



Cabin Crew Recruitment Process From the Aesthetic Labour Perspective

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Abstract

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<p>A cabin crew member is a skilled airline professional and responsible for maintaining the comfort, safety, and overall satisfaction of passengers. Being a cabin crew member is both rewarding and exciting. However, to be successful in this job, individuals are required to have various skills and qualifications.</p> <p>The recruitment process within the airline industry has traditionally focused on technical skills, interpersonal skills, and physical appearance. However, the concept of aesthetic labour has been a growing interest in service industries and served as the theoretical foundation for this study. It highlights the significance of employees' appearance, behaviour, and the overall presentation in industries that interact directly with consumers such as fashion, beauty, and hospitality. Aesthetic labour holds significant importance in the airline industry as cabin crew members are often seen as the face of the airline.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis was to discover how the recruitment process for new cabin crew members differentiates between the four airlines included in this study: Finnair, SAS, Ryanair, and Emirates Airlines. This study also focused on how these four airlines prioritize aesthetic features alongside other qualifications and skills. Studying this topic is important for understanding how aesthetic criteria play a role in hiring biases and exclusionary practices, as well as their effects on the employee mental health.</p> <p>The study was carried out as a qualitative study during the autumn of 2024. Both written and electronic literature were used as sources for the theoretical framework of this research, and the data for the survey research was collected through Webropol tool. The survey was sent out to cabin crew around the world by sharing it on social media platforms, resulting in 15 responses within two weeks.</p> <p>The results of this study showed that there are differences in the recruitment and training practices within these four airlines. It was seen that Finnair and SAS focus more on professionalism and customer-friendliness rather than specific beauty standards. Emirates was clearly reported being more strict with the aesthetic requirements. Within all four airlines, training was described very intense but rewarding.</p>
Key words Recruitment Process, Cabin Crew, Airline Industry, Grooming Codes, Aesthetic Labour

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1. Introduction

A cabin crew member is a skilled airline professional and responsible for maintaining the comfort, safety, and overall satisfaction of passengers. The role of a cabin crew member is both rewarding and exciting. However, it requires several skills and qualifications to succeed in this role.

The recruitment process in the airline sector has historically been influenced by a mix of technical skills, interpersonal abilities, and physical presentation. This thesis attempts to explore the variations in the recruitment processes for cabin crew, as well as the influence of aesthetic labour on hiring practices within the aviation industry. This study attempts to highlight the main requirements that impact the recruitment strategies in different airlines, in addition to uncover how aesthetic factors shape the selection criteria. Studying this topic is important for many reasons. For example, studying aesthetic criteria can raise important questions about potential hiring biases, including those related to gender, race, body type, and age. This study could add to broader discussions on how aesthetic preferences can lead to exclusionary practices, encouraging the industry to adopt more inclusive hiring practices. Additionally, the pressure to meet specific aesthetic requirements have different level of impact on the mental health and well-being of employees.

This study will focus on four different airlines: Finnair, SAS, Ryanair and Emirates. With the purpose to explore how these airlines prioritize aesthetic features alongside other qualifications and skills in their recruitment of new cabin crew members. The goal of this study is to deepen the understanding of how aesthetic labour influences modern hiring practices, particularly in industries where appearance and customer interaction are crucial to the position.

The main research question that the author intends to find answers is “How does cabin crew members see the affect of the set criteria pertaining to aesthetic labour?” The following questions will help the author to find the answers for the main question. “What kind of strategies is used in the recruitment processes of cabin crew members in Finnair, SAS, Ryanair, and Emirates?”, “How do recruitment and training practices regarding appearance differ among these four airlines?”, “What impact does aesthetic labour have on cabin crew members?”, and “How do airlines incorporate aesthetic labour into their cabin crew recruitment processes?”

The theoretical framework for this thesis is centered around the concept of aesthetic labour. This concept highlights the significance of employees' appearance, behaviour, and the overall presentation in industries that interact directly with customers. This is especially

obvious in sectors such as fashion, beauty, and hospitality, where aesthetic labour is crucial for roles that necessitate direct customer engagement. Aesthetic labour holds significant importance in the airline industry as cabin crew members are often seen as the face of the airline, with a mission to deliver a positive and memorable experience for passengers during the flights. Although aesthetic labour can assist airlines in upholding a strong brand image and fulfilling specific customer expectations, it also presents considerable risks, such as discrimination, reduced diversity, and harmful effects on employee well-being. It is essential to strike a balance between aesthetic standards and equitable, inclusive hiring practices to create more positive and sustainable work environment within the aviation sector.

The theoretical framework is followed by the methodology used in the survey to gather data, and then an analysis of the collected data. This study uses a qualitative method to explore the influence of aesthetic labour in the recruitment process.

This study concludes with a discussion that combines the survey findings with secondary data collected. The beneficiaries section will identify individuals or groups who might find the results from this research valuable, as well as recommendations for future research. Finally, in the end will be a brief reflection on my learning experiences during this thesis.

This thesis topic interests the author, as it can provide promising and valuable insights that could help her future career interest within the aviation industry. In addition to the interest, the author has gained firsthand experiences from cabin crew recruitment processes, as she has applied for Finnair and Ryanair in the past. These practical experiences could give a beneficial view for this thesis and allow her to add real-world examples and insights.

2. Significant factors in the recruitment process

This chapter will be focusing on the duties of a cabin crew member, as well as look into the standard criteria that are included in the typical recruitment process.

2.1. Cabin Crew Member

A cabin crew member is a professional employed by an airline to ensure the safety, comfort, and well-being of passengers during a flight. (EASA, 2024). Commonly referred to as flight attendants or air hosts/ hostesses, these individuals play a crucial role in the operation of commercial and some private aircrafts. The main duty of a cabin crew member is to protect all passengers on board, making them crucial to the flight's overall operation. (AME CET, 2024). The input of cabin crew members is crucial in enhancing the passenger experience, as they deliver hospitality and attention that can greatly affect a traveller's perception of the airline. In critical situations, these professionals are equipped with the training necessary to manage emergencies with poise and effectiveness, guiding passengers to safety. (Cabin Crew Wings, 2018).

In summary, a cabin crew member is a skilled airline professional. Cabin crew members are responsible for maintaining the comfort, safety, and overall happiness of passengers during the flight. They handle everything from basic routine operations, as well as emergencies that might happen during the flight.

2.2 Standard requirements

Being a cabin crew member is rewarding and exciting, but it also comes with many required skills and qualifications for individuals to succeed in this job. This chapter will focus on the main recruitment strategies that normally are used by airlines. As well as looking into the features that usually influence the selection of applicants, such as age, height, language proficiency, and physical fitness. These features often play a significant role when evaluating an applicant's suitability for roles within the aviation industry. (Cairns, J. 2023). By studying these requirements, the author hopes to develop a better understanding of the recruitment policies that shape the hiring practices in the airline industry.

Applicants who wish to become cabin crew members are required to have at least a high school diploma or an equivalent qualification. This basic educational requirement serves as an entry point into the aviation world. However, it is important to recognize that certain airlines may require stricter standards, necessitating applicants to have a university degree or a vocational credential in areas such as hospitality or tourism. (Cairns, J. 2023). These additional qualifications can boost applicant's competitiveness in the job market by enhancing their understanding of operational procedures and customer service. (AviationCV Blog, 2024).

Typically, 18 is the minimum age for any individual seeking to become a cabin crew member. (Cairns, J. 2023). Hiring managers use this age requirement to make sure that applicants are legally allowed to work, as well as have a certain level of maturity that is needed for cabin crew members to manage their duties. However, it is also important to note that some airlines may determine an upper age limit, which can range from 35 to 40 years. (AviationCV Blog, 2024).

Cabin crew members are required to engage effectively with both the passengers, as well as their colleagues. This is the main reason why effective communication skills are crucial in their role. (Stainton, H. 2023). Because of the international nature of air travel, it means that cabin crew members meet frequently individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It is important to have the ability to communicate clearly and with empathy when providing positive travel experiences. (Cairns, J. 2023). English serves as the main language in the aviation industry worldwide, which means that the knowledge of it, is especially important for applicants. (AviationCV Blog, 2024). As well as candidates who can speak multiple languages will have a significant advantage, as this talent can lead to more seamless interactions with passengers and improve the overall quality of service. (Cairns, J. 2023).

Besides having strong communication skills, cabin crew members are also required to have excellent customer service capabilities. (Cairns, J. 2023). As well as be friendly and accessible when fostering a hospitable environment for customers. (Stainton, H. 2023). Additionally, cabin crew members should be skilled and consistently maintain patience when handling difficult situations, including interactions with challenging passengers. This side of the cabin crew's responsibilities is especially important for passengers facing problems during their flight, as cabin crew members are the first and main people to turn to for help. (AviationCV Blog, 2024)

The role of cabin crew often requires standing for long times, lifting heavy objects, and assisting passengers during possible emergencies. Due to the demands of their profession, cabin crew members should prioritize physical fitness and overall health. (Cairns, J. 2023).

Therefore, certain airlines may implement specific height and weight requirements for cabin crew members. These features can be reasoned important as they can influence applicant's ability to reach overhead storage compartments and execute necessary physical tasks in urgent scenarios. (AviationCV Blog, 2024).

Furthermore, here is a few important skills that aspiring cabin crew members are required to possess, such as patience, flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to operate efficiently in high-pressure situations. (Cairns, J. 2023). These skills are very important when delivering excellent service and to guarantee the safety and overall satisfaction of passengers during their flight. For example, the ability to remain calm in difficult situations is crucial, as it fosters a sense of trust and security around passengers. (AviationCV Blog, 2024). Secondly, flexibility and being open to change are very important skills for cabin crew members. Flexibility is especially important skill when considering the challenging aspects of the job, such as extended hours, irregular schedules, and the need to adapt to different time zones. Additionally, being open to change allows cabin crew members to be able to respond efficiently to evolving situations, which can help to fulfill the expectations of customers, as well as the airline. (AviationCV Blog, 2024). And lastly, the ability to operate efficiently under pressure, as being able to make decisions and maintain concentration are essential skills for cabin crew. (Stainton, H. 2023). This only not ensure the comfort and safety of passengers but can also highlight the professionalism of the crew and airline.

2.3 Aesthetic Labour in the Recruitment Process

This chapter will have a look at how an applicant's appearance, attire, and hairstyle can have an impact during the selection process. Some companies, especially in the service-oriented industries, practice hiring based on how the applicants may fit with their desired image or brand identity. These companies hire their employees based on the appearance, demeanour, and personal presentation of the applicants. This concept is referred to as aesthetic labour. (Warhurst C., Nickson D., 2007). And will be further explored in chapter three.

The effects of aesthetic labour raise several ethical issues, especially in service-oriented industries, where the appearance plays a crucial role, yet it often remains as an unspoken factor. The assessment of aesthetic features is attached into the hiring process, acting as an "invisible" criterion. As a result, an applicant may be overlooked for a position even if they have the necessary educational and/ or technical qualifications. Discrimination based on race, age, social class or appearance is a common issue within the customer service

industry. (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007, 104-106). In certain industries, particularly customer-facing roles such as cabin crew, hospitality, retail, or luxury services, aesthetic labour plays a key role in recruitment. The companies seek individuals who do not only have the required skills but also possess the behaviour and look that fits the brand's image and expectations. (AME CET, 2024). These are factors that can significantly play a crucial role in shaping the airline's image and brand.

But it is also important to understand that different airlines may prioritize the importance of these factors at different levels. During this thesis we will explore whether certain airlines maintain stricter standards regarding personal presentation and how these standards may vary throughout the industry.

3. Recruitment Process of Selected Airlines

This chapter includes a look into the recruitment procedures that are used by four specific airlines. The focus will be on what potential applicants can expect from the process, as well as what kind of information is available regarding the recruitment processes of these airlines.

The airline industry is made up of various companies called airlines that offer air travel services to customers or business partners. (AME CET, 2024). These services are designed for both, passengers and cargo. Airlines are mainly using jets, while some airlines also provide helicopter services. By allowing customers to purchase flight tickets and travel to various destinations around the world, this industry plays an important role in the travel industry. (Barten, M. 2024). Additionally, to the travel opportunities, the airline industry also offers numerous career opportunities worldwide, such as positions for pilots, flight attendants, and ground personnel.

This study will focus on four major airlines: Finnair, Scandinavian Airlines, Ryanair, and Emirates Airlines. These airlines were selected based on factors that highlight their operational structures and hiring strategies. Each of these airlines operates within different segments of the aviation industry, targeting to diverse customers and using various business models that reflect their strategic priorities and market positioning. Through this study, the author seeks to explore the diverse recruitment methods used by these four airlines.

This information can help to clarify the reasons behind the unique strategies used by each airline, as well as provide aspiring applicants with valuable insights to improve their chances in the competitive field of aviation recruitment. With this information and understanding the specific requirements and expectations in the recruitment process, applicants can enhance their chances of success by tailoring their applications and preparing for interviews.

3.1 Finnair

This chapter will have a look into Finnair, with a focus on the expectations surrounding their recruitment process and employee training. Besides the strategies we will have a look on how factors such as appearance and behaviour might have an impact during their recruitment process.

Finnair was founded in 1923, and is recognized as one of the oldest airlines that are still in operation. Over the years, Finnair has grown to be a significant player in the Nordic aviation

industry and has become an important contributor to the region's connectivity and economic development. Because of Finnair's strategic location, it serves as a natural bridge between Europe and Asia, providing customers with efficient travel experiences. (Finnair, 2024).

Finnair not only prioritizes connectivity but also places significant importance on sustainability and innovation. The airline has undertaken numerous initiatives designed to minimize its environmental footprint, such as investing in state-of-the-art, fuel-efficient aircraft and investigating alternative fuel sources. (Finnair, 2024). This dedication to sustainability is in harmony with global trends and reflects the values held by many travellers.

In the ever-changing aviation industry, Finnair remains dedicated to providing high-quality service, enhancing passenger experiences, and expanding its global reach. As they state:

“Suomalaisten portti maailmalle”.

Free translation: “The gateway to the world for the Finnish people”.

With a rich history spanning over a hundred years, Finnair is ideally positioned to continue its important role in the aviation industry. (Finnair, 2024).

Finnair presents itself on its website as an airline that employs highly skilled professionals who are deeply committed to their roles with a strong sense of passion. The company places a significant emphasis on diversity as one of its fundamental values, promoting a culture of collaboration where customers are central to their operations. (Finnair, 2024). From Finnair career website you can find information about how to become a member of their cabin crew. Finnair lists the main required skills such as strong customer service, teamwork, adaptability, flexibility, situational awareness, proactive approach, and exceptional interpersonal abilities. Additionally, they highlight that the work is often irregular, as the flights and work shifts are scheduled on various days of the week at different times around the world.

Finnair is committed to shaping its recruitment strategies so they align together with their core values and operational needs. (Finnair, 2024). They also highlight that its recruitment process is designed to find applicants who in addition to possessing the necessary skills can also demonstrate a commitment to environmental responsibilities and cultural sensitivity.

To qualify for a cabin crew at Finnair, the airline has listed specific requirements on its website, which include:

- Minimum age of 18

- Completion of upper secondary education or vocational training
- Proficient in English
- Proficiency in Finnish is appreciated, and additional language skills are a plus
- Minimum height of 160 cm, with a reach of at least 218 cm
- At least one year of experience in the hospitality or customer service sector
- Good overall health, meeting EASA Part Med Cabin Crew standards and Finnair health guidelines
- Normal colour vision and hearing
- Ability to swim 40 meters
- All visible tattoos must be fully concealed in uniform, and all visible piercings removed (except earrings)
- Clear criminal record
- Valid EU passport with unrestricted global travel
- Authorization to live and work permanently in Finland, and able to reach Helsinki Airport within one hour when on standby

From Finnair's website you can find good information about their selection process for cabin crew members. They list there that it involves several stages including: online assessments, video tasks, medical examinations, interviews. They reason that the purpose of this selection process is to evaluate the essential criteria and qualifications that are relevant to cabin crew members.

From their website you are also able to find a comprehensive overview of the steps that will follow after an applicant has successfully completed the recruitment process. First applicants will receive their invitation to attend the Finnair Flight Academy for the training. The training period is eight weeks, during which participants will familiarize themselves with Finnair's operational policies and learn how to respond to various safety, first aid, and service situations.

The training program emphasizes safety and first aid, which are both crucial parts of the professional competence that is required from cabin crew members. In addition to safety training, the program covers essential topics such as service communication, cultural awareness, and Finnair's vision and principles of exemplary customer service. After completing the training program, individuals will possess the foundational skills necessary to serve as cabin crew members. (Finnair, 2024).

Furthermore, Finnair outlines expectations regarding dress code on their website, indicating that employees and applicants should recognize their responsibilities as cabin crew members and perform themselves professionally throughout the training process. It is also anticipated that they will exercise common sense and responsibility in their use of social media.

3.2 Scandinavian Airlines

This chapter will look into Scandinavian Airlines, also known as SAS. This chapter focuses on the airline's recruitment strategies.

SAS (Scandinavian Airlines System), is an important player in the airline industry in Scandinavia. The airline was founded in 1946, it was a partnership between the governments of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, as well as with the Wallenberg industrial family. Together they created the airline to improve connectivity among Scandinavian nations. (SAS, 2024). Aviation plays a key role in Scandinavia's infrastructure, making it easy for both businesses and people to connect efficiently. It adds value and supports the success of Scandinavian enterprises in a region that heavily relies on international trade. (SAS, 2024).

Copenhagen Airport serves as the main hub for SAS, with additional hubs in Oslo and Stockholm.

The mission of the airline is to connect Scandinavia to the world and vice versa. (SAS, 2024).

On their official website, SAS emphasizes that their values include Scandinavian identity and operational priorities, such as customer care, safety, and punctuality. SAS is also recognized as a leader in sustainable aviation. The airline is focused on involving sustainability in all points of its operations. The goal is to maximize their social benefits through services while minimizing their environmental footprint. (SAS, 2024).

On their website they state that working as a cabin crew member at SAS is more than just a job. Being a cabin crew for them signifies a representation of the SAS brand itself. During their recruitment process, the airline aims to identify applicants who are able to represent the Scandinavian identity. SAS defines this identity as simplicity, professionalism, and a strong dedication to environmental sustainability. They emphasize that the main duty of their cabin crew members is to guarantee the safety of passengers while delivering a pleasant and efficient experience throughout the flight. (SAS, 2024).

There is a good list of requirements listed by recruiters on SAS's website, such as:

- Minimum age of 18
- Height requirement between 160 cm and 190 cm
- Completion of high school or equivalent education
- Proficient in English (Berlitz level B2 or high school grade equivalent of B or higher)
- Physically and mentally fit, with good vision
- Able to pass health certification, including drug and alcohol testing
- Strong swimming ability
- Capable of adhering to uniform guidelines
- Valid EU passport, permitting unrestricted global travel

- Authorization to reside and work permanently in (Denmark, Norway, Sweden)
- Clear criminal record across all countries of residence, and willingness to undergo a 5-year background check upon hiring

On their website they outline several desired personal features in their employees and applicants. The applicants should demonstrate a service-oriented mindset, as well as possess excellent interpersonal skills, maintain a positive attitude, and exhibit a strong working ethic. Addition to these features, they should be willing to work irregular hours, adaptable, and reliable team players.

There was no information found about the steps of their recruitment process and neither any information about what an applicant can expect from the training process after getting in.

3.3 Ryanair

This chapter will look into Ryanair, and having a special focus on their recruitment strategies and employee training programs.

Ryanair is the parent company of Ryanair, Ryanair UK, Buzz, Lauda and Malta Air, and was founded in 1984 by three entrepreneurs, Tony Ryan, Christopher Ryan, and Liam Lonergan. (Peters, 2024). Ryanair operates in 37 countries and is recognized as the largest airline in Europe. They have the highest number of passengers transported annually and the largest fleet of aircraft. (Ryanair, 2024).

Ryanair is a significant low-cost airline in Europe, representing the budget airline framework. This framework is especially known for its competitive pricing tactics and approach to minimalistic service. By including a low-cost airline in this research, it can give different aspects of strategies used in the aviation industry.

Ryanair's brochure with the title "Who We Are," emphasizes its dedication to providing the best customer experience at the most competitive fares. On this same brochure, they claim that they hold a strong record of on-time flights. They state, "We keep our business simple, we work smart, don't waste money, and we always look for new opportunities." (Ryanair, 2024). Ryanair is committed to ensuring an excellent customer experience while they offer the lowest possible fares, which allows individuals to travel more frequently. (Ryanair, 2024).

Ryanair describes a career as Cabin Crew as enjoyable and rewarding, although it can also be demanding. (Ryanair, 2024). On their official website, they provide information on what

kind of person could be a good fit as their cabin crew member. Applicants should identify themselves as customer-oriented, as well as enjoy working in a fast-paced environment and be ready to work both early and late shifts. They also like to note that prior experience is not necessary, but enthusiasm and great teamwork skills are essential.

The requirements listed on their career website include:

- Proficient in spoken and written English
- Height range of approximately 157 cm to 188 cm
- Ability to swim 25 meters
- Hardworking, adaptable, and friendly personality is beneficial
- Willingness to work various shift schedules
- Enjoy interacting with people and capable of delivering outstanding customer service with a positive attitude
- Passionate about travel and meeting new people

On Ryanair's career website, they have listed an overview of their application process. After sending an application, the applicant will do an online English test. When the test is completed successfully, applicants will be asked to join for an interview with a hiring manager. If the applicant passes this interview, they will get the information about the commencement of the training.

To become a qualified Cabin Crew member at Ryanair, the applicant will go through a six-week training program. During this program new entrants will get the essential skills necessary for their daily responsibilities, ensuring excellent customer service and the safety of the passengers. (Ryanair, 2024).

3.4 Emirates Airlines

This chapter will look into Emirates Airlines, with an emphasis on their recruitment strategies and employee training programs. Besides the strategies we will have a look on how factors such as appearance and behaviour might have an impact during their recruitment process.

The story of Emirates Airlines started in 1984. (Emirates, 2024). According to information on their website, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, the UAE Minister of Defence and a member of Dubai's forward-thinking royal family, proposed the idea of starting a new airline to Sir Maurice Flanagan, who back then was the managing director of dnata. The name "Emirates" was selected for this new airline, as well as a detailed business plan by December 1984.

In the premium air travel industry, Emirates is one of the most known airlines, with its outstanding service quality and extensive global network. In all aspects of Emirates operations, the commitment to deliver luxurious travel experiences is the primary one. (Emirates, 2024).

On the Emirates career website, they describe that the working environment is vibrant and encourages personal and professional growth. New entrants will work with a team of professionals with varied skills, expertise, and knowledge from different regions of the world

To qualify for a position as cabin crew with Emirates, the airline has specified requirements listed on its website, including:

- Proficient in English, both written and spoken (knowledge of other languages is a plus)
- A team-oriented individual with a vibrant personality
- Minimum height of 160 cm and able to reach a height of 212 cm
- Eligible for an employment visa in the UAE
- Minimum age of 21
- At least one year of experience in hospitality or customer service
- Completed high school education (Grade 12 or equivalent)
- No visible tattoos while in Emirates cabin crew uniform

On the Emirates official website, they have provided good information for everyone who is interested in applying for a cabin crew member for them. They inform about the schedules and locations of their recruitment events, and invite all interested individuals to participate and gain information about the available positions. Emirates has listed thorough guidance on appropriate attire and how they expect applicants to show up for their recruitment events. For women, they recommend neatly styled hair, either in a bun or ponytail, full face make-up, and business attire with heels. For men, they recommend well-groomed hair and a clean-shaven face, a suit or smart business attire, and formal shoes.

Additionally, applicants can find information from Emirate's official website regarding what to expect from the recruitment days, as well as the training program. The recruitment day will start with a group introduction, and an overview of the role, the company, and life in Dubai. Followed by different kinds of assessments, such as group activities and online tests. Finally, at the end of the day, the applicants get to do a private interview with a hiring team. After getting selected to join the Emirates cabin crew program, the new hires will go through an intensive training program that will last seven and a half weeks. This training program starts with an introduction to what working for Emirates will be, as well as life in Dubai. Then followed by safety, security, and medical training. And continuing to the hospitality and service training, which is aimed at creating memorable experiences and providing quality

service. By the end of the Emirates training program, the recruiters will ensure that all new hires know and understand the proper way to wear their new uniform.

4. Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry

The theoretical framework of this thesis is Aesthetic Labour. Focusing on how it is seen within the aviation industry, as well as possible challenges faced by cabin crew members caused by this concept.

4.1 The Origin of Aesthetic Labour

In the early 2000s, the concept of aesthetic labour was introduced and popularized by Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson, together with others. Their investigations were mainly targeted at the service sector, where it is more common that appearance, behaviour, and interaction style of employees with customers are seen as essential elements of their professional responsibilities. Warhurst, Nickson, and their associates started to analyze aesthetic labour within the framework of the expanding service economy, especially in sectors such as retail, hospitality, and roles that involve direct customer engagement, where the "look" and "style" of employees were increasingly seen as reflections of the brand. This concept was analyzed in their 2000 publication titled "Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work: Some Case Study Evidence from the 'New' Glasgow." This work, along with other academic articles, recognized aesthetic labour as an important area to be studied more, especially its impact on recruitment, employee well-being, and organizational practices.

4.2 The Concept of Aesthetic Labour

Aesthetic labour is seen as the visual presentation of staff within service encounters. (Witz et al., 2003). It is acknowledged that this is significant in the service sector, where employees are required to represent and communicate a particular image or appearance that aligns with the company's branding or the desired customer experience. (Warhurst C., Nickson D., 2007). A direct definition of aesthetic labour includes the uniform presentation of staff, as well as their physical attractiveness. This phenomenon is especially seen in sectors such as fashion, beauty, hospitality, and restaurants, where aesthetic labour is essential to service roles involving direct client interactions.

In these industries, the belief is that physical attractiveness can improve the quality of service and meet more easily customer expectations. This is why the recruitment practices might lean more toward selecting attractive female applicants over male applicants. (Firth,

M. 2020). The typical thought is that customers may feel to have a better experience when they are served by individuals who fit the traditional beauty standards.

As aesthetic labour prioritizes the appearance of the applicant over their skills and qualifications. This practice raises many ethical concerns, such as gender discrimination and the objectification of employees, which will be reviewed next.

4.3 Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry

In the airline world, aesthetic labour is attached to the importance of the appearance and behaviour of cabin crew members, and making sure that they fit together with the airline's brand and the overall experience for passengers. According to Warhurst and Nickson (2007: 105), employees play a crucial role in the service. In the case of airlines, the idea of excellent customer experiences is particularly relevant, and their cabin crew members are the key players in creating these experiences.

Many people view cabin crew members as extremely appealing, but according to Ms. Brown, an experienced cabin crew, it is just an illusion shaped by the airlines. (YourLifeChoices, 2023). Applicant's ability to meet the airline's aesthetic expectations can have a significant influence on their chances of getting the job. When airlines are hiring new cabin crew members, they typically set specific criteria regarding height, weight, and overall appearance. (Cairns, J. 2023). Although some of these requirements can be justified by practical needs, such as the ability to access overhead compartments or pass through narrow aisles. Still, these requirements often reflect the airline's desire to keep up with a certain aesthetic that they believe appeals to their customers. (International Flight Academy, 2022).

The tattoo policies at many airlines are often seen as controversial and outdated. Currently, most of the airlines in operation do not allow their cabin crew to have visible tattoos, while some allow them as long as their employees can cover them up with the uniform. There are only a few airlines that currently allow visible tattoos, as long as they are not considered inappropriate or offensive. (Scales, P. 2023) This policy creates inequality since male cabin crew do not get the same scrutiny because their uniforms typically expose less skin compared to female uniforms. Regardless of applicants' qualifications in customer service, this policy can limit job opportunities for applicants with tattoos.

Ms. Brown elaborates that the training program for cabin crew encompasses a thorough approach to grooming, uniform standards, and overall image development, all designed to

foster an appealing look that aligns with the airline's brand identity. (YourLifeChoices, 2023). The training program includes detailed guidance on appropriate attire that meets both safety and comfort criteria, and makes sure that the crew looks good as well. (YourLifeChoices, 2023). In addition to clothing, the program offers specific recommendations regarding hairstyles, ensuring that crew members present a neat and professional appearance. Furthermore, male crew members are provided with explicit grooming standards related to facial hair, which include advice on beard styles and mustache styles. (Kim,S. 2016). Ms. Brown highlights just how much effort and money airlines invest in the image of their cabin crew members, which definitely have an influence on how passengers view and interact with cabin crew during their travels. (YourLifeChoices, 2023).

4.4 Challenges Associated with Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry

Aesthetic labour refers to the expectation that part of employees professional duties are to maintain visually appealing appearance that goes together with the image of company or brand. (Wood, R. 2023). Airlines frequently seek cabin crew members who can reflect their brand image, which may include specific standards of beauty, elegance, or style. (Smith, S.L.J. 2023). Although many changes have been made throughout the years of aviation, female cabin crew still suffer from expectations towards their looks and behaviour.

A challenge associated with aesthetic labour that will be first looked at is discrimination, concerning applicants' age, gender, or race. This means that applicants are assessed more by their looks than their skills or experiences. This practice can lead to excluding applicants who possess the necessary skills and experiences just because they do not fit into certain aesthetic criteria. (Nickson, D. 2022).

The research executed by Warhurst and Nickson (2020) indicates that both women and men often meet specific expectations regarding their appearance during the hiring process, and after getting hired by the company. Warhurst and Nickson noted that it was essential to acknowledge that men can also be influenced by aesthetic standards. However, they noted that it is more often women who face strict expectations and are more influenced by the pressures of aesthetic labour. This means that women often face different aesthetic standards compared to men. This does not only impact their job opportunities but also the experiences that they face in workplaces. Therefore, the different beauty standards imposed on women are more obvious not just during the hiring process but also when it comes to adhering to dress codes, highlighting the gender inequality linked to appearance management in the workplace. (Warhurst, C. and Nickson, D. 2020).

Easteal, O'Neill, and Ryan (2018) observed in their research that employees in the service sector, regardless of gender, may encounter both explicit and implicit gender-specific dress codes in their workplaces. Still, these dress codes tend to place a bigger emphasis on femininity, beauty, fashion, and overall appearance for women. Their research indicated that in the hospitality industry, the standards placed on women were significantly more strict than standards for male applicants. Additionally, the standards often include the exploitation of female sexuality, with requirements for attire designed to enhance the 'sexiness' of female employees.

An ex-cabin crew on YouTube, revealed some dark secrets about the airline industry. She explained that it is normal for cabin crew members to experience pressure to keep up with specific physical standards, especially in the airline where she worked, but she did not reveal this specific airline. She continued that the pressure can lead to stress, anxiety, and even push cabin crew members towards unhealthy habits such as extreme dieting or cosmetic surgeries. This kind of brutal emphasis on appearance can also affect badly on the mental health of cabin crew members. The pressure can make them feel like the only way to keep their job is to maintain a certain look. (YouTube, 2023).

Sexual harassment is a serious problem, particularly in customer service jobs. Cabin crew members, regardless of gender, often occupy positions with less authority and lower workplace status, which may increase their vulnerability to unwanted and aggressive behaviour. (Hodson et al., 2006; Lopez et al., 2009).

While aesthetic labour can improve customer perceptions by providing a visually appealing experience, it may also promote unrealistic or superficial expectations among passengers. (YourLifeChoices, 2023). The dependence on aesthetic labour raises ethical questions about the values that airlines promote. By prioritizing physical appearance, airlines might unintentionally send a message that appearance is more important than actual skills or job performance. This can create harmful stereotypes and societal expectations that link beauty with competence, which only then deepens biases in the workplace. High standards for appearance can cause more employees to quit, if flight attendants feel like they're being judged too harshly on how they look. This means airlines have to spend more on hiring and training new staff. (YouTube, 2023).

Additionally, the legal and ethical issues tied to appearance-based work bring up serious concerns about fairness and the well-being of employees, making it crucial for airlines to think carefully about their appearance rules.

In conclusion, although aesthetic labour can assist airlines in upholding a strong brand image and fulfilling specific customer expectations, it also presents considerable risks, such as discrimination, reduced diversity, and harmful effects on employee well-being. It is essential to find a good balance between aesthetic standards and equitable hiring practices is key to fostering a more positive and sustainable workplace in the aviation industry.

5. Method

This thesis is made with using the qualitative method with the goal to study the concept of aesthetic labour in the airline industry, especially its impact on cabin crew members. The main purpose was to understand the standard criteria that characterize the typical recruitment process of cabin crew members, as well as how the aesthetic labour is seen in the process. With a special focus on how airlines emphasize the specific aesthetic features, such as attire, grooming, body language, and interpersonal skills, when choosing new cabin crew members.

The main research question that the author intends to find answers is “How does cabin crew members see the affect of the set criteria pertaining to aesthetic labour?” The following questions will help the author to find the answers for the main question. “What kind of strategies is used in the recruitment processes of cabin crew members in Finnair, SAS, Ryanair, and Emirates?”, How do recruitment and training practices regarding appearance differ among these four airlines?”, “What impact does aesthetic labour have on cabin crew members?”, and “How do airlines incorporate aesthetic labour into their cabin crew recruitment processes?”

5.1 Qualitative Research

The qualitative study was carried out in the autumn of 2024. The qualitative method was chosen for this thesis since it provides a deeper look into the aesthetic labour involved in hiring new cabin crew members. The goal of this thesis is to enhance the understanding of this concept by studying the meanings and definitions. The author believes that the qualitative method will effectively answer the research questions.

5.2 The Survey

The primary strategy for collecting data and insights regarding the factors affecting the recruitment process involved contacting hiring managers to arrange interviews. However, as reaching out, the author only managed to receive a response from Finnair, stating that they are currently very busy and unable to join in new thesis projects this autumn. Which meant that it was necessary to bring in use a backup plan. The new plan was to develop a survey and share it among current and former cabin crew members, in the hope of getting responses. The questions in the survey aimed to gather insights into how cabin crew

members experience the aesthetic demands of the profession, with a particular focus on the recruitment and training phases.

The survey was created by using Webropol tool.

The survey (Appendix 1. and Appendix 2.) includes a cover letter and 15 questions. The first four questions will gather the respondents' background information, inquiring about the length of the cabin crew experience, the airline they work for, and how important the impact of physical appearance is during their daily roles, as well as how they feel meeting these standards affect their daily life practices. The next five questions concern the application process and the final six focus on the training process.

Most of the questions in the survey are open-ended, allowing respondents to share detailed reflections on their thoughts and experiences during the application and training phases. Furthermore, the survey includes four multiple-choice questions. The first two questions offer various answer options to choose from, while the third has response choices (yes or no), and the fourth with three options (yes, no, or maybe).

The survey (Appendix 1. and Appendix 2.) questions were developed together with the thesis questions in mind, as well as the information gathered throughout the process. The concept of aesthetic labour served as the foundation for the questions created for the survey.

The first two questions are multiple-choice, focusing on the length of the employment and for which airline they work. Questions 3, 4, 7, and 10-14 will explore the experiences around aesthetic labour. Questions three and four inquired about the respondents' perceptions of how aesthetic labour influence their everyday lives as cabin crew. Question number seven sought to define whether there were any guidelines regarding personal appearance during the application process. Question number 10 addressed the applicants' overall experience during the training, with a special relation to the aesthetic standards. Question number 11 asked if there were any possible sessions or discussions that covered self-presentation during the training phase. Question number 12 gauged whether respondents felt pressure to meet these aesthetic standards, offering options of yes, no, or maybe, while question 13 requested those who answered yes to provide further details. The next to last question, number 14 inquired about the possible consequences experienced if the aesthetic standards were not met while on duty. The rest of the questions (5-6, 8-9, and 15) focused on the duration and overall experiences and thoughts during the application process and training phase.

Question number five asked where respondents had found the job opening, while question six inquired about the length of the application process from submitting the application to the final interview. Question eight asked whether they were asked to submit a photo during the application process with options of yes or no. Question number nine requested respondents to describe their overall experiences during the application process. Finally, the last question of the survey, number 15 invited respondents to write any improvement suggestions for the recruitment process.

5.3 Data Analysis

For the qualitative research component, data analysis will involve qualitative analysis methods to extract themes and summarize insights from the survey created for cabin crew members.

As mentioned above the data was collected through Webropol, an electronic survey software. The survey was distributed to two relevant Facebook groups and directly to cabin crew members of the four airlines. The plan to keep the survey open was about two weeks. In the first week since the survey was published the number of respondents accumulated to 8, and the final number of the respondents was 15.

After the data have been collected, they were thoroughly analyzed. The results were put down in words and some visual material was created as well.

6. Results

This chapter analyzes the results received from the survey shared on social media platforms. The purpose of this study was to collect data regarding the current practices used in cabin crew recruitment process. Particularly focusing on the recruitment strategies used by the four airlines presented in this research: Finnair, SAS, Ryanair, and Emirates. This study analyzes the specific criteria set by each airline for their applicants, as well as the possible influence of applicants' appearance on the recruitment process.

6.1 Practical Information

The survey was shared in two relevant Facebook groups, as well as directly to cabin crew members. The survey was open for two weeks during the autumn of 2024. The total number of responses collected during this period was 15. During the compilation of the results, it was noticed that the question percentage was good but still not all the respondents had answered all the questions on the form.

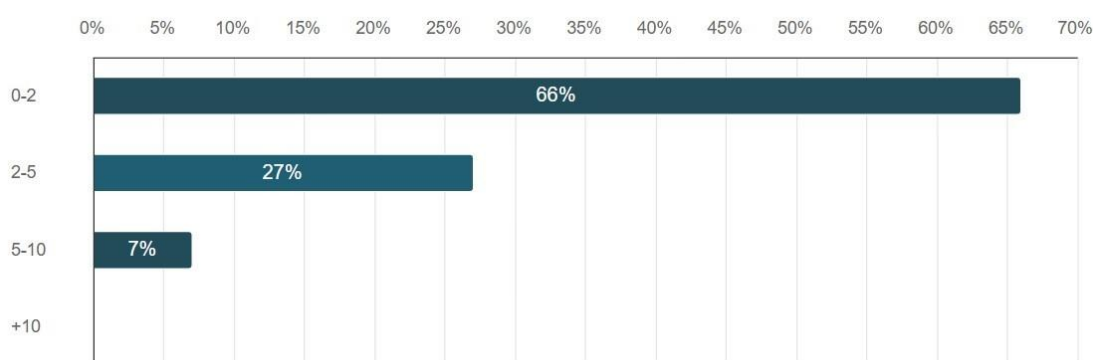


Figure 1. How many years of experience do you have as a cabin crew member?

Figure 1. (question number 1), shows that with 66% (10 respondents) having only 0–2 years of experience, most of the participants are relatively new to the profession. This could suggest that many crew members enter and exit the profession fairly quickly, possibly due to the demanding nature of the job or other personal and professional factors. The second-largest group, with 27% (4 respondents), has been working between 2–5 years. This stage may reflect a period of settling into the role, where employees either continue to build on their careers or start looking at other opportunities outside the cabin crew role. Only one

respondent (7%) has 5–10 years of experience, showing a significant drop-off as experience levels increase. This could suggest that few cabin crew members make it to this level, potentially due to burnout, or desire for career changes. The absence of any respondents with over 10 years of experience highlights a lack of long-term retention within the cabin crew role among the sample.

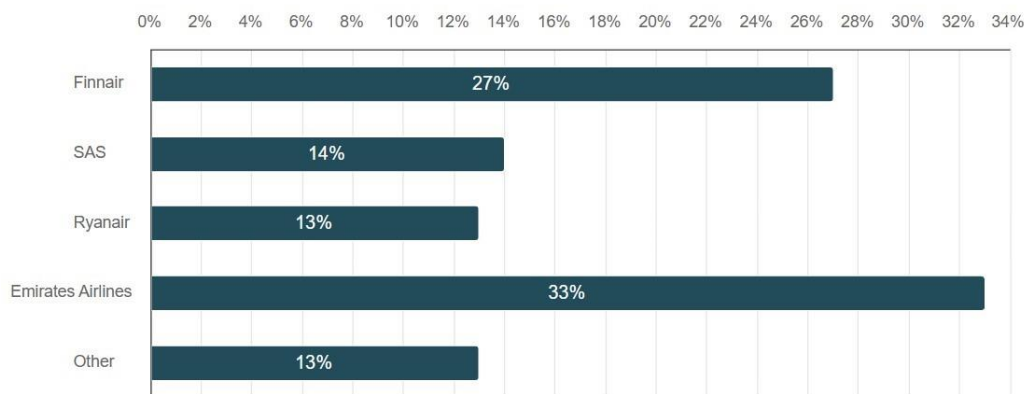


Figure 2. Which airline do you work or have you worked for?

Figure 2. (question number 2), shows that 33% of respondents (5 people) are currently or have previously worked at Emirates Airlines. Finnair follows with 27% (4 people). SAS has a representation of 14% (2 people), and Ryanair, along with the "Other" category, each account for 13% (2 people in each).

Question number three was, "How important do you feel physical appearance is in your daily job as a cabin crew member?", to which 15 people responded. The responses to this question reveal that physical appearance is widely seen as important among cabin crew members.

Several respondents (e.g., "very," "very important," and "need to look the right way in every shift") highlight that physical appearance is not just encouraged but often mandatory. Comments about being "monitored" on appearance, as well as requirements to wear "red lipstick, full on make-up," indicate a clear emphasis from certain airlines on standardized grooming. This reflects how airlines enforce specific aesthetic standards that shape how cabin crew members present themselves.

Additionally, multiple responses (e.g., "I found that my job was much easier when I looked a certain way," and "customers seem more friendly towards me then") suggest that meeting appearance expectations positively affects interactions with passengers. This aligns with the

concept of aesthetic labour, where employees' appearance can influence customer perceptions and responses. For these crew members, appearing in a certain way seems to ease smoother and more pleasant customer interactions, indicating that appearance plays a functional role in customer relations.

Some respondents noted that it's more about looking "neat and tidy," "presentable," and "customer friendly" rather than adhering to specific beauty standards. These responses suggest that for some airlines or individuals, the focus may be more on professionalism and cleanliness rather than on strict aesthetic standards, perhaps reflecting a more flexible approach that values a clean and approachable look over glamour.

The next question, number four was, "In which way do you feel meeting aesthetic standards regarding physical appearance in duty affects your daily practices (eg. how much time you are spending or in monetary means)?", to which 15 people responded. The responses to this question highlight the practical implications of meeting aesthetic standards as a cabin crew member.

Many respondents report spending significant time preparing for work, with some routines taking around 45 minutes to an hour. Daily practices often include full-face makeup, hair styling, and ensuring the uniform is clean and polished. This time commitment demonstrates how appearance standards are embedded into their daily routines, with some cabin crew members even mentioning specific tasks like ironing and shoe polishing. The emphasis on preparation time suggests that aesthetic standards are a time-intensive aspect of their role.

Additionally, respondents frequently mention the need for high-quality, long-lasting makeup and durable shoes. Some refer to investing in products that can withstand the long hours and conditions of flight duty, such as "quality, long-lasting makeup" that "could survive 16 hours." The cost of meeting these standards, including makeup, skincare, and professional shoes, can add up, indicating that aesthetic labour not only requires time but also a personal financial investment.

However, some respondents noted that they would still engage in similar grooming practices outside of work, implying a minimal additional burden. For these individuals, the airline's aesthetic requirements align closely with their personal grooming routines, making the standards feel less intrusive.

Additionally, many respondents mention the physical load of meeting appearance standards, specifically regarding footwear. High heels and dress shoes are standard for airport and inflight appearances, and some respondents note that wearing these shoes for extended

periods has caused foot damage. One person even mentioned bunion surgery, hinting at the potential for long-term physical issues linked to aesthetic requirements.

6.2 Application Process

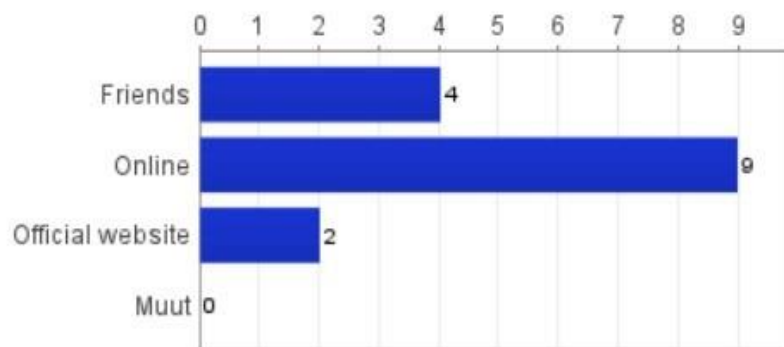


Figure 3. How did you find out about the cabin crew job opening?

Figure 3. (question number five), shows us how respondents found out about the job openings.

With nearly half of the respondents (9 out of 15) mentioning “online” as their source. It is clear that general online job portals or recruitment platforms play a crucial role in how individuals learn about cabin crew positions. Of the 9 respondents, 5 were more specific and clarified finding the job opening from social media. Two respondents mentioned finding the job directly through the airline website. Lastly, four respondents found out about job openings through friends or colleagues, underscoring the role of personal networks and word-of-mouth in recruitment.

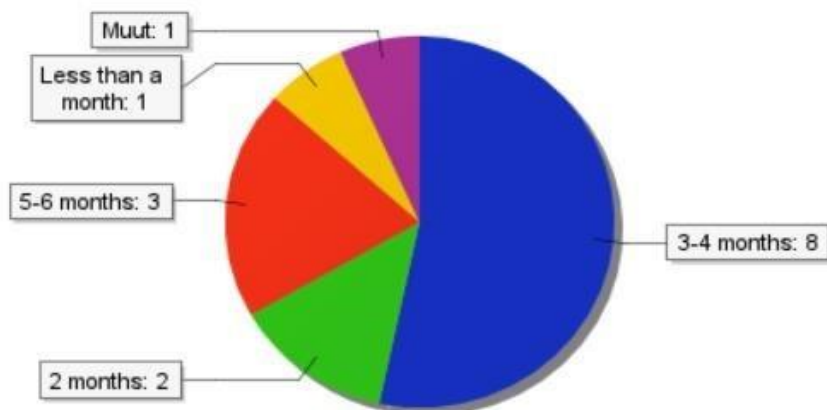


Figure 4. How long was the application process from the submission to the final interview?

Figure 4. (question number six), shows the average length of the cabin crew application process.

The majority of respondents reports that the application process for them took about 3 to 4 months.

Three responses note a process length of 5–6 months. Two respondents mentioned a 2-month process. Additionally, one answered “a few months”, which is not a precise answer and is a bit broad. Lastly, one respondent mentioned that for them it took only one week and she was accepted to start the training.

Question number seven was, “Were there any guidelines regarding personal appearance (eg. grooming, makeup, hairstyle, etc.) mentioned during the cabin crew application process? Please describe”, to which 14 people responded. The responses to this question show that while personal appearance guidelines are an important part of the cabin crew recruitment process, with variation in how directly and formally these standards are communicated within the different airlines.

A few respondents mentioned that appearance standards were shared via email before the in-person interview. These guidelines often included specific recommendations on attire, hair, and grooming, as well as encouragement to “look the part” for the job. This suggests that airlines emphasize professional appearance from the early stages, preparing candidates to align with the brand image even before they join.

For some respondents, the guidelines focused on looking “presentable” or “professional” without detailing exact beauty standards, like makeup or approved hairstyles. This approach could indicate a softer emphasis on aesthetic labour for certain airlines, allowing candidates some flexibility in presentation as long as they appear neat and professional. This is different

from airlines that have more strict standards, such as full-face makeup and red lipstick are required. A few respondents mentioned more detailed requirements, such as wearing full makeup, red lipstick, and skirts, as well as specific dress codes resembling the airline's uniform. This method encourages candidates to demonstrate their fit with the airline's brand and customer expectations from the beginning, highlighting that appearance plays an important role in the airline's identity and how the public see it.

Some respondents highlighted the rules about visible tattoos, which is known as a common policy within the airline industry. The responses also suggest that if tattoos are on areas usually covered up, they might not rule out applicants, giving some flexibility for personal expression within company standards.

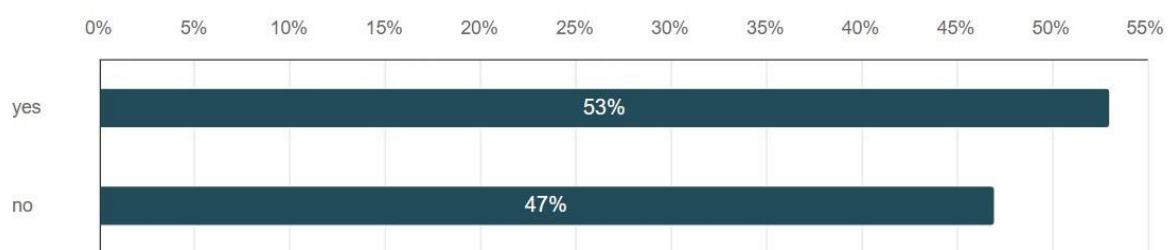


Figure 5. Were you required to submit photos of yourself as part of your application?

Figure 5. (question number eight), shows a nearly even split in whether photo submissions were required as part of the cabin crew application process. With 53% of respondents indicating that they had to submit photos, it's evident that certain airlines explicitly request images as part of their assessment process. This aligns with the idea of aesthetic labour, where appearance plays a role in hiring decisions. The other 46% of respondents were not required to submit photos, suggesting that some airlines may prioritize skills, experience, or other qualifications over appearance at the first stages of their hiring process.

Question number nine was, "How would you describe your overall experience during the cabin crew application process?", to which 15 people responded. The responses to this question highlight the different experiences during the cabin crew application process.

Many respondents mentioned feeling nervous, and some also described excitement, indicating that the process is both emotionally intense and important. Nervousness likely comes from the competitive nature of the process and the idea of being evaluated not just on skills but possibly on appearance and demeanour.

Despite the pressure, many respondents described the recruiters as “friendly,” “nice,” and “amenable.” These positive interactions helped to create a supportive atmosphere, making the experience feel more approachable even for those feeling nervous.

Several respondents commented that the process is long, with multiple steps and phases. This complexity likely shows the high standards and strict selection criteria in the cabin crew industry. However, it can increase anxiety and require significant patience from applicants, especially when they have to wait for updates after each phase. Although the process being long, many respondents found it to be “straightforward” and “well-organized,” especially when it involved clear communication and defined steps. A structured process with specific phases allows candidates to prepare at each stage, potentially reducing anxiety about the unknown.

A few respondents felt judged based on appearance and noted how interviewers observed them “from head to toes.” And one respondent likened the process to a “beauty pageant,” especially during in-person assessments, where appearance and behaviour seem closely observed. This comparison highlights how aesthetic expectations can create a sense that the hiring process is as much about physical presentation as professional qualifications.

6.3 Training Experiences

Question number 10 was, “How was your experience during the cabin crew training? How about your experience regarding the aesthetic standards?”, to which 15 people responded. These responses reveal insights into both the strict and rewarding aspects of the training itself, as well as the specific focus on aesthetic standards.

Many respondents described the training as intense, with a heavy workload involving studying, reading, practical skills, and testing. This indicates that cabin crew training is strict, emphasizing the high level of preparation required for the role, which involves essential safety and service skills like first aid and emergency response.

Many respondents mentioned the social aspect of their training, including meeting people from diverse backgrounds, as well as working with amazing and supportive colleagues and trainers. These experiences show that while the training can be intense, the friendships and support from peers and mentors make it worthwhile.

Respondents mentioned that their training included more or less talk about aesthetic standards. While some respondents noted only brief discussions about appearance, particularly about uniforms, and others reported more intensive aesthetic checks. There

were reported specific guidelines around makeup, nails, shoes, and overall grooming, with a few respondents mentioning checks for details like even hair colour or nude nail polish shades. This suggests that appearance standards are a formalized part of training, even if they are less emphasized than operational training. Some participants had negative experiences, particularly during uniform fittings. A few respondents felt uncomfortable or even “sexualized” during these fittings, indicating that uniform standards can sometimes lead to judgments about body shape and size. One respondent noted a specific incident where they were told their uniform looked “too sexy,” leading to adjustments in the fit of the uniform to make it baggier.

Question number 11 was, “Were there any sessions or discussions in the training phase that specifically addressed how to present yourself (e.g., makeup tutorials, grooming workshops)? Please describe.”, to which 15 people responded. The responses show a clear emphasis on grooming, uniform adherence, and brand image across different airlines.

One common theme was the overall emphasis on being presentable, neat, and professional. Some responses described the aesthetic guidelines as only basic tips on looking tidy and maintaining a clean uniform, while others mentioned more formalized sessions with a dedicated focus on presenting oneself as the “face of the company.” This shows that personal presentation is not just about looking good but also representing the brand's image.

Several respondents mentioned about specific training sessions that focused on personal appearance and uniform standards. These sessions included things like “beauty school” sessions, image consultations, or “beauty workshops” that taught how to properly wear the uniform, apply makeup, and follow grooming standards. For example, one respondent noted learning the “right way” to wear makeup and the types of products to use. Another mentioned that there was a session about the proper way to wear the uniform. In one response, it was noted that during their training there was held a strict beauty session at the end of the training, with even detailed measurements of how far pants should hang from the ground. One respondent pointed out that the image standards document included guidelines for both men’s and women’s uniforms, with specific instructions on how to wear each. In their airline it was allowed individuals to wear whichever uniform aligns with their identity, but without mixing pieces from both the men’s and women’s options. Respondents also pointed out specific grooming rules, such as nail polish colour restrictions, what kind of jewellery is allowed, and the ban on necklaces. This shows how detailed the aesthetic guidelines are, controlling not just the uniform appearance but also personal grooming choices.

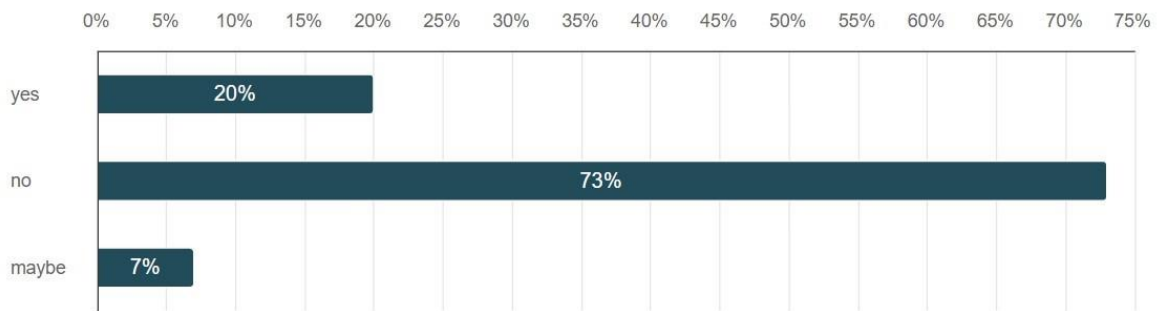


Figure 6. Did you feel pressure to meet certain beauty standards during your training?

Figure 6. (question number 12), shows a variety of experiences among respondents. Some felt little to no pressure, while others experienced significant stress related to appearance. The majority of respondents (73%) did not feel any pressure to meet beauty standards during their training. This can suggest that many people either accepted these expectations as part of the job or not did not see them as an undue burden. However, a small proportion (20%) did experience pressure, highlighting that beauty standards can have varying impacts on different individuals. The 7% who answered "Maybe" suggest some uncertainty about whether the aesthetic expectations felt like pressure.

Question number 13, was "Regarding the previous question, could you elaborate your experience?", to which 6 people responded.

A few respondents (e.g., "I love makeup," "I like wearing makeup") mentioned that they were fine meeting the aesthetic standards and finding it easy to adapt to the makeup and grooming requirements. These individuals felt comfortable with the beauty standards and did not find them to be particularly challenging. Some individuals who enjoy makeup (e.g., "I like more natural makeup") initially found the full glam and red lipstick required in training a bit overwhelming, but gradually became comfortable with it. This suggests that the aesthetic standards might initially feel restrictive, especially for those with a preference for more natural looks, but they eventually adapt. One respondent, who had worked in roles where appearance was a key focus, mentioned that the beauty standards in cabin crew training did not feel significantly different from their previous jobs. This suggests that individuals with prior experience in appearance-conscious positions might be more used to these beauty standards and not as impacted by them.

Some respondents indicated feeling self-conscious or pressured by the beauty standards. For example, one respondent even mentioned feeling "pressed" because they did not feel as confident about their looks compared to others in the group. This highlights how the emphasis on appearance can make insecurities worse for some individuals. Another

respondent noted that while they did not feel much pressure themselves but observed that the full makeup led to a sense of being constantly "looked at."

Question number 14, was " Would there have been consequences if the set aesthetic standards would not be met while on duty?", to which 12 people responded. The responses in this question indicate a mix of formal and informal consequences for failing to meet aesthetic standards while on duty.

A few respondents mentioned that failing to meet aesthetic standards would result in warnings (e.g., "You get warnings if you don't meet image standards," "warnings yes," "warnings if not followed"). This suggests that the consequences for not meeting the set standards are mostly verbal and making corrections, with a focus on improving compliance instead of giving immediate punishments. There were some specifics given regarding violations of aesthetic standards, such as "looking sloppy," having "very long nails," or wearing "extremely long hair down." One respondent mentioned hearing about colleagues being reported or questioned for not meeting certain aesthetic standards (e.g., wearing foundation when required).

A few respondents (e.g., "nope," "I don't think so," "no") did not perceive any significant consequences for failing to meet aesthetic standards, or they had not personally witnessed or experienced any formal repercussions.

Question number 15, was " Would you suggest any improvements to the cabin crew recruitment process?", to which 9 people responded. The responses to this question show a general satisfaction with the recruitment process.

A majority of respondents (e.g., "I think it was a good process," "nope," "no," "nope") did not suggest any improvements, indicating that they felt satisfied with the recruitment process and did not think any changes were needed. One respondent pointed out that the recruitment process is "continually changing", highlighting that airlines are making efforts to enhance it. Another respondent mentioned the struggle of keeping turnover low and finding employees who are interested in growing with the company. This hints at a need for recruitment strategies that focus on selecting candidates who are more likely to stay with the airline in the long run.

6.4 Detailed Results

The survey responses provide insights into the qualities that the main four airlines in this survey value in their cabin crew members, with different levels of emphasis on experience, appearance, and customer service.

Finnair holds the second largest representation in this survey, with 27% (4 respondents) being current or former cabin crew members. Among these, three had less than two years of experience, while one had been employed for under five years. SAS and Ryanair are both underrepresented in this survey, with just 14% and 13% (2 respondents from each). For SAS, one respondent had less than two years of experience, and one had more than five years. Similarly, Ryanair's respondents consisted of one person with less than two years and another with less than five years. Emirates shows the largest number of representation, with 33% (5 respondents), giving a detailed look into its distinctive standards. Among these, three had less than two years of experience, and two had under five years.

Application Process and Requirements

Finnair and SAS have relatively long recruitment processes, taking around 3-6 months. Besides reporting the process being too long, the respondents also found the processes well-organized. Ryanair was reported to have a shorter process, approximately 2 months, which may reflect a streamlined hiring procedure suited to a high-volume, cost-focused airline. Emirates recruitment process was reported to be around 3-4 months, although one respondent mentioned an exceptionally fast, one-week acceptance.

Ryanair and Emirates have both asked applicants to include photos with their applications, showing that physical appearance plays an important role in their selection processes. Respondents from Emirates reported feeling self-conscious and judged on their appearance during the application process. In contrast, Finnair and SAS respondents reported that they did not have to include photos, suggesting that they might be focusing more on customer service qualities instead of getting caught up on specific aesthetic criteria.

Aesthetic Expectations and Grooming Standards

Cabin crew members from Finnair and SAS reported that these companies emphasize more like a "neat and tidy" appearance, with a focus on professionalism and customer-friendliness rather than specific beauty standards. Respondents from both airlines generally felt comfortable with the grooming expectations and viewed them as manageable. Getting minimal consequences for not strictly meeting the standards, is often a "friendly" reminder. Ryanair and Emirates reported to require more strict rules towards grooming protocols. For Ryanair, visible tattoos are strictly prohibited, and failure to meet aesthetic standards usually

leads to reminders rather than warnings. Emirates takes it further, enforcing strict requirements such as red lipstick, full-face makeup, and specific grooming details, which feel demanding for some of the crew members. Respondents described Emirates as more judgmental, with recruiters examining them “from head to toe.”

Respondents from Finnair and SAS generally reported comfort with the grooming requirements, with some even noting that the routines aligned well with their personal grooming habits. This suggests that the grooming policies align more closely with everyday norms in these airlines. Emirates respondents, however, mentioned a mix of acceptance and pressure. Some felt “pressed” to match others’ appearance, and a few reported discomfort with the strict beauty standards. This pressure was heightened by the enforced “full glam” look, which some initially found overwhelming.

Training Experiences

Within all four airlines, training was described as intense, with a lot of studying and practical skills. Many respondents still found it socially fulfilling, really appreciating the friendship and backing from the trainers and coworkers. Emirates respondents, however, highlighted an added layer of attention to grooming during training, where standards were focused on the details, like makeup, nails, and even specific details like hair colour and nail polish. This strict approach to grooming made some Emirates trainees feel more self-conscious and pressured compared to what was reported by trainees from other airlines.

7. Discussion

This chapter will go through the conclusions, beneficiaries, development suggestions, and personal learning experiences. The conclusions section will combine the results gathered from the survey alongside the secondary data collected. The beneficiaries section will provide an overview of possible individuals or groups who might find the information in this thesis useful or otherwise interesting. Furthermore, we will suggest different development recommendations for potential future research on this topic. Finally at the end of this chapter will be a brief reflection on my learning experiences throughout this thesis progress.

7.1 Conclusions

I had previously applied to Finnair for a cabin crew role, and last year was my first time applying to Ryanair. The experience with Ryanair was noticeably different compared to Finnair. The process had fewer steps and was much faster compared to Finnair. This sparked the idea for my thesis, as I became curious about the differences in recruitment processes. This led me to expand the focus of my research beyond just Finnair and Ryanair, including SAS and Emirates as well.

Each of these airline's approach to aesthetic labour aligns with its brand identity and service model, with Finnair and SAS favouring more balanced, professional look, Ryanair maintaining a clean and efficient presentation, and Emirates emphasizing luxury and brand consistency.

Finnair has built a strong reputation in the airline industry, known for its focus on employee wellbeing, work culture, and transparency. Both Finnair and SAS aim for a professional yet friendly look, focusing on neatness and a welcoming attitude. For Finnair, customer-facing roles like cabin crew play a key role in delivering a great passenger experience, so they aim to maintain their service quality consistently. This often means that they look for applicants who can match certain aesthetic and behavioural standards fitting their brand image. SAS, on the other hand, promotes itself as a carrier that represents Scandinavian values like equality, minimalism, sustainability, and innovation. Their approach to aesthetic labour also involves training employees to manage their appearance and behaviour in line with the company's brand, focusing on a sleek, professional, and approachable style that reflects Scandinavian design and culture.

Ryanair's focus on cutting costs shapes its hiring strategy, which values efficiency and productivity over traditional customer service skills. They seek employees who can handle a fast-paced, budget-focused environment and fit the brand's ethos. While they have strict rules about tattoos and expect a polished appearance, their standards are not as high as Emirates'. Ryanair focuses more on speed and practicality, preferring flexible, cost-conscious staff who work well under pressure.

Emirates takes the most image-focused approach, with strict grooming standards to uphold its luxury brand image. This can create pressure for crew members, as they go through detailed grooming checks. Emirates places a big emphasis on service skills and physical appearance, which are key parts of their hiring process. Responses in the survey highlights that the airline's focus on image is very noticeable among the crew, and the strict grooming requirements can lead to feelings of self-consciousness due to the constant scrutiny.

These research findings show that aesthetic labour in the airline industry goes beyond grooming, being a strategy that shapes customer experiences and brand perception. The findings show that while safety and service skills are key in training, aesthetic expectations are also integrated and can vary a lot between airlines. Some focus heavily on specific grooming standards like makeup and uniform fittings, while others offer general advice on looking professional. These differences likely reflect variations in the brand identity and culture of the company.

Some respondents shared that the focus on appearance felt uncomfortable, this was especially reported to be happening during uniform fittings, where they felt judged or even sexualized. This highlights the personal and uncomfortable side of aesthetic standards. Certain airlines even require photos during the application process, which highlights the importance of appearance in hiring.

Overall, the financial, time, and physical commitment required to uphold the desired appearance are crucial aspects of being a cabin crew member. Aesthetic labour is not just a superficial requirement, it has real impacts on employees' daily routines, finances, and even their physical well-being. Reactions from respondents ranged from appreciating clear guidelines to feeling discomfort with the scrutiny, showing the complex balance between professionalism, brand image, and personal comfort in the cabin crew role.

While appearance may influence customer perceptions and brand identity, it's essential for airlines to find a balance by prioritizing diversity, equity, and employee well-being. By doing so, they can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, benefiting both the cabin crew and the overall travel experience for passengers.

7.2 Development Suggestions

The results from this study could be particularly interesting for individuals within the aviation industry, such as aspiring cabin crew members, aviation professionals, and even recruitment experts.

It is important for individuals dreaming of becoming cabin crew, to understand the expectations in the recruitment process. The purpose of this thesis was to clarify the standards expected from applicants related to appearance, grooming, and behaviour during recruitment. Enabling applicants to prepare thoroughly for interviews and meet the standards. By acquiring a deeper understanding of the recruitment process, aspiring cabin crew members can approach their applications with increased assurance. Moreover, with an emphasis on the challenges and outdated strategies caused by aesthetic labour, companies, airlines, and recruitment specialists can refine their strategies when hiring new cabin crew members. The conclusions drawn from this thesis can support aviation companies to contribute to more equitable hiring practices and appreciate the value of an excellent workplace culture that respects all employees, regardless of their physical attributes.

For future studies related to aesthetic labour, one development suggestion would be to gather more participants, especially from the underrepresented airlines to enhance data reliability and allow broader analysis across low-cost, legacy, and luxury carriers. Looking into the cultural and regional differences in grooming could show how national and brand aesthetics influence standards, for example comparing European airlines to other airlines in the world. Also, exploring how grooming standards affect different genders might reveal biases or pressures related to aesthetic labour. And lastly, gathering passenger opinions on cabin crew appearance could provide a clearer picture of whether these grooming policies meet customer expectations and how they affect satisfaction and brand perception.

7.3 Learning Experience

At the start of this thesis project, while thinking about the possible topics for my thesis, I found myself drawn to a few topics. However, aviation and airlines have consistently remained my main interests, and given that my aspiration is to become a cabin crew, so I started to consider how I could add this passion to my thesis.

After I decided that I wanted to focus on Finnair, Ryanair, SAS, and Emirates in my thesis, I proposed my thesis idea. Once my proposal was approved, the initial plan was to work on my thesis during the summer break, I aimed to draft the initial chapters, as well as formulate the questions I wished to pose to hiring managers.

I experienced significant fatigue after my exchange program in the Netherlands and the spring semester. And getting a summer job, I found myself intensely focused on work, which further contributed to my exhaustion and my ability withhold me to start on the writing process. In July, I finally managed to get myself together and started with researching and reading about aesthetic labour.

By September, I started to lose hope regarding my graduation in December, feeling quite disoriented and doubting my ability to finish everything on time. I started to feel tired of the constant stress, I made a conscious effort to remain calm and continued writing whenever I felt capable. Towards the end of September, I regained motivation and started to believe that I had a chance to complete everything by Christmas. I made a new plan with deadlines and committed to writing daily on days when I had no other obligations, ensuring that I would produce at least a small amount of work every day.

In October, I was pretty much writing every day. Some days, I would dive in for long stretches and make huge progress, while on other days when I was not feeling super motivated, I tried to focus on editing what I already had. I also decided to give up on the idea of interviewing airlines and instead put together a survey that I shared on social media, as well as sent directly to cabin crew members. While waiting for survey responses, I jumped into writing the methods section.

By early November, I dug into the results and analyzed them. At first, I struggled to get going because I was not sure how to start, but then I decided that I would just go question by question. The multiple-choice questions were the easiest to analyze and write up, but the open-ended ones were much trickier since people had the opportunity to express their thoughts with their own words.

Once I wrapped up the analysis and got everything written down, I moved on to the final part of my thesis, which was the discussion part. After drafting the conclusions that tied together the theoretical aspects with the survey results, I took some time to brainstorm potential development suggestions for future research and added a section on beneficiaries.

Lastly, writing my thesis taught me that airlines differ highly in their approach to aesthetic labour, as some emphasize more strict appearance and grooming standards, while others are more relaxed and inclusive. I found that strict grooming expectations can harm

employees' well-being, causing stress or discomfort. Customer experience is also tightly connected to aesthetic labour, as airlines use appearance to build their brand and shape interactions, leading to specific expectations for cabin crew. The pressure to maintain a certain look can be financially and physically demanding, possibly decreasing job satisfaction among cabin crew members.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Cover Letter

Hello,

I am currently studying Tourism and Hospitality Management at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Finland.

As part of my academic studies, I am conducting research for my thesis, which focuses on the recruitment process for cabin crew members across various airlines, with a particular interest in the concept of Aesthetic Labour.

The main purpose of my thesis is to understand the effects of aesthetic labour (such as grooming, attire, body language, and interpersonal skills), alongside the standard criteria that characterize the typical recruitment process for new cabin crew members.

My research will concentrate on four major airlines: Finnair, Scandinavian Airlines, Ryanair, and Emirates; however, individuals employed by other airlines are also encouraged to participate in this survey.

I would be immensely grateful if current cabin crew members could assist me in gaining a more profound understanding of the cabin crew hiring process. Your insights would be invaluable to my research, enabling me to merge practical experiences with the theoretical frameworks I am investigating.

Link to the survey: XXXX

Appendix 2. The Survey

1. How many years of experience do you have as a cabin crew member?
 - 0-2
 - 2-5
 - 5-10
 - 10+

2. Which airline do you work or have you worked for?
 - Finnair
 - SAS
 - Rynair
 - Emirates

3. How important do you feel physical appearance is in your daily job as a cabin crew member?

4. In which way do you feel meeting aesthetic standards regarding physical appearance in duty affects your daily practices (eg. how much time you are spending or in monetary means)?

Application Process

5. How did you find out about the cabin crew job opening?

6. How long was the application process from the submission to the final interview?

7. Were there any guidelines regarding personal appearance (eg. grooming, makeup, hairstyle, etc.) mentioned during the cabin crew application process? Please describe.

8. Were you required to submit photos of yourself as part of your application?
- Yes
 - No
9. How would you describe your overall experience during the cabin crew application process?

Training Phase

10. How was your experience during the cabin crew training? How about your experience regarding the aesthetic standards?

11. Were there any sessions or discussions in the training phase that specifically addressed how to present yourself (e.g., makeup tutorials, grooming workshops)? Please describe.

12. Did you feel pressure to meet certain beauty standards during your training?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

13. If you answered yes to the previous question, could you elaborate your experience?

14. Would there have been consequences if the set aesthetic standards would not be met while on duty?

15. Would you suggest any improvements to the cabin crew recruitment process?
