



# What is driving airline reputation?

Understanding the growing impact of sustainability and accessibility.

Aircraft | EXPO<sup>®</sup>  
Interiors



For the purpose of this report, we tracked stories and posts regarding 12 airlines across 8 different countries, over the course of one year (2024). In total, the analysis considered 55,267 articles and 1,014,058 social media posts.

#### Full breakdown of sources:

Sources: Online, Social Media

Time period: 1st Jan 2024 – 31st Dec 2024

Countries: Hong Kong, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Malaysia

Airlines tracked: British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, Etihad Airlines, KLM, Lufthansa, Malaysian Airlines, Qatar Airways, Saudia, Singapore Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Virgin Atlantic

Total articles in dataset: 55,267

Total social media posts in dataset: 1,014,058

# Understanding reputation

Aircraft Interiors Expo (AIX) partnered with CARMA, a leading media analysis and intelligence service provider, to investigate how cabin design and passenger experience can impact an airline's reputation.

CARMA employs a comprehensive approach to gauging reputation, analysing media coverage, social media activity, and audience perception through six pillars: products/services, sustainability, conduct, vision, performance, and culture.

CARMA's Reputation Score is calculated separately for traditional media, social media and audience research, and then combined. The score for each component is composed by weighting the presence of the pillars with the tone and volume of coverage/respondents, which is then weighted by the importance of each pillar to the audience (based on audience research).

Its research also provides insights into how reputation impacts purchasing decisions across various regions. For instance, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and United Arab Emirates (UAE), reputation is a strong driver of airline choice, while in Asia, purchase decisions are more complex. In the UK, reputation and purchasing decisions are often more separate considerations.



# Introduction

**In today's digital, interconnected age, reputation for brands is more important than ever.**

The ability for information to spread online (accurate or not), is becoming unstoppable. Consequently, a company's actions, whether it involves harmful, unethical, or unsustainable practices, or proactive measures such as taking bold steps to protect the planet or unveiling innovations to enhance services, hold significant weight. And often, the perception of these actions is even more important. The power and influence of both traditional media and social media have significantly amplified the impact of both positive and negative information, shaping public perception in real-time.

As airlines are responsible for the safe transportation of millions of passengers daily, trust and reliability are paramount. Therefore, for the airline industry, maintaining a solid and positive reputation couldn't be more crucial.

While safety concerns underpin much of the consumer perceptions of airlines, reputation in this sector is a complex equation. And as the aviation industry continues to grow and evolve, several additional criteria are creeping into the equation. Notably, sustainability and accessibility are growing in importance.

This report focuses on the increasingly crucial role that sustainability and accessibility now play in shaping airline reputation. We will examine how passenger experience innovations, presented at events like AIX, directly impact these crucial areas. In an era where environmental consciousness and inclusive travel are paramount, airlines are increasingly judged on their efforts to reduce their carbon footprint and ensure equitable access for all passengers. The following sections will explore specific examples of how these factors explored in the media landscape, and what impact this is having on airline reputation.

CARMA's extensive work in understanding the reputation of businesses in the aviation sector, has revealed that an airline's products and services have the most influence on passengers. Therefore, AIX has a unique role to play in helping to improve airlines' reputations through new cabin concepts that give businesses an opportunity to position themselves as pioneers in passenger experience.





# Driving airline reputation

**So, what factors are truly driving reputation in the airline industry? CARMA has created a unique methodology to track reputation, based on six key pillars - products and services, culture, sustainability, conduct, performance and vision.**

Analysis of the perceptions of 1,534 people based in the UK, UAE, KSA, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore, found that 'Products and Services' was the most influential factor in shaping people's perception of an airline.

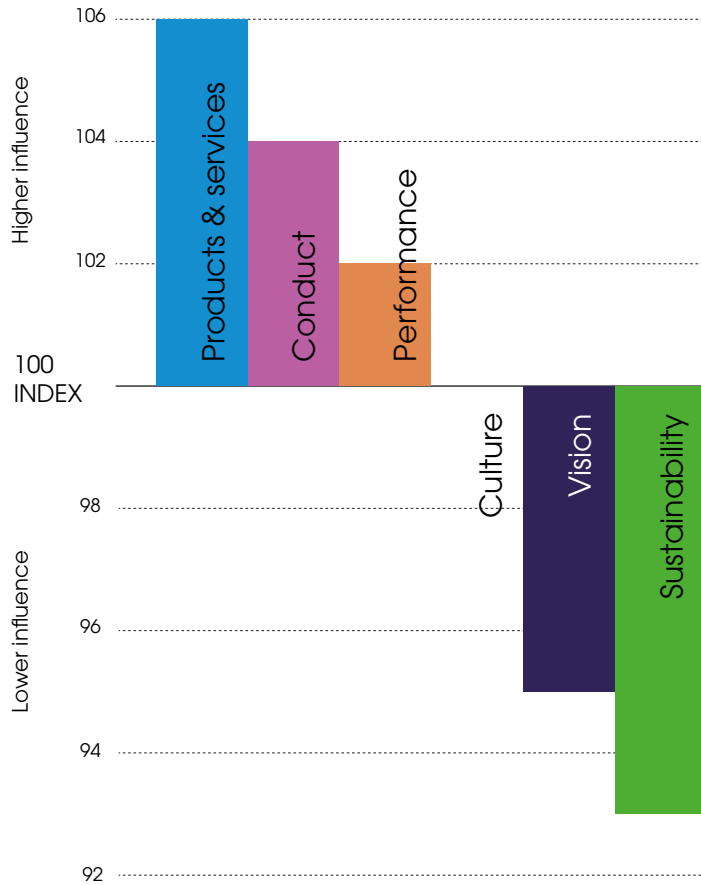
Similarly, the study showed that 'Products and Services' was also the biggest driver of coverage accounting for 70% of traditional media and 65% of social media posts.

CARMA also found that 'Products and Services' was a more influential category than 'Conduct', 'Performance', or 'Culture'. This suggests that by continuing to offer new and innovative services onboard, airlines can maintain or even improve their reputation, helping to influence purchasing decisions.

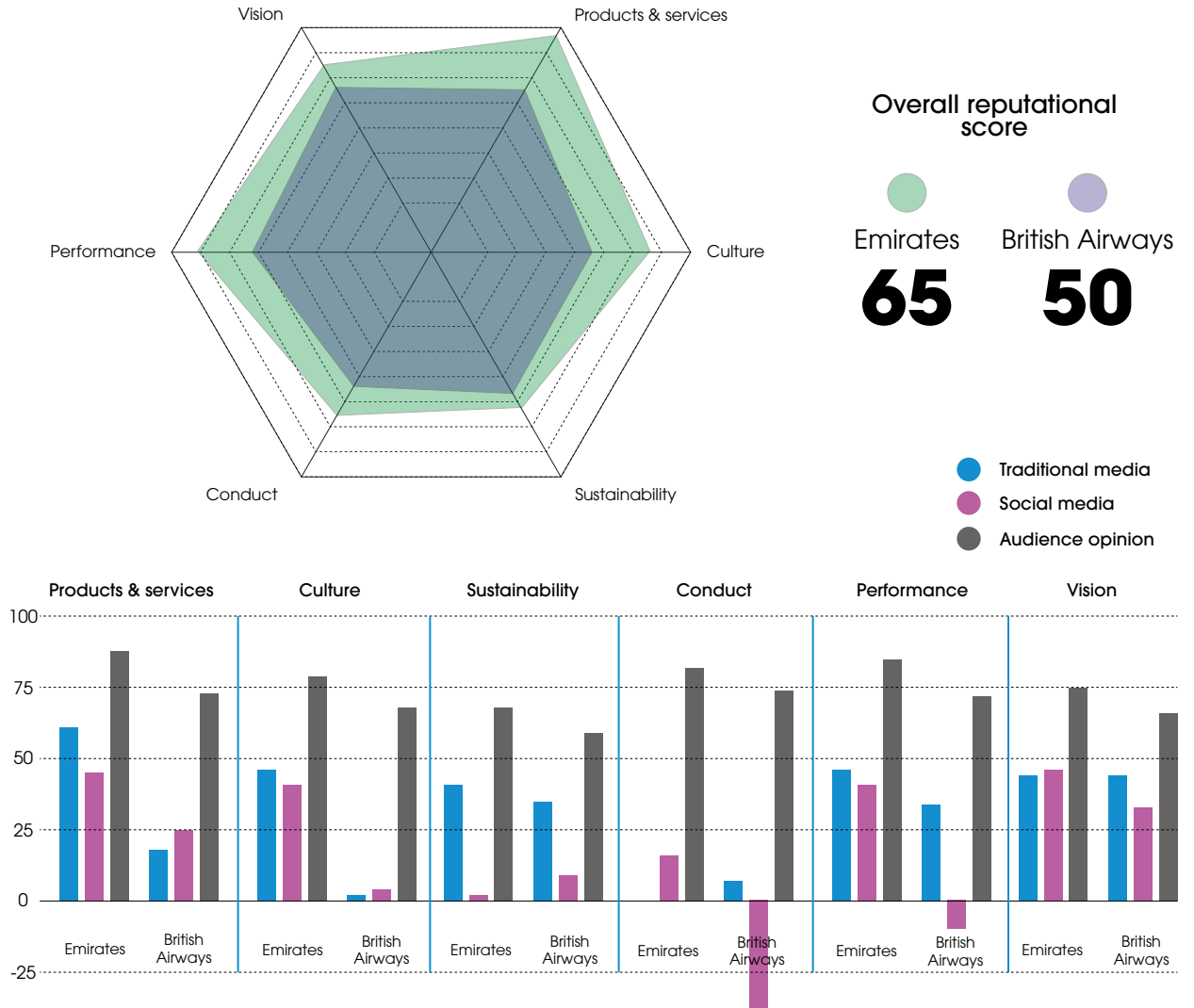
## CARMA's six pillars of reputation in focus

- **Products and Services:** Anything related to their customer offering such as quality, reliability and customer service.
- **Culture:** Anything related to their organisational culture, such as employee treatment, health & safety, diversity & inclusion.
- **Sustainability:** Anything related to their sustainability actions including community engagement, environmental impact and charitable endeavours.
- **Conduct:** Anything related to their behaviour and conduct, such as authenticity, transparency, compliance and ethical behaviour.
- **Performance:** Anything related to their business performance, such as consistency, investment potential and financial results.
- **Vision:** Anything related to their direction and vision of the future, such as innovation, value proposition and expertise.

## The factors driving people's perception of an organisation's reputation



## Exploring the global reputation of two major airlines



# Regional variation

## CARMA found notable variations in how different regions value reputational factors.

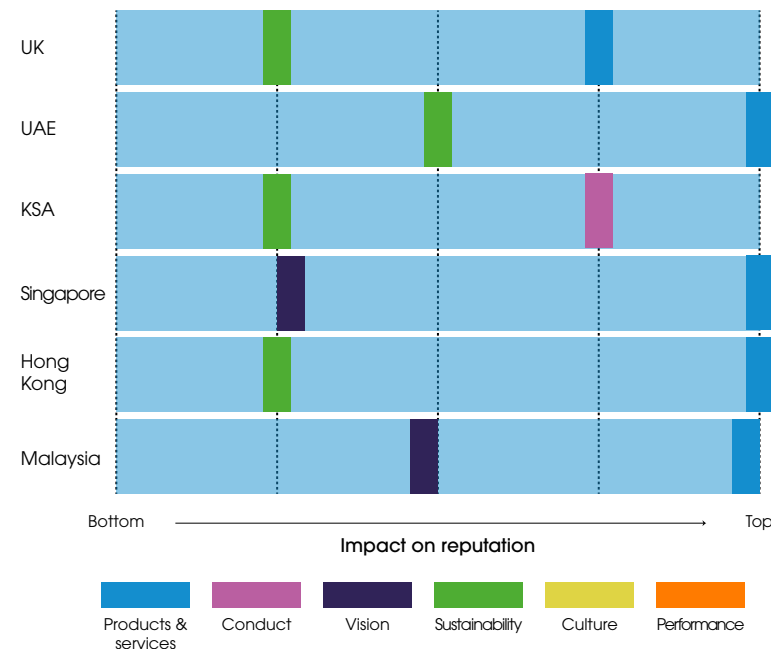
Notably, in the UK, airline reputation scores were not found to directly align with the volume of media coverage. For instance, Emirates received the best overall score in the region, despite a relatively low amount of traditional media coverage. Whereas British Airways, despite having the lowest reputation score, the airline was rated the highest in terms of likelihood of usage. This indicates the need for a greater and more positive exposure of BA's products and services in the media to strengthen its brand reputation.

Meanwhile, in Asia, Singapore Airlines stood out from the pack as the most reputable airline. Notably, the airline scored highly in the 'Products and Services' category, reinforcing the importance of this pillar. Not only was Singapore Airlines rated as the most reputable airline, but it was also rated the most highly for 'Usage Likelihood'.

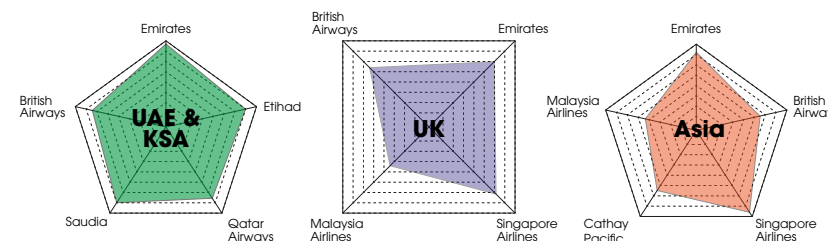
Finally, in the UAE and KSA, CARMA's report found that the Middle East based airlines received the most positivity from the media and audiences. Unsurprisingly, Emirates led the way with the highest reputation score, but was closely followed by Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways, and Saudia. Similarly, to the other regions, the top airlines for reputation also scored highly in 'Products and Services'.

Given the importance of 'Products and Services' on airline reputation score, investing in new and innovative onboard experiences will be essential for airlines moving forward. For airlines looking to bolster their interior products, services and onboard offering, Aircraft Interiors Expo (AIX) remains the event to attend. As the world's leading platform for airlines and cabin interiors professionals, AIX showcases products from all aspects of the cabin, from lighting, seating, galley equipment, and LEDs, to cabin management systems, IFEC hardware, and communications.

## What drives reputation in different regions?



## Products and Services reputation score by region



# Aviation's sustainability challenge

**While many consumers are aware of aviation's impact on the environment, they are still looking to fly with an airline that prioritises making sustainable choices and continually improving.**

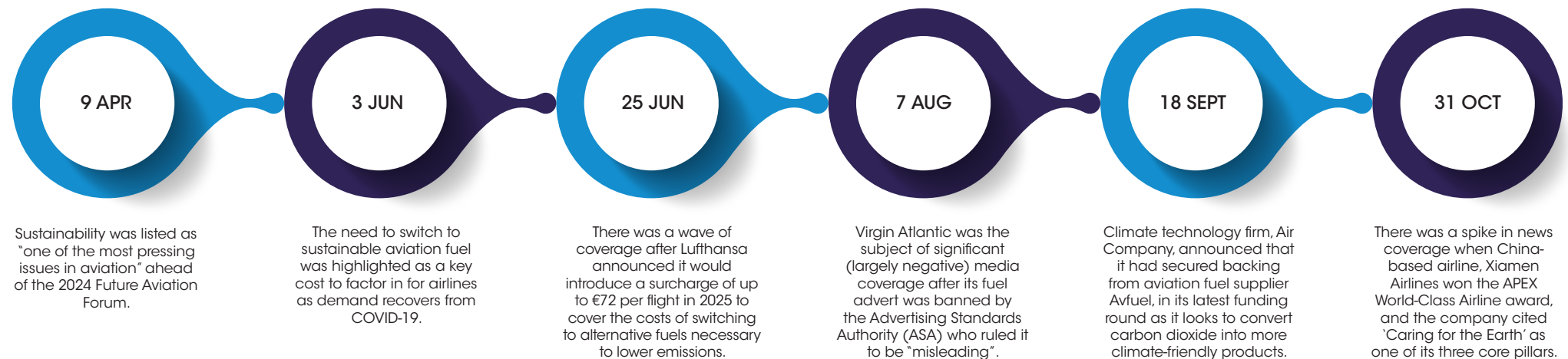
A recent survey from an international aerospace company found that 65% of respondents believe it's time for sustainable air travel. With respondents from across the UK, US, France and Germany, the survey found that 70% are concerned about the role of aviation in climate change.

But what does the media landscape look like when it comes to airline sustainability news? Over the course of 2024, CARMA (which analysed over 55,000 articles in the mainstream media) identified six key spikes in activity.

The data showed that sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) dominated much of the media coverage when it comes to sustainable aviation stories. However, in reality, the landscape for this is much larger.

Though SAF is certainly part of the narrative, many airlines are taking significant steps to reduce their carbon emissions and minimise their impact on the environment through sustainable aircraft interiors.

Analysis of the coverage suggests that there is a huge window of opportunity for airlines to gain a competitive advantage by promoting and generating wider awareness of other sustainability initiatives, whether that be the introduction of lightweight seating or use of more recycled materials onboard.





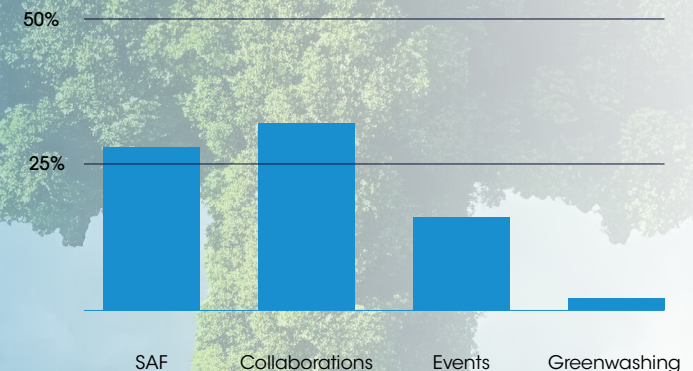
Looking at the news coverage in more detail, it's clear that partnerships were very effective at boosting sustainability messaging. Some of the most notable examples of stories included:

- 24/01: Lufthansa Group chooses Viasat to install the European Aviation Network (EAN) in-flight connectivity solution.
  - The articles specifically highlighted how the EAN allows Lufthansa Group to both save money and be more sustainable on its flights because of its "small, low weight, low drag terminals".
- 01/05: Turkish Airlines, Airbus and Rolls-Royce partnership over workforce and innovation.
- 01/10: Qatar Airways Group announced plans to acquire minority 25% equity stake in Virgin Australia.
  - This is an interesting example as the focus of the articles isn't solely on sustainability but is linked to it largely by spokesperson quotes.

It's worth noting that for much of the partnership news, sustainability wasn't the crux of the story. However, as explained above, the sustainability messaging was boosted through spokesperson quotes, indicating the importance of maximising these opportunities for airlines.

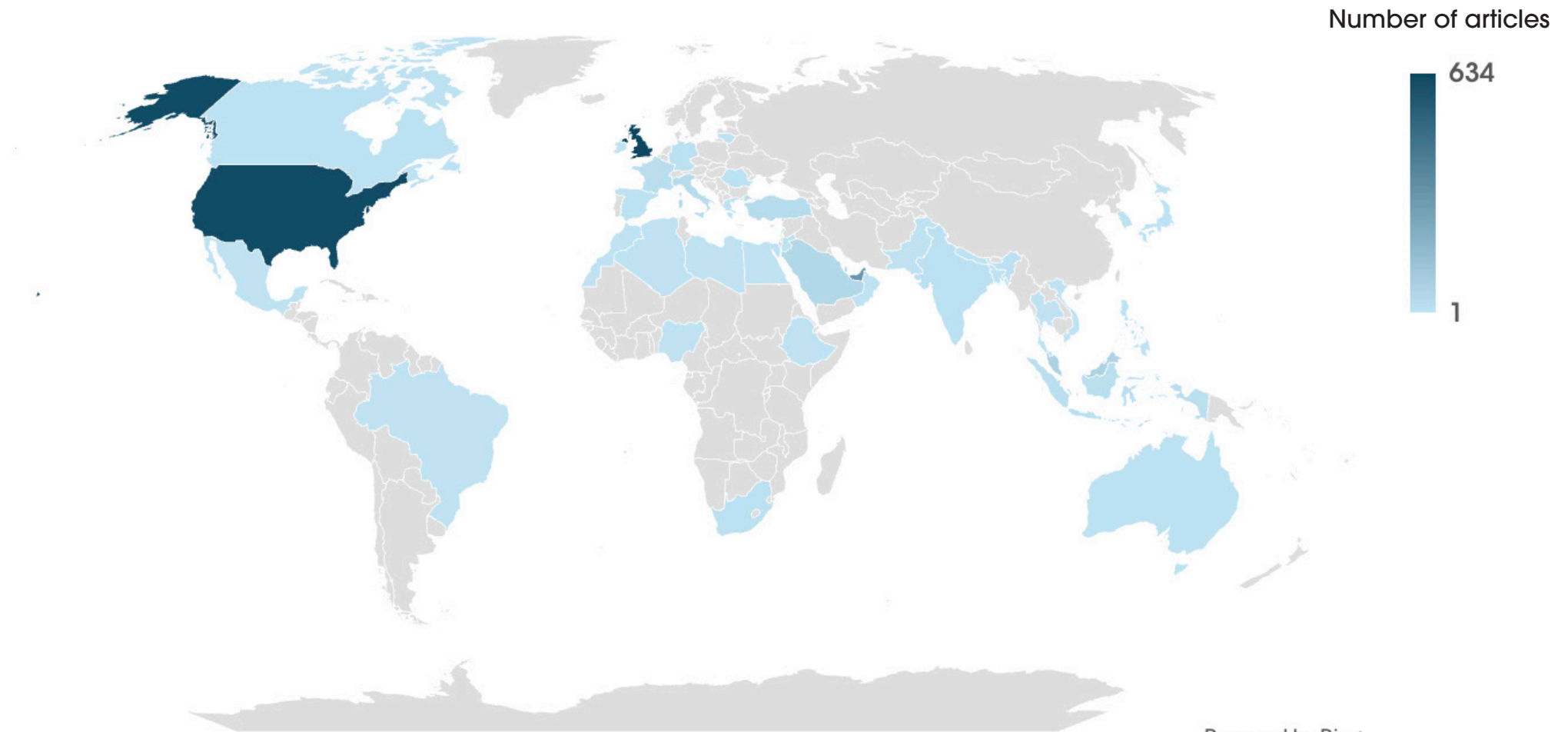
Greenwashing was a theme throughout the year, but it did not penetrate news coverage all that widely, appearing in only 2% of all sustainability coverage. Notably, the stories did translate into social media activity in a way other sustainability topics did not. A key example of this was an announcement from the EU it would be investigating 20 carriers for potential greenwashing. Data from CARMA also indicated that the US is more engaged with the topic of greenwashing than any other country.

Media coverage by sustainability topic, globally





# Global sustainability reporting



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## Exploring social media

When looking into the social media activity throughout 2024, there appears to be very little crossover between the top news coverage and social media posts. The lack of continuity between the platforms suggests a potential window of opportunity for airlines to drive further traction in sharing their sustainability stories on social media. From a reputation perspective, there is more that could be done to drive these new stories and translate them into positive conversations on social media.

## Spotlighting sustainable cabin interiors

Despite a complex media landscape, airlines across the globe are increasingly investing in a variety of products, strategies and initiatives which are helping to reduce their environmental impact. However, given the data at hand, it seems that many of the top stories are consistently neglecting to mention some of the most innovative strategies for reducing carbon emissions inside the cabin. Sustainable aircraft interiors are a particularly un-reported area in the media.

Some of the most common themes, products and strategies being employed in sustainable aircraft interiors include lightweighting. For airlines, this involves the process of reducing the overall weight of the aircraft, its components and materials, primarily through the use of lighter materials and optimised designs to improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions. There are a



number of different methods of lightweighting, which include lightweight paint, aircraft seating, galleys, and flooring.

Despite the topic of sustainable aviation gaining significant traction in the media, it's clear that an important segment within sustainability – cabin interiors – is going underrepresented in the news. The aircraft interiors industry is tackling the challenge of sustainability in a variety of ways, which are not being reported on in any great detail in the national or business mainstream media.

However, these solutions are being invested in, and they are helping to drive the future of aviation through the medium of sustainable interiors.

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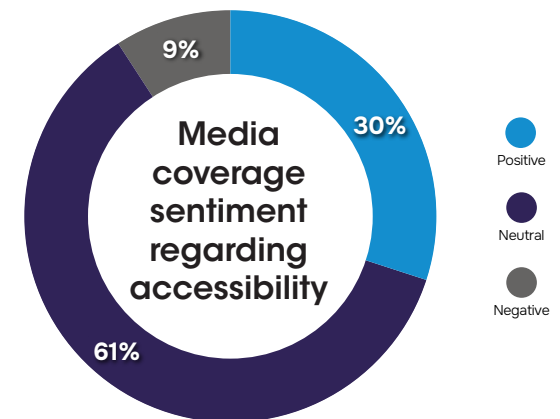
# Accessibility in aviation: a growing imperative

**For airlines, sustainability is not the only ethical concern that they must address. In recent years, discussions around inclusivity and accessibility in aviation have significantly intensified.**

This growing focus is driven by a greater awareness of the diverse needs of passengers and increasing pressure from a range of industry stakeholders, including affected passengers and their advocates. Slowly but surely, this pressure is leading to change within the industry. This

growing focus also aligns with the importance of the "Conduct" pillar in airline reputation – the second most important factor – as it underlines the significance of how airlines manage their relationships with passengers. Accessibility accounts for 1.2% of airline coverage, and 2% of social media posts.

Airlines are increasingly recognising that accessibility is a crucial factor, intrinsically linked to their conduct. There is a growing demand for airlines to adapt and innovate to meet





the evolving expectations of all passengers, including those with physical disabilities, limited mobility, non-visible disabilities, and neurodiverse differences. This is driving investment in training, infrastructure, and technology to ensure a more equitable and comfortable travel experience, demonstrating a commitment to treating all passengers with fairness and respect.

But what does the media landscape look like around accessibility in aviation? Exploring the data for sentiment around accessibility news coverage, we can see that differs significantly from sustainability, with the vast majority of articles having a neutral sentiment:

According to data from the CARMA platform, the biggest spike in reporting was on the 26th

September, as major airline, Virgin Atlantic, announced it would be stepping up its efforts to help deaf and hard-of-hearing travellers, with initiatives including special training for more of its crew.

The story was widely reported across UK publications – with 197 total articles on this in a single day. An important factor in the widespread coverage can likely be attributed to the airline partnering with deaf Gladiators star, Jodie Ounsley, and deaf twin content creators, Hermon and Heroda Berhane. This collaboration not only put a human face to the airline's accessibility initiatives, but also amplified the message through the reach and influence

**Virgin Atlantic achieved 197 total articles on this in a single day.**

of these popular public figures, demonstrating the positive impact of working closely with disabled people, and ensuring greater visibility for the story.

While Virgin's story gained the greatest traction in the media, there were a number of other stories less widely reported which shared important updates on the state of accessibility in the airline industry.


It's worth noting that the stories around airline accessibility for passengers with physical disabilities or limited mobility were generally more widely covered than the stories discussing accessible changes for neurodiverse passengers or those with invisible disabilities. Another point to observe is that these stories were picked up largely by the aviation and aircraft interiors trade media, as opposed to the national or business media.

Additional coverage on the topic of accessibility included:

- The news that Delta Flight Products (DFP) in collaboration with AirForAll – a consortium of design and disability advocate organisations based in the UK – announced the launch of several new accessibility-focus products for the airline industry; including two seats that allow users to remain in their own wheelchair for the entire journey and an accessible toilet that accommodates entry of an onboard wheelchair and up to two attendants.



© Virgin Atlantic

A photograph of a person from behind, wearing a textured brown sweater, sitting in a wheelchair and looking out a window. The background is bright and out of focus, suggesting an airport or travel setting.

## Reports of airlines damaging passengers' wheelchairs, and other similar issues was another key theme in accessibility coverage

- United Airlines announced its collaboration with the United Spinal Association. The partnership was focused on improving the travel experience for customers with disabilities. The airline will be working together with United Spinal to explore future solutions and collaborate with its community of experts to harness their valuable feedback and help better meet the specific needs of customers who use wheelchairs.
- In January 2025, Emirates announced it was set to be 'the world's first Autism Certified Airline'. Formally awarded by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), in practice this means over 30,000 staff will be undergoing specialised autism and sensory awareness training. The airline will also be introducing "sensory guides" and neurodiverse sensory products for passengers.
- At the end of 2024, Alaska Airlines reported its improved practices for enhanced accessibility for travellers. The airline's Disability Office teamed up with the Autism Society and port authorities to host a disability practice flight in Portland. The event gave guests with disabilities the chance to practice everything from navigating the airport, to going through security and even simulating a flight.

Reports of airlines damaging passengers' wheelchairs, and other similar issues was another key theme in accessibility coverage. Again, it's worth noting that these stories were covered by UK national media, as opposed to trade titles. For instance:

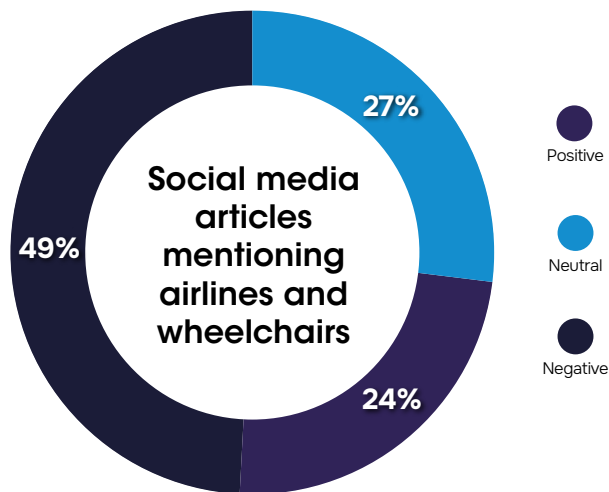
- 20 February 2025: Furious passenger blasts American Airlines and Delta after two wheelchairs were damaged and destroyed during separate trips in the same year
- 1 May 2025: 'Degraded' wheelchair user, 15, forced to shuffle up plane stairs and British Airways lost specialist chair.
- 29 September 2025: Disabled traveller left 'housebound' for months after airline error.
- 4 December: Gatwick: Holiday 'ruined' after wheelchair broke on easyJet plane.



Notably, Paralyzed Veterans of America's response to a US Department of Transportation fine against American Airlines for its "unsafe and undignified treatment of passengers with disabilities who use mobility devices" accounted for 81% of the negative news coverage on this topic.

Other incidents also garnered significant coverage. In April 2024, Southwest Airlines received substantial attention for poorly handling athletes' wheelchairs on flights. The issue stemmed from a lack of communication, leading to the wheelchairs being disassembled despite the passengers' requests, and then being presented to them in pieces at the end of the flight.

Notably, the coverage around wheelchairs



specifically, as opposed to general accessibility articles, was far more negative than the average data set. For social media articles mentioning airlines and wheelchairs, the sentiment was mainly negative.

Meanwhile, the majority of the corresponding news coverage mentioning wheelchairs was neutral, due to comments from spokespeople balancing out the overall sentiment of the articles.


For example, in the case of Southwest Airlines, where the airline was accused of poorly handling athletes' wheelchairs, the company's statement

effectively denied the charge. While social media coverage of the incident may have been negative, the inclusion of the airline's response in news articles contributed to a more neutral sentiment overall. This demonstrates how airline communication can influence the tone of media reports, even when the initial incident generates negative public reaction.

But what does all of this media coverage really tell us? While in comparison to other topics, accessibility isn't proving to cut through the noise of the media in the same way, it seems that the impact of a negative

**Airline communication can influence the tone of media reports, even when the initial incident generates negative public reaction.**





**Airlines should adopt a proactive communication strategy that prioritises the inclusion of their spokespeople in accessibility-related reporting.**

story – particularly when discussed on social media – can attract significant attention and potentially be hugely impactful on airline reputation.

When faced with negative accessibility coverage, airlines need to do more than just react. The data indicates that a crucial element of effective reputation management is proactively ensuring the inclusion of company spokespeople in media reports. This allows airlines to actively participate in shaping the narrative.

Therefore, airlines should adopt a proactive communication strategy that prioritises the inclusion of their spokespeople in accessibility-related reporting. By providing spokespeople to offer context, address concerns, and articulate the airline's position, they can exert greater control over the narrative and mitigate the potential damage of negative coverage.

Maksim Jurkov, Head of Design at global aviation innovator J&C Aero, explains that when it comes to accessibility, regulations play an important role. He highlights the 'FAA DOT requirements (14 CFR 382.65)', which demand "Non-discrimination on the basis of disability in air travel" and that "the industry needs to transport persons with reduced mobility (PRM) maintaining a reasonable level of accessibility during the flight phase."

He adds, "The key industry players are actively working on accessibility for both line and retrofit programs. Accessibility for persons with limitations on an aeroplane is a must, not optional, as it ensures safety, dignity, and equal opportunity for all travellers — for example, having accessible restrooms and boarding assistance allows everyone to travel independently and comfortably. Without it, people are unfairly excluded and face unnecessary risks or barriers."

While regulations are essential, accessibility in aircraft interiors is more than just a requirement. It's a commitment to all passengers and to creating a truly inclusive flying experience for everyone on board.



# Conclusion

This review of airline reputation sets out a roadmap for airlines, identifying the six key pillars on which an airline reputation is built. By focusing on each pillar of the Reputation by CARMA methodology, and the strategic adjustments that can be made within each area, airlines can significantly improve their reputation overall.

It's clear that there will be opportunities to gain a competitive advantage over competitors by focusing on sustainability initiatives – particularly by implementing those in the cabin, as reputation is largely driven by the products and services pillar. By investing in innovative solutions that transform the cabin, airlines will be able to further strengthen their reputation, not only through products and service offerings, but through the creation of a collective vision which positions the airlines as a leader in responsible air travel.

Though accessibility is not an individual element within the six pillars of the 'Reputation by CARMA' report, it does play an important role in the conduct pillar. Not to mention, as more accessible aircraft interior solutions enter the market, it's becoming a growing priority for airlines. There's also an increasing amount of media coverage

and social media discussion around the topic. By using the media to their advantage, airlines can improve their reputation through the spotlighting of accessible interiors solutions.

The data highlighted in this report illustrates an ecosystem of conversations around sustainability and accessibility in the traditional media and on social media. While neither topic may be dominating the media in the same way that some other aviation topics are, it's clear that the impact of these stories can be significant in affecting consumer views and perceptions.

Moving forward, airlines must recognise that sustainability and accessibility are more than just compliance and instead are fundamental aspects of building trust and maintaining a positive reputation in an increasingly conscious and connected world.



## About Aircraft Interiors Expo (AIX)

Both sustainability and accessibility will be key themes at AIX, and its sister conference Passenger Experience Conference (PEC). For more information on AIX 2025 – which takes place 8-10 April at the Hamburg Messe – or to register please visit [here](#). PEC will be taking place in the same venue on 7 April, where accessibility, inclusion, and sustainability also feature heavily throughout the programme.

Hosted by a variety of industry experts, the session 'Accessible, inclusive and equitable – action to improve air travel for all', on Monday 7 April at 16.45 will explore how to hardwire universal design principles into product and experience development and delivery to support end-to-end journeys that have the needs of all passengers front of mind.

Also exploring the topic of inclusivity in air travel is Jo Rowan, Associate Director, Strategy and Customer Experience Design at PriestmanGoode, who will be featured in the session, 'Designing with empathy'. The presentation will cover both process and best practice in working with those who have diverse perspectives and share examples of how design with empathy has unlocked outcomes that respond to different needs in aviation, other modes of transport and at different stages of the journey.

On the sustainability side, a key conference session will be 'Circularity in the cabin – progress reports' – a panel session with speakers from IBA Group, Gen Phoenix, and AVIC Cabin Systems. Being held at 15:05, the panel will feature insights from leaders of three different projects aiming to introduce meaningful sustainability solutions into the cabin, reporting back on their breakthroughs and challenges from the past year.

Register for this year's event at <https://www.aircraftinteriorsexpo.com/en-gb/register.html>



## About CARMA

CARMA is a global leader in communications intelligence.

We deliver actionable insights and unrivalled analysis, empowering our clients to make informed decisions and achieve their PR goals with precision.

Our measurement and evaluation programmes are supported by our global team of analysts and powered by primary research capabilities and real-time media monitoring across print, broadcast, online and social media.

Discover CARMA's suite of solutions, including our new Reputation by CARMA service, our team of experts, and the work we do at <https://carma.com/>

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