

## **Factors Influencing Airport Selection. The Case of Prishtina, Skopje and Tirana Airport**

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**Abstract:** Although increasing number of passengers served at an airport is attribution of airport privatisation and infrastructure modernisation, the fact that Migration of passengers from one airport to another is significant indicates that there are Specific variables that Affect passenger's decision when choosing an airport. This research paper aims at exploring factors influencing passengers when selecting an airport with the objective to determine and analyse variables that Influence passengers the most. The methodology applied consists of multivariate statistical analysis using Principal Component Analysis technique to define variables based on the passenger's preference and their valuation of the importance. Findings show that passenger's decision making depends on six key variables, namely: Airline Services, Variable Costs, Airport Services, Inefficiency, Demand and Practicality. The research provides new insights for airport and airline operators when positioning themselves in a competitive environment.

**Keywords:** Passengers; Air-Transport; Services; Competition

### **1. Introduction**

Because of continues changing economic and regulatory conditions (Bilotkach, 2018), as well as the burst of Low Cost airline carriers, we continue to witness the phenomenon of the airport competition, especially among Western European Airports.

Similarly, in the Balkan region, the market liberalisation and airport privatisation within a relatively small radius enabled the airport competition, since the passenger is mobile, and he/she looks for the most attractive airline connection and, within geographic limits, they often have the choice between several airports (Albers, Koch & Ruff, 2005). Therefore, the passenger-shift from one airport to another became evident in the Balkans too.

The selected airports in our study serve mainly short-distance flights within the European continent, not longer than four (4) hours flying distance and a market consisting of six point seven (6.7) million people (E.U. Commission, 2016). The

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airlines operating at the airports are those of mid-sized airlines, combined “Low-Cost Carriers” and “Fixed Cost Carriers”. The market share is 39% covered by Tirana Airport; 31% by Pristina and 30% by Skopje (figure 1) and only during 2016 all together they served five point eight (5.8) million passengers (“TIA, Nënë Tereza”, 2017; “TAV, Skopje Airport”, 2017; “Statistics – CAA”, 2017).

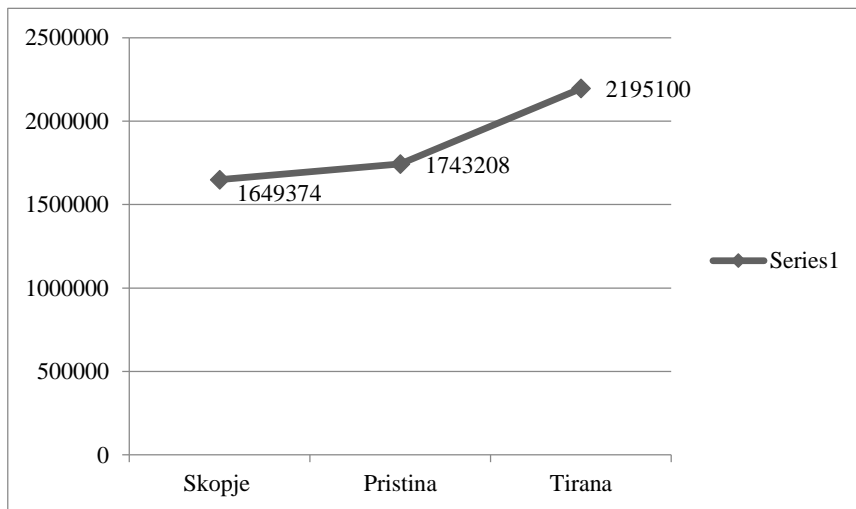
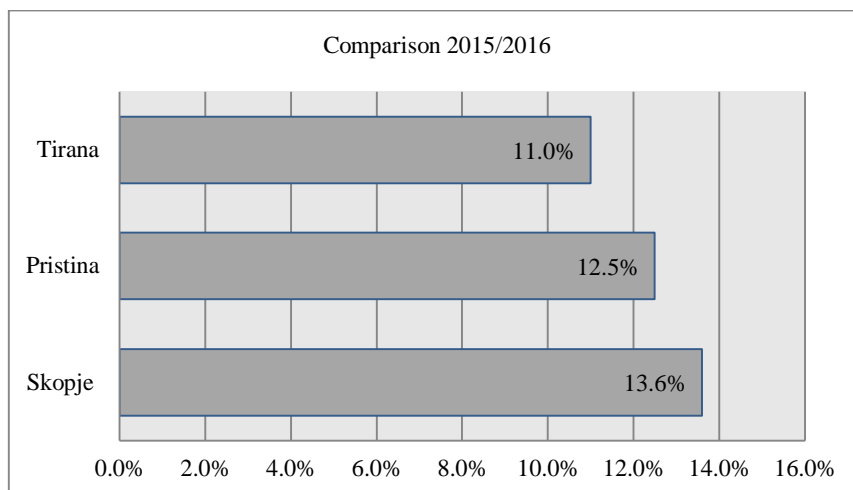


Figure 1. Market share for selected airports year 2016

When comparing the year 2015 with 2016 (figure 2), it is evident that with the start of low-cost operations “Wizz Air” in Skopje, the increase in the percentage of passengers and frequency of flights served is evident. Hence, the competition among the regional airports, especially among Skopje and Pristina became evident too. Data show that Skopje Airport marked the most significant increase by 13.6% in comparison with the year 2015, a difference that complies with the starting time of Low-Cost operations, “Wizz Air”.



**Figure 2. Comparison of passengers served 2015/2016**

Although this increase in passengers at all three airports is attribution of airport privatization and infrastructure modernization, the fact that passenger migration from one airport to another is significant indicates that there are factors that affect the passenger's decision when choosing the airport.

This research paper aims to explore factors influencing passengers when selecting an airport with the objective to determine and analyse variables that affect passengers the most. The findings will contribute to the air transport industry of the area concerned, by providing new insights for airport operators when positioning themselves in the market.

## **2. Literature Review**

The study of factors influencing passengers in airport selection is essential for airport management that needs to understand variables that affect passenger's consumer behaviour. A large number of researches address different factors that would explain passengers' consumer behaviour at airports. Most of these variables range from; passenger characteristics (Castillo-Manzano & Marchena-Gómez, 2010; Graham, Papatheodorou & Forsyth, 2016), type of airlines (Castillo-Manzano, López-Valpuesta & Pedregal, 2012) and the effects of their operational strategies (Atallah, Hotle & Mumbower, 2018; Yee Liau & Pei Tan, 2014), airport competition (Wiltshire, 2018; Thelle & Sonne, 2018; Windle & Dresner, 1995; Yen, Mulley & Tseng, 2018) and the transition in airport ownership towards privatisation (Jimenez, Claro & Sousa, 2014) or alliances among airlines and airports (Albers, Koch & Ruff, 2005).

As an excerpt, authors like (De Neufville & Odoni, 2003; Forsyth, Gillen, Müller, & Niemeier, 2010; Gelhausen, Berster & Wilken, 2018; Brueckner, Lee & Singer, 2013) argue that airports compete in two cases:

- when airport catchment areas overlap or when they effectively work as alternative transfer hubs.

However, (Barbot, 2009; Harvey, 1987; Marcucci & Gatta, 2011; Loo, 2008) aim to identify those factors from the passenger's perspective. (Loo, 2008) shows that; main attributes of airport services affecting passenger preference are:

- ticket price,
- access time to the airport,
- the frequency of flights and
- the number of airlines serving the airport.

(Harvey, 1987) Moreover, (Gayle & Yimga, 2018) argue that travel time and travel costs are the main elements in airport selection process, whereas (Lian & Rønnevik, 2011) conclude that airport access time, flight frequency, differences in airfare, type of aircraft and purpose of travel are determinants that all passengers consider. (Barbot, 2009) Acknowledges that; when passengers must choose between two airports they consider not just one airport, but the group of airports available in the region and the airlines operating at these airports. Furthermore, (Blackstone, Buck, & Hakim, 2006) found that although price factor is essential, the passenger's search for the lowest price is not as crucial as non-stop flight availability, check-in queues, monthly income and distance from the airport. In general, three main factors that are always present and significant in the airport selection process are:

- Ticket price,
- Time to get to the airport, and
- Frequency and type of airlines operating at the airport.

However, due to differences within the environment and the circumstances where the airport exercises its activity and, differences in attitude and behaviour of passengers towards the need and demand for travellers, the researches cannot define universal factors that influencing the airport selection.

Therefore, the fact that impact factors in airport selection are different, depending from the environmental conditions and circumstances where they operate, including the growing competition among airports, makes the airport managers realise the need to invest in innovative and more focused marketing strategies (Figueiredo & Castro, 2018).

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study is quantitative research of exploratory nature. The data derive from a survey with passengers at Pristina, Skopje and Tirana International Airport.

We have tested the questionnaire through a blind pilot study with passengers at Pristina Airport first. This process helped in refining and correcting the research instrument. Passenger participation in the interview was entirely on voluntary bases and in cases where questionnaires were missing data, they were eliminated and repeated. The sample consists of 600 departing passengers in total, surveyed during month May June 2017. We defined the sample size by using as a reference the total number of passengers served at all three airports during the year 2016. By applying a random stratified method, we have defined the sample size unit, where from a total number of passengers served by all three airports during 2016, 39% of them belong to Tirana Airport, 31% to Pristina Airport and 30% to Skopje Airport.

The methodology applied consists of multivariate statistical analysis using Principal Component Analysis technique, whose purpose is the extraction of factors with the highest impact level. The study, interpretation and result presentation were conducted using the SPSS program version 20.0 for windows.

### **4. Introduction**

The initial factors used in the questionnaire derived from the literature review, discussions, interviews and consultancy with the experts of the field.

A principal component analysis (in short PCA) approach was used to reduce a large set of variables (factors) to a smaller number of underlying factors called the principal components (or factors), that enable the comparison and interpretation of the same later. Based on the correlation with their primary variables we defined the extracted factors, and then the analysis allowed us to synthesise the information contained in those variables by identifying the most important ones.

This analysis is a mixture of subjective and objective techniques that enable the identification of principal factors with impact at passengers. Another reason for applying this analysis is also the fact that it is much easier to interpret a relationship of five or eight factors instead of fifteen or thirty factors; therefore, their reduction is imperative and vital so that the results can be easier interpreted or used in further regression analysis.

The main steps of the Principal Component Analysis (or Factor Analysis) procedure are:

- Testing of variable correlation.
- Extracting the principal components (the factors).

- Determining the “meaningful” or “relevant” factors that will derive (finding the final solution of the analysis).
- Computing and saving the factor scores.
- Interpreting the final solution and reporting the results

After the execution of the analysis, to decide about whether we should keep all the variables in our model or eliminate any, we started by studying the variables which are poorly correlated with all the other variables, in other words the variables for which all the correlation coefficient is lower than <0.30 in absolute value, see table 1.

	frequency of flying	price of the ticket purchased	how often you use technology for booking	time to airport processing	airport processing time	willing to change for X euro	willing to accept for X euro	parking cost	distance to airport	unplanned cost	cost of travel amenities	booking destination	covered service	schedule	weight allowance	type of aircraft	number of airlines operating at the airport	airport location	access to the airport	parking facilities	the frequency of flights operating at the airport LC vs FC	airlines operating at the airport LC vs FC		
frequency of flying	1.000	-.637	-.068	-.015	.000	-.019	-.019	.021	-.021	.048	-.020	.019	.034	.027	-.017	.007	.001	.015	.007	.044	.068	.054	.054	.084
price of the ticket purchased	-.637	1.000	.005	-.023	-.015	-.049	-.035	-.031	.022	-.073	-.035	-.011	-.042	-.032	.014	-.001	-.030	-.061	.009	-.022	-.019	.008	-.002	-.037
how often you use technology for booking	-.068	.005	1.000	.005	.054	-.019	.031	.013	-.040	-.020	.021	.098	.019	.005	.023	.059	.018	.004	-.054	-.058	-.036	-.018	-.035	-.002
time to airport processing	-.015	-.023	.005	1.000	.735	.374	.144	.019	-.034	.093	.251	-.073	.031	-.016	-.049	.001	-.017	.027	.048	.022	-.032	-.053	.023	-.071
airport processing time	.000	-.015	.054	.735	1.000	.295	.035	-.156	.037	-.029	.199	-.105	.064	.009	-.071	-.014	.010	.059	.007	-.025	-.015	-.022	-.017	-.092
willing to change for X euro	-.019	-.049	-.019	.374	.295	1.000	.684	.456	-.181	.656	.840	-.095	.020	.034	.058	.013	.055	.124	.058	.037	-.019	.022	.044	.002
willing to accept for X euro	-.019	-.035	.031	.144	.035	.684	1.000	.698	-.214	.666	.721	-.138	.041	.032	.153	.081	.104	.074	.042	-.019	-.046	.041	.040	.038
parking cost	.021	-.031	.013	.019	-.156	.456	.698	1.000	-.232	.656	.531	-.110	-.015	-.024	.105	.040	.009	-.042	.024	.007	-.032	.009	.057	.053
distance to airport	-.021	.022	-.040	-.034	.037	-.181	-.214	-.232	1.000	-.296	-.169	-.122	-.039	-.050	-.048	-.043	-.067	-.068	-.029	-.020	.023	.023	.006	.003
unplanned cost	.048	-.073	-.020	.093	-.029	.656	.666	.656	-.296	1.000	.559	-.041	.020	.032	.060	.024	.055	.140	.079	.037	.016	-.025	.081	.047
cost of travel amenities	-.020	-.035	.021	.251	.199	.840	.721	.531	-.169	.559	1.000	-.131	.032	.046	.072	.020	.075	.098	.008	.008	-.046	-.002	.006	-.021
booking destination	.019	-.011	.098	-.073	-.105	-.095	-.138	-.110	-.122	-.041	-.131	1.000	.284	.322	.244	.179	.267	.180	.230	.124	.106	.226	.164	.210
covered service	.034	-.042	.019	.031	.064	.020	.041	-.015	-.039	.020	.032	.284	1.000	.811	.595	.571	.514	.527	.132	.064	.124	.266	.090	.120
schedule	.027	-.032	.005	-.016	.009	.034	.032	-.024	-.050	.032	.046	.322	.811	1.000	.577	.602	.603	.494	.141	.140	.099	.280	.157	.182
weight allowance	-.017	.014	.023	-.049	-.071	.058	.153	.105	-.048	.060	.072	.244	.595	.577	1.000	.592	.571	.530	.234	.040	.014	.297	.123	.221
type of aircraft	.007	-.001	.059	.001	-.014	.013	.081	.040	-.043	.024	.020	.179	.571	.602	.592	1.000	.663	.480	.265	.135	.089	.246	.186	.207
number of airlines operating at the airport	.001	-.030	.018	-.017	.010	.055	.104	.009	-.067	.055	.075	.267	.514	.603	.571	.663	1.000	.584	.182	.096	.001	.248	.088	.304
airport location	.015	-.061	.004	.027	.059	.124	.074	-.042	-.068	.140	.098	.180	.527	.494	.530	.480	.584	1.000	.246	-.024	-.019	.192	-.044	.170
access to the airport	.007	.009	-.054	.048	.007	.058	.042	.024	-.029	.079	.008	.230	.132	.141	.234	.265	.182	.246	1.000	.376	.293	.305	.353	.356
parking facilities	.044	-.022	-.058	.022	-.025	.037	-.019	.007	-.020	.037	.008	.124	.064	.140	.040	.135	.096	-.024	.376	1.000	.652	.381	.464	.421
the frequency of flights operating at the airport	.068	-.019	-.036	-.032	-.015	-.019	-.046	-.032	.023	.016	-.046	.106	.124	.099	.014	.089	.001	-.019	.293	.652	1.000	.472	.487	.473
airlines operating at the airport LC vs FC	.054	.008	-.018	-.053	-.022	.022	.041	.009	.023	-.025	-.002	.226	.266	.280	.297	.246	.248	.192	.305	.381	.472	1.000	.610	.611

To find out if the analysis is going to produce trustworthy factors we run, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (table 2).

Table 2. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.765
Approx. Chi-Square		7216.032
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	276
	Sig.	.000

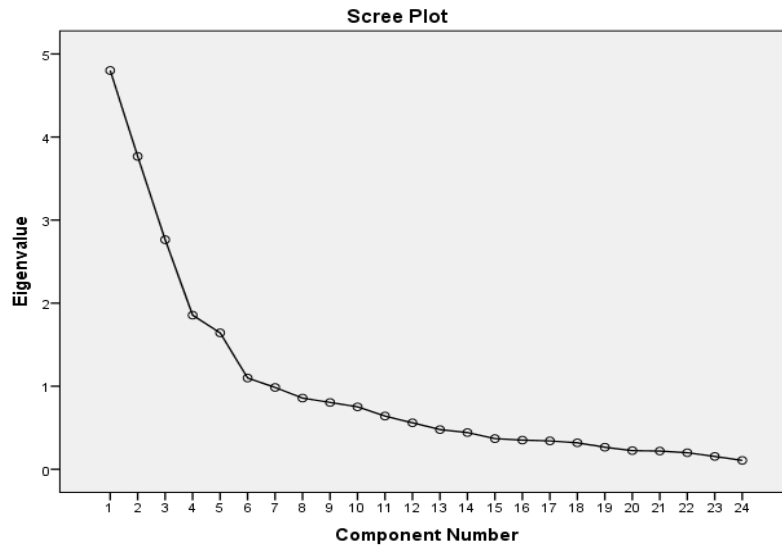
In our case, the KMO value is .765 which means that our sampling adequacy is medium. The p-value of Bartlett's test of sphericity is lower than 5%, and therefore we refuse the null hypothesis and conclude that the correlation among variables in our model is significant.

The measure of how much of the variance for the observed variables is explained by a factor is known as the eigenvalue. (Field, 2013) Clarifies that an eigenvalue equal to or greater than one represents substantial more variation than a single observed variable. Exploratory factor analysis in our data leads to the identification of six main factors whose eigenvalues are more significant than  $> 1$  and as such they explain 66% of the variation out of twenty-four primary variables that we had in the beginning (table 3).

**Table 3. Total Variance Explained**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.801	20.005	20.005	4.801	20.005	20.005	4.063	16.931	16.931
2	3.767	15.695	35.699	3.767	15.695	35.699	3.704	15.433	32.364
3	2.764	11.516	47.215	2.764	11.516	47.215	3.403	14.178	46.541
4	1.855	7.730	54.945	1.855	7.730	54.945	1.951	8.128	54.669
5	1.642	6.844	61.789	1.642	6.844	61.789	1.652	6.883	61.552
6	1.099	4.580	66.369	1.099	4.580	66.369	1.156	4.817	66.369
7	.985	4.106	70.475						
8	.857	3.570	74.045						
9	.805	3.353	77.398						
10	.752	3.132	80.529						
11	.641	2.670	83.200						
12	.560	2.332	85.531						
13	.478	1.992	87.523						
14	.442	1.842	89.366						
15	.369	1.538	90.904						
16	.351	1.463	92.367						
17	.342	1.425	93.792						
18	.318	1.327	95.119						
19	.265	1.106	96.225						
20	.225	.938	97.163						
21	.220	.915	98.078						
22	.200	.831	98.909						
23	.155	.646	99.555						
24	.107	.445	100.000						

Afterwards, we applied the Evrard selection criteria to retain factors whose eigenvalue is higher than one, known as the extraction process (figure 3).



**Figure 3. Scree plot extraction results, Evrard selection criteria**

The result from scree plot (figure 3) shows that out of twenty-four primary variables that we had in the beginning, we have six main extracted variables (factors), coded with numbers from one until six.

**Table 4. Component Matrix**

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
schedule of flights	.740	-.140	-.380	.027	-.029	-.031
type of aircraft	.715	-.113	-.325	-.001	.032	-.081
type of airline operating at the airport	.715	-.078	-.377	-.014	.002	-.048
LC vs FC	.715	-.078	-.377	-.014	.002	-.048
onboard service	.709	-.052	-.363	-.104	.060	-.090
destinations served	.703	-.124	-.418	.076	-.047	-.037
weight allowance	.616	-.006	-.431	.054	-.049	-.070
parking facilities	.600	-.205	.443	.031	.052	-.048
security at the airport	.566	-.188	.534	-.049	.010	-.003
number of airlines operating at the airport	.471	-.092	.306	.079	.073	.047
additional cost for which they would change	.228	.847	.085	.186	.023	-.033
cost of travel by alternate means	.210	.840	.044	.064	.040	-.064
additional cost willing to accept in order not to change	.255	.833	.065	-.172	.054	-.064
unplanned costs-other	.241	.768	.121	-.239	-.032	.044
parking cost	.175	.711	.136	-.390	.029	-.024
access to the airport	.373	-.206	.654	.087	.007	-.023
a frequency of low-cost flights operating at the airport	.479	-.138	.649	.052	.054	-.004
airport location	.396	-.149	.617	.096	.025	-.002
airport processing time	.003	.220	-.066	.896	-.036	.070
time to airport	.031	.342	-.008	.824	-.020	.093



price of the ticket purchased	-.061	-.059	-.036	.016	.896	-.041
frequency of flying	.065	-.010	.104	-.039	-.895	-.004
how often did you use technology for booking	.012	.014	-.096	.018	.092	.664
distance to airport	-.134	-.296	.017	.194	.025	-.555
Amenities	.388	-.264	-.042	-.083	.000	.542

From the component Matrix (table 4), to ensure that we do not have significant cross-loadings among our factor structure, we run the Varimax rotation analyses (table5).

**Table 5. Rotated Component Matrix**

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Destinations	.832					
Booking	.823					
weight allowance	.804					
onboard service	.791					
Schedule	.782					
type of aircraft	.751					
additional cost willing to accept in order not to change		.891				
unplanned costs-other		.839				
cost of travel by alternate means		.834				
additional cost for which they would change		.821				
parking cost		.811				
the frequency of flights operating at the airport			.820			
access to the airport			.781			
airlines operating at the airport LC vs FC			.775			
airport location			.753			
parking facilities			.733			
number of airlines operating at the airport			.533			
airport processing time				.928		
time to airport				.885		
frequency of flying					.901	
price of the ticket purchased					-.899	
how often did you use technology for booking						.664
distance to airport						-.586
amenities						.583

After defining coefficients with an absolute value higher than  $> .45$  the analysis resulted in a clear factor structure where the first factor has to do with airline services, like destinations covered, flight reservation methodology, onboard weight allowance, onboard services, flight schedule and type of the aircraft.

The second factor is linked with cost-related variables, such as the additional costs on top of the fixed costs, the extra costs that passengers are ready to pay in order not

to change their airport of choice, the extra cost for which the passengers will change the airport, cost of alternative travel, parking and other unplanned expenses.

The third factor has to do with airport services like frequency of flights available at the airport, access to the airport, type of airlines operating at the airport (low cost or fixed cost), airport location, parking facilities and airlines operating at the airport.

The fourth factor has to do with variables that are related to inefficiency, like airport processing time and time spent from the point of departure until the airport.

The fifth factor has to do with variables that have to do with mainly with demand, like frequency of flights and ticket price.

The sixth factor has to do with variables that are related to practicality, like technology, distance to the airport, and airport amenities in general.

In conclusion, the final extracted factors for Prishtina, Skopje and Tirana Airport are defined as:

- Airline services (factor 1)
- Variable costs (factor 2)
- Airport services (factor 3)
- Inefficiency (factor 4)
- Demand (factor 5)
- Practicality (factor 6)

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

This research aims to contribute to the air transport industry of the region concerned by providing new insights for airport operators, in positioning themselves in the new competitive environment.

The findings help in defining factors that passengers consider the most when selecting an airport to travel. Out of twenty-four variables extracted during the literature review, by applying the exploratory factor analysis, we have identified the level of importance for each variable. This way we have obtained six critical influencing factors, specific for Prishtina, Skopje and Tirana, which have the most significant impact on passengers, namely: Airline services (factor 1); Variable costs (factor 2); Airport services (factor 3); Inefficiency (factor 4); Demand (factor 5) and; Practicality (factor 6).

The research acknowledges the literature review that most of the variables affecting the decision-making process are related to the costs, time, practicality, type and frequency of flights operating at an airport.

In case of Prishtina, Skopje and Tirana Airport, the airport operators should define their marketing strategies and long-term plans considering, airline services provided at their airport, variable costs at passenger's disposal in the market, airport services, inefficiency factors, market demand and practicalities offered by them.

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