Marketing Strategy Factors Influencing Purchasing Intention of Star Alliance Airline Members

ปัจจัยกลยุทธ์ทางการตลาดสายการบินที่ส่งผลต่อความตั้งใจซื้อของสายการบินพันธมิตร สตาร์ อัลไลแอนซ์

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นักศึกษาหลักสูตรการจัดการมหาบัณฑิต สาขาการจัดการการท่องเที่ยวและบริการแบบบูรณาการ คณะการจัดการการท่องเที่ยว สถาบันบัณฑิตพัฒนบริหารศาสตร์

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the airline marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members. This research is considered a quantitative based research, employing a factor analysis as a tool. Finally, samples are 400 passengers using Star Alliance Airline members at Suvarnabhumi International Airport which are EVA, Air China, Egypt Air, Air India, Shenzhen Airlines, Turkish Air, Asiana, Singapore Airlines, and Thai Airways. This research employs purposive sampling to collect the data. The research tool is a questionnaire survey, asking the respondents about the factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members. The data collection process is during December 2016 to February 2017. Then, the descriptive and inferential statistics (Simple regression) are processed to analyze the collected data. The research outputs show three marketing strategies statistically influencing purchase intention, which are Quick Response Strategy, Strategic Alliance Strategy,

and Product Differentiation Strategy. The significant result of this research shows that the 'Definite Fly' has been impacted by the three aforementioned strategies for purchasing intention (32.2%) while the rest (67.8%) has been influenced by the other strategies.

Keywords: Marketing Strategy Factors, Purchasing Intention, Star Alliance Airlines

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อระบุปัจจัยกลยุทธ์การตลาดของสายการบินที่มีผลต่อความตั้งใจซื้อของ สายการบินพันธมิตรสตาร์อัลไลแอนซ์ ซึ่งใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงปริมาณโดยใช้การวิเคราะห์องค์ประกอบเป็น เครื่องมือ กำหนดขนาดตัวอย่าง 400 คน ประกอบด้วยกลุ่มผู้โดยสารของสายการบินพันธมิตร สตาร์อัลไลแอนซ์ที่ใช้บริการในท่าอากาศยานสุวรรณภูมิ ได้แก่ อีวีเอแอร์ แอร์ไชนา อียิปต์แอร์ แอร์อินเดีย เซินเจิ้นแอร์ไลน์ เตอร์กิชแอร์ไลน์ เอเชียน่าแอร์ไลน์ สิงคโปร์แอร์ไลน์ และการบินไทย ใช้การสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบ เจาะจง เครื่องมือวิจัยคือแบบสำรวจความคิดเห็นปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อความตั้งใจซื้อ เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลระหว่าง เดือนธันวาคม 2559 ถึงกุมภาพันธ์ 2560 วิเคราะห์ผลด้วยสถิติเชิงพรรณาและอนุมาน (การวิเคราะห์การ ถดถอยอย่างง่าย) ผลการวิจัยพบว่ากลยุทธ์การตลาดที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความตั้งใจซื้ออย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ได้แก่ กลยุทธ์การตอบสนองอย่างรวดเร็ว กลยุทธ์ยุทธศาสตร์พันธมิตร และกลยุทธ์การสร้างความแตกต่าง ของผลิตภัณฑ์ ผลการวิจัยระบุชัดเจนว่า กลุ่มผู้โดยสารที่ตัดสินใจเดินทางแน่นอนได้รับอิทธิพลจาก 3 กลยุทธ์ ข้างต้น (32.2%) สำหรับกลุ่มผู้โดยสารอื่น (67.8%) ได้รับอิทธิพลจากปัจจัยกลยุทธ์การตลาดอื่น

คำสำคัญ : ปัจจัยกลยุทธ์การตลาด ความตั้งใจในการซื้อ สายการบินพันธมิตรสตาร์อัลไลแอนซ์

Introduction

The strategic airline alliance greatly affects through marketing strategies and service operations (Torre, 1999; Tsantoulis and Palmer, 2008). Primarily, the objective is to support marketing activities and cost-reducing features. The airline alliance idea was initially introduced in 1997 under 'Star Alliances', aim to partner in internationally routing and allocating profits. Termed by Torre (1999), an airline alliance is an aviation industry arrangement between two or more airlines agreeing to cooperate on a substantial level. This is supported by Brueckner (2003) that the alliance offers marketing branding to assist travelers making inter-airline codeshare connections within countries. Under agreements between airlines in the alliance, passengers are easy to connect flights within the airline alliance. They are also able to earn points from airlines within the alliance for travel redemption. Premium travelers and airline elite members are permitted to enter the alliance lounge globally when flying with carrier members (Terblanche, 2015; Park and Cho, 1997; Torre, 1999). Not only for benefits of facilities,

Chanpayom (2003) also notes that the strategic alliance helps airlines to achieve common strategic goals, letting airlines to decrease costs while increase higher market share by maintaining existing while sourcing possible markets. The Star Alliance begun in May 1997 with the formation of airlines on three continents, including Lufthansa, United Airlines, SAS, Air Canada and Thai (Mitchell, 1998). In the following years, the partnership has been stronger under the Star Alliance umbrella. The alliance does not only intake new airline members, but also improve its service operational integration.

Marketing strategies of airlines have direct impacts on the service operation as they form an expectation through marketing tools. This expectation provides direct impacts to passenger intention (Schefczyk, 1993). Therefore, careful attention is required by airlines to focus on the service operation as it alters passengers' purchasing intention (Saha and Theingi, 2009). Although airline marketing strategies have been put an attempt to influence the intention to use the service of airline, the perceived services are different due to dissimilar quality of airline service operation. This directly creates different levels of expectation and satisfaction, indicating that airline service operations are highly important in influencing an intention before and after using services (Chang and Chang, 2010; Lopez and Bonilla, 2008). The literature reviews imply that many research relating to airline marketing strategy, service operation, passenger behaviors, airline service quality, airline branding but reviewing the relationship between demographic factors and marketing strategies in Star Alliance airline members is barely found in academic arena. Additionally, the aforementioned research topic in strategic alliance members is even hardly revealed in airline academic perspectives.

Given the above, it is necessary to study the relationships between airline marketing strategies and purchase intention in Star Alliance airline members. Once the relationships between them are analyzed, the guideline to develop purchasing intention via marketing strategies will be created.

Objectives

To identify the airline marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members.
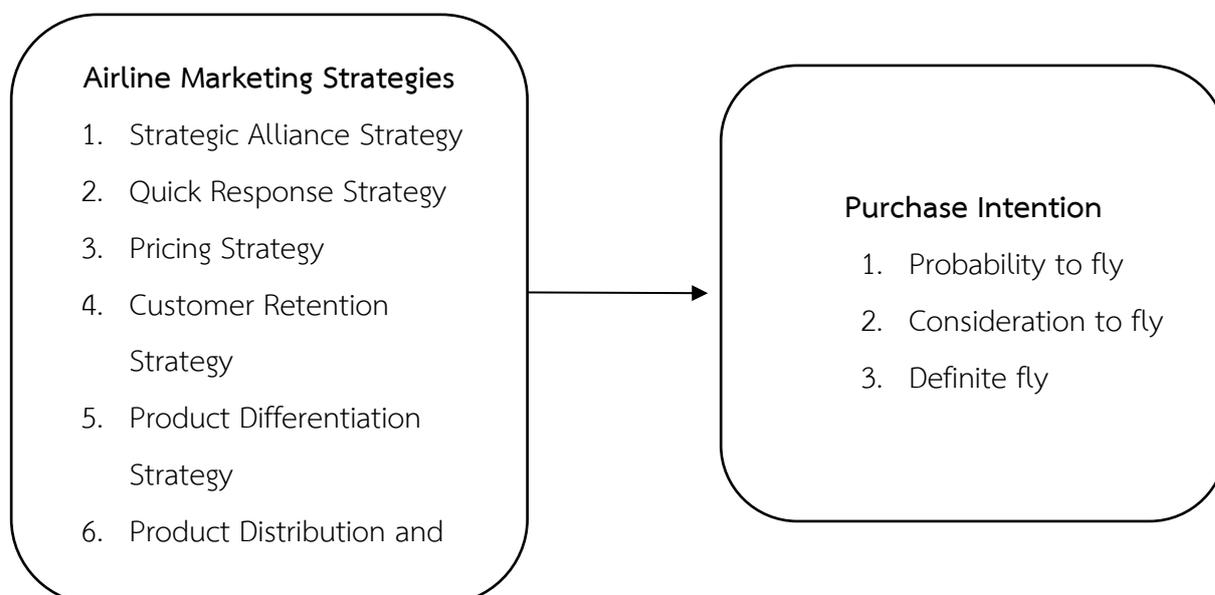
Research Hypothesis

All marketing strategy factors have statistically influenced the purchasing intention in selecting Asia-based Star Alliance airline services.

Scopes of the Study

This research primarily studies airline marketing strategies including strategic alliance strategy, social marketing strategy, quick response strategy, competitive differentiation strategy, product diversification strategy, product integration strategy, competitive pricing strategy, airline branding strategy, customer retention strategy, premium pricing strategy, cost leadership strategy, customized and personalized strategy, market positioning strategy, product distribution strategy and online marketing strategy. The researcher discovers these strategies based on airline annual reports from each targeted airline company. Then, the researcher finds the six common marketing strategies between Asia-based Star Alliance airline members which are strategic alliance strategy, quick response strategy, pricing strategy, customer retention strategy, product differentiation strategy, and product distribution and digital marketing strategy. After all, purchasing intension in airline business context is studied to explore the relationship between the marketing strategies and purchasing intension. For the scope of targeted population, the researcher collects the data from passengers flying with the Asia-based Star Alliance airline members at Suvarnabhumi airport, Thailand. The data is collected from the arrival and departure halls. The time range of data collecting process is August 2016 – May 2017.

Research Framework

Airline Marketing Strategies

1. Strategic Alliance Strategy
2. Quick Response Strategy
3. Pricing Strategy
4. Customer Retention Strategy
5. Product Differentiation Strategy
6. Product Distribution and

→

Purchase Intention

1. Probability to fly
2. Consideration to fly
3. Definite fly

Literature Review

Marketing Strategies in Airline Business

Marketing strategy has been termed as the effective tool in increasing sales while supporting the competitive advantage (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2013). Marketing strategy can be lifelong, short-term or long-term activities, subject to the situation of company, strategic plan, formulation, evaluation and selection of market-oriented strategies. Prominently, the market strategy always replies on the company's marketing purposes in marketing plan. In order to professionally plan the marketing strategy, the business environment must be broadly well understood internally and externally. There are many external environmental features to be contemplated; for examples, cultural, political, economic, technological features. After objectives are set, marketing plan or marketing strategy required a clear action to reach the targeted objectives. It is revealed that airline business has dynamic marketing strategies depending on the environmental situation. (Shaw, 2011). Because of the sizable marketing share within the industry, airlines are expansively working to gain profitable market share at their best. Therefore, each airline has diverse marketing strategies to encourage more passengers while sustain existing passengers (Park and Wu, 2006; Terblanche, 2015). The commercial airlines put more considerable at the marketing strategy, one of the significant reasons is to have an operational tool to widen the reputation of the airlines. Research of Park, Robertson and Wu (2004) and Park, Robertson and Wu (2006) illustrate that airline marketing is challenging because it is pondered as a service provider. The characteristics of airline marketing are well-defined as a perishable good as well as intangible good. The service awareness by customers is also subjective based on the quality of service that they received. The full-service airline is sensitive because of the growth stimulated by low costs carriers (LLCs). This progressively changes passengers' perception that full-service airlines are costly and excessive. Hapsari, Clemes and Dean (2016), Namukasa (2013), and Mun (2011) emphasis that the characteristics of airline passengers in 21st century are conscious value and low loyalty. Nonetheless, passengers at these days are great empowered, and demanding in flexibility and service excellence. After carefully analyzing the common marketing strategies in Asia-based Star Alliance airline members, there are only six marketing strategies employed, which are strategic alliance strategy, quick response strategy, pricing strategy, customer retention strategy, product differentiation strategy and product distribution and digital marketing strategy.

Regarding purchasing intention, it is defined as a plan to purchase products or services in the future to come (Bukhari et al., 2013; Chen and Chang, 2008). The purchasing intention is usually based on the advertisement and marketing activities that each company conveys to their customers. Bukhari et al. (2013) clarify that the purchasing intention often aligns with the marketing strategies used in a particular company. Basically, the purchasing intention directly concerns public advertisements which are celebrity endorsements and sport sponsorships. The variables that may affect the purchasing intention are brand familiarity and product pricing (Ruiz-Mafe, Sanz-Blas, Hernandez-Ortega and Brethouwer, 2013). The purchasing intention usually concerns with passengers' behavior, perception and attitude. Additionally, it is said that the purchasing intention can be shifted by several factors which are fluctuation of price, product or service quality perception, and value perception. Besides, internal impulse and external environment potentially alter consumers during making buying decision process.

Nonetheless, the researcher develops the questions about the overall purchase intentions by referring to Kim and Littrell (2001) to measure the level of purchasing intention with the traditional 5-Point Scale, employing 3 key statements; 1.) I would fly with Star Alliance airline members again in the future, 2.) I will consider to fly with Star Alliance Airline members, and 3.) I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members. The reasons behind is that the researcher tends to put an emphasis on marketing strategy factors rather than studying purchasing intention in-depth.

Research Methodology

This research employed the purposive sampling because purposive sampling represents a group of different sampling techniques (Palys, 2008). The researcher sets the criteria to select passengers flying with Asian country-based Star Alliance. The criteria are as follows; 1) Passengers who are willing to participate in the research, 2) Passengers who fly with Asian country-based Star Alliance airlines at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, 3) Passengers who already used the services provided by ground and in-flight Asian country-based Star Alliance staffs, 4) Passengers who experienced Star Alliance airlines both arrival and departure, 5) Passengers who have ability to communicate in English.

Once the targeted sampling passes the criteria, the researcher collects the data. The researcher collects the data of 400 sets of questionnaire survey, using a purposive sampling technique.

Data Collection

The questionnaires are distributed to passengers in the departure hall at Suvarnabhumi International Airport on a researcher-administered basis. The collection process is during December 2016 to February 2017.

Research Tool

The research tool for this research method is a questionnaire survey asking the respondents about the factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members. This questionnaire is divided into 5 parts; passenger's demographic profiles, the Star Alliance marketing strategies, airline service operations, passengers' purchase intention and an open-ended question for recommendations as the last part. The questionnaire is validated and verified using Index Objective Congruence (IOC) by three experts, two airline directors and one airline instructor.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the research involves summarizing the mass of data that has been collected, presenting the consequences in a way that communicates the most significant findings. In order to examine quantitative results, data coding is undertaken. The numerical codes are initially identified for each response before being evaluated with a computer software program. Afterwards, a full analysis of descriptive and inferential statistics is conducted after. The descriptive statistics, containing percentage, frequency, means, standard deviations, are applied to the data analysis. The analysis is adopted to explain the plain data of the questionnaire.

In terms of data analysis, the factor analysis is employed to filter the most possible factors. Once the factors have been obtained, single regression plays an important role in finding the influence between the independent and dependent factors. Finally, the factors which are under marketing strategies that influence the intention to purchase will be taken into consideration for purposing the guideline to enhance purchasing intention via airline marketing in Star Alliance Airline members.

Findings

To explicate the relationship between the airline marketing strategy affecting the purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members, single regression analysis is employed to explore the value of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables.

Table 1: The airline marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I would fly with Star Alliance airline members again in the future)

The Airline Marketing Strategy Factors	B	Beta	T	Sig.
1. Strategic Alliance Strategy	.188	.150	1.885	.060
2. Quick Response Strategy	.077	.066	.775	.439
3. Pricing Strategy	.263	.204	2.605	.010*
4. Customer Retention Strategy	.232	.197	2.382	.018*
5. Product Differentiation Strategy	.146	.100	1.449	.148
6. Product Distribution and Digital Marketing Strategy	.073	.054	.782	.435

Adjust R^2 = .460, F = 50.890, p < .05

The identification of significant factors is based on the t-test significance of each individual factor. Table 1 indicates that Pricing Strategy and Customer Retention Strategy factors evidently influence the purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I would fly with Star Alliance airline members again in the future) at significance p < .05.

Referring to the marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention (I would fly with Star Alliance airline members again in the future), the pioneer factor influencing purchasing intention (I would fly with Star Alliance airline members again in the future) is 'Pricing Strategy factor' (Beta = .204), followed by 'Customer Retention Strategy' (Beta = .194). However, it is affirmed that Strategic Alliance Strategy, Quick Response Strategy, Product Differentiation Strategy, Product Distribution and Digital Marketing Strategy factors do not influence purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I would fly with Star Alliance airline members again in the future).

To analyze the Coefficient of determination (Adjust R Square = .460), it is found that Pricing Strategy and Customer Retention Strategy influence purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I would fly with Star Alliance airline members again in the future) at 46% in total, while the rest of 54% comes from other factors.

Table 2: The airline marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members)

The Airline Marketing Strategy Factors	B	Beta	T	Sig.
1. Strategic Alliance Strategy	.155	.147	1.902	.058
2. Quick Response Strategy	.301	.303	3.691	.000*
3. Pricing Strategy	.199	.183	2.405	.017*
4. Customer Retention Strategy	.058	.058	.723	.470
5. Product Differentiation Strategy	.096	.077	1.160	.247
6. Product Distribution and Digital Marketing Strategy	.021	.019	.277	.782

Adjust R^2 = .491, F = 57.640, p < .05

Table 2 concludes that Quick Response Strategy and Pricing Strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members) at significance p < .05. The analysis is conducted using the same strategy as above.

To weight the marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention (I will consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members), it shows that the most factor influencing purchasing intention (I will consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members) is 'Quick Response Strategy' (Beta = .303), followed by 'Pricing Strategy factor' (Beta = .183). Nonetheless, Strategic Alliance Strategy, Customer Retention Strategy, Product Differentiation Strategy and Product Distribution and Digital Marketing Strategy factors do not influence purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members).

Referring to the Coefficient of determination (Adjust R Square = .491), it can be concluded that Quick Response Strategy and Pricing Strategy evidently influence purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members), based on 49.10% in total, while the rest 50.90% come from other factors.

Table 3: The airline marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members)

The Airline Marketing Strategy Factors	B	Beta	T	Sig.
1. Strategic Alliance Strategy	.212	.191	2.144	.033*
2. Quick Response Strategy	.360	.345	3.637	.000*
3. Pricing Strategy	.177	.155	1.763	.079
4. Customer Retention Strategy	.087	.083	.894	.372
5. Product Differentiation Strategy	-.207	-.159	-2.059	.040*
6. Product Distribution and Digital Marketing Strategy	-.077	-.065	-.832	.406

Adjust R2 = .322, F = 28.616, p < .05

Table 3 illustrates that Strategic Alliance Strategy, Quick Response Strategy and Product Differentiation Strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members) at significance $p < .05$.

Focusing on the order of marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members), it is shown that the most marketing strategy factor influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members) is Quick Response Strategy (Beta = .345), while the second place is Strategic Alliance Strategy factor (Beta = .191), followed by Product Differentiation Strategy (Beta = -.159) at the third place. However, Pricing Strategy, Customer Retention Strategy and Product Distribution and Digital Marketing Strategy factors do not influence purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members).

To investigate the Coefficient of determination (Adjust R Square = .332), it implies that Strategic Alliance Strategy, Quick Response Strategy and Product Differentiation Strategy noticeably influence purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members), based on 32.20% whereas other 67.80% derived from additional factors.

Conclusions and Discussions

There are only 3 marketing strategy factors influencing passengers' purchasing intention; Strategic Alliance Strategy, Quick Response Strategy, and Product Differentiation Strategy. Regarding the sequences of marketing strategy factors influencing purchasing intention of Star Alliance airline members (I will definitely consider to fly with Star Alliance airline members), it is concluded that Quick Response Strategy (Beta = .345) is the most influencing purchasing intention, while, the second place is Strategic Alliance Strategy factor (Beta = .191), followed by Product Differentiation Strategy (Beta = -.159). Considering quick response strategy, it is true as Bernstein, Dasai and Vernik (2012) saying that a quick response strategy is always firstly concerned when making a decision to book the airline ticket. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Star Alliance airline members have put an effort to make the call center most functional to provide feedback requested by the customers. Rust, Lemon and Zeithaml (2004) confirm that the call or contact centers are regarded as an important means for two-way communication between service providers and service receivers. However, it has been found out that doing so has been problematic for small or large Star Alliance airline members as Bernstein, Dasai and Vernik (2012) presenting that the airlines have subcontracted for call center operations. This has made the airlines to concern on the quality of the center management. However, Hadjiconstantinou (2012) adds that some airlines may choose the online websites to communicate with the customers with automatic responses. Also, Rust, Lemon and Zeithaml (2004) insert that to get the real feedback from the airline customers, some airlines have designed the websites with the function to get a feedback online. Focusing on the strategic alliance strategy which comes second, Kalligiannis, Latrou and Mason (2006) and Serrat (2010) discuss the form of strategic alliance strategy as the collaboration between at least two airlines to share the benefits and it may be temporary, permanent or periodical. It is accurate that the strategy aiming at sharing resources among airlines such as ground handling, airline lounges, flight code sharing, and marketing activities (Lin and Tsui, 2016; Burton and Hanlon, 1994). Thus, it is agreeable as Chen and Chen (2003) conclude that the power of strategic alliance strategy lies upon benefit sharing under the strengths of each airline. That is why all literature reviewed show that the majority of most airlines engage strategic alliance strategy. According to this, Serrat (2010) confirms that the strategic alliance strategy can better the image of the airline members and this can effectively influence the passenger decision making to use the service

of the airlines. With regard to product differentiation strategy, it is as mentioned by Rothaermel (2015) that the product differentiation strategy is considered as the strategic positioning approach to differentiate airline products. This can be more powerfully done by building up airline brands. As a result, Homsonbat, Lei and Fu (2014) say that one of the approaches is to offer exclusive benefits that can make the customers feel superior than using other airlines. Additionally, Lovelock (2011) adds that to differentiate the airline services, the airlines must provide outstanding flying experiences through creating impressive packages with attractive pricing. However, it has been found out that product differentiation strategy would be undertaken when the airlines would like to target a niche market. This is to avoid high competition among competitors (Heracleous and Wirtz, 2012).

All the above research results presented may lead to the conclusion that quick response strategy, strategic alliance strategy and product differentiation strategy are vital consecutively. However, this cannot be totally summed up that they are the three most important as each airline may have different target markets, marketing purposes, and airline specialization. Hence, the rest of the strategies studied in this research namely pricing strategy, customer retention strategy, and product distribution and digital marketing strategy may play an important role under different airline business circumstances. This can be concluded as Lovelock (2011), saying that the airline strategists must be wisely able to analyze the airline business environment so that they can select the right strategy to enhance the airline productivity.

In terms of implementation. the airlines in Star Alliance member can use the research outputs to form the marketing strategies that can influence the purchasing intention. As well, the data can be used for airline's performance enhancement of Star Alliance airline members. Regarding the recommendations, this research emphases on the airline marketing strategy factors practiced by Asia-based Star Alliance airline members influencing purchasing intention of Asia-based Star Alliance airline members, the future research can be developed to focus more on Star Alliance airline members at other global regions or even of other airline alliances; for examples, Sky Team and One World.

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