

# An Exploratory Study of In-Flight Safety Videos and Airline Marketing Strategy

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's modern world, traveling has become more common. With the emergence of social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, air travel has increased tremendously in recent years as travelers share first-hand experiences online (Borgogna, 2016). In the aviation industry, a government entity known as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ensures passengers' safety as a top priority. In an effort to promote safety awareness to the passengers, the FAA mandated the commercial airlines to present passengers on board with an in-flight safety video. The in-flight safety video is a pre-recorded video that explicitly presents safety instructions and procedures aimed to be delivered to passengers onboard.

Passengers have often reported these pre-safety briefings to be considered boring and repetitive, and are sometimes ignored (Seneviratne & Molesworth, 2015). This presents the argument that numerous airlines have considered and have therefore transformed their safety videos into more interesting means to attract passengers' attention, such as Air New Zealand (Plautz, 2016). However, recent trends from commercial airlines such as Air New Zealand and Virgin America have attracted millions of YouTube views through their pre-flight safety videos, encouraging viral marketing (Plautz, 2016). This begs the question as to whether airlines are incorporating entertaining content to the in-flight safety video to market their own airlines, or for passenger information retention purposes. As such, the objective of this chapter is to explore in-flight safety videos presented to passengers as a form of marketing, for numerous airlines ranging from premium to budget airlines. The remainder of the chapter includes the background of the in-flight safety video, addressing varying perspectives from the academic literature, followed by research methodology, contribution, and managerial implications.

## BACKGROUND

### Relationship Between In-Flight Safety and Customers

Customer retention is certainly a priority for many industries. For the aviation industry, factors such as a customer loyalty program, satisfaction, reliability, and perceived risks are important determinants of customer retention (Climis, 2016; Atalik and Ozel, 2007; Johnson; Garbarino and Sivadas, 2006). Climis (2016) suggests that a positive relation exists between perceived safety and satisfaction and that the reputation of the airline in terms of safety, and cabin crew knowledge were key elements for customers to

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repurchase and fly with the specific airline. This result is also consistent with related studies conducted earlier (e.g. Atalik and Ozel, 2007; Johnson, Garbarino and Sivadas, 2006).

Previous studies highlight various major problems in aviation safety such as equipment failure, weather conditions, unfastened seatbelt during turbulence, pilot error, air traffic control, cabin crew error, other aircraft collision, terrorism, or unknown (Oster Jr et al., 2013; Lofquist, 2010; Madsen, 2013). Madsen (2013) suggests that a positive link exists between safety risks and profitability when examined the US aviation industry. Aviation safety is an integral part for all concerned stakeholders, particularly passengers and cabin crew. As such, a recent study has looked into virtual reality (VR) as a method of knowledge transfer, specifically safety aviation instructions (Chittaro et al., 2018). The VR tool is proposed to be delivered on smartphone or mobile devices. The use of the mobile VR tool was also compared to the traditional briefing card. Results of the study show that knowledge transfer was significantly faster, more effective, and more accurate when participants used a less traditional tool (Chittaro et al., 2018). This is of great importance since the real-world application of safety knowledge is a fundamental survival factor in a life-or-death situation (Chittaro et al., 2018). Aviation safety is also associated to cabin crews' perceptions of safety culture (Sexton & Klinect, 2017). A study in the field of psychology suggests that a happy crew, with a positive perception of the safety culture are considered safer and less likely to conduct errors. This places emphasis for training departments to ensure teamwork, leadership skills, open communication, and less stress on performance are laid out to pilots and cabin crew to enhance the safety culture (Sexton & Klinect, 2017).

It is an important consideration for the aviation industry to understand what factors are taken into account for travellers in deciding which airlines to fly with. An econometric study was conducted using surveys to measure young travelers' flight choice (the average age of participants was 22 years old). The first questionnaire was generally asking which factors were most important to young travelers. It was found initially that young travelers did not take aviation safety as a factor in their decision making, but price was (Koo et al., 2015), which is contradictory to another study which stated that safety is ranked 7th and 8th for low-cost and budget airlines (O'Connell & Williams, 2005). However, when participants were prompted using a novel approach which specified four important factors: number of incidents (safety), price, flight duration and inflight service (food, entertainment, cabin crew service), safety then became a significant factor in decision making, particularly when risks are involved (O'Connell & Williams, 2005). Therefore, researchers suggest that there is a need for marketers to include safety as an important outline to advertise airlines (Koo et al., 2015, O'Connell & Williams, 2005). Although safety is a major key factor in customer satisfaction with airlines, passengers' perception of safety as an important factor differs from one passenger to another, especially between leisure and business travelers. Leisure travelers are more greatly concerned with safety perception of commercial airlines than business travelers (Ringle et al., 2011) leading to another implication for airlines to strengthen marketing activities involving safety aspects for the general public specifically leisure travelers (Ringle et al., 2011).

## **In-Flight Safety Requirements**

Federal regulators such as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), place a large focus on in-flight safety. In-flight safety instructions were traditionally delivered verbally by the cabin crew to the passengers on board. This practice still occurs in low-cost airlines that do not provide the technology such as screens onboard. Along with federal regulatory bodies, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), United Nations specialized agency, aims to work closely with its members in order to coordinate assistance among members in the aviation

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