

The Impact of Airline Continuity Behavior and Corporate Image on Consumers' Purchase Intentions: Brand Loyalty as a Moderating Variable

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Received: 05 Mar 2024; Received in revised form: 25 Apr 2024; Accepted: 05 May 2024; Available online: 19 May 2024

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Abstract— Nowadays, corporations are moving towards sustainable management, and the social responsibility reports released by corporations show their sustainable behaviors. Aviation is a high-polluting industry with high carbon emissions, which makes it even more important for airlines to have a sustainable management plan. Consumers are also becoming more aware of the need to go green in order to minimize environmental damage and enhance human well-being. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of corporate sustainability behaviors on airline ridership, the role of corporate image as a mediator, and the moderating effect of brand loyalty on ridership. A total of 412 questionnaires were collected from consumers who have traveled on airplanes. After deducting 50 invalid questionnaires, 362 valid questionnaires were collected, with a usability rate of 87.8%. Empirical factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and hierarchical regression model were applied. The results of this study show that corporate sustainability behavior and corporate image have a significant positive effect on purchase intention, corporate image plays a part in mediating the effect of corporate sustainability behavior on purchase intention, and consumers' brand loyalty strengthens the effect of corporate image on purchase intention. Finally, this study proposes some recommendations for airlines to make sustainable behavior decisions.

Keywords—ESG, Sustainable Behavior, Brand Loyalty, Ridership, Corporate Image

I. INTRODUCTION

This study stems from the growing global concern over climate change and environmental protection and how these factors affect the airline industry. Sustainable

behavior on the part of airlines is not only critical to minimizing environmental impacts, but is also key to shaping corporate image, attracting consumers and increasing brand loyalty. Understanding how these behaviors affect consumers' purchasing intentions is

particularly important as consumers are increasingly inclined to support brands that reflect their values and ethics, especially when it comes to sustainability. In addition, the moderating effect of brand loyalty may influence consumers' perceptions of airlines' sustainability behaviors and corporate image, which in turn may affect their purchase decisions. Therefore, this study aims to explore how sustainability behaviors and corporate image influence consumers' purchase intentions through brand loyalty, in order to provide airlines with strategic recommendations that can help them gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. This will not only fill a gap in existing research, but also provide a framework for airlines to more effectively align their sustainability goals with their business strategies.

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into how airlines' sustainable behavior and corporate image affect consumers' purchase intentions and to investigate how brand loyalty moderates this effect. Through this study, it aims to reveal the role of sustainability behaviors and positive corporate image in enhancing consumer purchase intention, and to assess the effect of brand loyalty in strengthening or weakening this relationship. This will help airlines better understand how to enhance customer loyalty and market competitiveness through their sustainability practices and image management strategies, thus providing empirical evidence and guidance for sustainability strategies and marketing decisions in the airline industry. It also explores the extent to which consumers perceive airlines' sustainability behaviors and how these perceptions affect their evaluation of the company's corporate image, which in turn influences their purchasing decision-making process. By analyzing the moderating effects of brand loyalty, the study hopes to provide deeper insights so that airlines can identify and implement more effective strategies to enhance consumer loyalty and at the same time promote sustainable behaviors and a positive corporate image. In addition, the study expects to provide valuable information to policy makers and practitioners in the airline industry on how they can achieve business success and brand growth while promoting environmental protection and social responsibility.

The research question of this paper focuses on how airlines' sustainability behavior and corporate image affect consumers' purchase intention and how brand loyalty moderates this effect. Specifically, the research questions can be broken down into the following key points:

1. How do airlines' sustainability behaviors affect consumers' purchase intentions?

2. How does an airline's corporate image affect consumer purchase intention?

3. How brand loyalty moderates the impact of airlines' sustainability behavior and corporate image on consumers' purchase intention?

4. How do the differences in consumers' perceptions of airlines' sustainability behavior and corporate image affect their purchase decisions when considering the moderating effect of brand loyalty?

The above research questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of consumer behavior and the role of brand loyalty in the implementation of sustainability strategies and positive corporate image of airlines. Through the research questions, the study hopes to provide airlines with strategic recommendations to help them attract and retain consumers more effectively and gain an edge in a competitive market.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability

As global warming becomes more and more serious, corporate sustainability is becoming more and more concerned, and in the past, related studies have mostly focused on corporate social responsibility, environmental protection, and giving back to the community (Jiang, Yuling et al., 2018). In recent years, corporate sustainability policies have become one of the most important issues of concern to investors and consumers, and some studies have pointed out that green marketing is a socially responsible way of marketing, which can also be regarded as a kind of CSR practice (Hu, Kaijie et al., 2020). There are many indicators related to corporate sustainability, such as SDGs, Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI), Socially Responsible Investment (SRI), and ESG principles. In this study, ESG principles are used to examine the impact of corporate sustainability behavior on corporate image and consumer purchasing intentions.

The concept of CSR was first mentioned in 1923 in British scholar Oliver Sheldon's *Philosophy of Management*, but it was not taken seriously at that time. Bowen (1953) mentioned the meaning of CSR and argued that fulfillment of the principle should be voluntary rather than coercive. ESG originated from the *Who Cares Wins* report by the United Nations in 2004, which pointed out how corporations and investors can incorporate environmental and governance issues into corporate operations. ESG is derived from the 2004 UN report "Who Cares Wins", which pointed out how corporations and investors can incorporate environmental, social, and governance issues

into business operations, and CSR has traditionally referred to corporations being socially responsible and giving back to society and the environment (Gillan, Koch, & Starks, 2021). ESG is one of the indicators for implementing CSR, which assesses the sustainability of a company in terms of environmental, social and corporate governance. In the past, sustainability was mostly focused on environmental issues, but ESG suggests that not only the environment, but also corporate governance and social aspects should move towards the goal of sustainability.

2.2 Enhancing corporate value through sustainable management

Enterprises play an important role in the trend of sustainable development, and more and more enterprises are carrying out energy-saving and carbon reduction measures. Relevant literature points out that when enterprises improve the efficiency of water use, electricity use and carbon emissions, although it helps to improve the company's performance (Yulin Zhang, 2019), effective environmental management is more helpful in linking the correlation between the environment and financial performance (Schaltegger & Synnestevedt, 2002). Nowadays, ESG has not only become an important reference for investors, but also one of the new standards of corporate value.

The benefits of companies' commitment to sustainable management and disclosure of ESG will help to enhance investors' understanding of the company, improve the corporate image, enable companies to re-examine their contribution to society, identify risks and make improvements early, formulate relevant strategies to promote sustainable development, and allow investors to get complete information as well as publicize the company's culture to increase exposure, which is helpful to the value of the company (Chen, Tsai, & Tzeng, 2022).

ESG represents the evaluation index of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is divided into three components: environment, society and corporate governance. In the past, there are related literatures that use this as the measurement component of sustainability (Yang, Xinying, 2018; Hong, Xiu-fen, 2019; Zhu, Min-rui, Tsai, Wei-zhe, Yang, Xiaowen, Yin, Qi, 2021), and it is more appropriate to be used as an assessment of sustainability of airlines, which is the subject of this study, therefore, this paper adopts ESG as a measure of the sustainability of airlines.

2.3 The Sustainability Scenario of Taiwan's Major Airlines

The two major airlines in Taiwan are Eva Airways (EVA) and China Airlines (CAL). In recent years, both airlines have been actively involved in the issue of sustainability.

Since the aviation industry is characterized by high pollution and high carbon emissions, the primary goal of implementing a sustainable strategy is to reduce carbon emissions, which is one of the ESG criteria. Since 2012 and 2014, China Airlines and EVA Air have been submitting annual CSR reports to show their determination to achieve sustainable operations. This study makes reference to the CSR reports of the two airlines as the basis of this study. A brief description of the ESG reports of the two airlines is as follows :

2.3.1 Environment

China Airlines' sustainable environmental initiatives include the introduction of the A321neo, a new-generation, energy-efficient aircraft that can reduce fuel consumption by 15-20%, improve noise pollution by 75%, and reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by 50% compared to previous narrowliners. It also reduces carbon emissions from ground operations by 45.8% compared to 2019, and reduces airborne waste, disposable plastic items, and per capita meal losses, which not only reduces waste but also reduces aircraft weight and improves fuel efficiency. EVA Air's proposed measures to reduce aircraft weight and improve fuel efficiency include flexibly adjusting the amount of water onboard according to the number of passengers, loading service items, reducing fuselage paint, and electronic in-flight magazines. The company also implemented a fleet replacement program, introducing 777 freighters and 787 passenger aircraft to improve fuel efficiency by 20%. China Airlines and EVA Air also set a goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, in an effort to maximize environmental protection and achieve sustainability.

2.3.2 Corporate Governance

In 2021, China Airlines and EVA Air will increase the proportion of female executives to 27.82% and 24.19%, respectively. In 2021, China Airlines and EVA Air will join the International Air Transport Association (IATA) travel pass program, which is a digital health verification program that reduces the need for manual identification and speeds up the check-in process, providing passengers with a more secure flying experience. In the midst of the epidemic, airlines have not only been actively pursuing relief programs and cutting back on non-emergency expenses, but have also improved operational efficiency by converting passenger planes into freighters to maintain the company's financial viability. In terms of corporate governance, China Airlines and EVA Air have been working to increase the proportion of female executives, provide a safe working environment for employees, and optimize employee benefits in order to achieve sustainable development at this level.

2.3.3 Social

In 2021, CAL invested NT\$18.25 million in social welfare and participated in the Huashan Foundation's Three Festivals charity event, caring for Taoyuan's local elderly with three disabilities (incapacitated, mentally retarded, and dependents) and organizing a charity sale of love masks to help Taoyuan's disadvantaged and poor families in Taoyuan. During the epidemic, the Taiwan government also offered to transport equipment for negative pressure wards, vaccines for the new crown, and related epidemic prevention materials donated by domestic enterprises. EVA also announced that it had joined the Taiwan Talent Sustainability Initiative Alliance to promote talent sustainability with many Taiwan companies. EVA has implemented sustainability policies in four main areas: safety, tourism, arts and culture, and social welfare. Starting in 2019, EVA will hire MedLink to provide passenger fitness assessments and medical consultations, and promote the "Airborne Medical Program" to invite passengers who are doctors to join the program, providing professional medical assistance to in-flight passengers who have medical needs. EVA also assists the military by providing emergency escape training for aircrews to help ensure the safety of military flights.

Therefore, the increase in greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution with the increase in the number of aircraft landings and takeoffs has caused the aviation industry to be highly regarded by governmental organizations and scholars (Tien-Huei Liao et al., 2016). In recent years, the two major airlines in Taiwan have invested in the topic of sustainability, and through various efforts such as reducing carbon emissions, improving energy efficiency, assisting domestic disadvantaged groups, and focusing on the work safety of their employees. They are moving towards the goal of sustainability. The indicators for sustainability assessment are DJSI, SDGs and ESG. In this study, ESG is chosen as the sustainability indicator for airline companies, which is measured in three dimensions: environmental, social and corporate governance. While previous studies have examined the relationship between corporate social responsibility, corporate sustainability, and brand image, this study takes the airline industry as the target to investigate the impact of corporate sustainability behaviors on corporate image and consumers' purchasing intentions.

2.4 Corporate Image

2.4.1 Definition of Corporate Image

Corporate image is an abstract concept and an extension of image; Gardner & Levy (1955) proposed that the concept of "image" includes corporate image, product image, and brand image; Kotler & Barich (1991) believed that image is the sum of beliefs, attitudes, and impressions that a

person or group has about an object, which can be a company, product, price, brand, etc. Mazzarol (1991) suggested that image is an abstract concept and an extension of image, but it is also a concept that can be used to define the image of an organization, Mazzarol (1998) states that corporate image is an indicator of the willingness of potential or existing customers to contact a company. According to past research, corporate image is a subjective feeling, experience, and impression that a company brings to consumers, investors, and stakeholders. Corporate image is the sum of the perceptions that a company gives to the outside world, which can truly reflect the public's evaluation, and it is an important intangible asset of a company, and the shaping of corporate image must be accumulated over time through concrete and tangible actions, and corporate image is one of the major bases for consumers to choose a brand (Jiang, Yuanbin, 2003). Summarizing the above, this study defines corporate image as the overall impression and cognition of the public towards a corporation.

2.4.2 Measuring Components of Corporate Image

The conceptual composition of corporate image is relatively complex, and there are different components of corporate image in the past literature. Walters (1978) proposed that corporate image is divided into three components for the products, services and organization of a corporation, including institutional image, functional image and commodity image. It consists of institutional image, functional image and commodity image.

In the past, some scholars have measured corporate image as a single construct. (Li-Yin Chien, Shu-Yi Ji, 2019) Considering the characteristics of the aviation industry, Ho Hoi-cheung, Ming-Ying Lu, and Mei-Jie Huang (2010) suggest that the factors constituting the image of air cargo terminals come from consumers' perceptions of the terminals, which include the company name, business philosophy, and reputation of the company, and then, based on the characteristics of the services of the air cargo terminals, they categorized their corporate image into company image, service image, and corporate reputation, which are measured as a single dimension. The corporate image is measured as a single construct. Tang et al. (2021) pointed out that the corporate image of airlines is an overall assessment of the company by the customers, which mainly focuses on the fleet, brand, and service, and includes flight safety, brand awareness, social trust, public welfare activities, and green environmental protection. In this study, we want to measure the impact of corporate image on consumers' purchasing intention by taking consumers of airlines as the target audience, therefore, we measured the corporate image of airlines as a single

dimension by referring to the way of measuring the corporate image of air cargo terminals and airlines by Hu, Kai-Chieh, et al. (2010), and Tang, Ling-Lang, et al.

2.5 Consumer Purchasing Intention

2.5.1 Definition of Consumer Purchasing Intention

Consumer willingness to buy has been shown to be a key predictor of consumer behavior in 1975, as the subjective tendency of consumers to purchase a subject (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and it has also been suggested that it can be used to predict consumer purchasing behavior (Morwitz & Schmittlein, 1992). Burnkrant (1979) suggests that purchase intention refers to an individual's propensity to act on a product and Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991) state that purchase intention refers to the chance, intention and likelihood that a consumer intends to purchase a particular product. Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) defined willingness to buy as a measure of the likelihood that a consumer will purchase a product, with a higher willingness to buy indicating a greater likelihood of purchasing the product, and Bruce and Abhijit (2002) stated that purchasing behavior is correlated with willingness to buy, and that willingness to buy is a measure of whether or not the consumer will engage in the purchasing behavior. Spears and Singh (2004) suggest that purchase intention is an individual's conscious effort to plan for the purchase of a branded product. Purchase intention may be formed when consumers have a favorable impression and attitude towards a product or brand, which means that purchase intention refers to the subjective probability of a consumer purchasing a particular product or brand. In other words, purchase intention refers to the subjective probability of consumers buying a particular product or brand. Summarizing the above, this study concludes that consumers' perceptions of a product or service may form purchase intention, and the higher the purchase intention, the higher the probability of purchasing behavior.

2.5.2 Measurement of Purchase Intention

The issue of measuring consumers' willingness to buy has been widely studied by many scholars in the past, and the ways of measuring willingness to buy proposed by many scholars are similar. In the past, the literature mostly focuses on the service industry and explores the effect of corporate image on willingness to buy, while fewer studies have mentioned the effect of the corporate image of the airline industry on consumers' willingness to buy. Based on the literature, it can be seen that purchase intention is often measured by a single construct, and each of them has developed its own questionnaire, in which consumers' purchase intention is measured by their likelihood of purchase, consideration of purchase, or unsolicited

recommendation. In this study, consumer willingness to buy is defined as the likelihood that a consumer's perception of a product or service will result in a willingness to buy, and the higher the willingness to buy, the higher the likelihood of purchasing behavior. Factors affecting consumers' willingness to buy include brand awareness, consumer perceived value, and brand reputation, etc. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of corporate image on consumers' willingness to buy by measuring consumers' likelihood of purchase, consideration of purchase, or active recommendation.

2.6 Brand Loyalty

2.6.1 Definition of Brand Loyalty

Loyalty is the behavior of a customer who makes repeated purchases of a brand without searching for other brands (Newman & Werbel, 1973). Dick and Basu (1994) pointed out that loyalty is the strength of the relationship between a customer's personal attitude and repeated purchasing behavior, and argued that loyal customers will spread favorable word-of-mouth for the enterprise, which will help the enterprise to fight against the competitor's strategy and bring higher revenues to the enterprise, and also willing to buy more products and services with lower switching intention. They also believe that loyal customers will convey favorable word-of-mouth for the enterprise, help the enterprise to fight against competitors' strategies, and bring higher revenues for the enterprise, and are willing to buy more products and services with lower switching intention. Therefore, building brand loyalty and making consumers recognize and even be loyal to the brand has always been the goal of marketers. In addition, brand loyalty is regarded as a major source of competitive advantage and sustainability (Egan, 2005; Parasuraman et al., 1991). Gremler and Brown (1996) categorized loyalty into cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, and behavioral loyalty. Oliver (1999) argues that loyalty consists of three elements: belief, emotion and intention, and it is because of the formation of these elements that customers will further purchase behavior. Dick and Basu (1994) pointed out that loyalty is the strength of the relationship between customers' personal attitudes and repetitive purchasing behavior, and believed that loyal customers will convey favorable word-of-mouth for the enterprise, help the enterprise to fight against the competitors' strategies, bring higher revenues for the enterprise, and be willing to buy more products and services, and have a lower switching intention, so the establishment of brand loyalty, so that the consumers will identify with and even loyal to the brand, has always been the marketing personnel to establish brand loyalty. Therefore, building brand loyalty and getting consumers to recognize and even be loyal to the brand has

always been the goal of marketers. In this study, Parasurman et al. (1994) defined brand loyalty as consumers' intention to repurchase and their willingness to convey positive word-of-mouth messages to friends and family.

2.6.2 Measuring Brand Loyalty

Generally speaking, the most direct way to measure customer loyalty is through repurchase behavior, but Jacoby & Kyner (1997) pointed out that customer loyalty and repurchase behavior have been shown to be unequal, and that loyal customers will repurchase, but those who repurchase may not be loyal. Since behavioral loyalty is difficult to observe and measure, most researchers use behavioral intention to measure loyalty (Yang & Peterson, 2004). Jones and Sasser (1995) suggest that there are two types of loyalty, one is long term loyalty which is true brand loyalty, and the other is short term loyalty, which is the tendency to change the target immediately when the customer finds out that there is a better choice. The other is short-term loyalty, and when customers find better choices, they will immediately change their targets. It is suggested that loyalty should be measured from the following three perspectives: (1) Primary behavior: This refers to the information on the transactions between the customer and the company in order to measure the brand loyalty, and to analyze the customer's recent purchasing experiences and behaviors, including the time of purchase and the frequency of purchases. (2) Derivative behavior (secondary behavior): This refers to whether or not the customer publicly recommends or introduces the product or service to provide positive word-of-mouth behavior. (3) Intent to repurchase: This refers to the customer's willingness to repurchase or use a particular service or product in the future. This study adopts Chaudhrie & Holbrook (2001) who divided brand loyalty into behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Behavioral loyalty consists of purchase behavior, word-of-mouth, and recommendations, while attitudinal loyalty is a manifestation of psychological commitments such as self-perception, price premium, and switching tolerance.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Framework

This study focuses on the impact of corporate image as a mediating variable, corporate sustainability behavior on consumer purchase intention, and customer loyalty as a moderating variable, and the structure of the study is shown in Figure 1. designation.

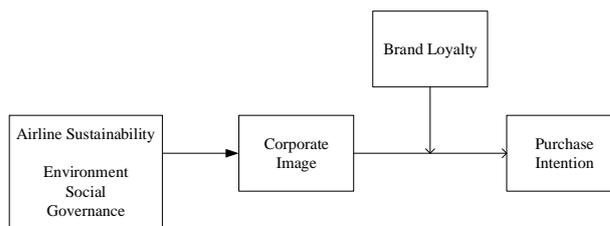


Figure 1
Research Framework

3.2 Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and the research framework of this study, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Corporate sustainability behavior has a significant positive effect on corporate image.

H2: Corporate image has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

H3: Corporate image has a mediating effect between corporate sustainability behavior and consumer purchase intention.

H4: Brand loyalty has a moderating effect between corporate image and purchase intention.

3.3 Population and Sampling Methods

This study was based on the two major airlines in Taiwan, China Airlines and EVA Air, and mainly on consumers who have ever traveled on airline flights. The study adopted a convenience sampling method, with a sample of about 350 people, and invited four professionals to conduct an expert questionnaire test, which was supplemented according to the expert's revised recommendations.

IV. RESULTS

In order to test the hypothesis of this study, a total of 366 questionnaires were collected, and after deducting the 50 questionnaires that were not completed, the total number of valid questionnaires was 316, and the validity rate of the questionnaires was 86.3%. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the four dimensions of "ESG", "corporate image", "purchase intention", and "brand loyalty", as well as the overall reliabilities of the dimensions and the overall reliabilities of the scales are all greater than 0.7, which range from 0.83 to 0.91, indicating that the scales of the present study have consistency and good reliabilities. The KMO value of ESG is 0.88, $p < 0.001$; the KMO value of corporate image is 0.86, $p < 0.001$; the KMO value of purchase intention is 0.84, $p < 0.001$; and the KMO value of brand loyalty is 0.87, $p < 0.001$. The KMO values of all the dimensions are all greater than 0.7, which is within the range of 0.84 to 0.88. The Bartlett's ball-park tests are all

significant. The KMO values of all dimensions were greater than 0.7, ranging from 0.84 to 0.88, and the Bartlett's sphere test was significant, which indicated that the data of this study were suitable for factor analysis. three dimensions of ESG were captured by the Promax method, which was in line with the original setting, and the dimensions of corporate image, willingness to buy, and brand loyalty were captured by the Promax method, which were in line with the original setting as well. In the correlation analysis of the dimensions, the correlation coefficient between ESG-E environmental dimension and corporate image is 0.31 ($p < 0.01$), the correlation coefficient between ESG-S social dimension and corporate image is 0.32 ($p < 0.01$), and the correlation coefficient between ESG-G corporate governance dimension and corporate image is 0.46 ($p < 0.01$). This shows that there is a correlation between ESG and its components on corporate image.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the study, it can be concluded that ESG-E (Environment) and ESG-G (Corporate Governance) have a significant positive impact on corporate image while ESG-S (Social) has no significant impact on corporate image. Corporate image has a significant positive effect on consumers' purchase intention. Corporate image partially mediates between ESG-E (Environment) and purchase intention, and corporate image fully mediates between ESG-G (Corporate Governance) and purchase intention. However, corporate image does not mediate between ESG-S (social) and purchase intention. When consumers have stronger brand loyalty, compared to lower brand loyalty, corporate image has a greater positive effect on purchase intention and can strengthen their purchase intention.

The above findings also reflect the actual operating conditions of Taiwan's airlines. The strikes at China Airlines in 2015, EVA Air in 2019, and EVA Air in 2023 show that employees are dissatisfied with their compensation plans and reward and punishment systems, and that companies do not pay much attention to their employees' working conditions and lack of manpower. The results of this study show that the actions of a company's internal governance have an impact on its own image, and that sustainable actions such as information transparency, a good compensation plan, and treating employees well are one of the ways to enhance the image of an airline company.

Finally, it is suggested that airlines can publicize their sustainability practices to enhance consumers' awareness of the importance of improving the environment, social

welfare, and the rights and interests of their employees, but should avoid formal or exaggerated publicity, in order to attract consumers' attention, enhance their corporate image, and increase consumers' purchasing intentions.

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