, however, did not provide a cash refund option whatsoever regardless of the lack of legislative basis for such a decision, like Russian airlines Pobeda and Aeroflot did. The corresponding amendments to the Air Code (Kokoreva et al., 2020) were proposed in the aftermath of the emergence of newly-invented refund practices to provide legal basis for some airlines' initiative, and not as a proactive move by the government to alleviate the financial burden for airlines.

The way airlines chose to handle both their verbal actions – i.e., informing their passengers about the airline's activities with regards to the changing schedule and cancelled flights, and their non-verbal actions including, for example, how they handle returns and rebookings can significantly affect the relationships they had built with their customers over the years. In a way, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may be considered a blessing in disguise for airlines striving to build strong connections with their passengers, since transgressions allow consumers to judge the reliability and overall quality of a brand (Aaker, 2004). Therefore, there is a high probability that the airline brands that take interaction with their passengers seriously and put efforts into nurturing the relationships with their frequent flying passengers, will come out of the crisis with a higher market share and lower need for tariff cuts. The experience acquired and practices introduced in this period are transferable to airlines' regular business activities, contributing to their brand equity by increasing the engagement levels of their passengers and fostering the relationships to develop beyond satisfaction alone.

1.1.2 Frequent Flyer Programs

To begin with, it is worth exploring the existing tools that airline brands use to encourage repeated purchases and build connection with consumers to understand where the room for

improvement and change lies. One of the most prevailing tools used by brands in aviation to reward loyal customers is through granting them statuses that are collectively referred to as ‘elite’ upon fulfilling specific criteria in an airline’s frequent flyer program (FFP) (Budd et al., 2020). Based on the name of the tool, it becomes obvious that it is not necessarily loyalty that is rewarded, but the frequency of travel; given that it takes more than 50 flights a year to achieve a gold status in Aeroflot Bonus FFP (see Appendix 1), it can be assumed that it is mostly business travelers who are able to reach such a goal. Although S7 has introduced amendments to its programs and started to offer rewards to passengers who travel less frequently, yet the idea of basing the reward off of the number of segments flown remains unchanged. In many cases, it is not the actual business traveler that chooses an airline and purchases a ticket, but a company, especially considering the fact that some business travel destinations, particularly in the Far East, are served by a limited number of carriers: for example, only 6 companies serve Yakutia, the largest Russian region, while Khabarovskiy krai is served by 13, national and international carriers combined (Gomilevskaya, 2018). Therefore, the program fails to reach its inherent goal: to reward those passengers that actively and consciously choose to fly with a particular airline.

Indeed, the loyalty programs show no direct effect on share-of-wallet for brand-loyal customers. Furthermore, only high-equity brands receive substantially higher gains from their loyalty programs than brands with lower equity, with FFPs producing the largest effect on price-seeking customers prone to switching brands easily (Voorhees et al., 2015). Furthermore, researchers have shed doubt on whether loyalty programs as a whole are effective since they fail to help understand customers’ behaviors and expectations (Xie and Chen, 2014). Therefore, despite providing an airline some benefits, frequent flyer programs do not specifically fulfil their purpose of rewarding and fostering fidelity; rather, they only attract brand switching consumers and do not recognize airlines’ best customers. And it is not the most loyal or engaged consumers that join FFPs; rather, consumers evaluate the rewards and characteristics of a loyalty program, much like any other product offered by a company, to evaluate their willingness to join it (Jang & Matilla, 2005).

Wang et al. (2014) suggest that recognition factors and social factors influence a frequent flyer program members’ willingness to continue flying with a particular airline and loyalty, while Mimouni-Chaabane and Volle (2010) list saving money, exploration, entertainment (i.e., enjoying the collection of points), recognition, and social benefits among the reasons for passengers’ involvement in the frequent flyer programs. The relationship between perceived benefits and perceived relationship investment is influenced by the FFP rules: if an airline seeks to encourage loyalty among different types of customers, they suggest, it should modify its membership rules to better address the market needs of various consumer types. When airlines design rules for their

loyalty programs, involvement may be a better option for a basis for consideration and measurement standard, and not the number of segments flown (Wang et al., 2014).

Overall, there is indeed a growing skepticism towards the effectiveness of loyalty programs, including the frequent flyer programs: Wollan et al. (2017) notice that the overall use of loyalty programs is declining, thus contributing less to the development of loyalty, while Eason et al. (2015) assert that if the use of loyalty programs is driven mainly by financial benefits, the consumers' repeat purchases should be considered spurious rather than resulting from true loyalty.

In the light of the declining efficiency, the FFPs' cost should also be taken into consideration when suggesting expanding the bonuses to a larger share of passengers, particularly considering that the revenues in 2020 are expected to drop 48% compared to 2019 (IATA, 2020). The idea of adjusting membership rules to attract more loyal customers assumes that a frequent flyer program is the only tool airlines can use to build fidelity, which, in reality, is not necessarily true.

Other tools airline brands implement to a different extent are their websites' news sections (Chong et al., 2018), communication through email (Dickinger et al., 2009), social media communication adopted to a particular platform (Leung et al., 2013), and personalized recommendations (Wittman et al., 2017). Taking into consideration the fact that FFPs, as they stand, do not create close connections between loyal customers and an airline brand, switching focus towards other instruments seems reasonable. The current state of interactions between an airline and a passenger is largely transactional with very little person-to-person communication involved in the customer experience; therefore, passengers are involved significantly less emotionally as they are rationally (Senior, 2016). It is important to understand that emotional connections drive brand loyalty, with 62% of consumers feeling they have a relationship with a brand (Deloitte, 2019). Thus, at this point airline brands are missing out on the important dimension of their relationship with passengers.

Taking that into account, the time of the crisis might be an exceptional opportunity for airline brands to build the emotional attachment among travelers who miss flying the most. In fact, leisure travel is one of the most missed activity during the pandemic, with consumers willing to travel 31% more frequently than before the COVID-19 outbreak (BCG, 2020). Considering that communicating through email and social media is almost the only remaining form of interaction with passengers now that air travel is virtually grounded – and the growing use of these instruments by consumers, it is the quality of such communication and whether the messages transmitted by airline brands resonate with consumers that will potentially determine the quality of relationships with passengers and will help build the emotional involvement.

1.2 Consumer-Brand Relationships

1.2.1 The Concept of a Consumer-Brand Relationship and Basic Definitions

Consumers can develop relationships with brands similar to those they form with people. They consider some brands an integral part of their lives, some they use to express themselves, with some brands they part their ways, in others they become disappointed, and there are many that stay casual acquaintances (Fournier, 1998). The relationship metaphor has been present in the marketing thought since 1980s and has since evolved into a complex framework (Ghani et al., 2018). The basis of this development lies in, among other things, application of findings in psychology of human relationships, anthropology, and neuroscience to consumer-brand relationships upon testing whether such utilization is justified and appropriate (Fetscherin, 2015).

Consumer-brand relationships are multidimensional and differ in their level of privacy, degree of formality, voluntariness, duration, symmetricity, intensity, and direction (positive vs. negative) (Fournier, 1998). These dimensions shape relationship forms, starting from marriages of convenience, i.e., long-term, committed relationships precipitated by environmental influence versus deliberate choice, and governed by satisfying rules, and ending with secret affairs: highly emotive, privately held relationships risk if exposed to others. In other words, even the most complex interactions between people can be mimicked in the context of consumer-brand relationships.

Furthermore, relationship maintenance requirements differ depending on the type (Rose et al, 1986): some need regular replenishment, while others are self-sustaining. Similar to human relationships, best friendships do not require constant work and frequent interactions as marriages or casual friendships. Understanding the relationship type and stage in which parties find themselves in enables to focus on elaborating a maintenance strategy peculiar to particular circumstances. It is worth noting, however, that the concept of relationship maintenance itself is debatable, with some arguing that a relationship neither develops, nor regresses without conscious decisions made and supported with deliberate actions by relationship partners or only changes as a result of an external transgression, i.e. *stress model* (Altman et al., 1981), while others believe that without regular maintenance activities, connections between a brand and a consumer debilitate, resulting in a so-called *entropy model* (Levinger, 1983). At the same time, the latter model is predominant in the context of consumer-brand relationships and is thus employed hereafter.

There are several models describing the ways a consumer-brand relationship evolves, with their shape depending on the type of the relationship established (Fournier, 1998). While there are debates on the precise number of stages a relationship goes through, the idea of a life cycle curve as a baseline describes the path including initiation, growth, maintenance, deterioration, and

dissolution (Levinger, 1983). The basic predicament inherent in the framework discussed lies in the assumption that any relationship strives for a steadily increasing closeness level towards a glorified goal, which is almost never the case: the deeper relationships are pursued only with a fraction of brands one encounters no matter how favorable initial interactions were (Levinger, 1980). It can serve as an ideal prototype with which alternative models of relationship development can be compared, such as a passing fling, in which high levels of satisfaction are achieved just as quickly as the enthusiasm dissolves, or a stable maturity model in which a relationship highlights in loyalty and deep commitment and does not fade away.

1.2.2 Brand Personality

Under psycho-lexical tradition (cf. Goldberg, 1982) identified that languages tend to, over time, develop a list of particular adjectives describing the significant differences between people's personalities. In the early 1990s a set of traits peculiar to certain personalities of people has been elaborated in the field of psychology. While earlier research elaborated lengthy lists of adjectives consisting of hundreds and thousands of descriptive words (Allport & Odbert, 1936), Goldberg (1990) introduced a theory better known as "the Big Five" factor structure. It states that in a variety of languages descriptive adjectives referring to personalities fall into one of only five groups: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness.

Expanding the metaphor of a relationship and taking into consideration the fact that brands act as fully-fledged partners (Aggarwal, 2004), brands, similarly to people, also have unique personalities, i.e., "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997).

However, Caprara et al. (2001) suggest that while in itself the idea of a concise structure of common descriptive adjectives for personality traits is useful in relation to brands, the Big Five personality factors are not applicable to the way *brand* personalities are described. Indeed, researchers in marketing have identified factors different to those of Goldberg (1990). The methodology employed for elaborating brand personalities is typically similar to those of human personalities: an extensive list of adjectives is compiled that would describe a particular brand and then, through factor analysis, the adjectives that are most distinctive and prevalent are grouped. Aaker (1997), for example, distinguishes five personality types with common traits inherent in brands: (1) '**exciting**': energetic, daring, and lively; (2) '**sincere**': kind, down-to-earth, family-oriented; (3) '**rugged**': tough, rough, sporty, and adventurous; (4) '**competent**': accomplished, intellectual, influential, reliable; (5) '**sophisticated**': prestigious, pretentious, and elegant.

Not only do personality types shape communication style of a brand, but also may affect customers' expectations and reactions to a brand's actions, particularly in times of transgressions (Aaker et al, 2004): as such, consumers shown to be willing to compromise and forgive 'exciting' brands more than 'sincere' ones, based on the initial perception of 'sincere' brands as trustworthy

and cautious, and ‘exciting’ brands willing to take higher risk in exchange for fun experience with consumers, hence the different expectations.

While the classification by Aaker (1997) is widely exploited, there have been other attempts to elaborate different types of personalities. Azoulay & Kapferer (2003) discussed that the classification proposed by Aaker is not replicable cross-culturally, prompting some researchers to tailor Aaker’s classification to a specific country – e.g., Bosnjak et al. (2007) elaborated a scale for German-speaking countries. Others, including Geuens et al. (2009) would criticize Aaker’s research for employing a wider definition of the notion of personalities, i.e., the set of *characteristics* associated with a brand, rather than *traits* – as suggested by Kapferer (2008), which would imply a narrower approach, thus only focusing on elements peculiar to one’s character. Geuens et al. (2009) suggest an alternative classification, with the personality measures falling into the following groups: (1) ‘responsibility’: down to earth, stable, responsible; (2) ‘activity’: active, dynamic, innovative; (3) ‘aggressiveness’: aggressive, bold; (4) ‘simplicity’: ordinary; simple; (5) ‘emotionality’: romantic, sentimental. However, the scale proposed does not solve the problem of cross-cultural application since it was largely tested in Belgium and the US, while in other countries only one brand was investigated. Furthermore, excluding such descriptions as “feminine” or “youthful” – which do not fall under the category of human character traits per se, but still can be used as vivid descriptions of a personality – is not critical in the present research since it does not have as its goal to define which characteristics peculiar to humans’ internal character can be applicable to brands. By employing a wider definition of brand personality, Aaker still allows for such descriptors and thus more freedom in describing a brand. Therefore, while recognizing the potential limitations of Aaker’s (1997) classification in terms of geographical applicability, it will be referred to hereafter when different types of personalities are evoked.

1.2.3 Brand Loyalty

One of the most intriguing types of consumer-brand relationships discussed in the academic literature and sought after by businesses, is brand loyalty. Fournier et al. (1997) discuss the notion of loyalty in the focus of fidelity and commitment, that mostly resembles a monogamous marital relationship. They criticize prior definitions for the lack of multidimensionality and focus on repeated purchases as a single criterium for loyalty, for the binary logic of dividing customers into ‘loyal’ and ‘disloyal’ segments. They also assert that assuming that repeated purchases result from a promise a consumer once made and chooses not to break is incorrect; instead, the authors suggest that loyal customers make a rational repeated choice of a particular brand over its competitors. The authors, however, do not formulate the alternative definition and refer to the complexity of the issue that makes it difficult to fully reflect in a single statement. Liu et al. (2012) define brand loyalty as the degree of attachment a customer has for a particular brand. However, the definition

in question I too generic and lacks indication of various manifestations brand loyalty takes; furthermore, it fails to determine the criteria for consumers to be labeled as 'loyal', assuming that some degree of loyalty is inherent in all customers. On the contrary, Grace (2018) suggests that one of the major outcomes of brand loyalty is the willingness of customers to tolerate relatively higher prices and forgive quality/performance fluctuations. Therefore, when discussing loyalty and bearing in mind the discussed limitations, the Grace (2018) suggests the following definition, under which brand loyalty will be referred to further on:

Brand loyalty manifests itself in (1) the positive feelings towards a brand, (2) dedication to purchase the same product or service repeatedly, despite competitors' actions to win loyal customers over and changes in the environment, (3) willingness to forgive and sacrifice, and (4) a positive word-of-mouth advocacy that maintain relationship stability and durability.

The importance of brand loyalty and its consequences have been broadly discussed in the academic literature: as such, a loyal customer base represents a barrier to entry the industry for new companies, a basis for price premium, and allows for a time buffer needed to respond to competitor innovations and actions (Aaker, 1996). Building loyalty enables companies to develop mutually-beneficial relationships with customers on a long-term basis (Pan et al., 2012): loyal customers increase brand equity, and are willing to pay more since they perceive unique value in the brand (Chaudhuri et al., 2001). Moreover, they are not attracted to competitors' offerings (So et al., 2013), allowing for focusing efforts on building strong unique capabilities and selling points without referencing those of competitors. Loyalty is also particularly important to service-providing companies, since it is the loyal customers that have a direct impact on an organization's current and future sales flows (Dwivedi, 2015). It is not the repeated purchases made by loyal customers alone that are important, but also the word-of-mouth they engage in (See-To and Ho, 2014), that is reviewed closely by potential customers, be it offline or online (Brown et al., 2007).

The difference it makes when a consumer becomes fully connected with a brand as opposed to just satisfied is striking. While bringing customers from unsatisfied to satisfied level only increases their value by 13%, loyal consumers are 52% more valuable to the company than the satisfied ones since they drive the growth of both market share with the repeated purchases they make and the relative price of a product, as committed consumers are willing to pay a premium (Magids et al., 2015). The first effect is known as *purchase loyalty*, whereas the latter is referred to as *attitudinal loyalty*.

However, since loyalty is a complex and relatively abstract construct that is gradually achieved by some satisfied customers, research provides for intermediary stages to illustrate the journey consumers take from potential customers to emotionally loyal customers. Kandampully

et al., 2014 propose the following pyramid to describe the progression of loyalty and the customer's attachment to the firm, as well as the most crucial factors for reaching each stage:



Figure 1 Customer Loyalty Pyramid

Note. Kandampully, J., Zhang, T., & Bilgihan, A. (2015). Customer loyalty: A review and future directions with a special focus on the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 379-414. doi:10.1108/ijchm-03-2014-0151

Interestingly, here they introduce yet another dimension of loyalty, i.e., “emotional loyalty”, characterized by affective commitment and trust and treat it as a superior construct to both attitudinal loyalty, expressed by advocates of the brand, and purchase loyalty that they refer to as “customer commitment” characterized by customer retention. Therefore, Kandampully et al., 2014, assert that until customers build an emotional bond with a brand, commit to purchasing its products and start to advocate for it, full emotional loyalty is not achieved, while claiming that as consumers cross different stages of the pyramid, they become more valuable to the brand. What is more important to conclude from the pyramid proposed, is that customer retention and, therefore, purchase loyalty alone does not guarantee that customers will engage in positive word of mouth or advocacy.

Given the complexity and ambiguity of the construct, the antecedents of loyalty vary significantly in prior research, particularly subject to loyalty being discussed in the purchase or attitudinal sense (Leckie et al., 2013). The antecedents of brand loyalty are numerous and varied. Among the traditional antecedents that are attributed to loyalty and appeared in the academic literature until mid-2000s, there are *loyalty program variables* (Uncles et al., 2003), *perceived switching costs* (Lee et al., 2001), *customer satisfaction* (Yoon et al., 2005), *service quality* (Caruana, 2002), and *commitment* (Little et al., 2006). All of the earlier factors, however, view customers mostly as passive consumers of the service or goods in question, rather than as active participants in the creation of a shared experience. Gallarza et al., 2006, assert that value can be

perceived in two dimensions: economic and psychological, which refer to the transactional value and emotional value that influence customers' decisions. Factors in the earlier research focus mostly on the purchase and consumption phase, rather than on relationships that consumers form with a brand beyond transaction.

The new wave of research identified other antecedents of loyalty, taking into consideration the changing landscape of consumer-brand relationships and new forms in which customers can interact and learn about brands, centering mostly on the emotional attachment customers develop towards brand, and not purely transactional benefits compared to competitors that they identify. Among the newly identified antecedents there are customer perceived value (Chen and Hu, 2010), customer engagement (Doorn et al., 2010; Gonring, 2008), employee engagement (Saks, 2006), corporate and brand image (Wang, 2010), customer trust (Choi and La, 2013), brand experience (Iglesias et al., 2011), rapport between customers (Delcourt et al., 2013), and employees as well as relational benefits (Chen and Hu, 2013).

Among all the antecedents, customer engagement sparks interest for it having a direct relationship with brand loyalty (Doorn et al., 2010) – and exploring the ways brands can shape customer engagement, since it is through nurturing active interactions on the part of consumers that deeper and more meaningful relationships are attained (Kumar et al., 2010)

The advantages that loyalty brings to a brand are difficult to underestimate, hence the efforts put into retaining and engaging consumers. With their word-of-mouth advocacy, a positive image of a brand is created, resulting in a flow of new first-time customers with pre-existing positive attitude towards a brand, enabling to optimize marketing efforts and reallocate costs from attracting new consumers towards retaining the existing customer and rewarding them for their loyalty. Most importantly, loyal customers constantly engage with a brand, contributing to its equity, either directly or indirectly. At the same time, loyalty itself is an important outcome of customer engagement (Askoy et al., 2013), suggesting that fostering CEBs leads to both the expansion of the loyal customers base and the reinforcement of attachment loyal customers feel towards the brand. Participation plays a crucial role in building customer loyalty (Eisingerich and Bell, 2006)

1.2.4 Consumer Engagement Behaviors

Doorn et al. (2010) developed the concept of consumer engagement behaviors (CEBs) which the authors define as the *customers' behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers*. Examples of such behaviors include but are not limited to word-of-mouth (both positive and negative), recommendations, reaching out to a company to express gratitude/dissatisfaction, writing reviews, and engaging in legal actions. Pansari et al. (2016), however, argue that purchases consumers make are also a manifestation of

customer engagement (CE). They define CE as the *mechanics of a customer's value addition to the firm, either through direct or indirect contribution*. Direct contributions include purchases, and by indirect, other types of engagement are implied, such as the afore-mentioned referrals, feedback, and discussions consumers have around the brand (Kumar et al., 2010). Interestingly, when discussing the types of consumer-brand relationships and how they relate to CE, Pansari et al. (2010) limit loyalty to repeated purchases and claim that customer engagement goes beyond them and focuses on other behaviors as well which contradicts with the definition given in the previous paragraph.

For the purpose of the present research, while accepting that making purchases is indeed a type of customer engagement behavior, the focus is put on the indirect contributions, since mobility has been significantly reduced due to the pandemic of COVID-19 and therefore largely limited to essential travel, making repeated purchase not as reliable of an indicator for customer engagement as it would be had there not been artificial restrictions in place. Indirect contributions of CEBs are also aligned with the extended definition of customer loyalty, implying that loyal consumers actively choose to both make repeated purchases and engage in such activities as spreading positive word-of-mouth, referring their friends to the brand, providing feedback to the company, i.e., the positive consumer engagement behaviors.

CEBs act both as manifestations and antecedents of loyalty: the more a consumer chooses to engage with a brand, the stronger the bond they form with it. As such, So et al. (2014) assert that customer engagement influences brand loyalty both directly and indirectly through brand trust and service brand evaluation, being the best explanatory factor for brand loyalty out of the three. It is this liaison that determines the importance of creating a fruitful footing for customer engagement if a company wishes to reap the benefits of brand loyalty. As companies struggle to comprehend and deconstruct the complex notion of loyalty in pursuit of short-term returns (Markey, 2020), CEBs are more manageable since they represent a more specific and lower-level construct than abstract loyalty. At the same time, customer engagement in itself is a multidimensional construct: Brodie et al. (2013) suggest that is based on three pillars: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Research aimed at developing scales designed to measure customer engagement often refers to these dimensions when categorizing the items within the scale. This is done, for example, by Hollebeek et al. (2014), So et al. (2014), and Harrigan (2017), although the names for the dimensions vary across the literature.

Another area in which CEBs indirectly influence brand loyalty is through brand experience, i.e., *sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments* (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand experience is positively affected by customer engagement (Islam et al, 2020),

proving Nysveen and Pedersen's (2014) supposition that “to create positive sensory brand experiences, [customers need to be] engaged in the brand.” In turn, if favorable, brand experience positively influences loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). Harrigan et al. (2017, 2018) also prove that customer engagement acts as an antecedent for loyalty.

As the CEBs differ in their nature, Doorn et al. (2010) elaborated five dimensions of CEB: valence, form or modality, scope, nature of its impact, and customer goals. As shown by Brady et al. (2006) in terms of *valence*, customer engagement can be classified as positive or negative. As for the *form* and *modality*, this dimension focuses on the ways consumer engagement can be expressed by the customers. The dimension of *scope* can be analyzed both in terms of time and geography. As such, consumer engagement can be momentary or ongoing (time), as well as local such as a complaint expressed in person or global, e.g., a post on a website. The impact of CEBs can be evaluated in terms of its intensity, immediacy, breadth, and longevity. Here, it is worth noting that the channels chosen by consumers significantly influence the impact of CEBs. Customer goals should be evaluated based on who the engagement is directed towards (the company as a whole, a government regulator, or a certain employee), to what extent the engagement is planned, and to what extent the goals are aligned with the company's goals.

The authors assert that those customers that are either highly satisfied or highly dissatisfied are the ones that most typically engage with the brand. Bearing in mind that some of the CEBs are publicly manifested, it is in the best interest of a company to shape the channels of communication according to their valence, bearing in mind the perceived cost of engagement, e.g. to ease the process of delivering a complaint directly to the company so that consumers were less likely to take their anger to forums and informal communities, but at the same time to open the floor for brand-related initiatives, co-creation, and positive communication in the public field whenever customer goals align with those of a company. Moreover, customers tend to not engage with brands unless they are convinced that firms are willing to engage with them as well to create positive experiences and value (Vivek et al., 2012), further implying the importance of careful design of communication channels as well as underlying the reciprocal nature of consumer-brand relationships that translates into customer engagement as well.

When elaborating a strategy for encouraging CEBs, it is necessary to understand what it is that drives customers to engage with a brand and whether a brand can directly influence such behavior. Kumar et al. (2010) identified 4 consumer engagement value dimensions, focusing only on activities of positive valence: purchase behavior (repeated purchases, up-selling, cross-selling), referral behavior, influencer behavior, and knowledge behavior. Referral behavior here is extrinsically motivated and is executed through the incentivized formal programs introduced by a company: e.g., Airbnb offers a voucher for each invited guest once they go on their first trip to

both the referent and referee. Influencer behavior is similar to referral behavior in a sense that consumer also endorses a brand to a potential customer; however, this dimension is characterized by intrinsic motivation and is expressed in such behaviors as positive word of mouth. Knowledge behavior manifests in the feedback that consumers provide the brand with and can be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Taking into consideration the motivation behind each behavior type is important when developing a communication strategy, since it provides the understanding of what a brand can directly influence and where an indirect approach is necessary.

Some of the channels available for brands and consumers involve social media. Goh et al. (2012) demonstrated that engagement in social media result in significant increase in purchases. Also, their research discusses the informative (how much do consumers learn from a post or a comment) and persuasive effect (based on content valence) of consumer engagement on social media. It turned out that consumer's persuasive effect is 22 times higher than that of a marketer. What is more interesting is that undirected contents (those that do not directly address a particular person) are more effective for informative and persuasive customer-to-customer communication, whereas direct contents, i.e., when a marketer communicates with consumers, show higher effectiveness.

With that in mind, through understanding the opportunities that consumer engagement behaviors provide and how to manage and use them to deepen the relationship with the customers, companies can use it to their advantage when communicating with their consumers. In such a competitive industry as passenger air travel that above everything faces a severe crisis, any advantage over rivals can have a considerable and positive financial impact. If successful, a regular positive consumer engagement may become a springboard to take consumers from satisfaction to loyalty. One of the rapidly developing customer engagement channels available to airlines in the light of the global pandemic and reduced in-person interactions with their customers is social media.

1.2.5 Customer Engagement on Social Media

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) provide the following definition to refer to social media websites:

Social media can be defined as all internet-based applications, in accordance with the principles of Web 2.0 and providing the creation and exchange of user-generated content, while also facilitating interaction and collaboration between participants.

In particular, examples include blogs and microblogs, such as Twitter, social networking sites (LinkedIn and Facebook), collaborative projects, e.g., Wikipedia, content community sites – Youtube, and feedback-related websites, such as online forums (Chan & Gulliet, 2011, Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Although a page on a social media website can be set up and run by a company in order to communicate with their customers and general public, this means of communication leaves room for interpersonal interaction between customers as well (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Even though accounts on social media are easy to set up and start using (Ubeda et al., 2013), they can provide valuable results if managed correctly, including but not limited to building brand loyalty beyond traditional methods (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), raising brand awareness, brand recognition, and brand recall (Gunelius, 2011), as well as lowering marketing costs (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Social media is used by brands to boost their sales, return on investment, stimulate word of mouth, and spread information about themselves (Kumar et al., 2013). Castronovo and Huang (2012) go as far as to suggest that marketing strategies should leverage the use of social media to the fullest, since consumers tend to trust information shared on social media more than directly by companies (Constantinides et al., 2013).

Although limited, research into social media as a customer engagement tool has shown that, on the one hand, messages on social media lead to increased consumption of products, or services discussed (Alhabash et al., 2015) – i.e., stimulate repeated purchases, while on the other hand, the traffic generated by company's social media plays a growing role in company's value (Luo et Zhang, 2013). Furthermore, Cambria et al. (2012) claim that messages found on social media also help improve a company's public image and increase customer equity. Social media also serve as a valuable insight into the thoughts, habits, and opinions of customers about the company through analyzing their conversations and activities on social platforms (Schweidel & Moe, 2014).

Since social media is a relatively recent phenomenon, a holistic approach to managing it has not yet been developed in the management academic literature. Some works have been focusing on individual aspects of social media management, such as identifying the most effective tone of communication (Gretry et al., 2017), other researchers, including Felix et al. (2016) have attempted to provide an all-encompassing tool to help elaborate a fitting social media strategy.

Among the former researchers, Schultz (2017), when looking into details of designing communication with customers strategy, particularly on social media, suggests that while the day of the week does not play a significant role in consumer engagement intensity with a post, the contents of what a company shares do. If a message only resonates with a part of the target audience, it negatively affects post interaction levels. At the same time, interactive posts that require a consumer to perform activities such as clicking on a link, a hashtag or a video (as long as they do not directly take users away from a brand-related community or website) have shown positive effect on the level of customer engagement. Ashley et al. (2015) found that the number of channels used by a brand not only affects the number of followers, but also increases the

engagement scores; the choice of the channels should depend on what the target audience of the brand uses the most because the consumer reach is higher for them than for others. Brodie et al. (2011) suggest that specific triggers, such as a need to reduce information search cost and perceived risk, may prompt an individual to join, and/or participate in, the online community devoted to a particular brand and ask a question instead of searching information elsewhere.

Another element of the social media strategy a brand can modify is the tone used when communicating with its customers and followers. Gretry et al. (2017) found that informal communication style only increases trust among consumers who are familiar with a brand. On the contrary, in cases when consumers are unfamiliar with a brand, informal communication style decreases the trust customers put in a brand. What is more, perceived appropriateness of the brand communication style mediates the effect of the communication style on brand trust. Therefore, when opting for a particular tone, a marketer should take into consideration both the interlocutor and the circumstances in which the interaction occurs.

Having summarized the potential benefits of social media for improving consumer-brand relationships, it should be recognized that social media is only one of the potential channels of interaction with consumers, and the brand’s personality should be upheld while communicating on various social platforms in the same manner as it would be conveyed through any other communication channel. Felix et al. (2016) introduced the strategic social media marketing framework that describes various patterns of behaviors companies take on social media that reflect their personality. Following the framework (fig. 2) will help align social media marketing with the vision, mission, corporate goals and culture of the company and truly make it a cohesive reflection of the brand.

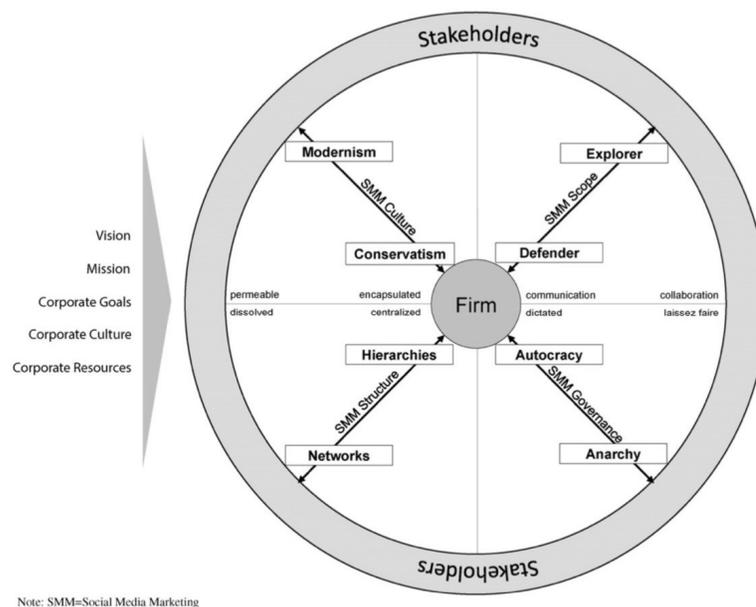


Figure 2 Social Media Marketing Strategy Framework

Note. Felix, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., & Hinsch, C. (2016). Elements of strategic social media marketing: A holistic framework. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 118-126. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.05.001

First of all, a brand, airline brands included, needs to decide how it is willing to use social media in its marketing and determine its scope, i.e., whether it will be used for communicating only with a few (or even one) stakeholders or exhaustively as a collaboration tool. The one who choose the first path, per Felix at al. (2016), are called *defenders*: for them, social media is merely a one-way communication tool used for either raising awareness about products or companies' initiatives or for entertainment. It would not be significantly different from the news section on the official website of the brand. *Explorers*, on the other hand, treat social media as a way to collaborate and co-create value with multiple stakeholders, from employees and suppliers to clients and even government agencies.

Considering that many stakeholders of airlines – such as regulatory bodies, or suppliers (e.g., airports or aircraft manufacturers) are quite concentrated and limited in number (Caderholm, 2014), the most likely groups of stakeholders airline brands would use social media to connect with are passengers and, provided that they are publicly traded companies, investors. The latter, in the context of the Russian market, is only applicable to Aeroflot (Moscow Exchange, n.a.). Therefore, for the airlines the difference between the two dimensions lies mostly in the way they approach their communication with their passengers online. Instead of communicating *to* their target audience, like *defenders* would, *explorers* communicate and interact *with* various stakeholders, bringing their opinions to the table and building emotional bonds with them.

Another dimension to take into consideration is the social media marketing culture, ranging from *modernism*, meaning that communication style employed by a brand is open, accessible, and flexible; to *conservativism*, implying that the preferred communication style reminds of a traditional, mass-advertised approach.

In the domain of structure, brands have the option to land between *networks* and *hierarchies*, with the former implying that all employees are responsible for interaction and content creation on social media platforms, as opposed to a stricter and more formal latter approach, calling for a designated employee or department to run social media for a brand. While these are the extremes of the dimension scale, a strategy closer to the *network* dimension in the context of airlines could mean introducing such initiatives as, for example, “Instagram account takeover by a pilot or a crew member” where they would share a typical work day.

Finally, social media marketing strategy can be approached in the domain of governance, partially resonating a company's approach to structure. As such, brands' social media strategy can vary between *autocracy*, i.e., following precise rules and guidelines in communication with

stakeholders on social media, and *anarchy*, when everything is allowed and no particular limit is set.

Even though described above are the most extreme scenarios, in reality most of the companies would choose a strategy that would fall somewhere in-between the spectrum of characteristics. Those airlines that, for example, practice a friendly and outgoing communication style in flight, such as Southwest airlines, whose crew is allowed to exchange jokes with passengers, are more likely to opt for modern and anarchical approach, while their direct competitor, United, a company following strict rules and precise code of conduct with customers, will likely choose a more conservative and autocracy-centered strategy.

Overall, social media is a promising and effective tool of stimulating positive customer engagement. For airlines especially, such a tool can serve as a bridge from transactional relationships with passengers to interactions beyond purchase, fostering the development of stronger bonds and preparing the soil for building loyalty. While the particular steps relevant for the passenger air travel industry in relation to building strong social media presence with the view of enhancing consumer-brand relationships have not yet been identified, inspiration for the baseline models to be tested further on in the research can be drawn from the hospitality industry which is often combined with air travel to form a single research target of the so-called tourism industry.

1.2.6 Conclusion

Many airlines struggled before the COVID-19 pandemic, with the existing business models failing to produce satisfactory results and profits generated only because of relatively low oil prices, with the exception of Gulf airlines and low-cost carriers (Dichter et al., 2016). COVID-19 exacerbated those problems leading airlines to a deep liquidity crisis amongst travel restrictions by governments and falling demand for the remaining flights due to the expectations of a recession and general anxiety over the pandemics.

Under such conditions, airlines take action both to stabilize their financial situation through change in refund rules and by applying for the state financial aid, and to retain avid flyers and keep them engaged with the brand until the ban on international travel is lifted. The latter would ensure a steady demand for air travel in the post-pandemic world; however, due to the unprecedented nature of the crisis, there are no specific rules developed for such events, and airlines adapt as the situation develops using their imagination and knowledge of their core loyal frequent flyers.

Building and maintaining loyalty is crucial as never before, since the pace at which airlines return to the pre-COVID crisis once the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic are lifted will largely affect their financial standing. Considering those crucial antecedents of customer loyalty, such as the quality of service, are unavailable for the lack of service provided at the moment,

airlines can make use of the situation and invest into emotion-driven nurturing of customer engagement behaviors beyond purchase. By focusing on social media as an intensively-evolving and readily-available means of interacting with travel-deprived passengers, airlines can elaborate effective strategies to foster customer engagement among the new and perspective passengers. Furthermore, careful navigation of communication channels can help direct the angry and dissatisfied passengers whose traveled plans were cancelled due to factors outside of the carrier's control outside of the public space, while providing an engagement platform for passengers who long for travel and seek opportunities to connect with their favorite activity while it is unavailable.

As airlines establish their presence in social media, they will have to take into consideration not only the particular websites and platforms – seeking to be present where most of their target audience is – but also the social media strategy that would enable them to interact with their passengers and encourage as much of fruitful positive customer engagement behaviors as the platform allows. While the work by Felix et al. (2016) does provide a comprehensive review of potential dimensions a social media strategy can take, the authors call for further research. In particular, they suggest that the strategy has to be aligned with the firm's internal influencers, such as vision, mission, or corporate goals – yet leave the testing of this claim to other researchers to explore.

Considering that some of the crucial elements for building trust between airlines and passengers revolve around the safety of their clients as utmost priority (IATA, n.a.; ICAO, n.a.) in order to prevent their customers from avoiding the airline in case of severe accidents (Yang et al., 2018), carriers often include competence, qualification, and professionalism as recurring themes in their communication with the passengers.

With Felix et al. (2016) suggesting that the choice of strategy has to reflect the internal influencers, including brand personality, would this mean that if such companies as airlines that often fall into a competent range of the personalities spectrum choose between the dimensions of explorer (using social media as a tool for collaboration, bilateral communication, and interaction) and defender (seeing social media as merely a tool for conveying messages from a brand to an audience), would they need to opt for the latter option and dismiss the opportunity to establish stronger relationships with their passengers?

At the same time, when research suggests that interacting with customers and fostering positive consumer engagement behaviors lead to higher loyalty, they are considered universally beneficial activities, with no specific emphasis is put on the personality of the brand. Yet if research on brand personalities is evoked, Aaker (1997) further supports the suggestion of Felix et al. (2016) by stating that brands' personalities significantly affect the way their customers react to their activities, yet it is not clear how such different personalities as competent (characteristic for

many airlines) and exciting (embodied by some low cost carriers targeting younger audiences) would impact customers' reactions to brands willing to pursue the different dimensions of the social media marketing scope.

To test how different personalities peculiar to airlines affect the scope in which they can productively use social media platforms as a means to interact with their clients, the hypotheses presented hereafter are proposed.

If a brand has an exciting personality, then it is perceived as energetic and lively by customers. Therefore, an explorer dimension focusing on interaction and openness constitutes a better fit for brands with exciting personalities. Research on customer engagement indicates when there is such a fit, it has a positive impact on customer engagement. For example, Kim et al. (2001) suggest that a brand's personality should be an important influencer on the brand's marketing strategy in order to result in customers' higher Identification, later confirmed to be one of the components of customer engagement (So et al., 2014), and ultimately lead to increased loyalty. On the other hand, if a brand has an exciting personality, it will go against its traits to employ a defender dimension of a social media strategy that is characterized by reserved and impersonal behavior. Such a misfit will have a negative impact on customer engagement. Formally, it is hypothesized that:

[H1] if a brand with **exciting** personality employs a social media strategy in the "**explorer**" dimension, it will produce **stronger** CE effects than if it were to employ a "**defender**" strategy dimension.

On the contrary, brands with competent personalities are perceived as accomplished, intellectual, and reliable; they are too serious to suggest their clients engage in additional fun activities that are not related to their primary activity so as not to disperse the aura of their ultimate competence in what they do, i.e., provide an excellent service of safely taking their passengers from point A to point B. In this sense, the 'defender' strategy dimension represents a better fit for competent airlines. Similarly, if a competent brand chooses to use social media as a collaborative space, as the 'explorer' strategy dimension suggests, it might come across as not qualified enough to make independent decisions and its clients might repulse it, constituting a misfit between a personality and a strategy, resulting in the lack of positive synergies. Therefore,

[H2] if a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "**defender**" dimension, it will produce **stronger** CE effects than if it were to employ a "**exciting**" strategy dimension.

At the same time, if a brand with a competent personality chooses to open the floor of its social media for discussions and collaboration while reiterating its core values and reacting to customers' engagement behaviors, according to the 'explorer' strategy dimension, in a manner that upholds its personality traits of accomplishment and reliability, it might nevertheless increase positive CEBs, thus demonstrating no support for the need of a fit between personalities and strategy dimensions to observe positive CEBs. In this case,

[H3] if a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "**explorer**" dimension, it will produce **stronger** CE effects than if it were to employ a "**defender**" strategy dimension.

It is worth noting, however, that since customer engagement is a second-order construct (Calder et al., 2009), the hypotheses should be expanded in order to reflect its multi-dimensionality. The scales developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014), So et al. (2014) and Harrigan et al. (2017) for measuring customer engagement in different contexts suggest that there are several factors composing it, thus suggesting that customer engagement will not be formed as a single variable as a result of the factor analysis upon collecting the data. Therefore, it is not possible to test the hypotheses in the way they are phrased at the moment using the data obtained through the surveys without adjusting the hypotheses. As a result, the hypotheses are each developed further into three sub-hypotheses, following the structure suggested by Harrigan et al. (2017), so as to reflect the three dimensions of customer engagement: Identification, Absorption, and Interaction, rather than focus on customer engagement as a singular construct.

[H1a] If a brand with **exciting** personality employs a social media strategy in the "**explorer**" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Identification effects than if it were to employ a "**defender**" strategy dimension.

[H1b] If a brand with **exciting** personality employs a social media strategy in the "**explorer**" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Absorption effects than if it were to employ a "**defender**" strategy dimension.

[H1c] If a brand with **exciting** personality employs a social media strategy in the "**explorer**" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Interaction effects than if it were to employ a "**defender**" strategy dimension.

[H2a] If a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "defender" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Identification effects than if it were to employ a "exciting" strategy dimension.

[H2b] If a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "defender" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Absorption effects than if it were to employ a "exciting" strategy dimension.

[H2c] If a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "defender" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Interaction effects than if it were to employ a "exciting" strategy dimension.

[H3a] If a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "explorer" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Identification effects than if it were to employ a "defender" strategy dimension.

[H3b] If a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "explorer" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Absorption effects than if it were to employ a "defender" strategy dimension.

[H3c] If a brand with **competent** personality employs a social media strategy in the "explorer" dimension, it will produce **stronger** Interaction effects than if it were to employ a "defender" strategy dimension.

Upon definition and estimation of the CE dimensions, it is possible to proceed with the research design aimed at testing the discussed hypotheses and determine how and if these dimensions are affected by different combinations of brand personalities and social media strategy dimensions. Hereafter the three customer engagement dimensions will be analyzed separately as they form three distinct factors.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Experiment Overview

To test the hypotheses, an experiment was elaborated with two variables manipulated: “brand personality” and “strategy dimension”. In order to manipulate the “brand personality” variable, a description of a fictitious airline featuring descriptive adjectives peculiar to a particular brand personality was given to respondents, whereas for the “strategy dimension” variable two Instagram posts containing or lacking specific cues to foster interactivity and openness were created. By providing two pieces of information – a description of a brand and a post – the two variables can be controlled separately in order to avoid their interdependence on one another, were the two variables incorporated in a post alone.

The respondents were presented with one of four different scenarios of a fictitious “Fly Air” airline descriptions and Instagram posts: respondents chose one of the code names of the versions, from “ α ” to “ δ ” which led them to one of the scenarios. If there was a significant skew towards one option or another, the most popular options were temporarily disabled to achieve parity in the volumes of responses under given scenarios. The four versions represent different combinations of SMM strategies and personalities. The combinations are presented as follows:

Version	Brand Personality	Strategy Dimension
α	Exciting	Explorer
β	Exciting	Defender
γ	Competent	Explorer
δ	Competent	Defender

Table 1 Personality and Strategy Dimension Distribution for the Experiment

There were two sets of questionnaires elaborated: one in Russian for Russian-speaking audiences, and one in English, for non-Russian speaking respondents. The original survey was created in English and subsequently translated into Russian. In order to achieve the consistency in terminology employed in Russian-speaking academia on topics of consumer-brand relationships and brand personalities in particular, a paper by Antonova & Morozova (2015) on brand personality featuring Aaker’s (1997) framework, originally written in Russian, was used as a reference for translation.

The choice of Instagram as a platform for the experiment was motivated by a higher number of followers among major Russian airlines compared to other platforms, such as VK.com, Twitter and Facebook, meaning it is there those airlines are more likely to reach their consumers.

Furthermore, it is a social media website widely used both in Russia and abroad, unlike Facebook which lacks popularity in Russia or VK.com, which is largely a local phenomenon to which respondents from abroad cannot relate.

2.2 Creating Brand Personalities

With regards to personalities, the classification proposed by Aaker (1997) is used, according to which competent brands are described by consumers as “reliable”, “intelligent”, and “successful”, while exciting brands are referred to as “daring”, “spirited”, “imaginative”, and “up-to-date”. Respondents were provided with one of two descriptions of the “Fly Air” airline that incorporated the descriptive adjectives peculiar to each personality before proceeding to a post “generated” by the brand. In order to avoid excessive repetition, a longer list of adjectives used by Aaker (1997) before condensing it to 3-4 adjectives per personality was applied. The adjectives relevant to the airline’s personality were typed in *italic* to turn the respondents’ attention to them. The introductions were identical, with the only difference being the adjectives used to describe the “Air Fly” brand in order to achieve parity in the presentation and avoid potential external influences.

The following descriptions of the airline were presented to the respondents (the changing adjectives are highlighted in *italic*):

Exciting personality: Air Fly is an *up-to-date spirited* airline. It performs flights to over 50 destinations all over Europe and strives to deliver the best on-board experience to its passengers.

It is *imaginative* and *daring* in its approach to customer service, and has shown consistent growth in passenger turnover in recent years. It is unique in its *cool* and *contemporary* stance on passenger air travel.

Young and trendy, Air Fly has strong and *independent* personality: in addition to being both *cool* and *imaginative*, most of all, knows what its passengers want!

Russian translation: Air Fly – *современная и энергичная* авиакомпания. Она осуществляет перелеты по более чем 50 направлениям по всей Европе и стремится оказать своим пассажирам высочайший уровень обслуживания на борту.

Она подходит к оказанию услуг *смело и с богатым воображением*, а её пассажиропоток в последние годы неуклонно растёт. Она уникальна в своём *свежем и современном* взгляде на пассажирские авиаперевозки.

Будучи *молодой и трендовой*, Air Fly обладает сильной и *независимой* индивидуальностью: она не только *современная и творческая*, но, что важнее всего, знает, чего хотят её пассажиры!

Competent personality: Air Fly is a *reliable* and *successful* airline. It performs flights to over 50 destinations all over Europe and strives to deliver the best on-board experience to its passengers.

It is *intelligent* and *technical* in its approach to customer service, and has shown consistent growth in passenger turnover in recent years. It is a true *leader* in its *security*-focused stance on passenger air travel.

Confident and *successful*, Air Fly has an *intelligent corporate* personality: it's *hard-working* and, most of all, knows what its passengers want!

Russian translation: Air Fly – *надежная и успешная* авиакомпания. Она осуществляет перелеты по более чем 50 направлениям по всей Европе и стремится оказать своим пассажирам высочайший уровень обслуживания на борту.

Она *интеллигентно* и *технично* подходит к оказанию услуг, а её пассажиропоток в последние годы неуклонно растёт. Она настоящий *лидер* в своем взгляде на пассажирские авиаперевозки, ориентированные на *безопасность*.

Будучи *уверенной* и *успешной*, Air Fly обладает *интеллигентной* и *корпоративной* индивидуальностью: она *трудолюбива* и, что важнее всего, знает, чего хотят ее пассажиры!

2.2.1 Pre-Test: Selecting Brand Personality

Although brand personalities were manipulated independently from the strategy dimensions, there was a risk of them being perceived differently based on how Air Fly interacts with its customers. Moreover, since respondents did not know that it was through the brand description that the brand personality was manipulated, they might have tried to look for other cues in the post or comments section or even in the photograph used for the Instagram post to evaluate their personality. Considering that in two out of four scenarios the strategies employed did not align with the brand personalities, the risk of misinterpretation was even higher for those cases. Therefore, a pre-test was conducted in order to identify how the brand personalities would be perceived based on the description of the brand alone. Such confirmation allows for further exploration of the reasons for any discrepancies should they appear during the main experiment.

In the pre-test, two surveys were distributed, one for each brand personality. The respondents could only take one of the surveys so that they would not have a prior familiarity with the Air Fly brand and, subsequently, preconceived opinions of its personality based on the descriptions they could have seen before. The respondents were shown one of the descriptions of the brand introduced above, either for the exciting or competent personality. They were then asked to evaluate how they felt the descriptive adjectives fit Air Fly's personality on a 7-point Likert scale. The adjectives shown were "exciting", "competent", "rugged", "sincere", and

“sophisticated” shown in a random order. The survey (see Appendix 4) was conducted in Russian, similarly to the main survey in order to provide for the comparability of results.

A total of 40 responses were collected during the pre-test, 20 for each personality manipulated. The results were analyzed with the aim of identifying how the brand personalities were perceived based on the coding method selected. For each of the sets of data gathered through the pre-test, the following procedures were applied:

(1) The means for each personality descriptive adjectives were calculated and compared against each other in table 4.

Intended Personality	Mean for each descriptive adjective				
	Exciting	Competent	Rugged	Sophisticated	Sincere
Exciting	5,650	4,950	3,400	3,550	4,800
Competent	4,600	5,600	3,450	3,850	4,100

Table 4, Pre-Test Perceived Personality Mean Comparison

In both cases, the personalities that were coded received, on average, higher scores from the respondents than any other adjective presented.

(2) A paired t-test was run for the two highest-scoring adjectives to determine whether the brand was perceived according to the descriptive adjective with the highest mean more than any other personality.

In the case of exciting personality, it was determined during step 1 that the second to highest scoring personality was competent. A paired t-test (table 5) was run to identify whether there was a significant difference at a 95% significance level between the two means – and indeed, the brand’s personality was perceived as exciting more so than any other.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Exciting - competent	0,7000	1,4179	0,3171	0,0364	1,3636	2,208	19	0,040

Table 5, Paired T-Test Results, Survey for “Exciting” Personality

Similarly, for the survey where the brand personality was manipulated as competent, the second to highest scoring personality was exciting. However, after conducting the paired t-test

(table 6) it was revealed that there was a significant difference between the two means at a 99% significance level, meaning that Air Fly’s personality was perceived more as competent than any other description.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Exciting - competent	-1,0000	1,2566	0,2810	-1,5881	-0,4119	-3,559	19	0,002

Table 6 Paired T-Test Results, Survey for “Competent” Personality

(3) A one-sample t-test was run against the scale midpoint (for the 7-point Likert scale, the value was 4) to demonstrate that the brand was indeed perceived as having a highest scoring personality (tables 7 and 8).

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval for the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Exciting	4,931	19	0,000	1,6500	0,950	2,350

Table 7 One-sample T-Test Results, Survey for “Exciting” Personality

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval for the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Competent	8,718	19	0,000	1,600	1,216	1,984

Table 8 One-sample T-Test Results, Survey for “Competent” Personality

For both exciting and competent personalities, the null hypotheses were rejected, and the one-sample t-tests demonstrated that there was a significant difference between the means of the highest scoring personalities and the mid-point of the scale employed.

With the pre-test demonstrating that, if manipulated independently, personalities are perceived through the brand description as exciting and competent, and it is thus possible to proceed with the data collection for the main part of the research.

2.3 Elaborating Social Media Marketing Strategies

After Air Fly is introduced, the respondents are presented with a screenshot of a post found in the “airline’s” Instagram account, designed to convey either the “explorer” or the “defender” social media marketing strategy dimension.

The “explorer” strategy dimension implies two-sided communication between a brand and a consumer. In reality, however, a brand is only perceived by a consumer as an interlocutor with certain personality traits due to the message cues used to maintain the illusion of a two-way interaction. Labrecque (2014) applies the concept of parasocial interaction (PSI) to consumer-brand relationships in social media environments. She defines PSI as an “*illusionary experience, such that consumers interact with personas as if they are present and engaged in a reciprocal relationship*”. They foster PSI through **openness** and **interactivity** which they are able to convey through specific cues and signals in their interactions with consumers. In order to create the desired two-sided communication experience required for the “explorer” dimension while maintaining the “defender’s” one-sided communication approach, the steps used by Labrecque (2014) to foster PSI are followed.

Openness was manipulated through the content of the post. Both the “defender” and the “explorer” strategies employed the same visuals and text in the post, with the difference being the lack of interactivity and openness clues for the former. It is done with the aim of assuring equality in terms of visual presentation between the two strategies, similarly to only changing key descriptive adjectives when introducing the “Fly Air” brand. Posts for both “explorer” (figure 1) and “defender” (figure 2) strategies presented an announcement of the summer schedule and new summer destinations to European resorts. While in both strategies Fly Air expressed excitement about summer vacations, in the “explorer” strategy the narrator described their childhood memories of going to the beach during school break with their family. This personal connection was absent in the “defender” strategy.

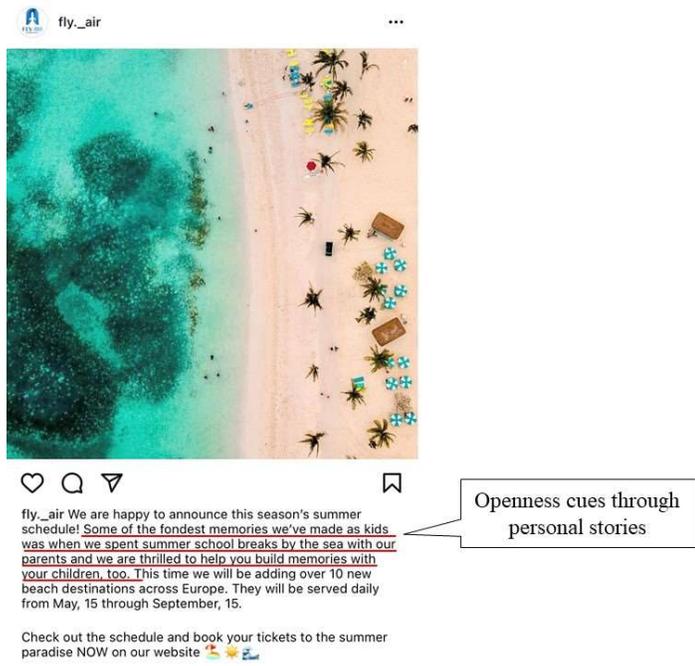


Figure 3 Explorer Strategy Post

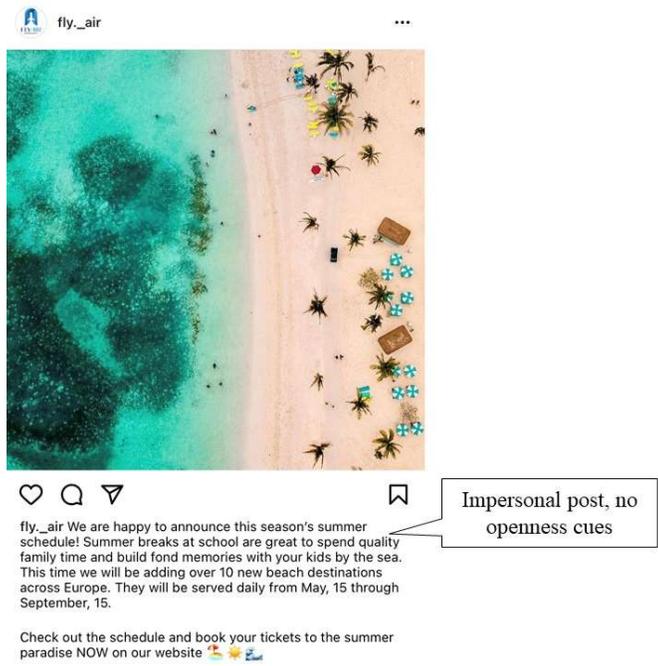


Figure 4 Defender Strategy Post

Interactivity was manipulated through the comments to the post. In both scenarios in the post shown to the respondents “passengers” would leave the same questions in the comments section that would be typical for an airline brand community, such as those about cancelled flights or availability of particular destinations. In the “explorer” strategy dimension (figure 3), replies to passengers’ questions were personalized, i.e., the passengers were directly addressed by their

names and came directly after the passenger’s questions, indicating the timely response (Song and Zinkhan, 2008).

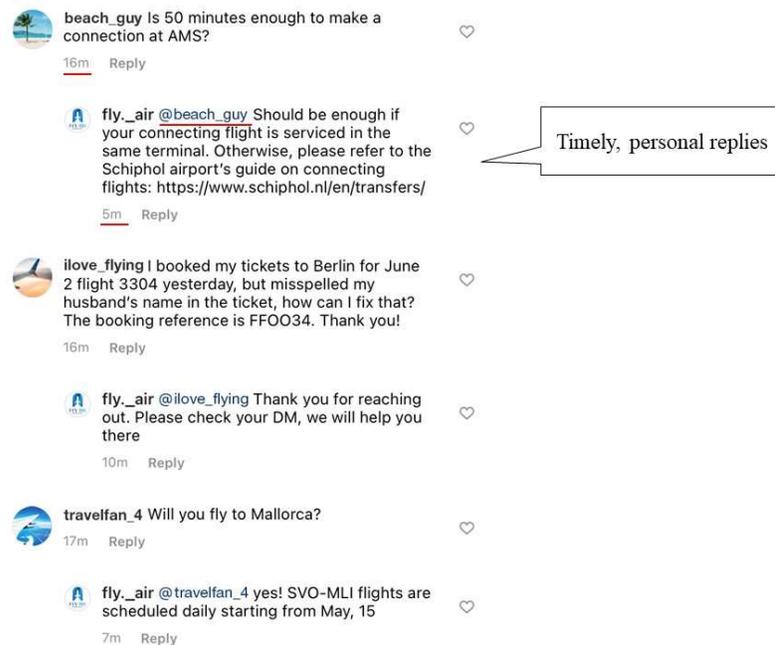


Figure 5 Explorer Strategy Comment Section

In the “defender” strategy dimension (figure 4), however, passengers were not directly addressed in comments; instead, the brand would only give a generic comment and refer to their clients as “passengers”. The airline’s reply would also appear higher on the page to indicate a longer time between responses.

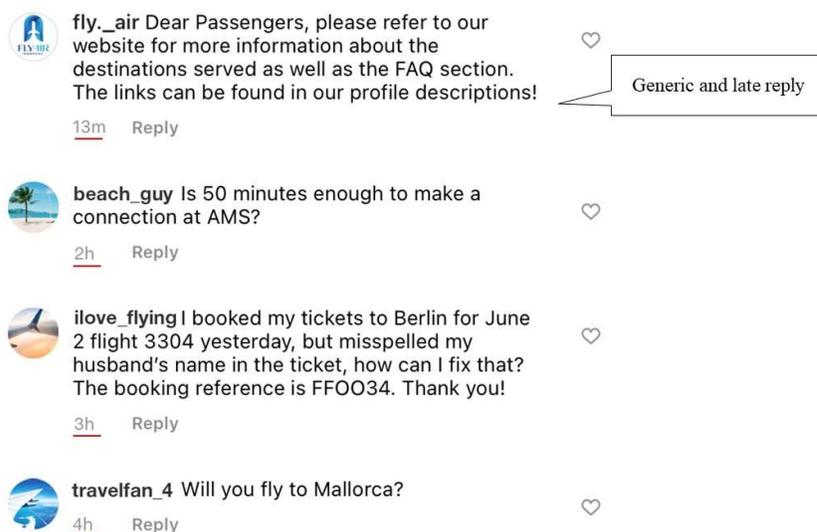


Figure 6 Defender Strategy Comment Section

Similarly to the brand’s introductions, the posts and their comment sections were prepared in both Russian and English (both versions are available in Appendix 2).

2.4 Customer Engagement Measurement Tools

In order to measure customer engagement in different scenarios, a scale developed by So et al. (2012) for online tourism brand community engagement and later transformed and validated for social media websites by Harrigan et al. (2017) was employed. The 7-point Likert scale is intended to measure the following constructs behind customer engagement: identification, absorption, and interaction.

The factor and item descriptions are as follows:

Factor	Item description in English	Item description in Russian
Identification	When someone criticizes Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal insult.	Когда кто-то критикует аккаунт данной авиакомпании, я воспринимаю это как личное оскорбление.
	When I talk about Air Fly's account, I usually say "we" rather than "they".	Когда я говорю об аккаунте данной авиакомпании, я обычно говорю "мы", а не "они".
	When someone praises Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal compliment.	Когда кто-то хвалит аккаунт данной авиакомпании, я воспринимаю это как комплимент, адресованный лично мне.
Absorption	I am passionate about Air Fly's account.	Я с энтузиазмом отношусь к аккаунту данной авиакомпании.
	I feel excited about Air Fly's account.	Меня воодушевляет аккаунт данной авиакомпании.
	Anything related to Air Fly's account grabs my attention.	Все, что связано с аккаунтом данной авиакомпании, привлекает мое внимание.
	When I am interacting with Air Fly's account, I forget everything else around me.	Когда я взаимодействую с аккаунтом данной авиакомпании, я забываю обо всем вокруг.
	In my interaction with Air Fly's account, I am immersed.	Во время взаимодействия с аккаунтом данной авиакомпании, я чувствую себя поглощенным.

Interaction	In general, I like to get involved in the airline community discussions.	В целом, мне нравится быть вовлеченным в дискуссии в сообществах авиакомпаний в социальных сетях.
	I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the airline community.	Мне нравится взаимодействовать с единомышленниками в сообществах авиакомпаний в социальных сетях.
	I often participate in activities of the airline community.	Я часто принимаю участие в деятельности сообществ авиакомпаний в социальных сетях.

Table 2 Factor and Item Description for Customer Engagement Measurement Scale

In the original scale the phrase “this tourism site” is employed instead of “Air Fly’s account”. The wording was altered to better reflect the object to which the scale items refer. The full survey distributed among the respondents is available in Appendix 3.

2.5 Manipulation Check

In order to verify that the respondents perceive both the brand personalities and social media marketing strategy dimensions as intended, manipulation check questions were asked after the primary customer engagement survey. In the section related to the brand personality perception, respondents were asked to evaluate whether the brand is sincere, exciting, competent, sophisticated, or rugged, with the options presented in random order to avoid nudging the respondents to one answer or the other. As for evaluating openness and interactivity, the variables manipulated for the “explorer” and “defender” strategy dimensions, scales employed by Labreque (2014) and adapted from McMillan and Hwang (2002), Song and Zinkhan (2008), and Thorson and Rodgers (2006) were used for measuring perceived interactivity, while items from scales by John (1984) and Anderson and Weitz (1992) were used for measuring openness.

Factor	Item description in English	Item description in Russian
Perceived Interactivity	Air Fly will talk back to me if I post a message.	Air Fly ответит мне, если я отправлю сообщение.
	Air Fly would respond to me quickly and efficiently.	Air Fly ответит мне быстро и эффективно.

	Air Fly allows me to communicate directly with it.	Air Fly позволяет мне общаться с ней напрямую.
	Air Fly listens to what I have to say.	Air Fly прислушивается к тому, что я хочу сказать.
Openness	Air Fly is open in sharing information.	Air Fly открыто делится информацией.
	Air Fly keeps me well informed.	Air Fly хорошо меня информирует.
	Air Fly doesn't hold back information.	Air Fly не удерживает информацию.

Table 3 Factor and Item Description for Measuring PSI

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to evaluate the post they saw using two 7-point Likert attitude-towards-the-ad scales. The spectrum “unfavorable” – “favorable” suggested by Park and Young (1983) was used to measure the affective component of the post, while the spectrum “uninformative” – “informative” by Burton and Lichenstein (1988) intended to measure the cognitive component of the post.

At the end of the questionnaire, demographic questions were asked to determine the heterogeneity – or lack thereof – of the sample. Apart from standard questions, such as age or occupation, questions regarding the experience in using social media or traveling by air were asked.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1 Data Collection and Sample

The data was collected through the platform of Google Forms, with the survey distributed through social media and messengers. Although two identical versions of the survey – in English and in Russian – were elaborated and distributed, the overwhelming majority of the answers came from the Russian-speaking audience. Therefore, the two samples were not collapsed, and only the responses received through the Russian survey were analyzed and interpreted. IBM SPSS Statistics was used as a software tool for the analysis of the statistical data gathered.

Overall, 180 answers were received through the Russian survey, 45 for each version of the survey. 89% of the respondents live either in Moscow (74 respondents) or in Saint Petersburg (87 respondents), with 71% (127 respondents) of the respondents coming from women. 68% of the respondents were born between 1995 and 1999, with the age of all respondents ranging between 19 and 50. All of the respondents have obtained education at a level at least equivalent to a high school diploma, with 71% (128 respondents) of them being either in the process or having obtained a master's degree. As for the occupation, 55 respondents (31%) are in the process of obtaining higher education, and 114 (63%) work either full time (60 respondents) or in combination with studies (54 respondents).

The respondents are quite familiar with social media, with over 85% indicating that they use social media websites either “often” or “very often”. However, few of them follow any airlines on social media, with 72,2% saying that they either “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with such a statement. Of those 15,6% of the respondents that indicated this statement true about them, 10,2 p.p. only ranked it on a scale as “slightly agree”, meaning that while they might be following some airline brands on social media, they are unlikely to be actively engaged in them. This indicates that the respondents are not familiar with the behavior of a typical airline brand on social media.

With regards to travel experience, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 14% (25) of the respondents would travel once a year or less, 51% (91) would travel 1-3 times a year, 28% (54) – every 2-3 months, and 7% (13 respondents) would travel once a month or more frequently. Furthermore, the respondents tend to compare different flight options to their target destinations rigorously (with the mean value of responses being 5,983 out of 7).

3.2 Manipulation check: Strategy Dimensions

While in the pre-test the manipulation check of brand personalities was conducted, the way that strategy dimensions were perceived by the respondents was evaluated in the main phase of the research. The scales employed measured PSI and were discussed extensively in section 2.5.

To begin with, factor analysis (table 9) was conducted, resulting in the 7 items forming a single factor designated as parasocial interaction (PSI).

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5,387	76,954	76,954	5,387	76,954	76,954
2	,836	11,949	88,903			
3	,225	3,212	92,115			
4	,209	2,983	95,098			
5	,145	2,073	97,171			
6	,116	1,660	98,831			
7	,082	1,169	100,000			

Table 9 Factor Analysis for Items 17-23, Total Variance Explained

Since the 7 items of the scale load onto one factor which, on its own, explains 76,95% of the variance, a new variable ‘PSI’ is created, with the value of an average score received for items 17-23. It is then possible to run the analysis described hereby to ensure that the strategy dimensions were perceived as intended using the ‘PSI’ variable as the base for the analysis.

(1) PSI is divided into two variables: ‘PSI_explorer’, whose values were constituted of the PSI scores received in versions α and γ , and ‘PSI_defender’, whose values were comprised of the PSI scores received in versions β and δ . The mean values of the derived variables are **5,3174** and **3,6587** respectively.

(2) A paired t-test (table 10) was conducted to demonstrate that there is a significant difference between the two and that the strategies were perceived differently.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
PSI_explorer – PSI_defender	1,6587	1,6789	0,177	1,3071	2,0104	9,372	89	0,000

Table 10 Paired t-test between PSI_explorer and PSI_defender

Indeed, there is a significant difference between the two means, indicating that in two different scenarios the strategies were perceived differently. However, this test alone is not

indicative of whether the respondents perceived the strategy dimensions as intended since it does not take into consideration the position on the Likert scale that the means analyzed took.

(3) Therefore, in order to verify that in versions α and γ , unlike β and δ , PSI was observed, two one-sided t-tests were conducted against mid-point of the scale (i.e., 4). First, a test for PSI_explorer was conducted (table 11).

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval for the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
PSI_explorer	11,585	89	0,000	1,3174	1,0915	1,5434

Table 11 One-sample T-Test Results, “Explorer” Strategy Dimension

Based on the one-sample t-test, there is a significant difference at a 99,9% level between the mean value of PSI_explorer and the middle point of the scale. Therefore, the manipulation was perceived as intended, and PSI was observed.

For PSI_defender, however, the results were different (table 12). It can be concluded that – based on the significant difference between the mean of the variable in question and the mid-point of the scale at a 95% significance level, there is a *lack* of parasocial interaction between the Air Fly brand and the respondents, as intended.

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval for the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
PSI_defender	-2,364	89	0,020	-0,3413	-0,6281	-0,0545

Table 12 One-sample T-Test Results, “Explorer” Strategy Dimension

Overall, it can be concluded that the manipulation of both strategy dimensions was successful based on the correct interpretation of the two by the respondents.

3.3 Estimating Customer Engagement Dimensions Values

When the manipulation of the strategies and personalities is checked, it is then possible to proceed with the main phase of the analysis.

The scales employed for measuring customer engagement are intended to measure three dimensions of it: *Identification* (Q1 – Q3), i.e., whether the brand matches the self-image of the

customers (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006); *Absorption* (Q4 – Q8), i.e., a customer’s level of concentration and engrossment in a brand (Schaufeli et al., 2002); and *Interaction* (Q9 – Q11), i.e., sharing and exchanging ideas, thoughts, and feelings towards a brand (Vivek, 2009). It is expected, however, that for an imaginary brand that the respondents have not had a chance to interact with on their own while only observing how a brand interacts with imaginary clients, the scores for interaction will be low for any version of the survey, since none of the respondents were given the opportunity to interact with the brand themselves.

Indeed, the means for the items composing Interaction are low, and so are the means for Identification. All the means for the items comprising the three CE dimensions derived from the surveys are provided in Table 13.

Factor	Item description	Mean Value
Identification	Q1. When someone criticizes Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal insult.	1,656
	Q2. When I talk about Air Fly's account, I usually say "we" rather than "they".	1,611
	Q3. When someone praises Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal compliment.	1,783
Absorption	Q4. I am passionate about Air Fly's account.	3,506
	Q5. I feel excited about Air Fly's account.	3,711
	Q6. Anything related to Air Fly's account grabs my attention.	3,028
	Q7. When I am interacting with Air Fly's account, I forget everything else around me.	1,783
	Q8. In my interaction with Air Fly's account, I am immersed.	2,394
Interaction	Q9. In general, I like to get involved in the airline community discussions.	2,128
	Q10. I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the airline community.	2,011

Q11. I often participate in activities of the airline community.

1,594

Table 13 Customer Engagement Dimensions Means

At this point, however, it is impossible to make any conclusions, since it is not clear whether the items indeed comprise the factors they were intended to form, and if the low means signify the overall low level of scores given on for each question or if they are affected by particularly low scores given in the versions where the lack of interaction does not produce synergy effects.

The next step of the analysis therefore is to verify if the items fall into the same factors as Harrigan et al. (2017) intended. To do this, a factor analysis was run and, indeed, three factors were extracted using principal component analysis (Table 14).

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	5,591	50,824	50,824	5,591	50,824	50,824	3,683
2	1,268	11,523	62,347	1,268	11,523	62,347	4,234
3	1,177	10,704	73,052	1,177	10,704	73,052	3,787
4	0,718	6,524	79,576				
5	0,534	4,850	84,426				
6	0,464	4,223	88,648				
7	0,359	3,262	91,910				
8	0,284	2,577	94,488				
9	0,266	2,419	96,906				
10	0,210	1,913	98,819				
11	0,130	1,181	100,000				

Table 14 Factor Analysis for Items 1-11, Total Variance Explained, Attempt 1

As intended, three factors were extracted based on the eigenvalue exceeding 1. The items were rotated using the Oblimin with Keizer normalization method (Table 15). The items that form the same factor are color-coordinated.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Q1. When someone criticizes Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal insult.	,880	,062	,033
Q2. When I talk about Air Fly's account, I usually say "we" rather than "they".	,684	-,157	-,041
Q3. When someone praises Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal compliment.	,826	-,112	-,010
Q4. I am passionate about Air Fly's account.	,074	-,884	,012
Q5. I feel excited about Air Fly's account.	-,039	-,967	,054
Q6. Anything related to Air Fly's account grabs my attention.	,151	-,766	-,045
Q7. When I am interacting with Air Fly's account, I forget everything else around me.	,386	-,250	-,327
Q8. In my interaction with Air Fly's account, I am immersed.	,060	-,545	-,352
Q9. In general, I like to get involved in the airline community discussions.	-,219	-,142	-,896
Q10. I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the airline community.	,071	-,114	-,786
Q11. I often participate in activities of the airline community.	,271	,211	-,786

Table 15 Factor Analysis for Items 1-11, Pattern Matrix, Attempt 1

As a result of the rotation, it was confirmed that all the items formed the same factors as intended by the scale except for item Q7, whose loadings were split between factors 1 and 3 relatively evenly, with none of the loadings exceeding 0,4. Therefore, it was decided to exclude this item from the analysis and run the factor analysis again (table 16) to confirm that this exclusion would not provoke the remaining items to either form a different number of factors or form them in a different manner.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	5,080	50,802	50,802	5,080	50,802	50,802	3,959
2	1,258	12,578	63,380	1,258	12,578	63,380	3,252
3	1,177	11,772	75,151	1,177	11,772	75,151	3,409
4	0,594	5,937	81,089				
5	0,490	4,895	85,984				
6	0,423	4,235	90,219				
7	0,312	3,115	93,334				
8	0,273	2,725	96,059				
9	0,256	2,558	98,617				
10	0,138	1,383	100,000				

Table 16 Factor Analysis for Items 1-6, 8-11, Total Variance Explained, Attempt 2

After the item was removed, the items analyzed would explain 75,151% of the variance as opposed to 73,052% obtained through the first attempt. Based on the pattern matrix (table 17) produced after rotation using the same method as for attempt 1 (Oblimin with Keizer normalization method), the items formed the same factors as intended. The items composing the same factor are color-coordinated.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Q1. When someone criticizes Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal insult.	-,055	,880	,014
Q2. When I talk about Air Fly's account, I usually say "we" rather than "they".	,172	,675	-,049
Q3. When someone praises Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal compliment.	,123	,826	-,027
Q4. I am passionate about Air Fly's account.	,881	,091	,007
Q5. I feel excited about Air Fly's account.	,965	-,031	,057
Q6. Anything related to Air Fly's account grabs my attention.	,772	,148	-,041

Q8. In my interaction with Air Fly's account, I am immersed.	,568	,027	-,329
Q9. In general, I like to get involved in the airline community discussions.	,149	-,198	-,895
Q10. I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the airline community.	,126	,080	-,786
Q11. I often participate in activities of the airline community.	-,191	,265	-,784

Table 17 Factor Analysis for Items 1-6, 8-11, Pattern Matrix, Attempt 2

Based on the factor analysis above, 3 factors were extracted and named, as the customer engagement scale suggested (Harrigan et al., 2017), as Identification (items 1-3), Absorption (items 4-6, 8), and Interaction (items 9-11). Their value was calculated as an average of the values of the items that form those factors. The mean values of the newly formed factors are presented in table 18.

	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation	Variance
Identification	5,00	1,00	6,00	1,6833	,06880	,92303	,852
Absorption	5,25	1,00	6,25	3,1597	,10031	1,34584	1,811
Interaction	5,00	1,00	6,00	1,9111	,08819	1,18316	1,400

Table 18 Descriptive statistics for Customer Engagement Dimensions

3.4 Analysis of the Effect of the Interaction between Strategy Dimensions and Personalities on Customer Engagement Dimensions

To set up the hypotheses testing, the two brand personalities and strategy dimensions were recoded into binary variables, designated as “Coded Personality” and “Coded Strategy” respectively, to run the subsequent analyses. The exciting personality was coded as “1” and so was the explorer dimension. Competent and Defender personalities were coded as “0”, resulting in 4 “0” and “1” combinations, unique for each of the versions of the survey presented to the respondents. The versions were coded as follows:

Version	Brand Personality	Code	Strategy Dimension	Code
α	Exciting	1	Explorer	1
β	Exciting	1	Defender	0

γ	Competent	0	Explorer	1
δ	Competent	0	Defender	0

Table 19 Coding Personalities and Strategy Dimensions into Dummy Variables

These dummy variables were used as independent variables for two-way ANOVA analyses with the three customer engagement dimensions as dependent variables.

To prepare the data for the analysis, all significant outliers were removed: 10 items were deleted for Identification after one iteration with no further outliers observed, and 22 items in total were deleted for Interaction after 4 iterations. There were no significant outliers within the Absorption variable.

Since the main question is whether there are synergy effects between the strategy employed and the personality of a brand, the interaction between the two is examined.

In table 20, the mean values of the three dependent variables are presented for each of the versions of the survey. As per table 19, the version “0; 0”, for example, should be decoded as version δ , combining competent personality with the defender strategy.

Variable	Coded Personality	Coded Strategy	Mean	Std. Error
Identification	0	0	1,402	0,099
	0	1	1,605	0,100
	1	0	1,561	0,102
	1	1	1,548	0,101
Absorption	0	0	2,644	0,194
	0	1	3,283	0,194
	1	0	3,022	0,194
	1	1	3,689	0,194
Interaction	0	0	1,417	0,126
	0	1	1,605	0,130
	1	0	1,813	0,125
	1	1	1,610	0,125

Table 20 Estimated Marginal Means for Identification, Absorption, and Interaction; coded personality*coded strategy

As expected, the mean values for Interaction are low across all versions (mean values for all four versions are below 2 out of 7), since none of the participants had a chance to personally interact with the Air Fly brand, and were only shown the manner in which the brand interacted with other (also fictitious) customers. The questions on the scale, however, assume that it is the respondent that interacts with the brand. Equally low are the mean value for Identification.

Such low results may be explained by the differences in the circumstances in which the scale employed was used for the present research and in which it was validated. When Harrigan et al. (2017) developed a three-item scale for measuring customer engagement with tourism social media brands, the respondents were asked to answer the questions with regards to their favorite travel brand. Similarly, when the original scales developed by So et al. (2014) were validated, the respondents were asked to reply with regards to a travel brand (either airline or a hotel) based on the last brand whose services they had purchased the most recently. Therefore, in both cases the respondents had already had a chance to personally interact with a brand at least once during the purchase phase. As for Identification, the fact that the respondents in the research by Harrigan et al. (2017) used their favorite brands as a reference, made them more likely to identify themselves with a brand, i.e., the degree of a consumer's perceived oneness with or belongingness to the brand (So et al., 2014), as opposed to a brand they have never heard of before and might have even suspected to be fictitious, as is the case with Air Fly that was first introduced to the respondents at the moment of their completing the questionnaire.

However, the present research required that the respondents would not have any biases or pre-formed opinions about a brand in order to minimize external influences on the manipulations of personality and strategy dimensions. While recognizing the limitations of the use of the scale by Harrigan et al. (2017), it was decided that it was nevertheless a solid choice since it (a) measured three distinct factors, and (b) was designed and validated specifically for both social media communities and tourism brands. Other scales for customer engagement developed by So et al. (2014), Hollebeek et al. (2014), Brodie et al. (2011, 2013) or Calder et al. (2009) were not conceptually better suited for evaluating customer engagement with an imaginary brand, and did not provide the benefits offered by the scale developed by Harrigan et al. (2017) with regards to the suitability of use within the tourism sector.

While the mean values of the variables in question for each version seem to be different, it is not yet clear how statistically different they are. Therefore, a one-way ANOVA is run for Identification, Absorption, and Identification separately to assess if there is indeed a difference between how respondents assess these customer engagement dimensions based on the different combinations of brand personalities and social media marketing strategy dimensions.

The first one-way ANOVA was run exclusively for responses given by the participants evaluating customer engagement dimensions for the brand with an exciting personality. In this case, strategy dimensions (“explorer” and “defender”) are treated as independent variables for each of the customer engagement dimensions. The results of the one-way ANOVA analysis are summarized in table 21.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Identification	Between Groups	0,04	1	0,004	0,008	0,930
	Within Groups	38,280	81	0,473		
	Total	38,284	82			
Absorption	Between Groups	10,000	1	10,000	5,109	0,026
	Within Groups	172,247	88	1,957		
	Total	182,247	89			
Interaction	Between Groups	0,847	1	0,847	1,041	0,311
	Within Groups	65,100	80	0,814		
	Total	65,947	81			

Table 21 ANOVA for 3 CE Dimensions, Exciting Personality

Based on the p-value of 0,026, there is a significant difference at a 95% significance level in how the respondents perceive Absorption in the “explorer” and “defender strategy”, suggesting that Hypothesis H1b is supported. On the other hand, as expected, there is no significant difference between the levels of either Identification or Interaction between different strategy dimensions for the exciting brand personality. Therefore, among the hypotheses H1a-H1c, only **H1b** is supported (table 22).

Hypotheses	Result
[H1a] If a brand with exciting personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Identification effects than if it were to employ a " defender " strategy dimension.	Not supported

[H1b] If a brand with exciting personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Absorption effects than if it were to employ a " defender " strategy dimension.	Supported ¹
[H1c] If a brand with exciting personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Interaction effects than if it were to employ a " defender " strategy dimension.	Not supported

Table 22 Hypotheses H1a-H1c Testing Results

Following a similar procedure, hypotheses H2a-H2c and H3a-H3c that explore the potential synergy effects of strategy dimensions on competent brands are tested. In this case, only the responses given by the participants evaluating customer engagement dimensions for the brand with a competent personality were evaluated, with strategy dimensions, again, acting as independent variables. The results of the one-way ANOVA are summarized in table 23.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Identification	Between Groups	1,302	1	1,302	3,532	0,064
	Within Groups	30,589	83	0,369		
	Total	31,890	84			
Absorption	Between Groups	11,750	1	11,750	8,590	0,004
	Within Groups	117,645	86	1,368		
	Total	129,395	87			
Interaction	Between Groups	1,088	1	1,088	2,648	0,108
	Within Groups	30,811	75	0,411		
	Total	31,899	76			

Table 23 ANOVA for 3 CE Dimensions, Competent Personality

Based on the p-value of 0,004, there is a significant difference at a 99% significance level between how the respondents perceive Absorption in the "explorer" and "defender" strategy, suggesting that Hypothesis **H3b** is **supported**, since the mean variable for Absorption is higher

¹ At a 95% significance level

for the explorer strategy dimension. Since Hypothesis **H2b** is the exact opposite of H3b, it is thus **rejected**.

With the confidence interval at 95%, hypothesis **H3a** is also rejected. However, it is **supported** at the significance level of **90%**. Here, similarly to Absorption, stronger **Identification** effects are observed for the explorer strategy dimension. Since Hypothesis **H2a** is the exact opposite of H3b, it is **rejected**.

At the same time, there is no significant difference between the Interaction effects observed in the versions where either social media marketing strategy dimension is employed. Therefore, both hypotheses, **H2c** and **H3c**, are rejected.

The results of hypotheses testing for the competent personality are summarized in table 24.

Hypotheses	Result
[H2a] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " defender " dimension, it will produce stronger Identification effects than if it were to employ a " exciting " strategy dimension.	Not supported
[H2b] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " defender " dimension, it will produce stronger Absorption effects than if it were to employ a " exciting " strategy dimension.	Not supported
[H2c] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " defender " dimension, it will produce stronger Interaction effects than if it were to employ a " exciting " strategy dimension.	Not supported
[H3a] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Identification effects than if it were to employ a " defender " strategy dimension.	Supported ²
[H3b] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Absorption effects than if it were to employ a " defender " strategy dimension.	Supported ³
[H3c] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Interaction effects than if it were to employ a " defender " strategy dimension.	Not supported

Table 24 Hypotheses H2a-H2c, H3a-H3c Testing Results

² At a 90% significance level

³ At a 99% significance level

Taking into account that none of the hypotheses H2a-H2c were supported, we can reject the initial hypothesis 2 altogether; i.e., there is no empirical support to a synergetic effect of the competent personality and the “defender” strategy dimensions that would produce stronger customer engagement effects. As for the two remaining hypotheses, although it is not possible to neither confirm nor reject any of them in their original phrasing, there is statistically significant empirical evidence that the “explorer” strategy dimension produces stronger Absorption effects for both the exciting and competent personalities. At a 90% significance level, there are stronger Identification effects when both the “explorer” strategy dimension and the competent personality are present.

The final results of the hypotheses testing can be summarized as follows:

Hypotheses	Result
[H1a] If a brand with exciting personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Identification effects than if it were to employ a “ defender ” strategy dimension.	Not supported
[H1b] If a brand with exciting personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Absorption effects than if it were to employ a “ defender ” strategy dimension.	Supported ⁴
[H1c] If a brand with exciting personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Interaction effects than if it were to employ a “ defender ” strategy dimension.	Not supported
Hypothesis 2 If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " defender " dimension, it will produce stronger CE effects than if it were to employ a “ exciting ” strategy dimension.	Not supported
[H3a] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the " explorer " dimension, it will produce stronger Identification effects than if it were to employ a “ defender ” strategy dimension.	Supported ⁵

⁴ At a 95% significance level

⁵ At a 90% significance level

<p>[H3b] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the "explorer" dimension, it will produce stronger Absorption effects than if it were to employ a "defender" strategy dimension.</p>	Supported ⁶
<p>[H3c] If a brand with competent personality employs a social media strategy in the "explorer" dimension, it will produce stronger Interaction effects than if it were to employ a "defender" strategy dimension.</p>	Not supported

Table 25 Hypothesis testing results

To sum up, there is an empirical support at a 95% significance level to the hypotheses suggesting that the “explorer” strategy dimension, in the airline brand context, enables for stronger Absorption effects, i.e., the cognitive dimension of customer engagement. Taking into account that there is no significant difference between the strength of Identification and Interaction effects observed in the exciting and competent brand personalities, it can be concluded that for both personalities the use of the “explorer” social media marketing strategy dimension will produce overall stronger customer engagement effects than in the case of the “defender” dimension.

⁶ At a 99% significance level

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Discussion of the Results

The *aim* of the given research was to identify feasible actions airline brands can take in building their social media marketing strategy to encourage positive customer engagement behaviors with the view of building loyalty among their passengers. It was achieved through analyzing the current market literature on consumer-brand relationships and social media marketing as well as conducting an experiment to test the hypotheses elaborated as a result of the existing academic literature review.

Throughout the study, the following research questions were answered:

- (a) How can an airline engage with their customers?
- (b) What social media marketing strategies depending on the airline's brand personality are most effective?
- (c) What social media strategies are effective in fostering customer engagement among airline passengers and building strong emotional bonds beyond transaction?

In particular, the aim was achieved through fulfilling the *research objectives*, and as the objectives were reached, the research questions mentioned above were answered.

First of all, through literature review it was determined that (a) airline brands can engage with their passengers either through transaction and during service provisioning (at the airport and on board) or beyond purchase, for example, by using social media platforms to encourage passengers to engage with the brand, which is particularly useful in times when the industry is experiencing the worst crisis of crashing demand in its history.

A theoretical framework designed to elaborate social media strategy by Felix et al. (2016) was tested through an experiment, evaluating which combinations of brand personality and social media strategy dimensions would produce stronger customer engagement effects. Empirical support was found for the hypotheses suggesting that (b) airlines, regardless of their brand personality, should use the "explorer" strategy dimension, i.e., they should treat social media as a versatile tool for communication and collaboration with multiple stakeholders, rather than a one-way communication tool, simply mirroring the news section on the airline's website.

Finally, (c) a list of "good practices" for fostering customer engagement among airline passengers on social media is elaborated in the "Managerial Implications" section, illustrated with examples of "dos" and "don'ts" to further facilitate the implementation of the strategies tested and shown effective in fostering customer engagement through the experiment.

4.2 Theoretical Implications

The present research was conducted with the aim of filling in the research gap in the marketing literature on the strategies used to foster customer engagement among airline

passengers. Having applied the social media marketing strategy framework developed by Felix et al. (2016) to the airline industry, the given research adds to the marketing literature by providing empirical evidence in support of using particular strategies to foster customer engagement in the context of the airline industry, thus filling in the identified gap. It was revealed through an experiment that the use of social media as a multi-faceted tool for cooperation and interaction with multiple stakeholders produces stronger customer engagement effects regardless of the airline brand's personality than if social media were used as a one-way communication tool, i.e., if the "defender" strategy dimension was used.

Furthermore, since the theoretical framework employed for the study has not yet been tested in the context of a particular industry, the present research contributes to its development by applying it to the passenger air travel industry.

Additionally, the given study further elaborates the theoretical framework by Felix et al. (2016) by investigating how internal influencers, such as a brand personality, impact the choice of a social media marketing strategy, particularly in the scope dimension of the framework. No connection was found between the brand personality and the choice of the scope of the social media marketing strategy, at least in the aviation industry. One of the explanations for such a phenomenon can be that the airline industry in general prioritizes security over everything else and treats the safety of travel as integral and paramount aspect of their business (IATA, n.a.; ICAO, n.a.). As such, when passengers encounter an airline with a competent personality, i.e., the one described as "reliable", "secure", and "technical" (Aaker, 1997) among other descriptions, they may attribute these adjectives not only to the brand's personality, but also to the mere affiliation of the brand with such a security-focused industry, assuming that any airline should be, above all, secure and reliable no matter what its brand personality is. Therefore, in this sense, airlines with a competent personality might experience more freedom in how they choose to interact with its passengers than competent brands from other industries where the focus on security represents a differentiation factor rather than the undisputed industry norm.

4.3 Managerial Implications

At its core, the thesis is practically-oriented, since it seeks to provide airlines with the tool suitable for communicating with their passengers beyond transaction, especially now that the demand has been superficially cut to record-breaking levels. The managerial implications are split into two parts: first, general conclusions from the empirical section of the thesis are discussed; then, a list of good practices identified through literature review and the experiment design are compiled to ensure that airlines make best use of their social media accounts.

To begin with, it was identified that the nature of the current consumer-brand relationships in the airline industry is generally quite transactional, suggesting that passengers are likely to

switch between airline brands often depending on each individual offer, including, for example, price, airport and time of departure and arrival, length of layover and even lack thereof (Milioti et al., 2015). Customers that are loyal to an airline, however, are more likely to fly frequently with the airline of choice regardless of the competitors' offers (So et al., 2013), not to mention their engagement in positive word-of-mouth and acting as self-proclaimed brand ambassadors (See-To and Ho, 2014), prompting for other passengers to use the airline's service with a positive bias towards the brand upon their first transactional encounter. Considering the current state of the airline market with the unprecedented decline in demand provoked by the global pandemic, loyal customers willing to support the brand will serve as a basis for a more rapid recovery compared to competitor airline brands as the demand picks up. While loyal customers do engage with brands (e.g., they participate in discussions around the brand, share reviews and recommendations, and reach out to the brand), customer engagement also acts as an antecedent of loyalty (Harrigan et al., 2017, 2018). Therefore, if an airline brand manages to foster customer engagement, its loyal customer base is likely to expand, resulting in a larger share-of-pocket.

With social media being one of the few tools available to airline brands to engage with customers, the choice of strategy for social media marketing will determine whether customer engagement improves or not. Felix et al. (2016) elaborated a comprehensive framework for establishing a social media marketing strategy depending on such internal influencers of a brand as its stakeholders, mission, personality, and goals. In the given research, it was determined that an "explorer" strategy dimension of the afore-mentioned framework, i.e., treating social media as a versatile tool for interaction, collaboration, and cooperation with various stakeholders, increases customer engagement levels regardless of the airline's brand personality. Therefore, the airlines should not be afraid to come across as "unprofessional" or "too trendy" by employing social media as a versatile platform for communication with their passengers, since pursuing the "defender" dimension that is more conservative, controlled, and allows for larger distance between passengers and an airline brand does not produce higher customer engagement results. Consequently, the airline brand's desire to create a professional and reliable image through a competent personality does not interfere with the choice of social media marketing strategy.

In order to create an interactive space and foster positive CE through the "explorer" strategy dimension, it is possible to turn to the phenomenon of parasocial interaction, where consumers feel as if they were communicating with a real person, rather than an abstract "brand". To do so, airline brands should employ openness cues in their posts and interact with its passengers, since they are unlikely to engage unless they see proof of potential response by the brand (Vivek et al., 2012). Openness cues involve sharing personal stories told, for example, from the viewpoint of pilots or cabin crew. Interactivity is achieved through providing timely, personal, and informative

replies to customers reaching out to the brand. A good example among Russian carriers would be S7 Airlines that replies directly to passengers reaching out and usually does not follow scripted reply pattern (S7 Airlines, 2021), creating an illusion that the customers communicate with a real person.

The choice of social media platforms should be based on the platforms which most of the airline's passengers use, particularly if an airline has a pronounced focus on a specific market. It is notable, for example, that Aeroflot has the largest number of followers on Instagram, yet continues to only reply to their passengers' questions on selected platforms, notably vk.com (572 thousand followers), Facebook (257 thousand), and Twitter (178 thousand), where the number of followers is significantly lower than on Instagram (658 thousand). On Instagram, many comments left by the brand simply ask passengers making inquiries to use other channels, thereby causing frustration (Aeroflot, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; My Aeroflot, 2021).

It is crucial, however, to note that not all customer engagement is desirable in the public space. For example, a dissatisfied customer, if unable to find ways to reach the brand directly and make sure they are heard, may turn to public platforms and express their dissatisfaction there. As such, passengers are quite active on the UTair official community page on vk.com. However, the overwhelming majority of the comments are related to the fact that the passengers' flights were cancelled or rescheduled without consulting with them first; passengers also express great dissatisfaction with the fact that they were unable to reach the airline through other channels and are obliged to resort to a public space where they feel the airline brand would be more likely to react (UTair, 2021). Therefore, airline Brands, especially during crisis situations, should provide exhaustive and timely functioning channels for feedback and problem-solution to avoid negative customer engagement behaviors in the public space.

4.4 Limitations and Areas for Further Research

There are a number of limitations inherent in the given study. First of all, the respondents were mainly from Russia, with the majority of them born between 1995 and 2002. Thus, the conclusions and recommendations derived from the analyses conducted are applicable first and foremost to the Russian market. At the same time, the age of the respondents is not such a strict limitation as the geography of the sample, since (a) there are representatives of generations Y and Z, and (b) the overwhelming majority of them frequently use social media, which is representative of both generations (Rosenthal et McKeown, 2011) and which is a more meaningful characteristic of the sample with social media marketing strategies being the subject of the study. Therefore, the results obtained through the research generally can be applied to Russian social media users. The research could be extended to other markets and additionally verified by specifically incorporating older millennials into the sample.

A limitation related to the interpretation of the results lies in the scale employed in the research. While the scale for measuring customer engagement by Harrigan et al. (2017) was developed for the travel industry in the context of social media, the authors validated it using the brands respondents were familiar with – worse still, their favorite travel brands. Since the nature of the experiment required eliminating any potential interference with the manipulated variables, it was necessary that the respondents would not have any preconceived biases towards a brand they were evaluated. Therefore, it was decided to create a fictitious brand to ensure the reliability and clarity of the experiment, while keeping in mind that the respondents would likely have a hard time identifying themselves with a brand they have never seen before or evaluate their experiences interacting with it while only observing someone else’s comments, thus potentially affecting the Interaction and Identification scores. However, treating the three customer engagement factors measured by the scale separately allowed to make relevant conclusions. A larger scale of the research could allow for a more elaborated social media account of the Air Fly airline and a study where participants could interact with the brand themselves over a course of time. This would allow them to get to know the brand, enabling them to evaluate the Identification and Interaction dimensions of customer engagement based on their personal experience.

Additionally, the strategies were only tested in the context of Instagram – a platform that heavily relies on visual stimulation and that provides a variety of interaction functions beyond commenting and replying. The platform was selected because major international and Russian airlines had the largest followers’ base on the platform, meaning that it was an important social media platform for communicating with the airlines’ target audience. In further research, other social media websites can be explored, such as vk.com, Facebook or Twitter that do not rely as heavily on the visual aspect of posts as Instagram.

Furthermore, the major focus of the study was the comparison between the “defender” and the “explorer” dimension of the social media marketing strategy framework by Felix et al. (2016). Other dimensions, such as Culture, Governance, and Structure, can be explored. Specifically, synergetic effects produced by certain combinations of the four dimensions could be studied, as well as whether there are differences in levels of customer engagement when these dimensions are combined with brand personalities on different platforms.

In the given research, the afore-mentioned strategy dimensions were studied in conjunction with two brand personalities that are most prevalent among airlines, notably exciting and competent. The 3 remaining brand personalities (sophisticated, rugged, and sincere), although not as common for the industry, could be explored further to complete the study of the combinations of personalities and strategy dimensions. Also, the theoretical framework by Felix et al. (2016) mentions multiple internal influencers that could determine the choice of the social media

marketing strategy. While brand personality alone was the focus of the given research, other influencers could be studied as well.

Finally, the study focuses specifically on airlines and therefore, its results should only be interpreted in the context of the passenger air travel. Further research is needed to extrapolate the results to other industries.

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Select Frequent Flyers program' structure

1. Aeroflot-bonus elite levels structure

Privileges elite levels



Silver >



Gold >

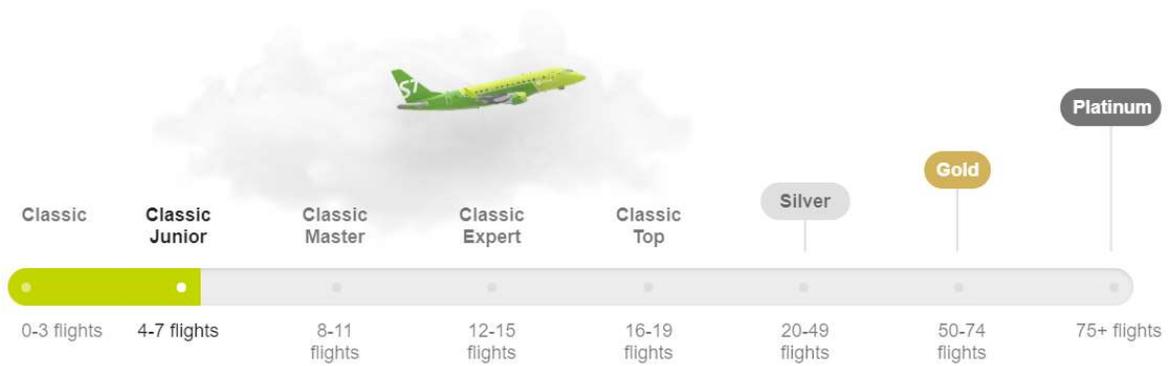


Platinum >

Requirements to achieve an elite status:

- Silver – 25 000 qualifying miles or 25 segments in a year;
- Gold – 50 000 qualifying miles or 50 segments in a year;
- Platinum – 125 000 qualifying miles or 50 segments flown in business class in a year.

2. S7 Priority FFP structure



Texts of Fly Air's Instagram posts and comment section in English

Defender strategy dimension:

fly_air



fly_air We are happy to announce this season's summer schedule! Summer breaks at school are great to spend quality family time and build fond memories with your kids by the sea. This time we will be adding over 10 new beach destinations across Europe. They will be served daily from May, 15 through September, 15.

Check out the schedule and book your tickets to the summer paradise NOW on our website 🌴🌞🌊

fly_air Dear Passengers, please refer to our website for more information about the destinations served as well as the FAQ section. The links can be found in our profile descriptions!

13m Reply

beach_guy Is 50 minutes enough to make a connection at AMS?

2h Reply

ilove_flying I booked my tickets to Berlin for June 2 flight 3304 yesterday, but misspelled my husband's name in the ticket, how can I fix that? The booking reference is FFO034. Thank you!

3h Reply

travelfan_4 Will you fly to Mallorca?

4h Reply

Explorer strategy dimension:

fly_air



fly_air We are happy to announce this season's summer schedule! Some of the fondest memories we've made as kids was when we spent summer school breaks by the sea with our parents and we are thrilled to help you build memories with your children, too. This time we will be adding over 10 new beach destinations across Europe. They will be served daily from May, 15 through September, 15.

Check out the schedule and book your tickets to the summer paradise NOW on our website 🌴🌞🌊

beach_guy Is 50 minutes enough to make a connection at AMS?

16m Reply

fly_air @beach_guy Should be enough if your connecting flight is serviced in the same terminal. Otherwise, please refer to the Schiphol airport's guide on connecting flights: <https://www.schiphol.nl/en/transfers/>

5m Reply

ilove_flying I booked my tickets to Berlin for June 2 flight 3304 yesterday, but misspelled my husband's name in the ticket, how can I fix that? The booking reference is FFO034. Thank you!

16m Reply

fly_air @ilove_flying Thank you for reaching out. Please check your DM, we will help you there

10m Reply

travelfan_4 Will you fly to Mallorca?

17m Reply

fly_air @travelfan_4 yes! SVO-MLI flights are scheduled daily starting from May, 15

7m Reply

Texts of Fly Air's Instagram posts and comment section in Russian

Defender strategy dimension:

fly._air



fly._air Уважаемые Пассажиры, на нашем сайте представлена информация о направлениях наших авиарейсов, а также раздел часто задаваемых вопросов. Ссылки можно найти в описании профиля!

11m Reply

ilove_flying Вчера я забронировала билеты в Берлин на 2 июня (рейс 3304), но пропустила букву в имени мужа – это можно исправить? Бронь FFOO34

2h Reply

beach_guy Хватит ли 50 минут на пересадку в Домодедово?

3h Reply

travelfan_4 Будут ли рейсы на Майорку?

4h Reply

fly._air Мы рады объявить о новом летнем расписании! Летние каникулы – это отличный повод провести семейный отпуск на берегу моря. В этом году мы предлагаем более 10 новых направлений по всей Европе. Рейсы будут осуществляться ежедневно с 15 мая по 15 сентября. Новое расписание уже на сайте: бронируйте билеты в рай прямо СЕЙЧАС 🌴🌊👉

Explorer strategy dimension:

fly._air



ilove_flying Вчера я забронировала билеты в Берлин на 2 июня (рейс 3304), но пропустила букву в имени мужа – это можно исправить? Бронь FFOO34

12m Reply

fly._air @ilove_flying спасибо за обращение! Написали Вам в лс, попробуем разобраться

4s Reply

beach_guy Хватит ли 50 минут на пересадку в Домодедово?

12m Reply

fly._air @beach_guy должно хватить, если стыковочный рейс выполняется в том же терминале. Больше информации можно узнать в соответствующем разделе на сайте аэропорта: <https://www.dme.ru/transfer/>

2m Reply

travelfan_4 Будут ли рейсы на Майорку?

13m Reply

fly._air @travelfan_4 да! Рейсы по маршруту SVO-PMI будут выполняться ежедневно, начиная с 15 мая

32s Reply

fly._air Мы рады объявить о новом летнем расписании! Наши самые теплые детские воспоминания о том, как мы проводили летние каникулы у моря с нашими родителями, а теперь наша очередь отвозить детей на юг. В этом году мы предлагаем более 10 новых направлений по всей Европе. Рейсы будут осуществляться ежедневно с 15 мая по 15 сентября. Новое расписание уже на сайте: бронируйте билеты в рай прямо СЕЙЧАС 🌴🌊👉

Customer Engagement with Airline Brands Survey

Section 1

The question presented in this section is used to allocate you to one of the groups for the experiment. Please pick any of the options below.

Please select any of the following⁷:

- α
- β
- γ
- δ

Please, take a look at the description of Air Fly airline and one of the posts featured in its Instagram carefully. **Pay close attention both to the text of the post and how the airline interacts with the passengers.** You will NOT be able to come back to this information, therefore, take your time.

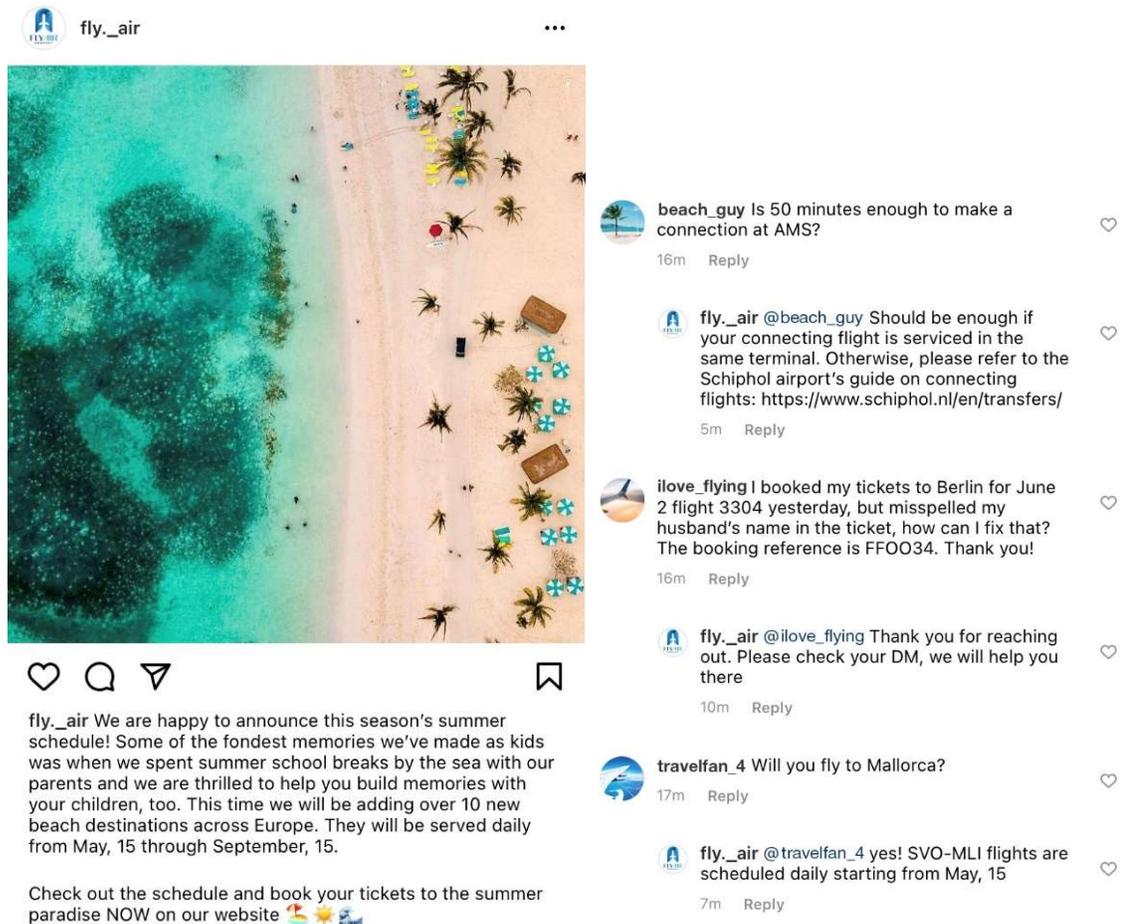
⁷ Depending on the option selected, the respondents would be shown one of the combinations of the Air Fly brand descriptions and the brand's Instagram post

Version α

Air Fly is an *up-to-date spirited* airline. It performs flights to over 50 destinations all over Europe and strives to deliver the best on-board experience to its passengers.

It is *imaginative* and *daring* in its approach to customer service, and has shown consistent growth in passenger turnover in recent years. It is unique in its *cool* and *contemporary* stance on passenger air travel.

Young and trendy, Air Fly has strong and *independent* personality: in addition to being both *cool* and *imaginative*, most of all, knows what its passengers want!



The image shows a social media post from the account 'fly._air'. The main image is an aerial view of a tropical beach with turquoise water, white sand, palm trees, and beach umbrellas. Below the image are icons for heart, comment, share, and bookmark. The post text reads: 'fly._air We are happy to announce this season's summer schedule! Some of the fondest memories we've made as kids was when we spent summer school breaks by the sea with our parents and we are thrilled to help you build memories with your children, too. This time we will be adding over 10 new beach destinations across Europe. They will be served daily from May, 15 through September, 15. Check out the schedule and book your tickets to the summer paradise NOW on our website 🌴☀️🏖️'. To the right of the post is a list of replies from other users, including questions about flight connections, ticket corrections, and flight destinations.

fly._air

beach_guy Is 50 minutes enough to make a connection at AMS?

fly._air @beach_guy Should be enough if your connecting flight is serviced in the same terminal. Otherwise, please refer to the Schiphol airport's guide on connecting flights: <https://www.schiphol.nl/en/transfers/>

ilove_flying I booked my tickets to Berlin for June 2 flight 3304 yesterday, but misspelled my husband's name in the ticket, how can I fix that? The booking reference is FFO034. Thank you!

fly._air @ilove_flying Thank you for reaching out. Please check your DM, we will help you there

travelfan_4 Will you fly to Mallorca?

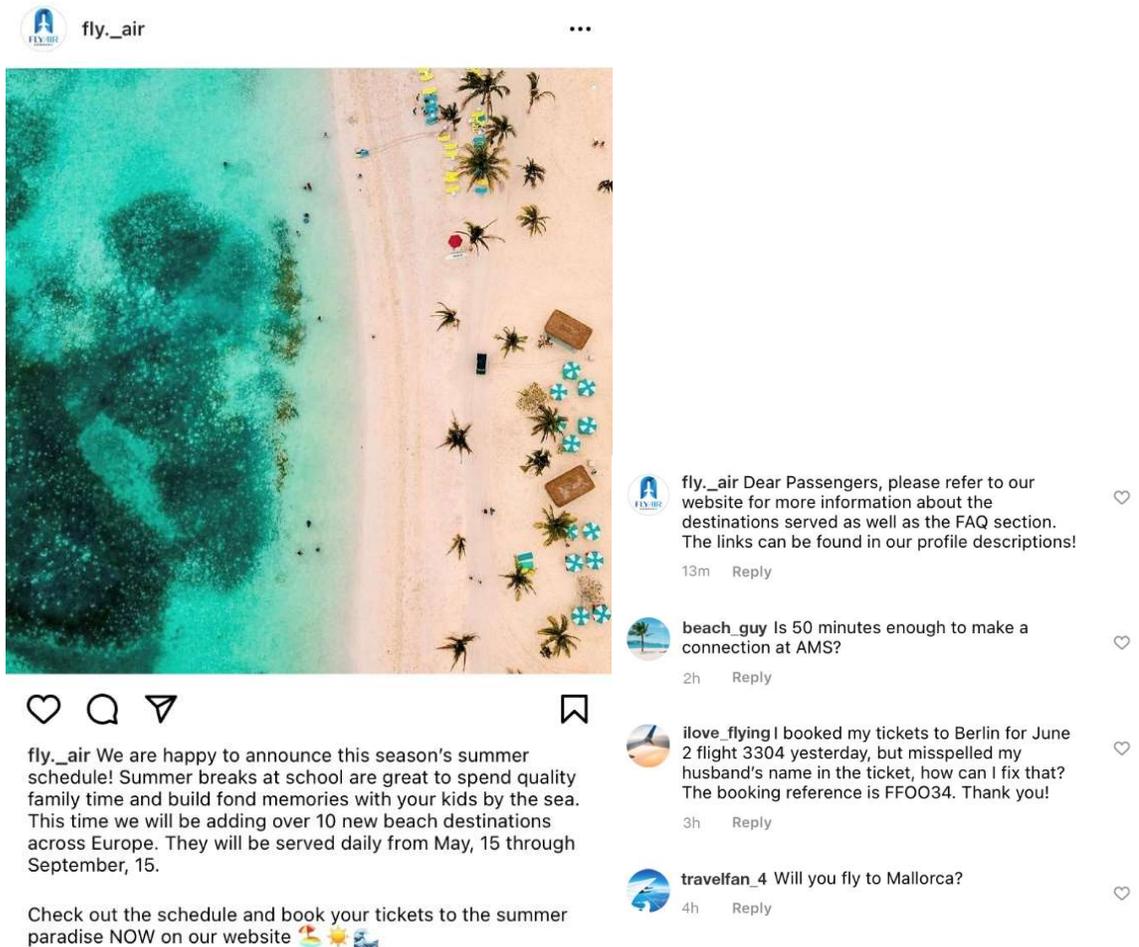
fly._air @travelfan_4 yes! SVO-MLI flights are scheduled daily starting from May, 15

Version β

Air Fly is an *up-to-date spirited* airline. It performs flights to over 50 destinations all over Europe and strives to deliver the best on-board experience to its passengers.

It is *imaginative* and *daring* in its approach to customer service, and has shown consistent growth in passenger turnover in recent years. It is unique in its *cool* and *contemporary* stance on passenger air travel.

Young and trendy, Air Fly has strong and *independent* personality: in addition to being both *cool* and *imaginative*, most of all, knows what its passengers want!



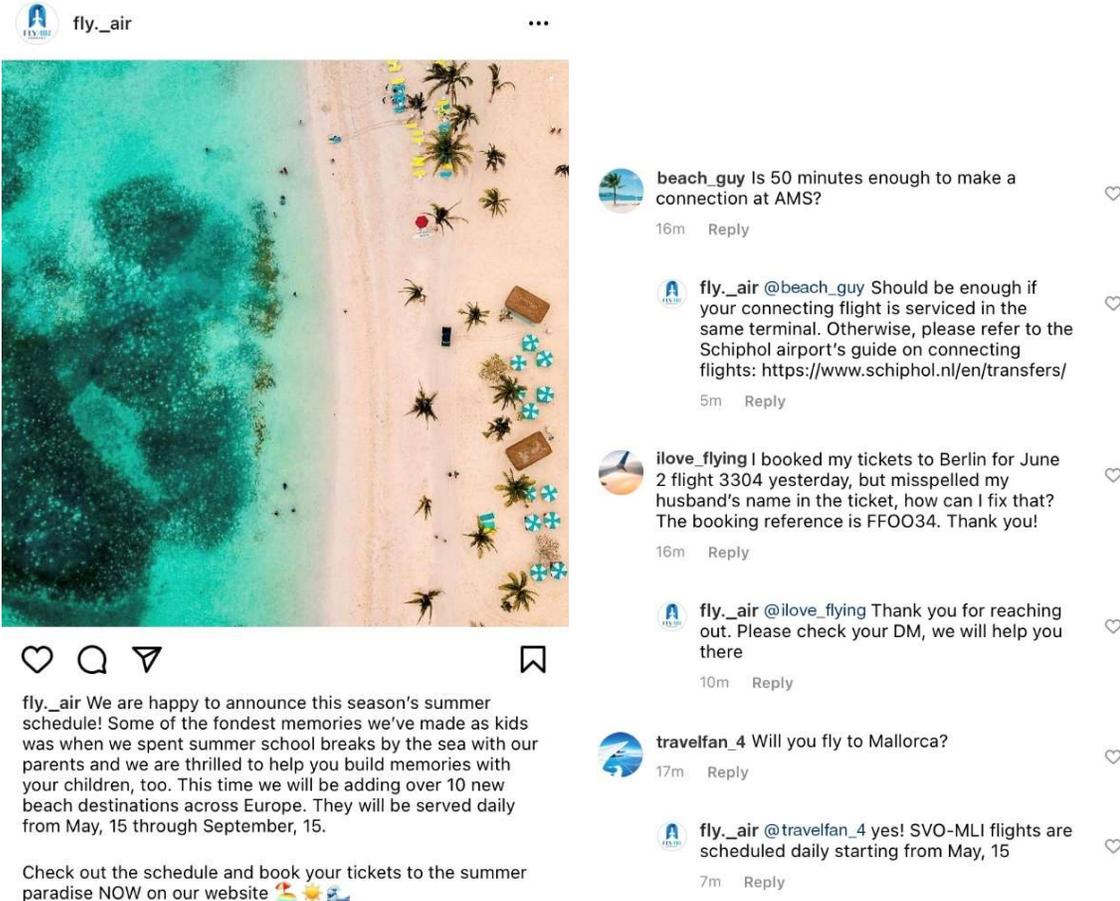
The image shows a social media post from the account 'fly._air'. The main post features an aerial view of a tropical beach with turquoise water, white sand, palm trees, and lounge chairs. Below the image are icons for heart, comment, share, and bookmark. The text of the post reads: 'fly._air We are happy to announce this season's summer schedule! Summer breaks at school are great to spend quality family time and build fond memories with your kids by the sea. This time we will be adding over 10 new beach destinations across Europe. They will be served daily from May, 15 through September, 15. Check out the schedule and book your tickets to the summer paradise NOW on our website 🌴☀️🌊'. To the right of the post are four replies from other users: 'fly._air Dear Passengers, please refer to our website for more information about the destinations served as well as the FAQ section. The links can be found in our profile descriptions! 13m Reply', 'beach_guy Is 50 minutes enough to make a connection at AMS? 2h Reply', 'ilove_flying I booked my tickets to Berlin for June 2 flight 3304 yesterday, but misspelled my husband's name in the ticket, how can I fix that? The booking reference is FFO034. Thank you! 3h Reply', and 'travelfan_4 Will you fly to Mallorca? 4h Reply'. Each reply has a heart icon to its right.

Version γ

Air Fly is a *reliable* and *successful* airline. It performs flights to over 50 destinations all over Europe and strives to deliver the best on-board experience to its passengers.

It is *intelligent* and *technical* in its approach to customer service, and has shown consistent growth in passenger turnover in recent years. It is a true *leader* in its *security*-focused stance on passenger air travel.

Confident and *successful*, Air Fly has an *intelligent corporate* personality: it's *hard-working* and, most of all, knows what its passengers want!



fly__air

beach_guy Is 50 minutes enough to make a connection at AMS?
16m Reply

fly__air @beach_guy Should be enough if your connecting flight is serviced in the same terminal. Otherwise, please refer to the Schiphol airport's guide on connecting flights: <https://www.schiphol.nl/en/transfers/>
5m Reply

ilove_flying I booked my tickets to Berlin for June 2 flight 3304 yesterday, but misspelled my husband's name in the ticket, how can I fix that? The booking reference is FFO034. Thank you!
16m Reply

fly__air @ilove_flying Thank you for reaching out. Please check your DM, we will help you there
10m Reply

travelfan_4 Will you fly to Mallorca?
17m Reply

fly__air @travelfan_4 yes! SVO-MLI flights are scheduled daily starting from May, 15
7m Reply

fly__air We are happy to announce this season's summer schedule! Some of the fondest memories we've made as kids was when we spent summer school breaks by the sea with our parents and we are thrilled to help you build memories with your children, too. This time we will be adding over 10 new beach destinations across Europe. They will be served daily from May, 15 through September, 15.

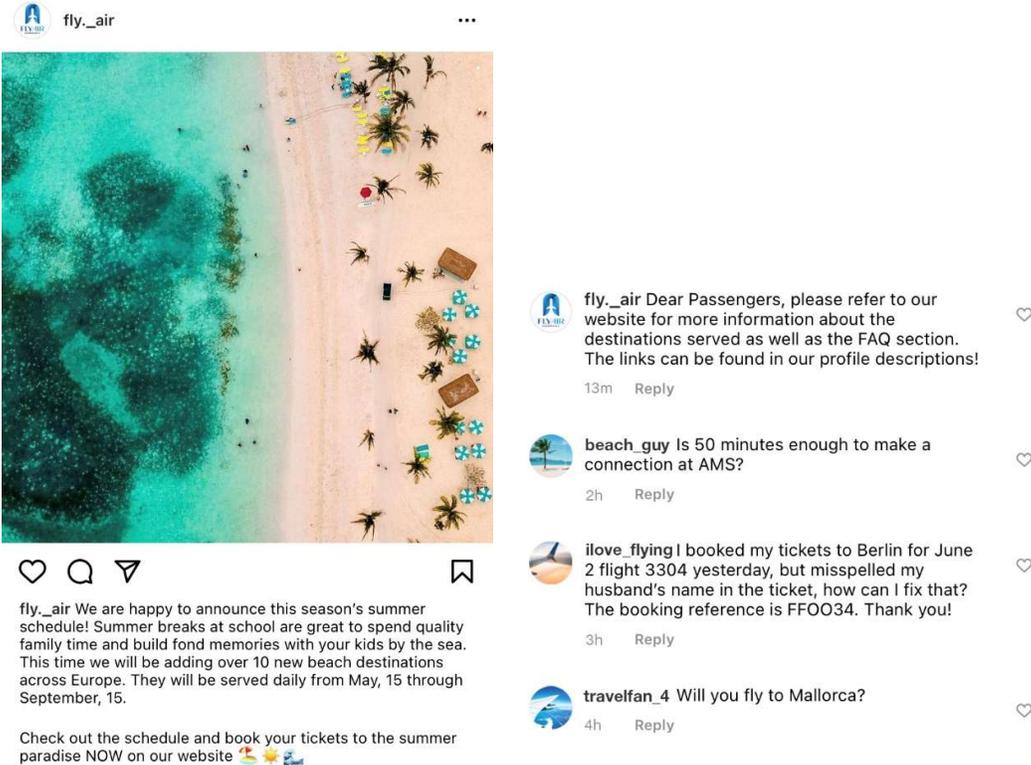
Check out the schedule and book your tickets to the summer paradise NOW on our website 🌴🌞🛩️

Version δ

Air Fly is a *reliable* and *successful* airline. It performs flights to over 50 destinations all over Europe and strives to deliver the best on-board experience to its passengers.

It is *intelligent* and *technical* in its approach to customer service, and has shown consistent growth in passenger turnover in recent years. It is a true *leader* in its *security*-focused stance on passenger air travel.

Confident and *successful*, Air Fly has an *intelligent corporate* personality: it's *hard-working* and, most of all, knows what its passengers want!



fly._air

fly._air We are happy to announce this season's summer schedule! Summer breaks at school are great to spend quality family time and build fond memories with your kids by the sea. This time we will be adding over 10 new beach destinations across Europe. They will be served daily from May, 15 through September, 15. Check out the schedule and book your tickets to the summer paradise NOW on our website 🌴🌞🌊

fly._air Dear Passengers, please refer to our website for more information about the destinations served as well as the FAQ section. The links can be found in our profile descriptions!
13m Reply

beach_guy Is 50 minutes enough to make a connection at AMS?
2h Reply

ilove_flying I booked my tickets to Berlin for June 2 flight 3304 yesterday, but misspelled my husband's name in the ticket, how can I fix that? The booking reference is FFO034. Thank you!
3h Reply

travelfan_4 Will you fly to Mallorca?
4h Reply

Section 2

Now that you have studied the “Air Fly’s post”, please respond to the following statements by choosing the most appropriate number on the scale:

(for questions Q1 to Q11, the 7-point Likert scale is used, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 7 is “strongly agree”)

Q1. When someone criticizes Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal insult.

Q2. When I talk about Air Fly's account, I usually say "we" rather than "they".

Q3. When someone praises Air Fly's account, it feels like a personal compliment.

Q4. I am passionate about Air Fly's account.

Q5. I feel excited about Air Fly's account.

Q6. Anything related to Air Fly's account grabs my attention.

Q7. When I am interacting with Air Fly's account, I forget everything else around me.

Q8. In my interaction with Air Fly's account, I am immersed.

Q9. In general, I like to get involved in the airline community discussions.

Q10. I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the airline community.

Q11. I often participate in activities of the airline community.

Q12. How would you rate Air Fly's post? (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “very unfavorable” and 7 stands for “very favorable”)

Q13. How would you rate Air Fly's post? (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “very uninformative” and 7 stands for “very informative”)

Q14. I am likely to choose Air Fly company next time I need to buy a flight ticket. (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 7 stands for “strongly agree”)

Q15. If I know someone looking to buy a flight ticket, I am likely to recommend him/her to choose Air Fly brand. (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 7 stands for “strongly agree”)

Section 3

Please, evaluate each statement below on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree" unless asked otherwise.

Q16. Brand personalities can be characterized with unique adjectives. Based on the information you were presented about Air Fly brand, which of the adjectives below do you think best describes Fly Air brand?

- Sincere
- Exciting
- Competent
- Sophisticated
- Rugged

Please, evaluate each statement below on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree".

Q17. Air Fly will talk back to me if I post a message.

Q18. Air Fly would respond to me quickly and efficiently.

Q19. Air Fly allows me to communicate directly with it.

Q20. Air Fly listens to what I have to say.

Q21. Air Fly is open in sharing information.

Q22. Air Fly keeps me well informed.

Q23. Air Fly doesn't hold back information.

Section 4

Q24. Considering the time before COVID-19, how often did you travel?

- Once a year or less
- 1-3 times a year
- Every 2-3 months
- Once a month or more often

Q25. I am the one who makes thorough research into an airline before I choose to fly with it. (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 7 stands for “strongly agree”)

Q26. I am the one who compares different flight options to my target destination rigorously. (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 7 stands for “strongly agree”)

Q27. How often do you use social media? (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “not at all” and 7 stands for “very often”)

Q28. I follow airline brands on social media websites. (7-point Likert scale, 1 stands for “not at all true of me” and 7 stands for “very true of me”)

Q29. Your gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Q30. What year were you born in? (open question)

Q31. Where do you live?

- Moscow
- Saint Petersburg
- Other: _____

Q32. What is your marital status?

- Married
- In a relationship
- Divorced
- Single
- Widowed

Q33. What is the highest degree you obtained or are in the process of obtaining?

- High school diploma (unfinished or finished)
- Associate degree (unfinished or finished)
- Bachelor's degree (unfinished or finished)
- Master's degree (unfinished or finished)

- Doctoral degree (unfinished or finished)

Q34. What is your current occupation?

- Student
- Employed (I combine work with studies)
- Employed full-time
- Entrepreneur/business owner
- Freelancer/self-employed
- Retired
- Unemployed

Q35. Which of the options best characterize your financial situation?

- I only have enough to cover my food expenses
- I have enough to purchase clothing but I need to save to purchase small domestic appliances
- I have enough to purchase small domestic appliances, but I will have to save to purchase such goods as computer, refrigerator, or washing machine
- I can afford almost everything, but will need to save or take a loan to buy a car or an apartment
- I can afford everything

Personality Manipulation Check Surveys (run entirely in Russian)

Title: Исследование вовлеченности потребителей с брендами авиакомпаний: индивидуальность бренда

Introduction:

Здравствуйтесь!

Меня зовут Дарья, я студентка магистратуры Высшей Школы Менеджмента СПбГУ. Я провожу исследование, которое поможет выявить связь между различными характеристиками бренда и оптимальной стратегией маркетинга в социальных сетях.

Этот опрос нужен, чтобы помочь мне проверить собранные данные для исследования. Все ответы полностью анонимны и будут использованы только в академических целях в рамках указанного исследования.

Спасибо за Ваш вклад в исследование!

В случае возникновения вопросов, Вы можете обратиться по электронному адресу: st079294@student.spbu.ru

Викулова Дарья,
студентка магистратуры ВШМ СПбГУ

Brand Descriptions:Survey A

Air Fly – современная и энергичная авиакомпания. Она осуществляет перелеты по более чем 50 направлениям по всей Европе и стремится оказать своим пассажирам высочайший уровень обслуживания на борту.

Она подходит к оказанию услуг смело и с богатым воображением, а её пассажиропоток в последние годы неуклонно растет. Она уникальна в своем свежем и современном взгляде на пассажирские авиаперевозки.

Будучи молодой и трендовой, *Air Fly* обладает сильной и независимой индивидуальностью: она не только современная и творческая, но, что важнее всего, знает, чего хотят ее пассажиры!

Survey B

Air Fly – надежная и успешная авиакомпания. Она осуществляет перелеты по более чем 50 направлениям по всей Европе и стремится оказать своим пассажирам высочайший уровень обслуживания на борту.

Она интеллектуально и технично подходит к оказанию услуг, а её пассажиропоток в последние годы неуклонно растет. Она настоящий лидер в своем взгляде на пассажирские авиаперевозки, ориентированные на безопасность.

Будучи *уверенной и успешной*, Air Fly обладает *интеллигентной и корпоративной* индивидуальностью: она *трудолюбива* и, что важнее всего, знает, чего хотят ее пассажиры!

Questions (adjectives displayed in random order, the same question was asked in both surveys):

Я думаю, что индивидуальность авиакомпании Air Fly можно описать, как:

Яркую, энергичную (шкала Лайкерта, где 1 – «полностью не согласен», 7 – «полностью согласен»);

Компетентную (шкала Лайкерта, где 1 – «полностью не согласен», 7 – «полностью согласен»);

Мужественную (шкала Лайкерта, где 1 – «полностью не согласен», 7 – «полностью согласен»);

Утонченную (шкала Лайкерта, где 1 – «полностью не согласен», 7 – «полностью согласен»);

Искреннюю (шкала Лайкерта, где 1 – «полностью не согласен», 7 – «полностью согласен»).