

**Etihad Airways**

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### **Executive Summary**

This research report is prepared to discuss the strategic position of Etihad Airways and its sustainability practices in the light of environmental and internal factors affecting it. There are three types of environmental analysis done here: Porter's 5 Forces Model, PESTEL analysis, and SWOT analysis. The internal analysis is done with the help of the VRIO framework. This framework tries to evaluate the variables that are significant to the airline's industry, particularly Etihad Airways. Based on external and internal analysis the strategic position of Etihad Airways sustainability practice is evaluated. This is done to create a logical inference between the present strategic position and internal and external environmental factors like a cause-and-effect relationship. Based on this logical reasoning, three different recommendations are suggested with three different outcomes. One of the seven schools of thought of Mintzber's is applied as a self-critique tool for the recommendations suggested. The effect or ways the recommendations will affect Etihad is also discussed.

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## **1. Introduction**

The report is presented to analyse and evaluate the strategic position of Etihad Airways. For this purpose, it is divided into 5 parts structured. The 1st part consists of environmental analysis with the help of Porter's 5 forces model, PESTEL analysis and SWOT analysis of Etihad. The next part is the internal analysis done with the help of the VRIO framework. Based on the finding from both environmental and internal analysis, the firm's competitive position is evaluated in the industry. The sustainability development goals are also evaluated and links between Etihad's industry positioning and sustainability are investigated. Based on the analysis in the previous section, strategic recommendations are made. The recommendations either reemphasises achieving its current strategic goals through more concentrated efforts or based on a completely different and radically new process or the path in which Etihad follows the same goals with no or minor adjustments. Based on the recommendations made in the previous section, Mintzberg's 10 schools' principles are applied to critique. The two broad schools of thought, namely prescriptive and descriptive, are discussed in this aspect. Based on the recommendations suggested before, a plan of action is prepared the plan of action is discussed in ways how the global positioning of Etihad Airways is affected, as well as how the change in management or organisational culture affects Etihad. The last and concluding section gives a synopsis of the report's findings in each of its sections and the way it is linked with the recommendation and the effects on Etihad Airways caused by the implementation of the recommendations.

## **2. Environmental analysis of Etihad Airways**

### **(i) PESTEL Analysis**

#### **Political-**

- UAE enjoys a stable political environment (The Global Economy, 2022).
- The presence of corruption is very less. Trade restrictions are present
- Investment freedom is better.
- UAE has witnessed a steady rise in its economy over the past decade.
- Increased foreign investment has led to substantial business development
- Substantial support in form of domestic investors from UAE based business tycoons.

#### **Social-**

- Social structure is significantly different from other developed countries.

- Significant presence of migrant workers (UAE Information and Service, 2022).
- Migrant workers face difficulty to understand social norms
- Etihad has more international routes than domestic routes.
- Thus, Etihad is less dependent upon the social conditions of the UAE.

#### **Technological-**

- Increased foreign investment in UAE will increase technological development in the next 50 years (Toussi, 2022).
- More innovation in renewable energy, big data and artificial intelligence.
- Through foreign investment, Etihad Airways can supplement its technological demands for future endeavours (Kamel, 2022).

#### **Environmental-**

- Scarcity of water and high daytime temperature (MOCCAE, 2021).
- Desert-like condition of UAE makes air conditions almost mandatory
- Lack of effort from the government to bring sustainable environmental practices.

#### **Legal-**

- The legal conditions in UAE provide a mixed shade
- There are strong criminal laws and civil laws
- As well as, there are reports of human rights violations (US Department of State, 2022).

#### **Economical-**

- The projected real GDP growth rate will reach 3% by the end of 2022 (IMF, 2022).
- The projected consumer price change will be 2.2% by end of 2022 (IMF, 2022).
- The sovereign debt of UAE is within controllable limits and set to decline further from 39.36% to estimated 36.96% by 2026 (Statista, 2022).

## (ii) Porter's 5 Forces Model



Fig 1: Porter's 5 forces Model

### Rivalry among existing competitors

- Significantly high rivalry among existing competitors in the airline' in UAE.
- 8 airlines companies operating in UAE, including Etihad Airways, in 436 routes throughout the world (Worlddata.info., 2022).
- Top 4 players i.e., Emirates, Etihad, Arabia, Flyand Dubai operate on more than 85% of the routes.
- Price wars are evident among these players operating on the same routes.

### The threat of new entrants

- Low threat of new entrants, due to strict foreign investment laws.
- Prior approval is needed for foreign investment.
- No domestic players strong and large enough to enter the low cost and premium segment of Etihad.
- Larger operational base leads to greater economies of scale for Emirates.
- Unique brand identity of Etihad of bringing the world to Abu Dhabi, different from all
- Switching cost of Etihad is less than that of new entrants.

### Bargaining power of suppliers

- No direct manufacturing hubs anywhere, this makes it highly dependent upon suppliers.
- Depends upon major airlines manufacturing to supply passenger and cargo jets for parts and accessories.
- The supplier base cannot be changed due to higher switching costs.
- Substitutes from other suppliers are not suitable other than the authorised ones.

**Bargaining power of buyers**

- Etihad operates across 60 countries spread across Asia, Australia, the Middle East and North America (Etihad Airways Partners, 2022).
- Diversified customer base enables Etihad to diversify its exposure bracket.
- Not too much dependent upon one particular nation, region or continent.
- The switching costs of Etihad airways customer are less as there are other airlines.
- Etihad enjoys a strong load factor of around 70% (Etihad Airways News, 2022).

**Threat of substitute**

- There is a low threat from the substitute of Etihad Airlines.
- Operational networks are cross-continent or cross boundaries.
- Jets and airlines provide the fastest mode of travel although at a higher cost.
- Trains, cars and ships are relatively cheaper but involve a lot of time and hazards of long-distance travel.

Force	Medium
Power of Suppliers	high
Power of Buyers	medium
The threat of new entrants	Low

<b>Threat from substitutes</b>	Low
<b>Competitive rivalry</b>	high

**(iii) SWOT****Strength-**

1. Diversified customer base
2. Massive operational network
3. Increased passenger destinations by 20% in 2021 (Etihad Airways News, 2022).
4. Quick switching from passenger to freight operation during pandemic times.

**Weakness-**

1. Large migrant employees in the workforce.
2. Use quasi-alliance partnership with other airlines for route infiltration (Etihad Airways, 2022).
3. Heavy investment in partner airlines resulted in a financial loss (Aviationweek, 2022).
4. Pandemic caused financial strain over and above financial loss from partner investment.

**Opportunity**

1. New orders for a large number of aircraft announced in Dubai air shows (Aviationweek, 2022).
2. Increased flight operation will lead to increased passenger revenue.

**Threat**



1. Increased borrowing to finance the new aircraft acquisition.
2. Dwindling sales revenue and loss from partner investment can compound the ill effects of increased borrowings (Gale, 2022).

### **3. Internal analysis of Etihad Airways**

#### **VRIO Framework**

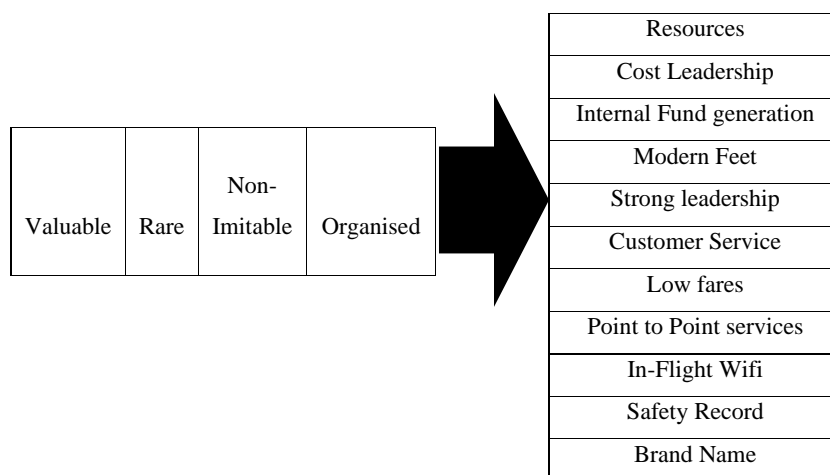


Fig 2: Airlines Industry VRIO Framework

#### **Value-**

Etihad Airways have a substantial backup from both domestic and foreign investors. This enabled it to acquire modern fleets. Its presence in strategic airports across the world has led to the adoption of better customer service guidelines. Low fare has increased its customer

base. Strong support from domestic investors has attracted foreign investors (Chatzoglou et al., 2018).

#### **Rare-**

Etihad had developed strategic relationships with many foreign airlines to foray into new routes. This strategy has helped save costs involved in the license for route operations. This kind of strategic partnership is not easily found among other operators (Buzatu et al., 2019).

#### **Imitability-**

Operational safety is not a norm but is regarded as an asset in the airline industry. Etihad has performed substantially well in its operational safety track record compared to other airlines. Developing an exceptional safety track record records involvement of all stakeholders large and small and thus takes considerable time to develop. Recently, Etihad was named the second most safe airline globally by the Airlines rating portal in 2022 (Atalayar, 2022). This is not an easily imitable feat.

#### **Organised-**

The organisational structure of Etihad is quick to adapt to changes in its functional and operational procedures according to the requirement. This dynamic adaptability has helped Etihad sail through tough business times such as the Pandemic. For example, to address and mitigate the effects of Covid 19, Etihad introduced a new operating model for mid-sized carriers. Etihad usually doesn't operate mid-sized carriers as it is not focused on short-haul trips, but rather long-haul trips. So mid-sized carriers do not provide economy of scale in long haul trips. The change to the mid-size carrier model helped Etihad streamline the structure, reducing unnecessary costs (Etihad Airways News, 2022). This enabled it to control its growth naturally as air travel resumed after the pandemic. Thus, costs were cut down keeping the same standard of safety, security and wellness-service programs.

#### **4. Strategic position of Etihad**

##### **(i) Competitive Position**

Based on the evaluation of the environmental and internal analysis of Etihad, it can be said that it is more prone to changes in the internal environment than to the external environment. Although it can be argued that a crisis like the Covid 19 pandemic has dealt a serious blow to Etihad, others have also been subjected to similar crises. So, Etihad's sales revenue was market

**Commented [AB1]:** Write about SDG

adjusted. Etihad reported a net loss of \$476 million compared to \$1.7 billion in 2021 (Simple Flying, 2022). Although it is substantially less than the previous it is the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in a row of losses of \$7.8 billion. Other major industry players such as Emirates, made a loss of \$1.6 billion in 2021 and \$ 3.4 in 2020 (Techxplore, 2022). While Arabia another major player in the UAE airlines business made \$196 million in profit in 2021 (AI Monitor, 2022). This points out that major factors that led to the poor performance are mostly internal related. Thus, Etihad is positioned as a growing major player in the UAE airlines business. Among the major competitors in UAE, Etihad has an almost similar number of routes comparable to Emirates. Thus, both Etihad and Emirates have understood the importance of route capturing for profit maximization.

#### **(ii) Sustainability Development Goals (SDG) Position**

According to reports published by Etihad, a 5.6% reduction in emissions was achieved due to its new operational procedures in 2021. It inducted its Rolls Royce powered engine jets in its sustainability program and Boeing manufactured engines and united key OEMs to create a comprehensive cross-functional initiative to reduce CO2 emissions. Took the initiative to plant 400 mangrove plants in Jubail Islands in 2022 for every passenger onboard its most sustainable flight. A loyalty program called Conscious Choice was launched for guests to reduce their carbon footprint in their daily lives. Etihad raised \$1.2 billion sustainability linked loan to achieve its sustainability goals (Etihad Airways News, 2022).

### **5. Strategic Recommendations**

**Commented [AB2]:** Include the SDG

#### **(i) Change management through divestment**

Etihad reported 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of loss and it needs to cover for what is lost through other means. Divestment is rather a bold strategy but it is needed in such desperate times as it will cause a change in the management. Through change management, it can bring a fresh set of ideas and strategies. This will benefit Etihad and add to the value creation for Abu Dhabi's civil aviation sector. Apart from this Etihad will be able to focus on its core airlines business through more efficient resource allocation and accelerate its transformation.

#### **(ii) Globalisation through new technology adoption**

Etihad has partnered with more than 20 airlines operators and gained access to over 60 countries with 436 flight operation routes across the globe. This sheer massive scale of route

management, flight allocation, flight diverting, airport management, and passenger management is an operational nightmare. Etihad must bring operational efficiency to its present locations or bases to increase its global presence. If the operational efficiency is not achieved on its present bases then efforts of globalisation will take a long time and can get even stalled due to a fund crunch. Adopting a radically new quantum computing driven AI decision system will provide real-time data across airports, bases, flight movements, and passenger movements and suggest real-time automated decisions with outcome projections. This idea can be implemented on a pilot project basis and later scaled up through successive stages.

### **(iii) Achieving SDG through loyalty programs**

New more incentivised loyalty programs linked to the sustainability efforts of Etihad can be offered. That will increase the customer following of Etihad Airways. This can be done by increasing the existing partner base and products base. This will give customers more items to choose from and voluntarily choose loyalty programs more often. With an increased customer base in loyalty programs, Etihad can fulfil its goal of planting 400 mangrove plants for every passenger onboard thus achieving sustainable flights earlier than planned. This in turn will bring Etihad a step closer to achieving its SDG.

## **6. Critique**

### **The configuration schools**

The recommendations are critiqued from the configuration school of thought viewpoint, belonging to 10 schools of thought of Henry Mintzberg (Mintzberg et al., 2020). The recommendations made, abide well with the techniques of the configuration school where there are two types of strategy. One is well suited for the stable phase and one suitable for the transition phase. Etihad is going through the 3 phases: stable, disturbed, and transitional. In this context, the recommendations such as change management and globalisation through new technology adoption are a mixture of emergent and deliberate strategies. Although it can be argued that the strategies recommended lean more towards the emergent type which is more disruptive in the application. This kind of strategy is more suited in such times when the airlines industry is already in a disruptive phase and looking for new innovative ways to gain an edge.

## **7. Implications for implementation**

### **(i) Change management**

Change of management is disruptive and can cause substantial organisational change. As old strategic and subsidiary divisions are sold, the management directly or indirectly related to the business can be affected. This effect may be related to job security and loss of position to voluntary quitting. Any change in organisational structure is sensitive unless safeguards are pre-installed. Disinvestment can also result in loss of employment for non-managerial staff and crew. This kind of sudden disinvestment decision can be met with displeasure among unions and resistance. Subsidiary hand-over through divestment can result in process stagnation from improper follow of due diligence if done in haste.

### **(ii) Globalisation**

Time cannot be traded for safety. Applying a new quantum computing-based AI system to streamline global operations can greatly increase efficiency in theory. Although putting the same into practice may require substantial trial and error events, which is a cost-intensive endeavour. Besides cost, safety, a time-tested asset for the airline's industry, cultured through decades of human trial and error and innovation, cannot be turned overnight into a quantum-based AI decision system. Because there are innumerable aspects that cannot be digitized for quantum modelling. For eg. ATC controllers provide the finest examples of human intervention that defined the outcome of a safe flight.

### **(iii) Loyalty programs**

The loyalty programs can be all part of a grand sustainability plan, but the added cost of all such strategies can ultimately lead to no value addition. This can impact the revenue generation of Etihad which is already flailing in negative ways. The end result being not being able to close the gap between its present position and the targeted SDG.

## **8. Conclusion**

The research report indicates that the impact of environmental factors can be regarded as a medium instead of low or high according to the evaluation done with the help of Porter's 5 forces model. The string of revenue loss of Etihad is mostly due to strategic decisions taken by the management. The reliance on partner airlines for new market entry has led to substantial

investment which has not ultimately led to any positive value addition in the long run. The Covid pandemic has compounded the problem even more in the last few months. Etihad has positioned itself as one of the top market players in UAE and worldwide. Its unique brand identity comes from its service, creating a unique and excellent customer experience. In order to help Etihad transition through this unstable phase into a more stable phase some recommendations are suggested, which are change management, and adoption of a radically new AI for globalisation. The recommendations are critiqued in the light of the configuration school of thought of Henry Mintzberg, as a self-examination tool. The critique presents how the configuration school of thought takes a decision that satisfies the need for both emergent and deliberate strategy.

In the same way, it is shown through critique as to the ways some of the recommendations can cause disruptive changes while some strategies can be very much straightforward deliberate type. The implication or effects of the recommendations indicate that there can be changes in the organisational structure which can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. As Etihad goes through a transitioning phase of growth and stability, disruptive changes can bring value addition and at the same time can add to more operational chaos. Adoption of radically new AI system for globalisation must be done with some additional caution and only on a small scale but must be through over if they are well suited and adds to the greater good of increased safety and security.

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