

PASSENGER PERCEPTIONS OF GREEN FLYING: DO ECO-FRIENDLY AIRLINES ATTRACT MORE TOURISTS?

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Abstract

Sustainability has emerged as a central priority for the global tourism industry, and aviation—often criticized for its environmental impact—plays a decisive role in shaping perceptions of responsible travel. This article examines the relationship between eco-friendly airline practices and passenger perceptions, with a focus on their potential to influence tourism flows. Green initiatives such as fleet modernization, adoption of sustainable aviation fuels, reduction of single-use plastics, and investment in carbon offsetting programs are no longer peripheral measures but increasingly integral to airline strategy. These actions, when communicated transparently, have the potential to enhance corporate reputation, build trust with passengers, and strengthen the perceived value of the overall travel experience. Although cost and connectivity remain the dominant factors guiding airline choice, environmentally responsible branding has become a powerful differentiator in a competitive marketplace, particularly among younger travelers and tourists with heightened ecological awareness. The adoption of sustainable practices within aviation not only contributes to global climate objectives but also reinforces the appeal of destinations seeking to position themselves as leaders in responsible tourism. By embedding sustainability at the core of their operations and marketing, airlines can transform environmental responsibility into both a driver of competitiveness and a catalyst for more sustainable patterns of tourism development.

Key words: *Green aviation; eco-friendly airlines; sustainable tourism; passenger perceptions; airline competitiveness; environmental responsibility.*

JEL Classification: *L93, Q01, Q56, Z32.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Aviation plays a pivotal role in global tourism, connecting destinations, enabling cultural exchange, and supporting economic growth. For many regions, air transport is the essential gateway through which international tourism flows are made possible. Yet this centrality also brings challenges. Aviation is responsible for a significant share of global greenhouse gas emissions, and its environmental footprint has made it a focal point of debates on sustainable development. The tension between aviation's economic benefits and its environmental costs has become increasingly evident, especially as climate concerns shape policy, industry practices, and traveler expectations.

In recent years, demand for sustainable travel has risen sharply. Tourists are becoming more aware of the environmental consequences of their choices, and destinations are positioning themselves as sustainable to remain competitive. Within this context, airlines face mounting pressure to demonstrate environmental responsibility. Initiatives such as fleet modernization, the adoption of sustainable aviation fuels, waste

reduction strategies, and transparent carbon offsetting programs are not only technical measures to reduce emissions but also communication tools to signal commitment to sustainability. For travelers, these initiatives may influence perceptions of an airline's brand, trustworthiness, and alignment with their personal values.

This article therefore addresses a central question: Do eco-friendly airlines attract more tourists? The objective is to explore how environmentally responsible practices within aviation shape passenger perceptions, and whether such initiatives can strengthen airline competitiveness and contribute to destination attractiveness. By examining the intersection of airline sustainability, passenger behavior, and tourism flows, the discussion highlights both the opportunities and limitations of "green flying" as a driver of future growth in the tourism sector.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent reviews and industry reports document that sustainability has moved from peripheral CSR activity to a central strategic priority for many carriers. Airlines increasingly promote fleet renewal,

operational efficiency, and investments in Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) as core elements of their decarbonization strategies, and major industry bodies (e.g., IATA) emphasize these pathways in their communications. At the same time, corporate sustainability reporting (ESG/CSR) has become more integrated across carriers' strategies following the post-COVID recovery (Sorsa, 2024; IATA, 2023).

A strong strand of recent empirical work examines whether passengers will accept a "green premium" — higher prices or voluntary charges to reduce aviation emissions. Meta-analyses and several single-country studies show heterogeneity: some passengers (notably younger travelers, environmentally engaged segments, and certain corporate customers) express willingness to pay for lower-emission options or SAF, but overall sensitivity to price and network convenience remains dominant in purchase decisions. The literature therefore portrays willingness to pay as conditional (dependent on price premium size, perceived genuineness of the green measure, and flight characteristics such as distance). (Wendt, 2024; Wang, 2024).

SAF features prominently in policy and academic discussions as one of the technically and politically feasible levers to reduce lifecycle emissions. Reviews from 2023–2024 summarize SAF's potential while stressing current constraints — limited supply, high cost relative to fossil jet kerosene, and feedstock controversies. Industry analyses also signal that airlines and corporate buyers show growing interest in SAF procurement agreements, but broad passenger recognition of SAF and its benefits is inconsistent. Thus, SAF is framed both as an industry priority and as a nascent marketing opportunity — contingent on cost declines, transparent supply chain claims, and credible communication to passengers. (Wang, 2024; IATA, 2023).

Voluntary carbon offsets and airline offset programmes have been widely used as near-term mitigation and marketing tools. However, recent research and investigative journalism highlight concerns about the effectiveness and credibility of many offset projects; regulators and consumer protection agencies (notably in the EU) have stepped up scrutiny of green claims and offset-based marketing. Emerging literature underscores a dual effect: offset programmes can raise passenger perception of airline responsibility when credible, yet poorly documented or exaggerated offset claims risk reputational damage and regulatory pushback. This shift affects how passengers interpret "eco-friendly" branding and may moderate the positive marketing effect that airlines seek. (Tsoi, Yu and Luo, 2025; The Guardian, 2023; Financial Times, 2023).

Closely related to offsets is the communication strategy of carriers. Recent studies evaluate how airlines present sustainability claims, finding that

transparency, specificity (e.g., exact SAF share, verified offset standards), and third-party certification increase credibility. Conversely, vague or aspirational claims invite accusations of greenwashing and regulatory action. Regulatory developments (e.g., restrictions on misleading environmental labels) and high-profile investigations into airline claims are shaping both industry practice and passenger expectations: credible communication is now a key condition for converting sustainability investments into positive passenger perceptions. (Tsoi, Yu and Luo, 2025; EU, 2023).

The recent scholarly and industry literature suggests that visible, well-communicated sustainability initiatives can enhance brand reputation, strengthen customer loyalty, and contribute to a destination's image when airlines partner with tourism stakeholders. The marketing value of sustainability is most potent among specific market segments (e.g., younger leisure travelers, eco-conscious tourists, and sustainability-focused corporations). However, the literature consistently cautions that sustainability is rarely the sole decision factor: price, schedule convenience, loyalty programs, and route network remain primary determinants. Thus, green positioning appears to act as a differentiator rather than a primary demand driver in many contexts. (Sorsa, 2024; Wendt, 2024).

Policy initiatives at regional and international levels (such as CORSIA, EU Green Deal provisions, and consumer protection rules) influence both airline behaviour and passenger-facing claims. Regulatory tightening around advertising claims and offsets (notably in the EU) may reduce deceptive messaging and raise the bar for what qualifies as an "eco-friendly" offer. The literature recognizes that policy signals affect passenger trust and industry incentives — amplifying the need for verified, standardized claims that consumers can trust. (IATA, 2023; EU, 2023; Financial Times, 2023).

While the last five years produced multiple impactful contributions, the literature shows recurring gaps relevant to your article's industry frame: (1) longitudinal evidence linking specific airline sustainability investments to measurable changes in tourist flows is scarce; (2) research that situates airline sustainability within destination marketing strategies (joint airline-DMO effects) remains limited; and (3) there is growing need for comparative work across regions that accounts for regulatory variation and cultural differences in environmental concern. These gaps suggest promising avenues for practical, industry-oriented analysis that combines marketing, regulatory, and tourism demand perspectives. (Sorsa, 2024; Wendt, 2024).

The recent literature converges on several practical points useful for an industry audience: (a) sustainability initiatives—if genuine, transparent, and cost-managed—can strengthen brand image and attract

particular passenger segments; (b) these initiatives rarely override price and connectivity but serve as meaningful differentiators; (c) communication quality and regulatory compliance are as important as the underlying technical measures; (d) SAF is the strategic centerpiece but requires supply-side scaling and credible claims to offer marketing value; and (e) airlines that partner credibly with destinations and tourism stakeholders are better positioned to translate “green flying” into measurable tourism appeal.

III. AVIATION AND SUSTAINABILITY – AN INTERRELATED CONNECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

III.1. Overview of aviation's contribution to emissions and climate change

The aviation sector is one of the fastest-growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions globally. While commercial aviation accounts for roughly 2–3% of global CO₂ emissions, its impact is amplified by non-CO₂ effects, including nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions, water vapor contrails, and cirrus cloud formation, which together contribute significantly to radiative forcing and climate warming (Lee et al., 2021). These effects are especially pronounced in the upper atmosphere, where aircraft emissions have a disproportionate climate impact compared to surface-level emissions from other transport modes.

Global air traffic has expanded rapidly over the past decades, driven by the rise of low-cost carriers, increasing international tourism, and globalization of business networks. The International Air Transport Association (IATA, 2023) projects that passenger numbers will nearly double by 2037 compared to pre-pandemic levels, highlighting the potential for aviation's environmental footprint to grow substantially if mitigation measures are not widely adopted. This growth presents a unique challenge: while aviation underpins global tourism and economic development, its environmental consequences are increasingly scrutinized by policymakers, the public, and sustainability-focused investors.

Emissions from aviation stem primarily from the combustion of fossil-based jet fuel, which produces CO₂ as well as NO_x, particulate matter, and sulfur oxides. Unlike ground-based transport, where electrification is becoming a feasible alternative, aviation faces technological constraints; battery energy density and weight limitations currently prevent large-scale electrification for long-haul flights. As a result, emissions reduction in aviation relies on a combination of approaches, including fleet modernization, operational efficiency improvements, sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), and carbon offsetting strategies.

Each of these measures carries varying degrees of effectiveness, cost, and adoption timelines, creating a complex landscape for airlines striving to balance environmental responsibility with commercial viability (Wang, 2024; Sorsa, 2024).

The sector's environmental impact is not only a technical challenge but also a reputational and economic one. Growing public awareness of climate change has led to the emergence of “flight shame” movements in Europe and heightened scrutiny over airlines' environmental claims. Consumers increasingly expect airlines to demonstrate credible sustainability efforts, while governments are implementing stricter regulations and carbon pricing mechanisms to curb emissions. These pressures position environmental performance as a strategic concern, with implications for brand image, passenger loyalty, and the attractiveness of destinations connected by airline networks. Consequently, understanding how aviation's environmental footprint intersects with passenger perceptions is central to assessing the market potential for eco-friendly airlines (Tsoi, Yu and Luo, 2025; Wendt, 2024).

III.2. Policy and regulatory pressures – aviation industry response: green strategies adopted by airlines

The European Union (EU) has been at the forefront of integrating sustainability into aviation policy, recognizing the sector's significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. Central to this effort is the ReFuelEU Aviation initiative, which mandates that aviation fuel suppliers at EU airports progressively increase the share of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) in their offerings. Starting in 2025, suppliers are required to blend at least 2% SAF, rising to 6% by 2030 and reaching 70% by 2050. This ambitious trajectory is designed to reduce aviation's carbon footprint while driving the adoption of SAF across Europe. Complementing this, the EU Green Deal envisions a climate-neutral Europe by 2050, with aviation playing a crucial role. The EU supports research into alternative fuels such as hydrogen and e-fuels, although challenges remain, including the high cost and limited availability of SAF, which could hinder the achievement of these targets.

At the global level, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has implemented the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA). This market-based mechanism aims to stabilize international aviation emissions at 2020 levels by requiring airlines to offset any growth in emissions beyond this baseline. While CORSIA provides a global framework for emissions management, its effectiveness depends on widespread participation and the credibility of the offset projects involved.

In response to these regulatory and policy pressures, airlines are increasingly adopting both SAF and carbon offsetting programs as part of their sustainability strategies. For example, Malaysia Airlines, in collaboration with Petronas, has commenced flights powered by domestically produced SAF, demonstrating its commitment to decarbonization and setting a precedent for regional efforts in sustainable aviation. Similarly, EasyJet has been a pioneer in carbon offsetting, neutralizing the emissions from all its flights since November 2019 through accredited offset projects, thereby positioning itself as a leader in voluntary emissions reduction within the sector.

Beyond the adoption of current technologies, airlines are also investing in research and development for future sustainable solutions. Collaborations with aircraft manufacturers, such as Airbus, are focusing on the development of zero-emission aircraft powered by hydrogen. These innovations aim to revolutionize air travel by introducing propulsion systems capable of significantly reducing or even eliminating carbon emissions, aligning long-term industry growth with environmental sustainability.

IV. PASSENGER PERCEPTIONS AND TOURISM DEMAND IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

IV.1. Does Sustainability Influences Airline Choice and Brand Reputation?

Environmental sustainability initiatives—such as the adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF), carbon offset programs, and fleet modernization—have become increasingly central in shaping consumer preferences within the aviation sector. Airlines that actively engage in such initiatives are perceived as more responsible and forward-looking, which can directly influence passengers' willingness to choose them over less sustainable competitors. Baumeister (2022) highlights that airlines demonstrating clear environmental responsibility tend to significantly enhance customer satisfaction, suggesting that ecological performance is becoming as important as traditional factors like price or schedule. Similarly, Demir (2023) found a strong correlation between passengers' environmental awareness and their airline choices, reinforcing the notion that sustainability has moved from a marginal consideration to a decisive factor for many travelers. For example, KLM has positioned itself as a leader in sustainability through its SAF-powered flights and its "Fly Responsibly" campaign, which actively encourages customers to offset their carbon emissions and even reconsider

whether to fly at all (KLM, 2024). Such initiatives not only reduce environmental impact but also strengthen the airline's reputation as an industry pioneer.

Beyond operational initiatives, broader Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts also play a critical role in building consumer trust and loyalty. Airlines that integrate sustainability into their CSR strategies are not only meeting environmental goals but also strengthening their brand image. Chung et al. (2025) argue that CSR initiatives linked to environmental performance foster greater passenger satisfaction and trust, both of which are key mediators in cultivating long-term loyalty. EasyJet has been particularly notable in this regard, claiming carbon neutrality for all its flights between 2019 and 2022 through large-scale offset programs, positioning itself as one of the first major European carriers to make such a commitment (EasyJet, 2022). Although later shifting toward direct emission reduction strategies, this move cemented EasyJet's reputation as an innovator in green aviation.

Generational perspectives further shape how sustainability influences airline choice. Younger travelers, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, are markedly more environmentally conscious and tend to integrate sustainability into their decision-making processes. Seyfi (2025) even describes Gen Z as the "sustainability generation," citing their strong awareness of ecological challenges and demand for corporate responsibility. McKinsey (2024) similarly reports that younger travelers are more likely to reduce or avoid flying due to eco-anxiety, reflecting a deeper internalization of environmental concerns compared to older cohorts. For these generations, sustainability is not merely an added benefit but a core expectation. Lufthansa, for instance, has launched a "Green Fares" ticket option, which bundles SAF usage and carbon offsetting into the ticket price, directly appealing to younger passengers who want tangible, transparent choices to reduce their travel footprint (Lufthansa Group, 2023).

By contrast, older generations such as Baby Boomers and Generation X often place greater emphasis on convenience, comfort, and cost when making travel decisions. A YouGov survey (2025) revealed that only 31% of Baby Boomers expressed concern about the environmental impact of their holidays, compared to 47% of Gen Z travelers. This disparity underscores the fact that while sustainability has become a decisive factor for younger cohorts, it remains a secondary consideration for older ones. Nevertheless, even older travelers are increasingly exposed to airlines' sustainability messages. Ryanair, for example, has integrated emissions transparency into its booking system, highlighting its claim of having the lowest emissions per passenger among major European airlines (Ryanair, 2024). While this may not drastically sway older generations, it contributes to a positive

perception of responsibility and efficiency.

For airlines, recognizing and addressing this generational divide is crucial for balancing market appeal and brand reputation. Younger travelers respond strongly to visible commitments such as SAF adoption, carbon-neutral programs, and innovative technologies like hydrogen-powered aircraft. Communicating these initiatives transparently can strengthen brand loyalty among this environmentally conscious demographic. Conversely, for older travelers, while sustainability may not be the primary motivator, it still enhances the overall perception of an airline's responsibility and reliability. By combining sustainability messaging with assurances of comfort, safety, and service quality, airlines can ensure they appeal to a broad cross-section of passengers.

Ultimately, sustainability serves a dual role: it acts as a differentiating factor in airline choice, particularly among younger generations, and as a long-term driver of brand reputation across the industry as a whole. Airlines that embed sustainability into both their operational strategies and their branding narratives are better positioned to meet evolving passenger expectations, strengthen customer loyalty, and secure a competitive advantage in an increasingly environmentally conscious marketplace.

IV.2. Environmental Branding, Tourism Appeal, and the Balance Between Sustainability, Price, and Convenience

Environmental branding has become a decisive factor in the competitiveness of both airlines and tourism destinations. Travelers increasingly perceive sustainability as part of a destination's identity, with airlines acting as ambassadors of this image. For example, Icelandair has integrated its branding with Iceland's natural landscapes by highlighting carbon reduction programs and supporting geothermal energy initiatives, effectively tying the airline's sustainability efforts to the country's eco-tourism appeal (Icelandair, 2024). This alignment demonstrates how airlines can reinforce the attractiveness of destinations by embedding environmental values into their brand, thereby enhancing tourism flows. Such synergies between airline branding and destination marketing are expected to intensify as sustainability becomes a core component of tourism competitiveness (Baumeister, 2022).

Airlines that successfully communicate sustainability commitments can differentiate themselves in saturated markets while enhancing the reputation of the destinations they serve. For instance, Air New Zealand markets itself as "the world's most sustainable airline," positioning itself in line with the country's clean and green image, which is central to New Zealand's tourism branding (Air New Zealand, 2023). This environmental branding not only

strengthens customer trust but also boosts the perception of New Zealand as a sustainable tourism destination. In this sense, airline sustainability initiatives are not merely operational but play a strategic role in shaping the broader tourism ecosystem and creating a value proposition that extends beyond price or convenience (Chung et al., 2025).

However, price sensitivity remains a critical factor in consumer decision-making, particularly in the highly competitive low-cost airline sector. While passengers increasingly value eco-friendly practices, many remain reluctant to pay significantly higher fares to cover the cost of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) or carbon offsets. A McKinsey (2024) study found that although 40% of passengers claim to care about sustainability, fewer than 15% are willing to pay more than €20 per flight to support greener initiatives. Ryanair, Europe's largest low-cost carrier, has recognized this tension and instead emphasizes efficiency gains—such as higher load factors, modern fleets, and direct routes—as a way to balance sustainability with affordability (Ryanair, 2024). This approach reflects the reality that environmental branding must be carefully balanced against consumer price expectations in order to remain commercially viable.

Convenience is another decisive element that interacts with sustainability. For many travelers, particularly business passengers or families, time efficiency, frequency of flights, and network coverage outweigh environmental considerations. For example, Lufthansa's "Green Fares" initiative, launched in 2023, allows passengers to opt into more sustainable travel by including SAF and offsetting in the ticket price, but it is offered alongside traditional fare options to maintain flexibility (Lufthansa Group, 2023). By embedding sustainability into the booking experience without compromising convenience, airlines provide passengers with choices that align with their values while respecting their practical needs. This hybrid approach—offering both sustainable and standard products—is likely to become an industry norm as airlines seek to balance environmental branding with passenger expectations for flexibility.

Looking to the future, the challenge for airlines and tourism destinations will be to align sustainability with affordability and convenience without undermining profitability. Technological innovation is expected to play a decisive role, with hydrogen-powered aircraft, electrification of regional flights, and large-scale SAF production projected to reduce costs over time (IATA, 2025). Moreover, digital solutions such as carbon calculators integrated into booking platforms will allow passengers to better understand the environmental impact of their choices, empowering them to balance sustainability against cost and convenience. As younger, environmentally conscious generations enter the market in greater numbers,

airlines and destinations that fail to adapt risk losing competitiveness (Seyfi, 2025).

Ultimately, environmental branding, when effectively integrated into the broader tourism and aviation ecosystem, can enhance destination appeal while strengthening airline competitiveness. However, the transition must be managed carefully: branding strategies that overemphasize sustainability without addressing passenger concerns about cost and convenience may alienate customers. Conversely, airlines and destinations that combine authentic environmental practices with flexible and affordable offerings are likely to thrive in the emerging sustainable tourism landscape. The winners will be those that not only market sustainability but embed it meaningfully into operations, ensuring long-term trust, loyalty, and alignment with global climate goals (Demir, 2023)

destinations, aligning their sustainability efforts with local tourism initiatives. For instance, Singapore Airlines has partnered with Singapore Tourism Board to market sustainable travel experiences, emphasizing nature conservation and cultural heritage. This collaboration not only attracts eco-conscious travelers but also supports the local economy by directing tourist spending to sustainable businesses (Aviation Benefits, 2024).

Several airlines have taken proactive steps to integrate sustainability into their tourism promotion efforts. United Airlines' partnership with Visit Greenland exemplifies this approach, where the airline promotes eco-tourism experiences in Nuuk, highlighting local conservation efforts and cultural preservation. Similarly, Malaysia Airlines' collaboration with Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism focuses on promoting lesser-known destinations that prioritize environmental sustainability, thereby distributing tourist traffic and reducing pressure on overvisited areas (Washington Post, 2025).

Collaborations between airlines, airports, and tourism boards are essential for promoting sustainable tourism at scale. These partnerships facilitate the development of infrastructure that supports eco-friendly travel, such as electric ground services and sustainable airport facilities. For example, several European airports have partnered with airlines and local governments to create "green travel corridors," promoting destinations that adhere to sustainable tourism principles. These initiatives not only enhance the travel experience but also contribute to the economic development of the regions involved (AeroTime, 2024).

Sustainable tourism, facilitated by responsible airlines, has a significant positive impact on local economies. By promoting destinations that prioritize environmental and cultural preservation, airlines help ensure that tourism revenue supports local businesses and communities. For instance, in rural areas with rich natural assets but limited economic opportunities, nature-based tourism can create jobs and diversify economies, leading to improved livelihoods and reduced poverty (World Bank, 2024).

Nature-based tourism, often promoted by airlines through sustainable travel packages, offers substantial economic benefits to local communities. Tourists spending on activities, transportation, food, and accommodation generates income that circulates within the community, creating jobs and supporting local enterprises. This form of tourism helps countries achieve development goals while promoting biodiversity conservation, ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of environmental degradation (World Bank, 2024).

Technological advancements are playing a crucial role in supporting sustainable tourism. Airlines are investing in digital platforms that provide travelers

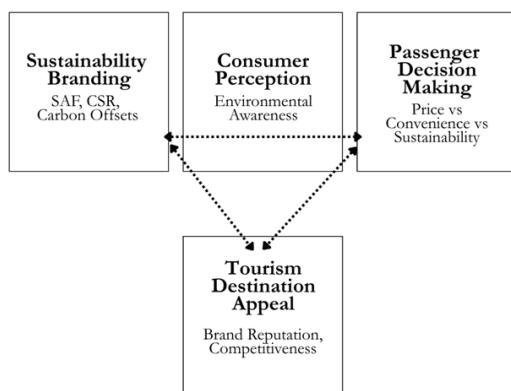


Figure 1 – The Concept Framework: Sustainability, Consumer Choice, and Tourism Appeal
Source: Author's Own Concept, 2025

V. AIRLINES AS DRIVERS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM – GREEN AIRLINES AND DESTINATION MARKETING

Airlines are increasingly recognized as pivotal players in promoting sustainable tourism, not only by reducing their environmental footprint but also by actively shaping destination development. Their role extends beyond transportation; they influence traveler behavior, destination choices, and local economic dynamics. By integrating sustainability into their operations and partnerships, airlines contribute to the creation of more resilient and inclusive tourism economies (IATA, 2025).

The emergence of "green airlines" has transformed destination marketing strategies. These airlines collaborate with Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to promote eco-friendly

with information on sustainable travel options, such as eco-friendly accommodations and low-carbon transportation alternatives. These platforms empower travelers to make informed decisions, aligning their choices with their environmental values. Additionally, the adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) by airlines reduces the carbon footprint of air travel, contributing to the overall sustainability of the tourism sector (Aviation Benefits, 2024).

Consumer demand for sustainable travel options has been growing steadily over the past decade, driven by heightened awareness of climate change, environmental degradation, and social responsibility. Modern travelers increasingly view sustainability as a core component of their decision-making process, extending beyond price and convenience to encompass the environmental and social impact of their journeys. This shift is evident across various demographics, particularly among millennials and Gen Z travelers, who are more likely to prioritize eco-friendly services and are willing to adjust their travel behaviors accordingly (Deloitte, 2023).

One of the most significant trends in this area is the willingness of travelers to pay a premium for carbon-neutral or low-emission flights. Studies indicate that up to 60% of passengers in certain markets express readiness to invest in more sustainable options if these choices are transparently communicated and verifiably certified (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Airlines that introduce carbon offset programs, sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) initiatives, and energy-efficient operations are tapping into this emerging willingness to pay, turning environmental responsibility into a differentiator that can justify higher pricing tiers without losing competitiveness.

Destinations themselves are also influencing traveler choices. Increasingly, tourists prefer locations that implement strong environmental policies, such as low-emission transport, protected natural reserves, and sustainable accommodations. Airlines partnering with such destinations or highlighting eco-conscious travel packages are able to reinforce their commitment to sustainability, creating a seamless narrative from departure to arrival. For instance, carriers promoting routes to eco-certified resorts or cities with ambitious carbon reduction strategies appeal directly to the eco-conscious traveler (Travel Weekly, 2023).

The adoption of sustainable practices by airlines also strengthens brand reputation and customer loyalty. Travelers perceive airlines that invest in green initiatives as forward-thinking, responsible, and aligned with global environmental goals. For example, carriers like KLM, Lufthansa, and Alaska Airlines have emphasized sustainable aviation fuels, improved fleet efficiency, and carbon offset programs as part of their brand identity, successfully attracting loyal customers who align personal values with corporate responsibility (CAPA, 2022). Such initiatives transform sustainability

from a peripheral marketing message into a core component of brand differentiation.

Consumer demand is further influenced by transparency and verifiability. Travelers are not merely looking for symbolic gestures; they expect measurable impact. Airlines that provide detailed reporting on carbon footprint reduction, fuel efficiency gains, or verified carbon offset contributions gain credibility and trust. This level of transparency fosters informed decision-making and empowers travelers to participate in sustainability, reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility between airline and passenger (Air Transport World, 2023).

Digital technologies are enhancing how airlines communicate their sustainable initiatives. Mobile apps, booking platforms, and loyalty programs now allow passengers to track the environmental impact of their journeys, select greener flight options, or even participate in offsetting programs at the point of sale. By integrating sustainability into the travel experience, airlines make eco-conscious choices intuitive and accessible, effectively shaping consumer behavior while demonstrating corporate commitment (Skyscanner Insights, 2023).

Moreover, sustainable travel options extend beyond environmental concerns to include social responsibility. Increasingly, travelers expect airlines to support local communities, fair labor practices, and responsible tourism. Airlines that integrate sustainability holistically—considering economic, environmental, and social dimensions—resonate more strongly with consumers, who increasingly evaluate brands on their broader contribution to global well-being (World Tourism Organization, 2022).

The shift toward sustainability also has long-term business implications. Airlines that fail to respond to evolving consumer preferences risk losing market share to competitors who prioritize environmental responsibility. Conversely, those that proactively innovate in sustainability can gain early-mover advantages, strengthen loyalty programs, and cultivate a distinct brand identity that appeals to environmentally and socially conscious travelers (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Despite the positive trends, challenges remain in promoting sustainable tourism. Issues such as over-tourism, environmental degradation, and economic leakage can undermine the benefits of tourism. However, these challenges also present opportunities for airlines and their partners to innovate and lead in sustainable practices. By investing in community-based tourism, supporting local enterprises, and promoting off-the-beaten-path destinations, airlines can help create a more balanced and sustainable tourism model (Responsible Tourism Partnership, 2023).

Looking ahead, the vision for sustainable tourism involves the creation of integrated ecosystems where airlines, airports, tourism boards, and local

communities collaborate to promote responsible travel. This includes the development of infrastructure that supports sustainable tourism, such as renewable energy-powered airports and waste-free accommodations. Airlines will play a central role in this ecosystem by offering sustainable travel options,

supporting local economies, and contributing to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Through these efforts, the tourism industry can achieve a balance between economic growth and environmental stewardship (UNWTO, 2025).

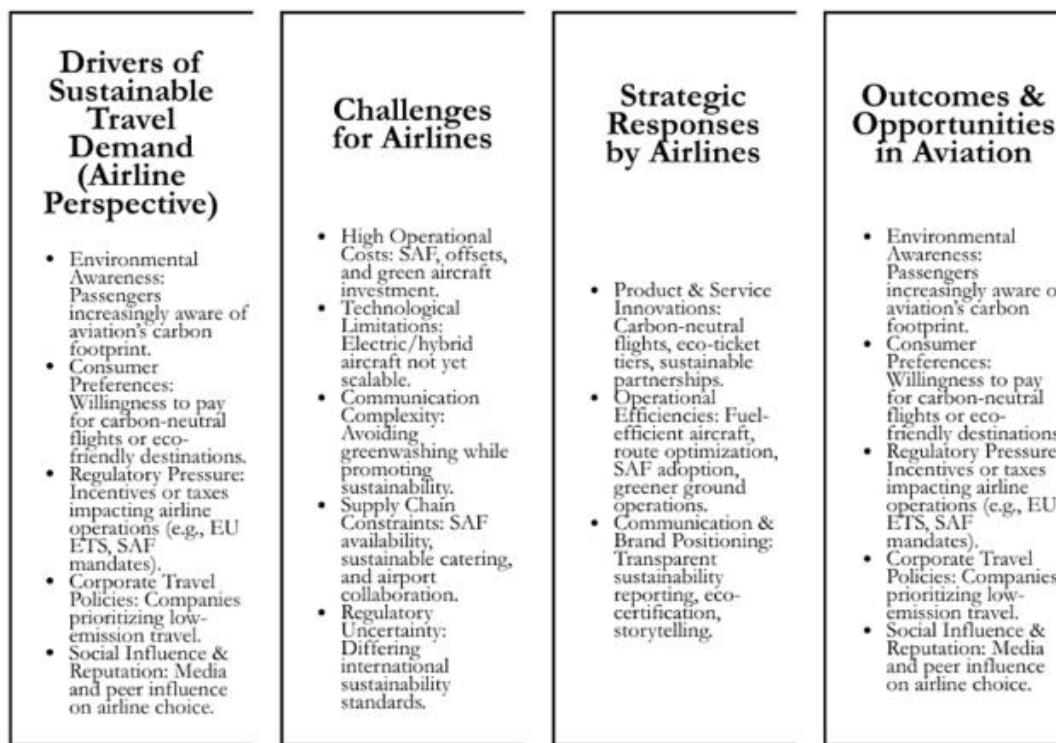


Figure 2 – Figure Concept: Sustainable Travel Demand Framework in Aviation
Source: Author's Own Concept, 2025

In the evolving aviation landscape, sustainability has emerged as a pivotal factor influencing consumer choices. Airlines that proactively adopt eco-friendly practices, such as investing in fuel-efficient aircraft and implementing carbon offset programs, can distinguish themselves in a competitive market. This differentiation not only appeals to environmentally conscious travelers but also aligns with broader industry trends towards sustainability. Research indicates that passengers' perceptions of an airline's green image significantly influence their booking decisions, with many travelers expressing a willingness to pay a premium for environmentally friendly options (Gössling et al., 2015).

Effective communication of sustainability efforts is crucial for airlines aiming to attract eco-conscious travelers. Transparency in environmental practices, such as clear labeling of carbon emissions and the use of eco-friendly materials, can enhance passenger trust and satisfaction. Studies have shown that when airlines openly share their environmental initiatives, passengers are more likely to perceive them positively and consider them in their travel decisions

(Li et al., 2023).

Integrating sustainability into airline operations presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, adopting green technologies and practices can lead to cost savings in the long term and open new market segments. On the other hand, the initial investment and operational adjustments required can be substantial. Moreover, airlines must navigate varying environmental regulations across different regions, which can complicate the implementation of uniform sustainability strategies (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Airlines' sustainability efforts can have a profound impact on tourism flows and the image of destinations. Eco-friendly airlines can attract tourists who prioritize environmental considerations, thereby influencing the overall attractiveness of destinations. Furthermore, destinations that are accessible via sustainable travel options may enhance their reputation as responsible and forward-thinking, potentially leading to increased tourist arrivals and longer stays (Gössling et al., 2019).

VI.CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Passenger perceptions of green flying clearly indicate that sustainability has become a significant factor in airline choice. Eco-friendly initiatives, such as carbon offset programs, use of sustainable aviation fuels, and fuel-efficient aircraft, not only signal environmental responsibility but also influence travelers' decision-making. Research shows that passengers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for airlines that demonstrate genuine commitment to reducing their environmental impact, suggesting that green credentials can serve as a competitive differentiator in a crowded market. The visibility and transparency of airlines' sustainability efforts are equally important in shaping passenger perceptions.

Travelers tend to respond positively when airlines communicate their environmental initiatives clearly, whether through carbon labeling, eco-certifications, or informative marketing campaigns. This transparency builds trust and enhances brand loyalty, encouraging eco-conscious passengers to choose airlines that align with their environmental values. Thus, communication strategies are essential to translate operational sustainability into perceived value for customers. However, embedding sustainability within airline operations is not without challenges.

While adopting green technologies and

practices can lead to long-term cost efficiencies and access to new market segments, the initial investments and operational adjustments required can be substantial. Airlines must also navigate a complex landscape of regional regulations and technological limitations, which may slow or complicate the adoption of comprehensive sustainability measures. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits for passenger attraction and long-term market positioning remain compelling.

Finally, the impact of eco-friendly airlines extends beyond individual carriers to influence tourism flows and destination reputations. Travelers increasingly prefer destinations accessible via sustainable travel options, which can enhance the overall image of those locations as responsible and forward-thinking. Consequently, eco-friendly airlines not only attract environmentally conscious passengers but also contribute to broader trends in sustainable tourism, reinforcing positive feedback loops between airline practices, passenger behavior, and destination appeal. In conclusion, green flying is not merely an operational trend but a strategic avenue for attracting tourists and shaping the future of sustainable air travel.

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