

The Fame Index

You don't own your fame — the public does.



British Airways Is Back — Not as a Hero, but as the Main Character Again

Why British Airways' fame improved even while its reputation remains fragile.

By Russell Glenister

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British Airways did not “fix” itself between FY23 and FY25.

Flights were still cancelled. IT systems still failed. Social feeds still filled with screenshots of delays at Heathrow Terminal 5.

And yet, British Airways' fame increased.

This is not a contradiction. It is the point.

The change was not operational excellence. It was cultural centrality.

British Airways moved from being a utility people endured to a brand people actively narrate — often critically, ironically, or through survival-style rituals. And in the Fame Economy, that shift matters more than smooth operations ever did.

1. From “Utility That Fails” to Cultural Reference Point

In FY23, British Airways suffered a particularly damaging kind of invisibility. It was neither admired nor meaningfully discussed — it simply failed in the background.

By FY25, that had changed.

British Airways re-entered everyday cultural participation. People once again used BA as a reference point to explain:

- What British travel feels like.
- How Heathrow chaos unfolds.
- What loyalty points are (and aren't) worth.
- How “Britishness” expresses itself under stress.

This does not mean people like British Airways more.

It means they can't stop talking about it. They are using it as a narrative surface for their own lives.

That distinction explains why the data looks “good” even when the vibes are mixed.

2. Propagation Didn't Turn Positive — It Turned Participatory

A common mistake is to read increased propagation (sharing) as increased approval.

That is not what happened.

British Airways' propagation improved because **participation returned**, not because sentiment flipped. The brand became useful again for expression — even when the expression was mocking, critical, or weary.

The New Rituals:

- **The Parody Loop:** Riffs on the “A British Original” campaign that reframed delays as national character traits.
- **The Survival Guide:** TikTok “trip reports” that function as advice on how to survive a cancellation rather than endorsements of the flight.
- **The Meltdown Thread:** Real-time documentation of IT failures that became shared communal events.

These are not signs of trust recovery. They are signs of relevance recovery.

People stopped ignoring BA — and started performing it again.

3. Prestige Content ≠ Average Experience

Another reason the fame data appears generous is the content asymmetry of aviation culture.

The most visible British Airways content is not economy cabins or short-haul delays. It is:

- A380 walk-throughs.
- First and Club World reviews.
- Av-geek rituals focused on rarity and nostalgia.

This creates a **Prestige Halo** in cultural space even while the median passenger experience remains strained.

Crucially, The Fame Index does not confuse this with trust.

Prestige-heavy content lifts Cultural Penetration and Loop Propagation, but it does not automatically raise Identity Lock or Defensive Fame Moat.

The system allows British Airways to look culturally large without pretending it is universally loved.

4. The Moat Is Real — But It's Leaking

The most important grounding mechanism in the analysis is the Defensive Moat.

British Airways remains structurally unavoidable:

- Heathrow slot dominance.
- Corporate travel defaults.
- National carrier status.

This ensures ongoing exposure.

But the same data shows the moat is less defensible than before. When price parity exists, many passengers actively choose Emirates, Qatar, or Asian carriers instead.

This is why the analysis can say, without contradiction:

British Airways is more famous — and less protected.

That tension is not a flaw. It is the most realistic part of the story.

5. Final Verdict: Fame Is Not Redemption

If there is one idea to keep in mind, it is this:

Fame ≠ Excellence.

Relevance ≠ Trust.

Participation ≠ Preference.

British Airways did not become better in a way most passengers would recognize. It became central again.

It is once more the airline through which British people (and global travelers) process delay, status, class, humor, and identity.

That makes BA culturally dominant — not culturally approved.


Why This Matters:

British Airways is widely criticised, but it has not been abandoned at scale — and that continued participation is what sustains its fame.

Whether cultural centrality can translate into renewed preference remains uncertain, and the available data does not suggest a straightforward recovery.

What is clear is that British Airways has shifted from being a background utility that fails to a cultural reference point through which people describe the experience of flying in and through Britain today.

That condition sustains fame, even when it coexists with frustration.

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