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### The Human Connection of Travel: Why Air Travel Will Never Go Away

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The Human Connection of Travel: Why Air Travel Will Never Go Away

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in  
Aviation Science

Bridgewater State University

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## **Introduction**

Advancements in communication and environmental technology may mark the end of aviation as we know it. Numerous people who were forced to remain at home during the pandemic have gotten a taste of a life in which they spend more time with their immediate families and are just as productive at work. Many meetings that individuals used to travel across the nation to attend are now more commonly streamed online for their convenience. Not only that, but the ability to communicate with loved ones who live far away via Facetime and other video-calling technologies has made it possible for us to see and chat with them. We now have virtual reality, YouTube, and Google Maps, all of which enable us to view other areas of the world in real time, rather than needing to go to these different locations in person to get the whole experience. Is this a sign that the era of air travel is coming to an end? Will the movement to phase out the use of fossil fuels leave the aviation industry behind?

To disprove these theories, I have gathered extensive data that validates the continued need for air travel. That the extensive use of technology is only a result of a pandemic that has forced much of the human population to adapt, temporarily. Lastly, aviation has already adapted to the shift towards renewable energy by blending the technology already present in aircraft, with renewable energy.

*Black Swans*

An occurrence known as a "black swan" event or an economic downturn causes significant upheaval in the aviation industry, every so often. The dot-com collapse occurred in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the recession of the 1990s. Following that, the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, and the SARS pandemic between 2002 and 2003, created more disruption. A few years later, the global financial crisis of 2008, made the first 10 years of the 21st century exceptionally unstable. In 2013, the avian flu reappeared, followed by Ebola and the Zika virus.

However, despite these downturns, global aviation traffic has shown consistent long-term increase since the 1970s. *Global Air Passenger Markets: Riding Out Periods of Turbulence*, released by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in 2015, found that it typically takes at least five years for the sector to recover following a short-term upheaval. David Oxley and Chaitan Jain state that "about 72 percent of the effect of the original shock survives one year after the occurrence. After two years, the impact of the shock on global aviation traffic has been reduced to slightly more than half of its original magnitude, and after five years, the effect has been reduced to slightly less than one-fifth of its initial magnitude."

Airlines had to restore capacity following the September 11th terrorist attacks, which, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, had caused the greatest decrease in aviation traffic in history. It took around six years for airlines to regain capacity. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, travel demand in the United States dropped by more than 30%. Because of the recession, airlines were forced to reduce capacity significantly and to lay off more than 62,000 employees, accounting for 11 percent of the airline industry's workforce at the time. To compete with low-cost airlines that have closed in on short-haul networks and profited from drastically

lowered aircraft costs, legacy carriers have transferred some capacity to overseas markets and dropped rates to compete with low-cost carriers. For example, in January 2002, Ryanair purchased 100 Boeing 737-800 jets at a 53 percent discount.

The COVID-19 threat has had a considerably more profound impact. By April of 2020, more than 140 airlines had reduced their capacity to 10% or less of their previous levels (Sehl, 2020). Both Tony Douglas, the CEO of Etihad Airways, and Willie Walsh, the departing CEO of IAG Group, have said that they do not expect to see major demand return until the end of July. Long-distance travel will be the most adversely affected, since domestic travel restrictions will be relaxed before foreign travel limitations are removed. For airlines, income is more closely tied to total passenger miles flown than any other mode of transportation, according to IATA Chief Economist Brian Pearce, who spoke at the association's April briefing. According to the airline industry, "domestic (flying) accounts for one-third of passenger revenue kilometers, making the delayed opening of international borders more troublesome for the airline sector" (Sehl, 2020). The closure has also resulted in an increase in aircraft retirements, hastening the end of the age of the jumbo jet. Austrian Airline, for instance, intends to reduce its fleet size from 80 to 60 aircraft by 2022: "The whole airline business is gloomy," said Andreas Otto, a member of the executive board. According to the report, "we must anticipate that we will reach pre-corona levels" at the earliest possible time in 2023. The ability to convince passengers that it is safe to fly again is critical to regaining income.

Could the advancement of communication and environmental technologies, on the other hand, finally signal the end of air travel as we know it? There has been a widespread effort to phase out the use of fossil fuels and replace them with clean, renewable energy sources (United Nations, 2021). There has also been tremendous development in our capacity to connect with

people over the past decade, thanks to technologies such as Facetime, Zoom, and other online communication platforms. Is it necessary to travel anymore, given that we can now see each other no matter where we are or what time it is? The answer is yes. No matter how far technology has progressed, one fundamental feature of human nature will remain unchanged. That is, the human need to feel connected to others.

We are all familiar with the comforting sensation of being physically held by another human being - the sense of being heard, emotionally understood, and supported by another human being. Having a warm sense of human connection is very crucial in preserving our overall emotional and physical well-being (Brown, 2018). The reality is that even the most powerful technology will never be able to imitate human touch and affection. This is one of the factors that contribute to the necessity of travel.

Not only that but traveling also serves as a vehicle for fostering human relationships with one another via exposure to other cultures, cuisines, new locations, music, and the ways in which people go about their daily lives in various areas of the globe. It's the most effective "in-action" way of learning that a person can receive. The internet can only provide a limited amount of information on a place. Even though virtual reality is a new and novel way to take tours of locations, there is nothing quite like seeing a new area for the first time in person (Dispatch, 2018).

Last, but not least, face-to-face meetings are critical when it comes to concluding business agreements and making critical business decisions. A previous study conducted by Oxford Economics showed that when a face-to-face interaction is included in the sales process, the rate of turning prospects into real customers roughly doubles (Oxford, 2009). Some Fortune 500 companies, justifiably, will not sign any contracts until they have had a face-to-face meeting

with the company's executives; after all, why would they? Such gatherings are also particularly important during sessions of government, in which critical decisions that impact millions, if not billions, of people are created and implemented.

### *Human Connection and Relationships*

Often when experts speak to the idea of "social connection," they are referring to the sense that you are a part of a group and are generally close to the people around you. Scientific research clearly implies that this is a fundamental psychological need that must be met in order to be content with one's life. "People who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression," writes Emma Seppala, director of the Stanford Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. Furthermore, studies have shown that they have better "self-esteem, greater empathy for others, and are more trustworthy and cooperative, and as a result, others are more receptive to trusting and working with them as well".

Professor Brene Brown, a social connection expert at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, said in an interview that "a strong feeling of love and belonging is an inescapable yearning that all individuals have." The desire to love and be loved as well as the desire to belong are biological, cognitive, physical, and spiritual impulses that have been embedded in us. Our ability to perform properly is impaired when such requirements are not supplied." Brown (2018). It's easy to believe that we want money, power, fame, beauty, and endless youth, but the truth is that most of our aspirations are motivated by a need to belong and be accepted, to connect with people and be loved.

Naturally, for many of us, travel is the only way to meet our need for social connection - that desire for human closeness and comfort, which is often satisfied via family and friends - and

therefore, travel is the only solution. The difficulties of the previous year have resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on family. Many Americans are motivated to travel by a desire to reconcile with long-distance relatives or to spend quality time with people closest to them, which motivates them to travel (Simmons, 2021). The key incentives for traveling have altered to place a greater emphasis on human connection. In a study done on the desire to see family, 41 percent of respondents believe that visiting friends and relatives has become "much more" essential to them in recent years. Furthermore, more than a third (37 percent) said that their definition of "meaningful" travel has shifted to include more time spent with family and friends (Thompson, 2021).

According to research conducted by the University of Cambridge in 2020 on loneliness and separation from family during the pandemic, 55 percent of respondents reported feeling more alone and less connected during the pandemic period. 33 percent said it had no effect on their feelings of loneliness, while 12 percent said they felt less alone and more connected as a result of the study. Some of those who reported feeling more alone said they had a heightened sensation of isolation when they heard others speak about their families, how much they missed them, and how regularly they were in touch with them. Some people said that their sensation of loneliness was exacerbated around annual holidays and special occasions (for example, Christmas) (Cambridge, 2020). Another person spoke of being worried about their distant family members and wondered how they were doing and whether they were safe.

Above all, the ability to travel allows us to maintain the most crucial component of our physical connection with our loved ones - the capacity to spend time with them. The more time we spend interacting with others, the better we feel regarding ourselves. This is one of the reasons why aviation is so important for human connection. It is the quickest mode of



transportation, allowing us to spend the maximum amount of time with our loved ones. Whatever technology we use to communicate with our loved ones, it will never be able to completely replace the instinctive desire for their physical presence, which flying is the best at delivering.

### *Discovery and Tourism*

Humans need to travel. We are social animals who are all members of the same species, yet our geographical location affects the acts of society in accordance with cultural and political rules. Despite the fact that we are so similar, our small worlds are so different. Traveling to explore locations other than our hometown is essential for expanding our horizons and being more aware of the rest of the world. Whether someone travels inside their own country or to another one, it may be an unforgettable experience that will be remembered for a lifetime. A continuous pattern of learning and awareness should be maintained throughout one's life, and traveling is an excellent method to do this.

Traveling exposes us to a variety of different cultures. Individuals who have lived their whole lives at home would find it difficult to comprehend the challenges and joys of people from different areas and nations, and this is especially true for children. From one side of a country to the other, that very country might be quite diverse. The languages, cuisine, local music, and the geography may all be different from one location to another. All across the globe, there are a variety of languages and modes of communication to choose from. When we are exposed to these things, we learn to be more open-minded and see that, despite our differences, it is our commonalities as people that bind us together. Traveling is beneficial to mankind on a global scale.

One of the most valuable aspects of traveling is the connections that can be established and the relationships that can be formed while on a trip. Because mankind is so frequently divided, learning to speak across borders and cultivate a global knowledge of one another is critical to the prosperity of all governments and individuals on the global stage. Traveling is a great opportunity to learn about other people's cultures, cuisine, new places, music, and the way they go about their daily lives in other areas of the globe. It also allows you to make personal relationships with individuals all over the world. It's the most in-depth on-site training a person may get. The internet can only provide a limited amount of information on a location. Although virtual reality is a new and unique way to take tours of locations, there is still nothing quite like seeing a new area for the first time in real life.

Aspects of human happiness and mental health that are enhanced by travel include: Traveling has been shown to be beneficial to one's mental health in studies. People living in a society where they are continuously burdened with the stress of job, relationships, and raising a family must make time to unwind to maintain their usual levels of functioning in their daily lives. Traveling allows people to develop a better awareness of themselves, which allows them to feel more complete inside their own identity. None of this can be experienced through the use of technology.

On the other hand, aviation also allows entire economies to run and be successful, through people that wish to explore and travel. That need that humans have to travel is partly what allows aviation to be so successful, and in turn, aviation's success means that many countries are able to benefit from economic growth through that tourism. Getting down to the facts, tourism itself is one of the largest industries in the world. Global tourism supported 284 million jobs in 2015 and generated 9.8 percent of global GDP (\$7.2 trillion), according to the

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). Over 36 million of the 62.7 million employees supported by the aviation industry are aviation-enabled occupations linked to the tourism industry, accounting for over a quarter of the total. Tourism accounts for more than \$892 billion of the overall \$2.7 trillion in economic activity supported by aviation. The importance of air transportation to the tourism sector cannot be overstated. With 54 percent of all foreign visitors arriving at their location by flight, it is simple to see why.

When you bring it down to a regional level, the importance of aviation becomes even more apparent in certain regions than at the national level. Taking Africa as an example, tourism accounts for 5.8 million of the total 6.8 million employment made possible by aviation in the continent. Island countries account for 1.2 million of the overall 1.4 million employed, which is a significant proportion. In the case of certain countries, it is difficult to picture their economy functioning without the regular influx of visitors brought in by airlines from across the world. For example, tourism in the Maldives accounts for 42 percent of the country's total economic production, thanks to the use of planes.

In addition, over three million individuals were employed directly by airlines, air navigation service providers, and airports in the United States. There were 1.1 million people employed in the civil aerospace industry (which includes the manufacturing of aircraft, systems, and engines). An additional 5.5 million people worked in a variety of other airport-related jobs. The aviation industry has contributed to the creation of 52.8 million indirect, induced, and tourism-related employment (Aviation, 2018). There are other economic benefits of aviation that are not even included in these estimates, such as the employment and growth that arise when many businesses exist because of air travel, the innate value that the speed and networking air travel offers, or domestic tourism and trade in the United States.

### *Professional Interactions*

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous businesses have drastically altered their corporate travel policies and procedures. Flight cancellations, lockdowns, and health-related issues made travel management more difficult, and video conferencing became the standard method of communication. Corporate travel is being called into question in an increasingly digital world, and many believe it will be obsolete in the near future. However, as human beings, we are inherently programmed to interact with one another. Since the beginning of time, humans have depended on one another and the information we have shared to survive. According to extensive studies conducted by UCLA, humans are developing to become more and more dependent on these social systems.

Corporate travel facilitates the exchange of ideas and the development of the economy. A team's effectiveness will decrease the more it functions remotely, according to research conducted by the London School of Economics. One of the fundamental goals of business travel is to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas. According to this research, the process of sharing information across individuals may be a long and drawn-out one. We must physically transfer the individual (and, therefore, the information) to diverse places to accelerate the process. Because various nations or regions inherently have skill in varied sectors of business, according to Harvard University, business travelers contribute to economic progress via the knowledge and ideas they offer.

Digital communication is often succinct, and one side may be unaware of the goals or challenges that the other person or group is experiencing. Meeting personally for a conference, for example, may provide either side with a better grasp of their own challenges, build a better

awareness of their role within the organization, and enable breakthroughs that will result in a more efficient workplace in the future. Businesses and economies alike will welcome the return of business travelers, since the personal relationships formed during business travels provide chances for innovation, creativity, and higher productivity.

Direct communication provides a competitive advantage as well. The picture of sales personnel traveling to close business agreements is perhaps the most well-known face of business travel. Many sales operations were moved online last year as a result of necessity. Although Bill Gates, for example, said that long-term in-person meetings and business travel will be phased out last November, the reality is that they will return. At the end of the day, the technology to hold meetings online was already in place prior to the epidemic. But corporations continued to emphasize significant travel expenditures, which often included foreign air travel, to send business travelers to hold face-to-face discussions with customers and partners. For both big and small organizations, face-to-face encounters distinguish you from competitors that depend on digital communication to communicate. Clients are significantly more inclined to pick a firm that has gone to them in order to interact with them personally than the alternative. In person, it is simpler to establish confidence, have candid and perhaps difficult talks, and negotiate the specifics of a commercial transaction. When travel restrictions are lifted, organizations that continue to depend on digital meetings may find themselves at a competitive disadvantage to the competition that chooses to send their employees out into the world.

There are many different types of business travel. Corporate travel is conducted for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to the purpose of negotiating or closing commercial agreements, and business travelers come in a variety of shapes and sizes. With more teams working remotely or dispersed across great distances or differing time zones, business vacations

may also bring diverse teams together to create connections and offer input on a variety of topics. For example, conferences might incorporate business travel components to bring together geographically dispersed personnel to network, exchange ideas, and acquire critical information. Off-site meetings, on the other hand, may help promote fresh ideas, and team-building days can assist in enhancing communication while also serving as a reward following a successful period for the company.

All of this brings us back to the concept of human connection. Face-to-face engagement is essential for companies to succeed since we humans have an inbuilt desire for interaction in order to be successful in all parts of our lives. Larger companies based on teams of people who physically work together are more likely to succeed in the long run. When people meet in person, trust is simpler to establish, and communication is easier to cultivate than when they depend only on video conferencing. Because of the setbacks in 2020 and the incredible leap forward in communication technology, business travel will continue to be an integral aspect of every organization, and through it, aviation itself.

### *Environmental Technology*

Despite surviving numerous black swan events and establishing that despite the rise of communication technology, human connection will continue to allow the aviation industry to survive, could these aggressive changes in environmental technology make travel disappear? The answer is still no since the need for the stated types of human connection will drive us to seek alternatives to fossil fuels to meet our needs. In fact, we have already done so.

Aviation has always been an industry characterized by forward-thinking individuals and careful planners. The government intends to enact a \$3.5 trillion infrastructure package to aid in

the implementation of President Biden's climate change plan, which calls for the elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from electricity plants by 2035 (Brady, 2011). This extends further to the elimination of nonrenewable energy sources from automobiles and, eventually, from aviation. Because of this, Airbus has announced plans for a zero-emission aircraft powered by hydrogen, with the goal of putting them into service by 2035 (Ambrose, 2020).

Earlier this year, Airbus unveiled three distinct aircraft ideas that would be put through tests to determine the most effective method to travel vast distances by aircraft while avoiding the emissions of greenhouse gasses that are contributing to global warming. Should the ideas become a commercial reality, tourists, and business travelers from the UK for instance, might fly from London to the Canary Islands, Athens, or Eastern Europe without emitting any carbon emissions in the process. In all three of the aircraft ideas, hydrogen is used as a fuel since the only pollutants created when it is consumed are water vapor, making it an environmentally friendly alternative fuel for large vehicles such as planes, trains, and trucks. According to Airbus, the design possibilities would aid in the maturation of plans for what it hoped would be the "world's first climate-neutral, zero-emission commercial airplane," which it hoped to put in service by 2035, securing aviation's survival and success for many years to come.

## **Conclusion**

Advancements in communication and environmental technology do not spell the end of air travel as we know it. One essential element of human nature will stay unaltered, regardless of how far technology has evolved. That is, the human desire to be connected.

No amount of technology will ever be able to replace human contact and emotion. This is one of the main reasons that contributes to the need for air travel. Not only that, but we have proven that

travel also helps to create human interactions by exposing individuals to other cultures, cuisines, new places, music, and so on. It is the most effective method of learning and experiencing available to a person. The internet can only supply so much information on a location.

When it comes to closing business agreements and making crucial business choices, face-to-face meetings are essential. According to Oxford Economics, including a face-to-face encounter in the sales process almost doubles the likelihood of converting prospects into actual clients (Oxford, 2009). Lastly, the aviation industry has already adapted to the shift towards renewable energy. Airbus's new hydrogen powered aircraft, which is expected to be in the air during the 2030's, will not only spark competition and greater innovation, but also ensure aviation's survival for many years in the future.



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