



**Visual Politics of Corporate Uniforms in the Airline Industry:
A Study on the Representation of Gender and Professional Identity**

Received: 17 March 2026; **Accepted:** 04 May 2026

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Abstract

This study examines corporate uniforms in the civil aviation sector as visual and ideological tools that construct corporate identity, professional hierarchy, and gender roles. Adopting a qualitative multi-case visual analysis, the research analyzes promotional videos, social media content, campaign visuals, and uniform designs from five airline companies between 2008 and 2024. Drawing on representation theory (Hall), gender performativity (Butler), dramaturgy (Goffman), and symbolic capital (Bourdieu), the study explores how uniforms mediate institutional values and social norms. The findings reveal that uniforms function as strategic communicative devices that both reproduce and transform gendered professional identities. While traditional visual codes, such as color schemes, tailoring, and styling, continue to signal femininity and masculinity, there is a growing hybridization of gendered attributes. Emotional labor and communicative skills, historically feminized, and authority and technical competence, traditionally masculinized, are increasingly expected across all roles. This shift is further shaped by the rising visibility of female pilots, male cabin crew, and customer-oriented branding strategies.

Keywords: Airline industry, Corporate uniform, Professional identity, Gender, Representation theory, Visual representation

Introduction

The civil aviation sector is a highly visible field in which corporate representation, aesthetic regulation, and gender norms intersect. Corporate uniforms in this sector function not only as work attire but also as communicative and symbolic devices that convey institutional identity, professional hierarchy, and social expectations (Witz et al., 2003; Mills, 2003). Through their design, styling, and use in promotional materials, uniforms contribute to how employees are positioned within organizational structures and how they are perceived by the public.

Existing research has largely focused on the alignment between flight attendants' appearance, emotional labor, and corporate branding strategies (Tyler & Abbott, 1998; Mills, 2003; Bailey, 2017). These studies show that uniforms often reproduce gendered distinctions: cabin crew are associated with femininity, care, and service, while pilots are linked to authority, technical expertise, and masculinity. However, recent transformations in the aviation sector—including the increasing visibility of female pilots, the growing presence of male cabin crew, and the expansion of customer-oriented service models—suggest that these established representations are shifting. Despite these changes, there remains limited research examining how such transformations are visually and symbolically articulated through uniforms, particularly in the context of Türkiye (Özkan, 2020).

This study addresses this gap by examining corporate uniforms as visual and ideological tools that shape professional identities and gendered representations. Rather than treating uniforms as purely functional garments, the study approaches them as communicative elements embedded in broader institutional and cultural frameworks.

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The central research question guiding this study is: How do corporate uniforms in the civil aviation sector construct, reproduce, and transform gendered professional identities and organizational representations? To answer this question, the study analyzes promotional videos, social media content, campaign visuals, and uniform designs from five airline companies. By focusing on visual and representational practices, the research explores how uniforms mediate changing expectations around gender, authority, emotional labor, and professionalism.

The study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it shifts the focus from static interpretations of uniforms to their role as dynamic representational systems shaped by institutional strategies and socio-cultural change. Second, it highlights how gendered meanings are not only reproduced but also reconfigured through visual and communicative practices in the aviation sector. Third, it provides empirical insight from Türkiye, where such transformations remain underexplored.

Literature Review

Uniforms, Representation, and Gender in Civil Aviation: Representation and Gender Performativity as Analytical Frameworks

This study conceptualizes corporate uniforms as visual and discursive elements through which meaning is constructed and circulated. Drawing on Hall's (1997) theory of representation, uniforms are understood not as neutral or functional objects but as cultural signs embedded in institutional and ideological systems. Through visual codes such as color, tailoring, and styling, uniforms communicate values including authority, trust, service orientation, and professionalism. These meanings are not inherent but produced within specific cultural and organizational contexts.

To understand how these representations are gendered, the study adopts Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity. From this perspective, gender is not a fixed identity but is continuously enacted through repeated practices, appearances, and norms. Uniforms play a crucial role in this process by stabilizing and institutionalizing particular gendered expectations. For example, requirements related to grooming, posture, and aesthetic presentation function as regulatory mechanisms that guide how employees embody gender within professional roles. Thus, uniforms do not simply reflect gender differences; they actively participate in producing and normalizing them.

By combining representation and performativity, this framework allows for an analysis of uniforms as sites where institutional identity and gender norms intersect. Uniforms become visual technologies through which organizations encode particular meanings, while employees reproduce, or occasionally challenge, these meanings through embodied performance.

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Gendered Labor and Visual Codes in Aviation & Corporate Identity, Branding, and Uniform Design

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that the aviation sector has historically been structured around gendered divisions of labor. Early studies show that the emergence of cabin crew as a feminized profession was closely tied to care work and service expectations (Barry, 2007; Mills, 1998). Uniforms played a central role in this process by visually aligning flight attendants with qualities such as warmth, elegance, and approachability, often drawing on aesthetic codes associated with nursing and caregiving (Witz et al., 2003).

As the aviation industry expanded in the post-war period, uniforms increasingly became part of corporate branding strategies. Research indicates that airlines deliberately designed uniforms to reflect brand identity and enhance customer experience, often reinforcing gendered expectations in the process (Tyler & Abbott, 1998; Hochschild, 1983; Woodward, 2007). Feminized attributes such as emotional labor, attractiveness, and attentiveness were institutionalized through uniform policies, while masculinized attributes such as authority and technical competence were associated with pilots and reinforced through militarized design elements (Enloe, 2000).

More recent studies suggest that these traditional distinctions are being reconfigured. The increasing presence of female pilots and male cabin crew challenges established visual and professional hierarchies, yet these changes are not always fully reflected in institutional representations (Bailey, 2017). Contemporary research on gender diversity in aviation highlights ongoing tensions between inclusivity policies and persistent symbolic inequalities (Gender Diversity in Aviation, 2026). These findings suggest that while occupational roles are evolving, visual and representational systems may continue to reproduce older gender norms.

Beyond gender, uniforms function as key instruments of corporate identity and branding within the aviation industry. Recent research emphasizes that visual consistency, including uniforms, plays a crucial role in shaping brand perception and customer trust (Yilmaz, 2025). Uniforms contribute to the construction of a recognizable corporate image by aligning employee appearance with broader branding strategies.

Studies on employer branding and post-pandemic transformations in aviation further demonstrate that uniforms are increasingly integrated into strategic communication practices, particularly through digital platforms (Employer Branding in Aviation, 2025). Social media and promotional campaigns extend the visibility of uniforms beyond the workplace, transforming them into tools for storytelling and audience engagement.

In parallel, research on corporate image and consumer behavior indicates that visual coherence, including staff presentation, directly influences customer loyalty and purchase intentions (Han et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). These findings highlight

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that uniforms operate not only as internal organizational tools but also as external communicative assets that shape how airlines are perceived in competitive markets.

Research Gap and Contribution

Despite the growing body of research on aviation, gender, and branding, three key gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature treats uniforms as secondary elements within broader discussions of labor or branding, rather than as central analytical objects. Second, there is limited research examining how uniforms simultaneously function as visual, ideological, and communicative tools. Third, empirical studies focusing on Turkey remain scarce, particularly in relation to recent transformations in gender roles and digital communication practices.

This study addresses these gaps by analyzing corporate uniforms as multidimensional representational systems that mediate gender, institutional identity, and professional hierarchy. By focusing on visual materials such as promotional content and social media, the study offers a contemporary perspective on how uniforms operate within evolving organizational and cultural contexts.

Methodology

This study is structured around an interdisciplinary qualitative research strategy based on the premise that uniforms used in the airline industry serve as vehicles for multi-layered representations related to gender, professional identity, and corporate ideology, going beyond their role as mere visual aesthetic elements. The research adopts a multiple case study model within the scope of qualitative visual analysis. Each airline company was treated as a separate case within its own institutional and cultural context and analyzed using comparative visual reading methods.

The data collection process in this study is based on a mixed methodology that combines visual analysis—which examines the structural characteristics of visuals—with discourse analysis—which aims to uncover the meanings behind texts and representations. This approach allows the study to go beyond visual data alone and also analyze the discursive meanings carried by these data.

The study population consists of all personnel in the civil aviation sector who wear corporate uniforms (pilots, flight attendants, technicians, ground staff, etc.). The study examines companies holding prominent positions at the national and international levels, including (i) Turkish Airlines, (ii) AnadoluJet, (iii) Pegasus Airlines, (iv) British Airways, and (v) Singapore Airlines—which hold prominent positions at both national and international levels—were selected. The sample was constructed based on content published by these companies between 2008 and 2024 across digital platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn), corporate websites, and print communication tools such as promotional catalogs, advertising archives, and magazines.

To enable a comparison of different forms of cultural and corporate representation, the study selected a sample comprising airlines based in Turkey, Europe, and Asia.

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Turkish Airlines, AnadoluJet, and Pegasus, as Turkey-based airlines, provide an opportunity to examine local corporate representation practices and uniform design for cabin crews; British Airways, as a long-established European flag carrier, represents Western service culture. Singapore Airlines was included in the sample because it is an Asian airline that attracts global attention for its cabin crew image and uniform design. This selection enables a comparative analysis of the relationship between airline uniforms and corporate identity and gender representation across different cultural contexts.

The year 2008 was selected as the starting point because it marks the period when social media began to be used as a corporate communication tool. In particular, the accelerated digitalization and increased production of visual content following the COVID-19 pandemic have made this timeframe methodologically significant.

Data Analysis Method

Two main analysis methods were used in the study:

Descriptive analysis: Visuals associated with each brand were systematically examined; the visual representations of female and male employees were described in terms of the aesthetic codes used and the corporate values highlighted.

Visual thematic analysis: Recurring symbols, costume elements, color usage, body language, gendered poses, and performative roles were analyzed to identify common themes.

This analytical process is theoretically grounded within the frameworks of Butler's performativity of gender, Goffman's dramaturgical approach, Hall's theory of representation, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. This multi-layered methodological approach allows for the analysis of the uniform not merely as a garment, but also as a stage for institutional visibility, the ideological shaping of the body, and a space where social norms are reproduced on the visual plane.

To ensure that the analysis process was carried out systematically and transparently, the visual materials were examined using a multi-stage coding process inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. In the first stage (open coding), visual elements such as color usage, clothing cuts, accessories, body language, posture, and style were identified and labeled across the dataset. In the second stage (categorization), these initial codes were grouped under broader analytical categories; headings such as gender representation, authority, emotional labor, professionalism, and corporate identity were created. In the final stage (theme development), recurring patterns among different examples were synthesized to reveal overarching themes reflecting the visual policies of corporate uniforms. The analysis process focused on revealing how specific visual elements—such as the use of color (dark tones and pastel colors), cut characteristics (structured or relaxed fits), accessories (scarves, ties, etc.), and bodily performance (posture, facial expression, and gestures)—contribute to the construction of gender-based occupational identities and institutional representations. To enhance analytical consistency, the coding process was conducted iteratively, and

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In this context, the research examines how institutional identity is constructed through the aesthetic codes of the uniform using selected airline examples, how this identity is organized within the contexts of gender, professional identity, and status, and how it is reproduced through digital representations.

Ethical Principles and Limitations

Only publicly available digital and social media content was used in this study. The study's sample consists of visual materials, promotional videos, advertisements, and social media posts. Therefore, there are no concerns regarding personal data breaches, participant privacy, or unethical practices. Among the study's limitations are the fact that the data was largely collected from digital platforms and public communication channels (social media, corporate websites, promotional videos, catalogs, etc.) and that the analysis focuses solely on content from the 2008–2024 period for the companies examined. While this limits the study's claim to encompass all general trends in the sector, it enables in-depth analysis through specific examples.

The timeframe used in the research corresponds to a period when social media began to be widely used in corporate communication; the acceleration of digitalization following the pandemic makes this historical period even more meaningful. Although this approach is limited in terms of generalizability, it lends the study a detailed conceptual depth. The interviews and archival searches conducted as part of the research were carried out in accordance with ethical approval principles, with participants' identities kept confidential.

This research is grounded in the researcher's in-depth field knowledge, derived from twenty-seven years of experience in civil aviation. The researcher's ability to approach institutional practices from an insider (emic) perspective has imparted an autoethnographic depth to the study, shaped not only by an observer's role but also by that of a participant (Ellis et al., 2011). This approach has enabled not only the interpretation of textual and visual documents but also a holistic and contextual analysis process informed by the researcher's sector-specific experience. Here, autoethnography is positioned not merely as the transmission of subjective experience but also as a critical and analytical method of knowledge production in relation to the theoretical framework (Spry, 2001).

However, the conceptual proximity afforded by the insider perspective also carries risks of subjectivity, naturalization, and a lack of critical distance. Therefore, throughout the research process, the potential effects of the researcher's sectoral affiliation were continuously reviewed and managed through systematic reflexivity, critical self-evaluation, and theoretical oversight mechanisms (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

Within this framework, the study draws not only on textual and visual content but also on ethnographic insights regarding the forms of daily interaction in the organizational field, performance practices, and how gender-based differences are experienced at the field level. Thus, the multi-layered nature of the relationship

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between institutional discourse and individual performance has been addressed at both theoretical and experiential levels; the intersectional dimensions of gender, professional identities, and representational practices have been analyzed in greater depth.

Findings

The analyses conducted demonstrate that the uniform is not merely an aesthetic and functional element; it is also a representational practice that visually reproduces institutional power relations (Gürkan and Ege, 2023), ideological meanings, and gender representations. In the airline industry, corporate uniforms contribute to the reproduction of gender norms intertwined with professional roles (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990).

Uniforms for cabin crew are associated with female-dominated service roles through aesthetic concerns and bodily discipline; standards such as high heels, makeup, and skirt length create a more intense form of bodily control and pressure for gendered representation on female employees. In contrast, simple and comfortable uniforms for male employees reveal how gender norms are reproduced under the guise of “neutrality” (Butler, 1990).

The military-inspired, authoritarian, and masculine visual codes seen in pilot uniforms, however, create a reverse representational pressure for female pilots. These formal structures, designed based on the male body, place female pilots at a disadvantage in terms of both visibility and professional representation; they reproduce gender-based binary structures.

These findings demonstrate that professional identities in the aviation industry are shaped according to gender norms through corporate representation strategies, and that these codes are reproduced through visual representations and corporate aesthetic policies.

The Corporate and Social Representation of Airline Uniforms: Company-Based Analyses

In this section, the corporate identity strategies and visual representation policies of the organizations are analyzed through the uniforms of five selected airlines. Each company visually expresses not only its employees but also the brand’s historical context, cultural values, and the relationship it establishes with its target audience. In the company-based analyses, the effects of uniforms on corporate image, the concept of professionalism, and customer perception are evaluated; the relationship between corporate aesthetics and visual communication is highlighted.

(i) Turkish Airlines: A Representation of National Elegance and Global Discipline

Turkish Airlines’ new cabin uniforms, designed by Ettore Bilotta and introduced in 2023, blend traditional motifs with modern design to reflect elegance, cultural heritage, and professionalism. While the women’s uniforms offer aesthetic coherence and visual richness, the men’s uniforms emphasize authority through

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their more technical and functional appearance. These representations can be interpreted in a multi-layered manner within the frameworks of Hall's (1997) theory of representation, Goffman's (1959) performance model, and Bourdieu's (1984) concept of symbolic capital.



Figures 3, 4, and 5: The new cabin crew uniforms designed by Ettore Bilotta and unveiled by Turkish Airlines in 2023. Source: Turkish Airlines. (2023). Turkish Airlines brings elegance to the skies with its new uniforms. turkishairlines.com/tr-int/turk-hava-yollari-yeni-uniformalariyla-sikligi-gokyuzune-tasiyor

The 2023 Turkish Airlines uniforms featured in Figures 3, 4, and 5 visually reflect the brand's understanding of elegance, sophistication, and cultural representation (Turkish Airlines, 2023). The integration of traditional motifs with modern design elements in the uniforms is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is also a strategic approach to emphasize the organization's commitment to its local cultural roots while simultaneously highlighting its identity as a brand competing on a global scale. In this context, as Hall (1997) emphasizes in his theory of representation, how visual representations are interpreted and made meaningful by the audience is of critical importance in terms of deciphering ideological codes. When evaluated through the perspectives of Goffman (1959), Bourdieu (1984), and Hall (1997), Turkish Airlines' current uniform design reveals its connection to the multi-layered production of meaning in visual representation.

When viewed within the framework of representation theory, this example reveals how corporate identity is constructed through gender-based visual codes.

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(ii) AnadoluJet: Accessibility and Pragmatic Representation

AnadoluJet's identity as a low-cost airline is directly linked to the simple and functional design choices in its cabin crew uniforms. This is not merely an aesthetic preference but also a visual reflection of the economic strategy the brand represents. When evaluated within the framework of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, these uniforms construct a professional identity that is more accessible, humble, and service-oriented, rather than projecting an image of high status or privilege. Additionally, the blurring of gender codes in the uniforms has enabled a more neutral and inclusive representation; this has ensured that the professional identity is expressed in a simple yet effective manner.

At this point, by bridging Hall's approach to cultural representation with Goffman's theory of social roles, it becomes clear how the brand's economic position is communicated through the visual representation of cabin crew. Consequently, uniforms serve not only as a sign of corporate affiliation but also as the symbolic carrier of the message the airline conveys to its target audience.



Figures 6 and 7: AnadoluJet cabin crew uniforms. Source: AnadoluJet. (March 31, 2024). Spreading Our Wings Toward the Future with Our New Uniforms! [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/FHnh6wDIokQ> (Accessed June 2, 2025).

In Figures 6 and 7, AnadoluJet cabin crew uniforms reflect the brand's principles of accessibility and inclusivity through their simple and functional design. This visual choice, which challenges gender stereotypes, contributes to the construction of a pragmatic and service-oriented brand identity.

(iii) Pegasus Airlines: Youth, Dynamism, and Innovative Representation

The denim fabric and relaxed cuts used in Pegasus Airlines' cabin crew uniforms emphasize youth, accessibility, and a contemporary lifestyle. Butler's (1990) theory of the reproduction of gender is useful for understanding how the visual codes in these uniforms are subverted. At the same time, these designs are positioned as an indicator of the brand's stylish, innovative stance within the framework of Bourdieu's approach to symbolic capital.

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Figures 8 and 9: Pegasus cabin crew uniforms, featuring relaxed fits and the use of denim fabric, embody the brand's youthful, dynamic, and inclusive identity. Although shoes are not shown in the image, the overall design language reflects a new approach to representation focused on comfort and modernity. (Cabin Crew, 2025) Source: kabinmemuru.com. (2025). Pegasus Cabin Crew Uniforms 2025. (Accessed June 2, 2025), kabinmemuru.com/Pegasus-hostes-kiyafetleri-2025

The new Pegasus Airlines flight attendant uniforms featured in Figures 8 and 9 emphasize comfort, dynamism, and modernity as an alternative to traditional airline representations. This transformation in attire is not merely aesthetic; it can be viewed as part of a narrative strategy that challenges gender representations and seeks to align the corporate identity with youth, accessibility, and contemporary lifestyles (Cabin Crew, 2025).

This example reflects a shift towards more fluid and inclusive gender representations, in line with contemporary brand strategies.

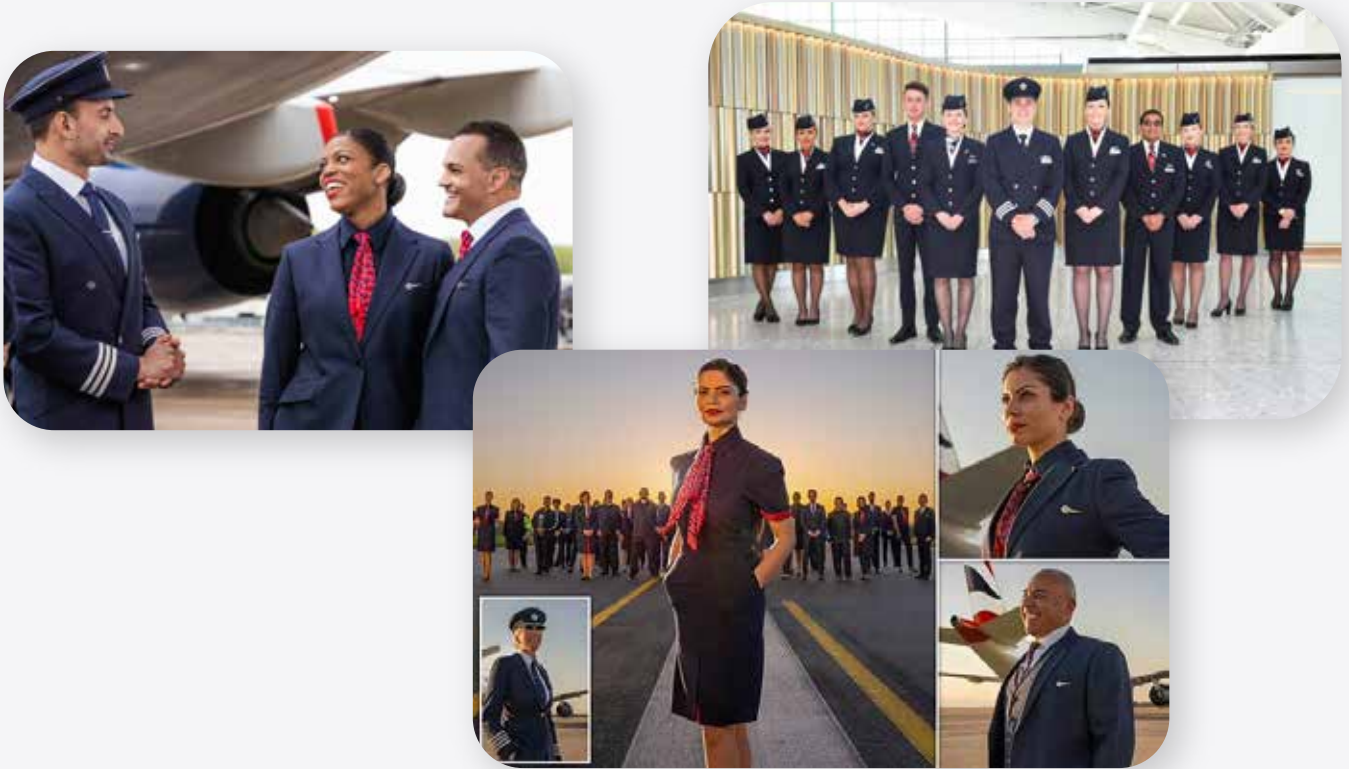
(iv) British Airways: Discipline, Continuity, and Professionalism

British Airways' uniforms convey a message of discipline, continuity, and professionalism by blending classic British elegance with a contemporary design language. While gender balance is maintained in both women's and men's designs, a commitment to the corporate heritage is visually sustained.

Furthermore, the fact that the uniforms have remained unchanged for over 20 years (BBC, 2023) reinforces this sense of continuity. The designs reflect the company's multicultural structure and universal professional standards, thereby supporting its image of distinction.

When evaluated through the approaches of Goffman, Butler, and Bourdieu, these uniforms signify a sustainable visual representation of corporate prestige and traditional professionalism.

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Figures 10, 11, and 12: British Airways' new uniform collection, unveiled in 2025 after a hiatus of nearly twenty years, was designed by Ozwald Boateng and reinterprets the brand's classic elegance and professionalism through a contemporary design language (RavenyPapagena, 2025). Source: RavenyPapagena. (2025). British Airways new uniform 2025. ravenypapagena.pages.dev/trxayyp-british-airways-new-uniform-2025 (Accessed June 2, 2025).

(v) Singapore Airlines: Cultural Identity and the Aesthetic Representation of Femininity

Singapore Airlines' Sarong Kebaya uniform is an iconic design representing Asian cultural elegance. While the "Singapore Girl" figure transforms into a stage where femininity and the concept of service merge with aesthetics, the simple suits offered to male cabin crew members serve as a complementary element of professional representation.

These visual performances point to the staged representations of in-cabin roles in line with Goffman's (1959) theory; meanwhile, Bourdieu's (1986) approach to cultural capital interprets the uniforms as carriers of the company's historical and cultural prestige. Within the framework of Hall's (1997) theory of performance, this iconographic arrangement facilitates the reproduction of specific cultural identities and their transformation into a universal brand narrative.

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Figures 13 and 14: Singapore Airlines cabin crew are represented in uniforms that reflect Asian cultural elegance: women wear the Sarong Kebaya, while men wear a classic suit and color-coded ties. (CabinCrew24, 2025) Source: CabinCrew24. (2025). Singapore Airlines uniforms and cabin crew roles. cabincrew24.com/singaporeairlinesuniforms

These visual representations reveal not only cultural identity but also how femininity is aestheticized at the institutional level and reinforced through normative roles. With the uniforms featured in Figures 13 and 14, Singapore Airlines cabin crew present a corporate identity where Asian aesthetics, gender roles, and professional representation are intertwined, through traditional Sarong Kebaya and color-coded suits.

Empirical Analysis and Case Studies

In this subsection, the visual politics of corporate uniforms in the aviation sector—within the contexts of gender, professional identity, and corporate representation—are thematically examined through five selected airline examples. Through these case studies identified from Turkey and the international arena, the visual, ideological, and cultural dimensions of the uniform are deeply analyzed and discussed.

(i) Color Choices in Uniform Design and Gender Perception

The use of pastel tones such as pink and turquoise in uniforms designed by fashion designer Cemil İpekçi for Turkish Airlines (THY) has sparked various criticisms within the organization and among the public, particularly due to male staff wearing these colors (Son Dakika Haber, 2008). These reactions demonstrate how deeply ingrained perceptions of gender norms are, the resistance the organization faces when presenting a visual representation that does not align with these norms, and the

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extent to which the public adheres to gender norms.

The fact that these colors are perceived as “feminine” reveals that the uniform is not merely functional; it is also a representational tool through which gender is visually constructed. This aligns with Butler’s (1990) approach, which argues that gender is not a natural but a performative construct.



Figures 15, 16, and 17: An image from a news article covering the process of changing the uniforms following the backlash that occurred after THY unveiled the uniforms designed by Cemil İpekçi in 2005. Source: THY is phasing out the Cemil İpekçi-designed dress. (January 16, 2008). Hürriyet.

hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/thy-cemil-ipekci-imzali-elbiseyi-cikariyor; HaberTürk (February 16, 2013). haberturk.com/yasam/haber/820523-bu-defa-uniformalar-uctu

In line with Goffman’s (1959) idea that institutions stage individuals according to specific social roles, THY quickly canceled these designs; in their place, it implemented new uniforms prepared by Vakko, featuring dark tones and traditional aesthetic codes.

In the new designs, the skirt lengths for female staff were lowered to below the knee, and it was decided that male staff would wear navy-patterned ties instead of pink ones (Habertürk, 2013). These changes demonstrate that corporate dress policies are shaped not by aesthetic preferences but by social norms, and that these norms are internalized by the organizations themselves.

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Figures 18 and 19: “In the uniforms designed by Vakko, flight attendants’ skirt lengths have been lowered to below the knee. Male staff members, who wore pink ties as part of the concept designed by Cemil İpekçi and had complained about them, will now wear patterned ties on a navy blue background.” (Sondakikahaber, 2008).

Source: Son Dakika Haber. (2008). *THY Entered Its 75th Year with Knee-Length Skirts*. sondakika.com/haber/haber-thy-75-inci-yilina-diz-alti-etek-le-girdi/
In Figures 18 and 19, the skirt lengths of flight attendants were lowered to below the knee in the uniforms designed by Vakko in 2008; in Cemil İpekçi’s designs, navy blue patterned ties were chosen instead of pink ties, following criticism of male staff wearing pink ties (Habertürk, 2013).

In conclusion, this situation transforms the uniform into a silent ideological text, revealing how aesthetic details that might seem insignificant on the surface can carry profound meanings. The debates surrounding color choices turn the uniform into not merely an article of clothing, but a symbolic element at the center of a representational crisis. It is evident that corporate identity and gender norms clash at this point. In this context, the uniform becomes part of a symbolic response to gender norms, going beyond merely defining the wearer (Goffman, 1959).

(ii) The Tension Between Aesthetic Perception and Visibility in Uniform Design

British Airways has made significant changes to its uniform design after many years. (BBC, 2023) The new uniforms, designed by Ozwald Boateng in 2023, claimed to promote diversity and inclusivity by offering options such as jumpsuits and headscarves for female cabin crew. However, the transparency of the silk blouses worn by female staff caused discomfort among employees as their undergarments were visible; this revealed just how sensitive an area this is regarding the representation of employees’ bodies and gender, beyond the uniform’s aesthetic dimension. In response to this criticism, the company plans to make changes to the blouse design (Milliyet, 2023).

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Figures 20 and 21: British Airways' 2023 uniforms designed by Ozwald Boateng. Although the uniforms include inclusive elements such as headscarves and jumpsuits, the sheer blouses have drawn criticism (Milliyet, 2023). Milliyet.

(December 9,

2023)..milliyet.com.tr/dunya/unlu-havayolu-cuvalladi-seffaf-bluz-skandali-Source: British Airways Media Centre (Accessed June 2, 2025).

Following comments about the staff's underwear, the company apologized and withdrew the white transparent shirt design shown in Figure 21, replacing it with jumpsuit-style uniforms that do not reveal undergarments (Milliyet, 2023).

However, the transparency of the silk blouses worn by female staff caused discomfort among employees as their underwear became visible; thus, it became evident that this issue extends beyond the aesthetic aspect of the uniform, highlighting how sensitive an area it is regarding the representation of employees' bodies and gender. This situation can be evaluated within the context of institutions "staging" individuals according to specific social norms (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990). In response to these criticisms, the company plans to make changes to the blouse design

(iii) The Tension of Representation at the Intersection of Grace and Obedience

Singapore Airlines' "Singapore Girl" representation—dressing female flight attendants in the traditional Malaysian "kebaya" as their uniform—has combined the brand image with grace and hospitality. While Singapore Airlines' "Singapore Girl" image associates female flight attendants with elegance and hospitality, it simultaneously confines them to the submissive and traditional social roles found in Asian culture. This dual identity, through the representation of women as both elegant and passive, demonstrates the reproduction of cultural stereotypes at the institutional level. This situation highlights the conflict between social identity and corporate image.

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*Figures 22 and 23: Singapore Airlines' "Singapore Girl" icon depicts female flight attendants wearing the traditional Malaysian-style kebaya dress. While this uniform reflects cultural identity, it has been criticized for reinforcing gender and cultural stereotypes. Source: CabinCrew24. (2025). *Singapore Airlines uniforms and cabin crew roles*. singaporeairlinesuniforms*

The posture of the flight attendants depicted in Figure 22 and the uniform design have been criticized as gendered and cultural stereotypes that confine Asian women to "submissive" and "traditional" social roles. This situation serves as an important example of how gender is reproduced through institutional representational practices. In response to these criticisms, Singapore Airlines implemented a uniform update in 2008 for male cabin crew members, featuring navy suits and colored ties (Galibert, 2008). These criticisms align with Goffman's notion that the individual is "placed on stage" as a figure representing institutional roles. Singapore Airlines' "Singapore Girl" image reinforces the corporate identity by confining female employees to aesthetic and traditional behavioral patterns. Thus, the uniform becomes an effective tool for reproducing gender norms and institutional representations. (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990).

(iv) Comfort in Uniforms, Gender-Neutral Representation, and the Reconstruction of Corporate Image

AnadoluJet's uniform policy aims to create a service-oriented and inclusive corporate image through a simple, functional, and gender-neutral design. Gender distinctions in the visual representations of female and male employees have gradually diminished, giving way to a more neutral and professional language. By reflecting this flexibility in its uniform design, AnadoluJet facilitates the reshaping of gender roles (Butler, 1990).

According to Goffman's theory of symbolic interaction, organizations "stage" individuals according to specific social roles and symbolically organize these role representations (Goffman, 1959). AnadoluJet's encouragement of sneaker use

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without distinguishing between men and women represents an egalitarian approach in this staging. The preference for pants in uniforms and the selection of neutral colors such as dark navy can be interpreted as a conscious choice to avoid the visual reproduction of gender roles.



Figures 24 and 25: AnadoluJet cabin crew uniforms; with their simple, functional, and gender-neutral design, they emphasize professionalism and equality. Source: AnadoluJet. (March 31, 2024). Soaring into the Future with Our New Uniforms! [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/FHnh6wDIokQ> (Accessed June 2, 2025).

AnadoluJet's streamlined and functional uniform policy strengthens the brand's modern and inclusive identity, offering a visual strategy aligned with its economic positioning (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, these visual arrangements have a direct impact on the organization's reputation and social status (Bourdieu, 1986). As seen in Figures 24 and 25, AnadoluJet's uniform design stands out as an egalitarian and inclusive representation strategy rather than one that reproduces gender roles.

(v) Young, Innovative, and Inclusive Uniform Policy

Pegasus Airlines adopted an innovative and inclusive approach to uniforms through a competition it launched in 2010 for young designers. Sporty and comfortable designs made of denim reflect the lifestyle of the younger generation while reshaping professional identity and gender performances in an egalitarian and neutral manner (Milliyet, 2010).

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Figures 26 and 27: Pegasus's sporty, dynamic, and comfortable denim uniforms reflect a youthful and inclusive approach to representation. Source: kabinmemuru.com. (2025). Pegasus flight attendant uniforms 2025. (Accessed June 2, 2025), kabinmemuru.com/pegasus-hostes-kiyafetleri-2025

As can be observed in Figures 26 and 27, Pegasus's approach demonstrates its stance on challenging traditional gender roles in visual representation (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, the organization's sensitivity to current social transformations and the corporate identity strategies shaped in this direction confer prestige upon it in the social sphere (Bourdieu, 1986).

Indeed, Pegasus's commitment to increasing the proportion of female employees by joining IATA's "25by2025" initiative and its efforts to maintain gender balance in management positions are among the concrete indicators of this symbolic capital. By signing this initiative, Pegasus has committed to increasing the representation of female employees (Demirören News Agency, 2019).

In 2022, 34% of the company's workforce consisted of women (Pegasus Airlines Inc., 2023). When evaluated alongside the transformation in its uniform policy, this corporate commitment stands out as a concrete demonstration of a will toward gender equality and inclusivity.

Discussion

This study examines the five airlines comprising its sample—along with their uniform policies and forms of corporate representation—across five sections, analyzing them on a company-by-company basis through historical and visual dimensions. These five airlines were analyzed using visual corporate communication materials within the framework of this study. The findings reveal the relationship between uniform-based representations and professional identity and corporate structure.

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(i) Reinforcement of Gender Codes in Digital Representations

On airline companies' digital platforms, female employees are frequently presented through themes of aesthetics, elegance, and a friendly demeanor, while male employees are highlighted through images of technical competence and leadership. This visual distinction, as Hall (1997) notes, points to the cultural and ideological construction processes of identities. This gender-based distinction is reproduced through visual representations and integrated into the organizational identity.

(ii) Gender Performance Through Uniforms

While aesthetic elements such as skirts, makeup, and high-heeled shoes are emphasized in uniforms for female cabin crew, male employees are represented through simple and functional designs within a masculine framework. This difference indicates that women are expected to present a representation based on outward appearance, while men are expected to demonstrate a performance focused on authority and technical competence (Butler, 1990). In this sense, the uniform is not merely clothing; it is the visual carrier of corporate gender norms.

(iii) The Exceptional Representation of Female Pilots

According to data from the General Directorate of Civil Aviation, women account for only 3.5% of pilots in the sector. (SHGM, 2018) Female pilots adapt to the male-dominated professional structure by wearing similar uniforms; yet, in the public eye, they are constantly highlighted as "female pilots," and their professional identities are defined through their gender. This situation constitutes a typical example of being symbolically overrepresented despite their small numbers: While female pilots attract attention through their visibility, they are simultaneously forced to constantly re-establish their professional legitimacy.

(iv) Dramaturgical Identities in Uniforms

According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach, institutions are a stage, and employees are actors playing roles on this stage. In this context, female employees are often presented as "gentle and elegant," while male employees are portrayed as embodying "authority and control." Uniforms, in turn, become visual costumes that reinforce these roles. This form of representation reveals how visibility functions as a strategic tool in the staging of organizational identities.

(v) Symbolic Capital and Uniforms

Within Bourdieu's (1986) framework of symbolic capital, uniforms imbue meaning not only for employees but also for organizational values and cultural identities. For example, Singapore Airlines' Sarong Kebaya design integrates Eastern culture with its global brand image; Turkish Airlines' uniform, designed by Ettore Bilotta, strikes a balance between national identity and international professionalism. These examples demonstrate that the uniform also serves as an ideological medium of representation.

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(vi) Visual Culture and Gender Representations

Berger's (1972) theory of ways of seeing emphasizes that visual presentations are biased and selective. In airline advertisements, female employees are typically portrayed as aesthetic and inviting, while men are highlighted for their technical and authoritative qualities. Within this framework, Mirzoeff's (2011) concept of "visual hegemony" explains how institutions shape identities and roles through their visual communication language. Representations are ideological tools that shape not only individuals but also institutional structures.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that corporate uniforms in the civil aviation sector are not merely functional garments; they are multi-layered visual representations intertwined with gender roles, professional identities, and corporate ideologies. As visual culture becomes increasingly decisive in corporate communication strategies, it inevitably imbues elements such as uniforms with political meanings. By drawing on Hall's theory of representation, Butler's performative approach to identity, Goffman's dramaturgical theory, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, the study has provided a conceptual framework for understanding inequalities in corporate representation. Analyses of airline companies' uniform policies reveal that female employees are associated with aesthetic and emotional domains, while male employees are linked to technical competence and authority. In this context, the uniform is not merely an element that shapes individual identities according to corporate norms; it is also a representational tool continuously reproduced through visual strategies. Consequently, by examining how visual presentations in the airline industry intertwine with professional identities and corporate values, this study offers a critical and original contribution to the literature of communication studies and cultural studies. The findings answer the research question by revealing how uniforms function as visual tools that both reproduce and transform gender-based occupational identities. The study highlights the need for more inclusive and reflective uniform design approaches in the aviation sector. Future research could further expand this analysis by incorporating audience reception research or employee perspectives.

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