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THE IMPACT OF BRAND IDENTIFICATION, CORPORATE STRATEGY AND VISUAL BRANDING ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN AIRLINE SERVICE

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Abstract:

The airline industry is a very competitive market. This makes strong airline brand appeal important to foster loyalty. The objective of the study is to see what the influence between brand identification, corporate strategy and visual branding towards customer loyalty in airline service is. To employ the study, quantitative research is done using an online survey to distribute questionnaires. Using the G-calculator and the population size of the airlines in KLIA1 and KLIA2, 385 sample sizes are gathered to measure the variable of the study. The data is analysed using SPSS and having reliability analysis and multiple regression. Findings showed that all variables have significant influence towards customer loyalty in the airline industry. Thus, this urges airlines to strengthen their brand identification, corporate strategy and visual branding to improve customer loyalty in airline service.

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Keyword:

Airline Industry, Customer Loyalty, Corporate Strategy, Brand Identification, Visual Branding.



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Introduction

The aviation industry is rapidly growing, and many different airline companies have been struggling to keep up with rapidly changing trends of competition in the aviation market. Having a loyal customer is a crucial role for airlines to remain in the aviation market. Airline industry performance is dependent on loyalty programmes done by airlines showing how important customer loyalty is towards airline performance. (Vilkaite-Vaitone & Papsiene, 2016). Ragab et al. (2024) described brand identification in the aviation industry as how customers perceive the airline and feeling how the airline connected to them emotionally. The problem regarding the study of brand identification influencing customer loyalty is the limited study of the problem in the context of the airline industry. For example, there is a study that aims to analyze the influence of brand identification and influencing customer loyalty, however the study is aimed towards the fashion industry (Blazquez-Resino et al., 2024).

Corporate strategy in the airline industry is referring to how airlines plan and adapt to achieve their goal and competitive advantage. In the airline industry, there are many aspects that could be incorporated in corporate strategy such as routing, aircraft model and customer service. A well-thought corporate strategy can lead a company to a long-lasting influence on financial and non-financial effects (Poretti et al., 2024). There is very limited study on how corporate level strategy affects customer loyalty in the airline industry. Most prior studies neglect how corporate strategy like long-term branding campaigns affect customer loyalty (Gurler, 2024; Shin et al., 2020).

Visual branding of the airline industry refers to the use of visual elements like colour and logo to push their brand to the eyes of potential passengers. The visual may include the airline logo, the cabin design and the uniform wear by airline cabin crew (Boubker & Naoui, 2022). Passenger perceptions of these services vary greatly due to factors like flight attendants'

uniforms and professional attitudes, contributing to a differentiated brand experience. Subtle but significant elements like flight attendants' moods and clothes have an impact on this customer loyalty towards airlines (Aslan et al., 2025).

Literature Review

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is proven by repeat purchases, purchasing frequency, recommend to other potential customers, price tolerance and positive review (Mohamad, 2022). Previous finding found on the comparison service quality and relationship-based approach significantly influences loyalty. For example, one study found that good website service has a very significant influence towards loyalty (Aiyub et al., 2025). This means that smooth and reliable services are able to make customers attach to the brand and stay loyal to it. Another study found that loyalty is developed by having a repeatedly positive experience with the brand to make customers keep coming back again (Dávila Espuela et al., 2023). This means that loyalty may be influenced by the mix of good service quality and relationship-based approach in airline services.

Moreover, past findings found that loyalty is influenced by corporate strategy and brand identification. One strategy used to increase customer emotional connection in airline services is by employing Customer Relationship Management strategy (CRM). This corporate level strategy increases customer satisfaction and then influences customer loyalty (Salah & Abou-Shouk, 2020). What it means is that corporate strategy like CRM may indirectly influence loyalty. Meanwhile, another study found brand experience and brand identification affects customer satisfaction which then improves customer loyalty in the airline service industry (Tian & Mohd Arif, 2023). This shows that corporate strategy and brand attachment are important aspects for an airline to foster loyalty among its passengers.

However, most past findings insist that brand identification is the main factor of customer loyalty in the airline industry. For example, one study found high service quality able to make customers loyal by making customers perceive the brand easily and associate themselves to the brand (Gürler, 2024). Not only that, but corporate strategy is also like a loyalty program, making customers identify the brand as part of themselves which in turn affects their loyalty to the brand (Shin et al., 2020). According to Zailani & Abdullah (2025), hotels and other hospitality operators with empathy, responsiveness, and respect in their service delivery methods are likely to enjoy patron loyalty, positive word of mouth, and repeat patronage. This suggests that brand identification and corporate strategy may together influence customer retention of airlines. This also gives an insight that emotional attachment like brand identification makes people keep coming back to the same airline.

Brand Identification

Brand identification and customer retention are strongly related in the aviation industry. Past studies support the idea that brand identification has a significant influence on customer loyalty. For example, creative branding strategies and effective service recovery enhance brand identification and customer trust to enhance loyalty (Tian & Mohd Arif, 2023). Similarly, another study also found that positive brand experiences trigger emotional attachment through identification which in turn foster loyalty (Harjadi et al., 2023). Not only that, but brand

identification is also shown to be the connector or the center of two elements towards customer loyalty. Finding found that loyalty programs rely on brand identification to strengthen customer commitment although they can act independently (Shin et al., 2020).

Cultural factors and personal factors are always associated with brand identification based on past findings. One example of personal factors is a sense of belonging where people feel that they are part of the environment and the environment must have them. Having a sense of belongings and shared sentimental value improve passengers' perceptions of loyalty towards an airline (Yoshida et al., 2021). However, not all personal factors are influential in the airline service industry such as social prestige is proven to be less influential to brand identification compared to shared values (Yoshida et al., 2021). In terms of cultural factors, the tendency of passengers to adjust their daily habits like changing their preference to adjust to social norms also influence brand identification and foster their loyalty (Büyükdag & Kitapci, 2021). For example, if society in one country prefers one airline, most other people will follow suit as well. This aligns with another study that found national pride influences brand identification and fosters their loyalty (Alexander & Kennedy, 2023).

Mohamad (2025) mentioned digital media significantly shapes how destinations are marketed and how travellers engage with brands. Brand identification also aligned with service quality, trust and emotional attachment of passengers to an airline. Service quality that is exceptional to passengers improved their perceived value towards an airline and perceived value made them return back to the same airline (Gürler, 2024). This is closely related to another finding where positive travel experiences build their association of self to the airline (Siqueira et al., 2023). The positive interactions with the crew and the great service of an airline make people feel valuable and special. This aligned with another study that focused on the emotional attachment towards an airline improving the tendency of loyalty to the airline (Ragab et al., 2024). Thus, it can be said that service quality and emotional attachment can align together to shape proper brand identification toward a brand.

Furthermore, there are findings from another industry that aligned with the other findings on airlines and some contrasting findings of brand identification. Some findings in other industries like the fashion industry shows that brand identification is a strong predictor to improve loyalty (Blázquez-Resino et al., 2024). This means that the findings of brand identification are consistent even at the lens of different industries. However, the factors may be differed different in markets such as the airline market in Korea found that brand identification having lesser influence compared to practical benefit towards loyalty (Chung et al., 2022). Examples of practical rewards are discounts, loyalty benefits and so on. Despite this, corporate initiatives like corporate social responsibility (CSR) may improve loyalty by building attachment through acts of kindness (Chung et al., 2022).

H1: There is a significant influence between brand identification and customer loyalty in the airline industry.

Corporate Strategy

Corporate strategy plays an important role in shaping customer retention based on past research. Most corporate strategies from past research focus towards Frequent Flyer Programs (FFPs). FFPs are designed to reward passengers that are loyal to the airline brand by giving discounts on next purchase or upgrade service. FFP is a great strategy to improve customer

retention as it makes customers feel valued and the need to feel the loyalty points making them keep using the same brand (Şahin et al., 2021). This is because FFP provides real value to customers by giving them valuable experience and then increasing their tendency to stay loyal with the same airline brand (Sarpong, 2021). The FFP strategy might be useful, but these past findings do not fully represent corporate strategy as a whole, just on specific strategy only.

So, by combining all past studies on different types of strategies, the study is able to picture how corporate strategy works as a whole. Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is a strategy implemented by airlines to ensure corporate objectives and strategy aligned with outcomes. Some studies on this study found that BSC strategy is able to directly impact customer loyalty (Ahmed & Ali, 2025). Another corporate strategy by airlines like Low-Cost Carrier (LCC) also found that it directly impacts the decision of passengers to use the same airline. LCC are strategies where airlines sell tickets with low price but with minimum service for price sensitive passengers. Airlines with LCC strategy are able to attract and retain their passengers based on previous studies. Moreover, adaptive corporate strategies that are implemented by the airlines have also shown to be very effective to influence loyalty among airline passengers (Poretti et al., 2024). All these findings can be used to further prove the strong ties of corporate strategy to customer loyalty.

Findings on other industries also further support the correlation between corporate strategy and airlines. For example, the closest to the airline industry is the airport service industry able to improve their customer retention by applying technology adoption strategies at the corporate level (Ayodeji et al., 2023). This aligns with another study that found that market focus strategies are able to classify their clients properly and are able to improve loyalty through satisfaction in the electrical industry (Syafiq et al., 2023). Coffee shop that adopts entrepreneurial marketing strategy to adjust price sensitivity able to influence price conscious consumers to keep coming to the same shop (Basha et al., 2023). Similarly, automotive industries that adopt the same strategy are also able to improve their customer loyalty (Nyosino et al., 2021). These findings show that corporate strategies affecting loyalty are fairly consistent even across different industries.

However, there are some discrepancies where the studies are not aligned with the past findings. For example, some studies stated that corporate strategies can't be measured, thus it must only be measured by service factors only in airline context (Gürler, 2024). This makes the other findings not aligned with the finding. Similarly, other past research suggested that strategies like FFP are just marketing tools and cannot be classified as corporate strategies (Shin et al., 2020). These mix of different definitions from different researchers make the research on corporate strategy towards loyalty much complex and urge the need for further examination.

H2: There is a significant influence between corporate strategy and customer loyalty in the airline industry.

Visual Branding

Visual branding plays an important role in shaping customer loyalty. Visual elements such as logos, colors, and overall airline image help passengers recognize and remember a brand which can later influence their attachment and loyalty (Olson, 2024). In the airline context, visual branding has been shown to increase emotional attachment and brand love which leads to stronger customer loyalty (Boubker & Naoui, 2022). This happens especially when airline

visuals are consistent and meaningful. Similar findings also show that professional and attractive visual designs help build trust, which is a key factor in long-term customer loyalty (Girma, 2021). These findings are evident that visual branding is able to shape people's emotion then affects their loyalty towards the airline brand.

Beside logos and colors, visual branding is also expressed through cabin crew appearance and presentation. Distinctive uniforms and professional behavior can enhance perceptions of reliability and service quality. This indirectly encourages customers to remain loyal to the airline (Aslan et al., 2025). Uniforms that are distinctive make passengers able to differentiate one airline to another making the branding stronger. However, not all visual elements have the same impact. Visuals that focus on showing professionalism influence loyalty better compared to visuals that only use aesthetics (Oh & Park, 2020). This means that the airline must make an image of safety and reliability to make its passengers feel safe every time they fly with the airline.

Visual branding is correlated with airline positioning and consistency based on past findings. Airlines visual branding effectiveness is different according to where the market segment of the airline is. For example, bright colors are effective towards LCC airlines and dark colors suitable for full-service carriers (Liu et al., 2024). These colors are important to change passengers' perception of the airline. Moreover, consistent visual branding like using the same logo and color palette is important to make it easy to recall a certain brand and improve tendency to loyalty (Yasa & Wijayanti, 2023). Similarly, visual branding improves the tendency of customer repurchase even in a non-airline industry like retail industry. (Kurniawan & Tanujaya, 2024).

There are some limitations and contextual differences in past findings. The Small Medium Enterprise (SME) industry found that visual branding can't bring people to stay loyal to the same brand (Rahman & Haydati, 2023). This is understandable because SME visual branding is not needed, but customers want practical use. However, studies on the banking industry found that visual branding is an important aspect to show a symbol, making people know which brand they prefer the most. (Ab Hamid et al., 2022) As for the limitations, past study found some limitations on the brand image towards loyalty where customers will not come back to the same airline even with a good brand image if their service fail to perform based on expectation (Boonchunone et al., 2021).

H3: There is a significant influence between visual branding and customer loyalty in the airline industry

Methodology

This study adopts a correlational research design to examine the impact of brand identification, corporate strategy, and visual branding on customer loyalty in the airline industry. The target population consists of frequent flyers with data collected through a combination of random intercept surveys at KLIA1 and KLIA2, convenience sampling, and online recruitment via aviation communities and social media. A sample size of 385 respondents is determined using Cochran's method. The research tool is a closed ended, structured questionnaire made with Google Forms that has four sections that are in line with the goals of the study and a 7-point Likert scale. The survey is distributed both in person and online via QR codes, with an emphasis on voluntary participation and anonymity. Multiple regression analysis utilizing SPSS, a

statistical program compatible with Google Forms that facilitates effective data management, analysis, and visualization making it ideal for large scale correlation studies like this one will be used to examine the quantitative data that was gathered.

Population and Sample

Passengers who regularly travel and exhibit brand loyalty are the study's target demographic; there is no minimum age restriction. These respondents were chosen because they may offer valuable insights on the elements that maintain customer loyalty due to their experience and frequent use of airline services. A combination of online and in person methods will be used to collect the data. Respondents using the online method will be contacted via online forums of followers for commercial aviation who actively participate in conversations regarding airlines and flying. Data will be gathered for the face-to-face approach at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 1 (KLIA1) and Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 (KLIA2).

Questionnaire Design

Convenience sampling, a non-probability sample method, was employed in this investigation. This is due to the fact that it is useful and appropriate for a hectic airport setting. The main research tool used in our study to determine the influence of brand identification, visual branding and corporate strategy on customer loyalty in the airline industry is by using closed-ended questions. The online-structured questionnaire is made by using Google Forms as it is user-friendly and easy to access by many people just through their phone. Google Forms is chosen because of its cost-effectiveness as the application is free to use by all users whether respondents or the one doing the questions. All items in the questionnaire except demographic section will use a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. This scale is able to provide a better understanding of their opinion that is aligned to our study for data collection.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25.0. The data will be analysed through reliability analysis to ensure the reliability of item. Then, the data collected will be analyzed through multiple regression analysis where it is able to analyze the value of a variable through two or more other variables. This method is suitable for quantitative research as it emphasizes statistical and numbering to provide insights towards a variable use in our study.

Findings and Analysis

Demographic of the Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents shows a well-balanced representation across gender, age, flight frequency, and airline preference. In terms of gender, the sample was almost evenly distributed, with 50.3% male and 49.7% female respondents. This shows minimal gender bias in this study. The age distribution reflects a strong presence of Millennials formed the largest group at 47.7%, followed by Generation Z at 27.3% and Generation X at 25%. This shows a diverse age mix of airline passengers in this study. Regarding travel behaviour, a substantial majority of respondents (78.6%) had flown with the same airline more than twice

in the past 12 months, suggesting a high level of customer loyalty, while 21.4% did not demonstrate repeat usage. In terms of airline preference, Malaysian Airlines emerged as the most preferred carrier at 37.5%, followed by Firefly at 31.9% and AirAsia as the third choice, while Maswings and other international airlines collectively accounted for 13.3% of preferences. This reflects different consumer choices based on service offerings and brand perception.

Table 1: Demographic Profile for the Respondent

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	199	50.3
	Female		
Age Group	Generation X (45 years and above)	98	25.0
	Millennials (29–44 years)	187	47.7
	Generation Z (13–28 years)	107	27.3
Frequency of Flight	Flown with same airline more than twice	308	78.6
	Not flown with same airline more than twice	84	21.4
Preference of Airline	Malaysia Airlines	147	37.5
	Firefly	125	31.9
	AirAsia	52	13.3
	Other Airlines	68	17.3

Source: Developed from Google Forms

Reliability Analysis

The reliability test demonstrated excellent reliability, with all variables scoring above 0.8, allowing the study to confidently proceed with full data collection without removing current variables. A total of 392 respondents participated in the main survey, and the results presented in table below confirm that all constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha values above the acceptable threshold of 0.7. This indicates strong internal consistency across all variables measured. The reliability analysis was conducted using SPSS, ensuring that the data collected is dependable and suitable for further statistical examination within the study.

Table 2: Result of Reliability of Each Variable

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Customer Loyalty	6	.900
Brand Identification	6	.899
Corporate Strategy	6	.818
Visual Branding	6	.840

Source: Developed from SPSS

Hypothesis Testing

The model summary shows a strong relationship between the independent variables and customer loyalty. The R value of .858 indicates that the variables used in this study are closely related to customer loyalty. The R Square value of .736 means that about 73.6% of the changes in customer loyalty can be explained by brand identification, corporate strategy, and visual branding. The Adjusted R Square of .733 is very close to the R Square value. This shows that the model remains reliable even after considering the number of variables used. In addition, the F-value of 358.754 with a significance level of $p < .001$ shows that the regression model is statistically significant overall. For additional study, this model generally matches the data quite well.

Table 3: Model Summary of Multiple Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig. (p)
1	.858	.736	.733	358.754	< .001

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Result

Hypothesis	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)	Accepted / Rejected
H1	.255	6.171	< .001	Accepted
H2	.324	6.697	< .001	Accepted
H3	.354	7.819	< .001	Accepted

Customer loyalty is positively impacted by brand recognition. An increase in brand recognition is indicated by the standardized beta value ($\beta = .255$) associated with an increase in customer loyalty. This association is statistically robust and dependable, as indicated by the high t-value of 6.171. This indicates that the association is meaningful and not the result of coincidence. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (H1) is accepted.

Next, customer loyalty is positively and significantly impacted by corporate strategy. The standardized beta value ($\beta = .324$) shows that changes in customer loyalty are significantly influenced by business strategy. This implies that higher levels of consumer loyalty are linked to more effective corporate strategy. The t-value of 6.697 shows that this relationship is statistically strong and not due to random chance. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is accepted.

Furthermore, customer loyalty is positively and significantly impacted by visual branding. According to the standardized beta value ($\beta = .354$), visual branding has a significant impact on consumer loyalty. The statistical strength and reliability of this link are confirmed by the t-value of 7.819, which indicates that the effect is not the result of chance. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 (H3) is accepted.

Discussion

Major Findings

The study concludes that passengers are more likely to remain loyal and select the same airline over and over again when they feel an emotional connection to the airline and regard it as an integral part of their identity. Customers can relate to airlines more easily when they are transparent about their values. For instance, travellers' loyalty to a certain airline is influenced by the airline's cultural identity. Customers tend to support businesses that they believe reflect their values and lifestyle, which contributes to the favourable outcome.

Furthermore, the study found that airlines with clear, well-planned strategies are more successful in keeping customers loyal. For example, pricing strategies by airlines making end of year discounts promotion or having good service recovery strategy. When passengers see that an airline is consistent and well managed, they will develop more trust and confidence in the brand. Long term loyalty and recurring business are encouraged by this trust. This explains why the analysis of business strategy has a substantial positive result.

Finally, it was found that the visual sight and touch greatly affect the interaction of the passengers with the airlines. Hence, there is a strong correlation between increased customer loyalty and improvements in visual aspects such as airline logos and crew uniforms. A strong and consistent visual brand helps the customer to better identify the airline and to perceive it as reliable and professional. If visual branding matches brand values and the quality of service, it is more likely that customers will choose the same airline again and remain loyal to it over time.

Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be noted. As the data was only collected from passengers using KLIA Terminals 1 and 2, it might not be fairly representative of airline passengers from other regions or airports. Moreover, the online Google Form survey used is based on self-reported responses which may result in inaccurate or biased reporting. Furthermore, the study's primary focus on Millennial and Generation Z respondents limited the relevance of the results to other age groups. The research only looked at some branding features, brand recognition, corporate strategy and visual branding, and did not consider other factors that influence loyalty such as pricing or digital experience. These limitations suggest that the results should be interpreted with caution and additional research may be needed for wider applicability.

Recommendation

It is suggested that future studies replicate this study with a larger and more diverse sample from other airports, regions, or countries to enhance the results' generalisability. Future study may involve other age groups other than Generation Z and Millennials for a broader view of customer loyalty in other passenger groups. Further studies should consider other factors influencing airline customer loyalty such as ticket prices, digital services, rewards and user experience technologies. Surveys can be combined with mixed research methods (e.g. focus groups or interviews) to give a better in-depth understanding of what passengers think and feel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the effects of corporate strategy, visual branding and brand identification on customer loyalty in the airline service industry. The findings confirm that these branding related factors exert a significant influence on passengers' satisfaction, trust and willingness to stay with the same airline. A strong brand identity helps airlines to develop emotional connections with their customers. Ethical and successful business operations increase credibility and long-term trust. Visual branding, such as consistent brand presentation and the appearance of cabin crew, further reinforces positive consumer perceptions. The study emphasises that airlines need to adopt integrated branding strategies and go beyond basic service quality to achieve long term competitive advantage and sustained customer loyalty in the highly competitive airline business.

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Author Contribution Statement: All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Ariff was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. Azrel handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Nurul Farah Izzah and Noraihan contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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