Key Drivers for Same-day Return Airline Choice of Business Travellers: A South African Community Airport Perspective

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Abstract

Time is money; therefore, it is important to understand which factors are most import for business travellers when choosing same day flights. The data was obtained from 101 business travellers that travel between a community airport to larger, but also other community airports in South Africa. This article presents the results of the key drivers for same-day return airline choice for business travellers. Safety record, on-time departure and convenience were ranked first to third, staff and on-line seat selection were ranked the lowest of the drivers. Insights into the nuances of each of these drivers are provided. The research indicated that there are differences in drivers for decision making between gender business travellers. Recommendations are made to current and prospective airlines that wish to increase their amount of business travelers on these specific routes. This study is unique as it provides insights on same day return flights for business travellers which is a under research area in travel and travel related issues.

Keywords: Business travellers; same-day return flights; consumer decision making; airlines; South Africa.

Introduction

Traveller choice of air services is a complex issue as travellers are increasingly being called upon to make choices among homogeneous products as a result of an increase in the number of operators in the South African airline industry and intensive competition amongst airlines (Milioti, Karlaftis & Akkogiounoglou, 2015). At the broadest level, even just differentiating between business and leisure passengers can be insightful as these two groups have different travel preferences and required experiences (Unger, Uriely & Fuchs, 2016). Business travel can be described as a trip that is undertaken with the aim of conducting formal or commercial activities or transactions that are linked to the traveller's occupation, for example negotiating a contract, visiting a client or signing deals (Douglas, Lubbe & Van Rooyen, 2018). In a competitive passenger market, passengers' preference or sensitivity to key factors is becoming particularly important for airlines to understand.

The passenger's choice is also influenced by their specific characteristics such as socio-economic profiles (Gallet & Doucouliagos, 2014; Milioti, Karlaftis, & Akkogiounoglou, 2015; Nenem, Graham & Dennis, 2020). Lee, Kang and Chu (2018) and Jung and Yoo (2014) declare that the trip purpose (business or leisure) may, however, be the largest single determinant of travel choice. For example, low airfares have been found to be a more important choice determinant for leisure travellers than for business travellers (Cho & Dresner, 2018). Camelleri (2018) claim that although price is a relatively important factor in all travel segments, it is usually less important to business travellers. Nenem et al. (2020) as well as Zhou, Xia, Norman,

Hughes, Nikolova, Kelobonye, Du and Falkmer (2019) concur with Camelleri (2018) and add that business travellers may be more likely than leisure travellers to choose an airline based upon on-time performance and non-stop services, as travel expenses are often paid by employers, and business travellers might be less flexible and thus consider time as their primary concern (Nenem et al., 2020).

Few studies have been conducted on choices made by business travellers when traveling short-haul travel between regional airports. The study of Inoue, Ono and Uehera (2015) investigated domestic travel by businesspeople between a metropolitan area and four regional areas in Japan. The results of the study indicated that increased travel cost, and time, statistically significantly reduced the probability of business and non-business travellers to choose air travel. The study of Jung and Yoo (2014) on short-haul domestic travel in South Korea reported that business travellers' choices to use air travel were influenced by the price, frequency of flights and service frequency. When studying the domestic travel patterns of three regional routes in China, Wang, Li, Wang, Moore, Staley and Li (2014) found that trip costs and frequency of flights had the most impact on business and non-business travellers. Camelleri (2018) confirmed that frequency, punctuality, flexibility and safety were the most important factors for business travellers.

In the airline industry, much research has been conducted on service quality factors (Brueckner & Flored-field, 2020; Gupta, 2018; Khudhair, Jusah, Mardani & Nor, 2019; Saleem, Zahra & Yaseen, 2017), factors affecting the choice of airlines in leisure travellers (Cho & Dresner, 2018; Cho, Windle & Dresner, 2017; Kim, Park & Choi, 2016; Medina-Muñoz, Medina-Muñoz & Suárez-Cabrera, 2018) yet few studies (Camilleri, 2018; Huse & Evangelho, 2007; Inoue, Ono & Uehera, 2015; Nenem, Graham & Dennis, 2020; Wu & So, 2018) have investigated the attributes affecting domestic airline choice for business travellers. As far as could be ascertained, no research could be found on same –day flight choice for business travellers in South Africa. Some studies relating to the South African airline industry effectiveness exist (Paelo, & Vilakazi, 2016; Matikiti, Roberts-Lombard, & Mpinganjira, 2018; Mhlanga, Steyn, & Spencer, 2018; Niemann, Kotze & Josi, 2018), yet only the study of Fourie and Lubbe (2006), focussed on business travellers indicating a research gap in the South African market. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate which airline attributes are most important for same-day return business travellers flying between major and community airports, as well as between community airports specifically on the George to Cape Town, George to Port Elizabeth and George to Durban routes.

The contributions of this paper are manifold. First, this paper investigates the drivers behind the choice of airline for same-day flights for business travellers, a crucial under-researched area, and provides evidence that major drivers relating to the choice of airline are the safety record of an airline as well as an on-time departure. Second, from theoretical and managerial perspectives, this paper provides insights into the different drivers for same-day choice of an airline by business travellers, specifically in the South African industry. Finally, this research opens many new avenues for future research on business travellers in the rest of South Africa and worldwide. The paper proceeds as follows: the literature review discusses the various attributes the business traveller could choose from, after which the research methodology and questionnaire pertaining to this specific study are discussed. The results of the descriptive, as well as inferential statistics, are presented and elaborated on, followed by the conclusions of the study are drawn.

Literature review

The South African aviation industry has, to a certain extent, been deregulated since 1991 (Mhlanga & Steyn, 2016). This deregulation resulted in great growth within the industry and

consequently, higher levels of competition between various airlines. Distances between the major cities (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban) vary from 700 to 2500 km and takes anything from 50 minutes to 2.5 hours in travel time by plane. Various same-day return flights exist between the major airports, namely, O R Tambo (Johannesburg); Cape Town (CTN), Port Elizabeth (PE) and Durban (DBN). Limited same-day return flights, however, exist between community (smaller) airports and the major airports, often leaving business travellers unable to return to their hometowns on the same day, causing frustration and loss of productivity as a result of the influence on their movability.

Many researchers have examined the factors that influence the choice of airline carriers. In academic research, a core set of attributes prevail regarding airline choice, most notably; price (Campbell & Vigar-Ellis, 2012; Cho & Dresner, 2018; Unger et al., 2016); convenience of flights (Buaphiban, 2015; Chen & Chao, 2015; Cho & Dresner, 2018); frequency of flights (Buaphiban, 2015; Gao & Koo, 2014; Koo, Capenecchia & Williamson, 2018; Cho & Dresner, 2018; Unger et al., 2016); on-time departure (Campbell & Vigar-Ellis, 2012; Koo et al., 2018); safety record of the airline (Campbell & Vigar-Ellis, 2012; Koo et al., 2015); ease of reservations (Buaphiban, 2015; Campbell & Vigar-Ellis, 2012); friendliness of staff (Cho & Dresner, 2018; Rady 2018; Venkatraman, 2016); free baggage (Bietsch & Egrie, 2018; Nicolae, Ferguson & Garrow, 2016), and reputation of the airline (Buaphiban, 2015: Graham & Bansal, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, the following factors were examined; price; frequency of flights; convenience; on-time departure; safety record of the airline; staff of the airline and free baggage. The various airline attributes utilised in this study are discussed in the following paragraphs. The first airline characteristic considered was the price of an airline ticket. Although the theoretical position of price as a major factor in airline choice is supported by numerous studies see (Camelleri, 2018; Campbell & Vigar-Ellis, 2012; Cho & Dresner, 2018; Unger et al., 2016), the price of an airline ticket is not the primary driving factor for all kinds of passengers. Wang et al. (2014) assert that in large organisations there seems to be little regard for cost, which can encourage business travellers to select more expensive tickets. Unger et al. (2016) as well as Johnson, Hess and Matthews (2014) concur with this statement and add that business passengers display a high willingness to pay higher fares in return for direct flights. This is contrary to leisure travellers, for whom price and frequency are often (though not always) highly important (Buaphiban 2015). Where business travellers might have little control over the prices of their tickets, Evangelho, Huse and Linhares (2005) state that factors such as frequent flier programs or schedule convenience might become more important. In recent years, however, the business market has seen a meaningful increase in the number of self-employed or small business owners, who, unlike corporate travellers, pay for their own fair, suggesting that price might indeed become a more valuable criterion for frequent business travellers (Camelleri, 2018).

The convenience of flights for this study entails the convenience of online reservations, ease of reservation and online-seat selection. Chen and Chao (2015) include priority check-in for business travellers and business lounges availability in their definition of the convenience of flights. Rouncivell, Timmis and Ison (2018) pronounce that the reason for travel (business or leisure) influences the willingness to pay for preferred seat selection. Dana and Schmitt (2017), as well as Unger et al. (2016), claim that in the US market the business traveller chooses the airline and flight based on services, fringe benefits and convenience because they do not pay for their own tickets. The South African study of Fourie and Lubbe (2006) concluded that business travellers utilising low-cost airlines place emphasis on the convenience of lounge facilities and online reservations. For business travellers concerned with same-day return

flights, convenience might be important, yet the frequency of flights adds an additional dimension to their decision making.

Frequency of flights is important for business travellers that are often pressed for time (Nenem et al., 2020; van Rooyen, 2017). Camilleri (2018) asserts that the most basic needs for short-haul travellers are timed, high frequency flights, as day-return itineraries are intended for businesses travellers who start and finish their business on the same day. These findings of Camilleri (2018) agree with the report of Parrella (2013), who claims that business travellers value multiple flight frequencies and prefer to use airports where they have greater flexibility in arrival and departure, but disagree that both leisure and business travellers rank frequency of flights low in small community airports. A study of South African passengers indicated that flight frequency was significantly more important for full carrier passengers than low-cost carrier passengers (Fourie & Lubbe, 2006). This suggests passengers make a trade-off between frequency and price.

Time taken to travel is often viewed as unproductive, with employees preferring the trip to be as quick as possible to improve productivity and punctuality thus become vital for customers who cannot afford to miss important business meetings (Douglas, 2019). At the same time, punctuality of flights is equally important for customers that travel on holiday as they rely on the punctuality of flights when they have connecting flights at other airports, as a late domestic flight could cause holiday-makers to miss their international connection resulting in a loss of time and money. This is evident in the findings of Cambell and Vigar-Ellis (2012), that identify punctual or reliable flights as the second most important attribute to respondents when selecting an airline. Chen (2017) adds that flight delays as a result of none on-time departures are one of the major stress factors for business travellers. For many business travellers, free baggage might seem unimportant especially if they plan the same day flight, free baggage, however, becomes an important factor when travelling for business for long periods of time, but especially for leisure travellers.

For many airlines, baggage fees constitute a large portion of their profit. Some airlines offer free baggage allowance, whilst others charge according to their business strategy. Law (2017) notes that free baggage is preliminary a sensitive matter for leisure travellers who travel infrequently. However, Nicolae, Ferguson and Garrow (2016) assert that airlines are more concerned to offer free baggage fees to regular business travellers as they are not sensitive to price changes but rather to convenience during their business trips.

Airline choice is influenced by several service quality aspects. In the current study, a variety of service quality aspects were combined and clustered to form "staff". These include both in-flight services (food and drink service and personnel behavior) as well as staff's participation in-ground services (check-in, baggage handling, and boarding/disembarking) (Rady 2018). In the South African study of Fourie and Lubbe (2006), major factors influencing airline choice of business travellers were lounge availability and in-flight service. In contrast to the study of Fourie and Lubbe (2006), the study of Campbell and Vigar-Ellis (2012) concluded that the efficiency of employees, although important to customers, was not found to be as much of a determining dimension for the respondents within the South African domestic airline industry. Campbell and Vigar-Ellis (2012) note that this does not, however, mean that customer service will not possibly become a determining dimension within the South African domestic airline industry in the future. The last factor pertaining to the current study relates to the safety record of the airline.

Flying involves emotional factors that can hinder rational decision-making. Dying in an aeroplane crash is considered a "bad death", preceded by pain and suffering (Koo et al., 2015). Safety is often listed in the literature as an important attribute to passengers when choosing an airline (Surovitskikh & Lubbe 2008). Molin, Blangé, Cats and Chorus (2017)

proclaim that passengers, in general, are willing to pay more for the "perceived safety" of airlines. In the South African studies of Campbell and Vigar-Ellis (2012) the safety attribute exhibited the highest importance score. Koo et al. (2015) assert that airlines with high safety levels may not necessarily benefit from this advantage, as uninformed passengers have difficulty in distinguishing between airlines based on their safety levels. As a result, airlines lack incentives to improve safety measures beyond the level allowed by regulations.

Same day return flights, at the time of writing this article, occurred between George and Cape Town, as well as George and Johannesburg, however, the earliest time of departure is 08h40 to Johannesburg, which is a two- and a half hour flight. Traveling by car from George to Cape Town is approximately four hours, and from George to Johannesburg for nearly twelve hours. Although there is a same-day return flight between George and PE, the earliest departure is 08h40 and arrival 12h45 with one stopover, indicating a four- hour travel time, whilst traveling by car would take between three and a half to four hours. The only return flight from PE to George departs at 13h25 landing at 19h00 with a two-hour stop-over in Johannesburg. Therefore, this flight is not conducive for business travellers as it allows virtually no time for business. No same-day return flights exist between George and Durban. The earliest departure from George is 08h40 arriving at 13h40 in Durban, with one stop-over. The last flight to George from Durban departs 17h05 and arrives the next morning, due to a long stopover, travel time by car would take approximately twelve hours (Travelstart, 2018). Although the details are given for these specific airports similar circumstances prevail at other community airports in South Africa.

Methods
A positivistic paradigm was selected, and the study was quantitative with a descriptive nature as it described the characteristics of a specific group, in this study business travellers. A self-administered survey was used to collect data amongst 101 business travellers that reside in the Western Cape, specifically the George, Oudsthoorn and Mossel Bay areas. The study made use of a probability sampling and employed simple random sampling, where respondents were selected at the George airport between the period of 18 to 20 June 2018. The researcher visited the airport for three consecutive days until 101 respondents completed the questionnaire. To qualify for the study, the respondents had to be business travellers. The George airport was chosen for this study as it is a regional community airport that services areas such as the local business centres of George, Mossel Bay, Oudsthoorn and the surrounding towns in the Western Cape. The airport is situated within a one hour' flight time from large cities, such as Cape Town, two hours' flight time from Johannesburg, and three and a half hours' flight time from PE. No same-day return flight exists between George and Durban (Travelstart, 2018).

The survey included ordinal and nominal scaled questions in order to ascertain the degree to which respondents agree or disagree with a series of statements. Five-point Likert-type response options from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree were utilised. To obtain demographical data from the respondents, nominal scales were employed where the respondents were allowed to provide only a type of descriptor as the response. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A consisted of items regarding the variables of the study namely price; convenience; flight frequency; free baggage; on-time departure; staff, and safety record of the airline. Respondents had to rank the importance of each factor on a scale from 1-5 (1= least important). Section B required the respondents to indicate their frequency of travel between the domestic airports, whether they would make use of same-day flights if they were available and what the ideal times of same-day returns would be. Section C comprised of the demographic details of the respondents.

SPSS 24 was used to obtain descriptive statistics and STATISTICA version 12 was used to conduct Kruskall-Walis and Mann-Whitney tests. The Kruskal–Wallis test (Leon, 1998) is a nonparametric approach to the one-way ANOVA. The procedure is used to compare three or more groups on a dependent variable that is measured on at least an ordinal level. As with the Mann–Whitney test, which is a special two-group case of the Kruskal–Wallis test, the data are pooled (across groups) and ranked from 1, for the lowest value of the dependent variable, to N for the highest value. In the case of ties, the midpoint is used.

Results and discussion

The following paragraph highlights the results of the respondent's profile.

Of the 101 respondents, 49% were male. The majority of respondents (63.92%) were 45 years and older, while 23% were between 25 and 45 years, 13% fell in the 25-35-year category and only 0.08% of respondents were between 18-35 years old. The majority of respondents (43%) were managers or business owners, 39% were consultants, 6% had administration positions and 12% indicated other positions. Business travellers from George amounted to 61.9% of respondents, 23.1% of respondents resided in Mossel Bay, 5% in Oudtshoorn and 10% of respondents indicated other neighbouring towns.

Of the respondents, 30% indicated that they fly at least once a week to Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban or PE for business purposes. Another 18% indicated that they fly more than once a week, 37% fly twice a month and 15% fly more than twice a month to the same destinations for business purposes. A large percentage (78.2%) of respondents indicated that they already do or will make use of same-day return flights to these destinations if available. Table 1 indicates a summary of the descriptive statistics of the variables of the study.

Table 1 Summary of descriptive statistics of the variables of the study

	Price	Conve-nience	Fre-quency	On time depar-ture	Safety record	Ease of reserv	Online reserv	Online set slection	Friendly staff	Free bagge	Established airline
Valid N	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101
Mean	3.96	4.27	3.83	4.30	4.34	4.27	3.79	3.35	3.66	4.01	3.65
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Std.	0.93	0.76	0.69	0.58	0.53	0.51	0.70	0.58	0.59	0.48	1.01
Range	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	4

Table 1 indicates that the standard deviation of the data varies between 0.48 and 1.01 indicating that there were differences in the answers of the respondents. Business travellers indicated that airline safety is the most important factor influencing their choice of same-day return. The high rating linked to the airlines' safety record concurs with the results Koo et al. (2018) as well as Campbell and Vigar-Ellis (2012), where safety exhibited the highest attribute score. Safety was also rated amongst the main determinants of the choice of airlines in the Chinese market (Joe et al., 2018), indicating that safety remains an important aspect in developing and developed countries. On-time departure was rated the second most important factor for business travellers. This finding correlates with the finding of Chen (2017) as well as Campbell and Vigar-Ellis (2012), where on-time departure was rated the second most important determining factor. On-time departures could have financial implications for business travellers who miss scheduled meetings or have to postpone their trips with another day. Convenience was the third most important factor for same-day return flights. This finding emphasises that business travellers, traveling from community airports, value the convenience of the airline, including the convenience and ease of online and seat selection. This finding concurs with similar studies by Rouncivell et al. (2018); Unger et al. (2016) as well as Fourie and Lubbe (2006) on business travellers in South Africa, which indicates that business travellers emphasise convenience,

highlighting lounge facilities and online-reservations. The price of an airline ticket only ranked fifth on the list of respondents. This finding concurs with the low ranking of price in the results of Koo et al. (2018), Cho and Dresner, (2018), Johnson et al. (2014) as well as Campbell and Vigar-Ellis (2012). The ranking of price in this study supports the argument of Johnson et al. (2014) that business passengers are prepared to pay a higher airfare.

The frequency of flights did not rate high in this study, contradicting results of Camilleri (2018); Nenem et al. (2020); and van Rooyen (2017). The most important contribution of this finding is that it supports Parella (2013) which claimed that leisure and business travellers rank frequency of flights low in small community airports as well as the results of Zhang and Xie (2005), where the ranking of this variable was low amongst both business and leisure travellers. Zhang and Xie's (2005) study on small community airport choice behaviour found that for these passengers, flight frequency is much less important. The authors, in addition, found that both business and leisure travellers rank flight frequency relatively low, although business travellers still tend to value this variable slightly higher. In the South African study of Fourie and Lubbe (2006) flight frequency also scored low for low-cost carrier passengers. A possible explanation for this result can be found in the fact that small community airports in most instances have limited flights per day to major airports and travellers do not have a choice but to abide by those travel times.

For business travellers in this study, online seat selection and friendliness of staff had the lowest influence on their choice of airline. This finding concurs with the low ranking of employees in the South African study by Campbell and Vigar-Ellis (2012). The low ranking of staff, however, is in contrast with studies of Fourie and Lubbe (2006) which ranked in-flight service of staff as a major influence on airline choice and Jou et al. (2018) where the staff was ranked as a major factor for airline passenger choice.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the rating scores between factors that affect airline choices; price; convenience; frequency, on-time departure; safety record of the airline; ease of reservation; online reservation system; online seat selection; staff; free baggage, and; established airline. Table 2 represents to findings of the Kruskal-Wallis test on differences in the rating scores between factors.

Table 2 Findings of the Kruskal-Wallis test on differences in the rating scores between factors

| | Multiple Comparisons z' values; Rating (Copy of DATA AIRLINE) Independent (grouping) variable: Factor Kruskal-Wallis test: H (10, N= 1111) =203.4542 p =0.000 | | | | | | | | | | |
Depend.: Rating	Price	Conve- nience	Fre- quency	On time departure	Safety record	Ease of reserv	Online res system	Online seat selection	Friendly staff	Free baggage	Establis- hed airline
Price		2.41	1.84	2.49	2.86	2.21	2.08	6.10*	3.41*	0.19	2.26
Convenience	2.41		4.25*	0.08	0.45	0.20	4.49*	8.51*	5.82*	2.60	4.68*
Frequency	1.84	4.25*		4.33*	4.70*	4.05*	0.24	4.26*	1.57	1.65	0.43
On time departure	2.49	0.08	4.32*		0.37	0.28	4.57*	8.59*	5.90*	2.68	4.75*
Safety record	2.86	0.45	4.70*	0.37		0.65	4.94*	8.99*	6.27*	3.05	5.12*
Ease of reserv	2.21	0.20	4.05*	0.28	0.65		4.29*	8.31*	5.62*	2.40	4.47*
Online res system	2.08	4.49*	0.24	4.57*	4.94*	4.29*		4.01*	1.33	1.89	0.18
Online seat selection	6.09*	8.50*	4.26*	8.59*	8.96*	8.31*	4.01*		2.69	5.91*	3.83*
Friendly staff	3.40*	5.82*	1.57	5.90*	6.27*	5.62*	1.33	2.69		3.22	1.14
Free baggage	0.19	2.60	1.65	2.68	3.05	2.40	1.89	5.91*	3.22		2.07
Established airline	2.26	4.67*	0.43	4.75*	5.12*	4.47*	0.18	3.83*	1.14	2.07	

Significant differences in ratings ($p<0.005$) are indicated with an * in Table 2. Distributions of rating scores were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Rating scores were statistically significantly different between the different factors, $\chi2(10) = 110.781$, $p < 001$.
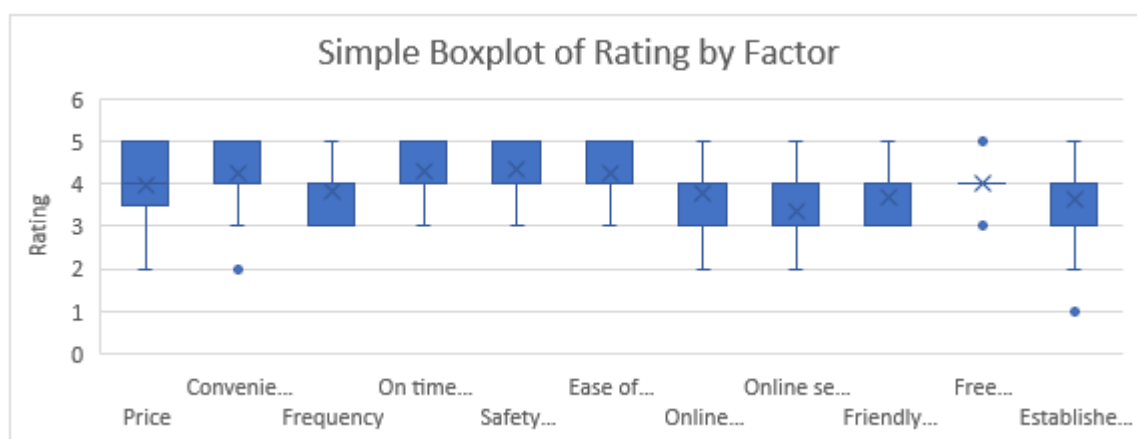
**Figure 1.** Simple boxplot of rating by factor. (Source: Researchers' own construct)

Highlights from the results in Table 2 and Figure 1 indicate the following. The largest discrepancies in rating exist between: price and online-seat selections (6.10); convenience and online-seat selection (8.51); on-time departure and online seat selection (8.59); safety record and online-at selection (8.96), and; ease of reservation and online seat selection (8.31). Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were conducted, and Mann-Whitney U tests were run to determine if there were differences in ratings between males and females. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test on gender is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 Mann-Whitney U test on differences of ratings gender

|	Price	Convenience	Frequency	On time departure	Safety record	Ease of reserv	Online res system	Online seat selection	Friendly staff	Free baggage	Establish ed airline
Mann-Whitney U	1250.50	919.50	1203.50	837.50	1096.00	1215.00	1155.00	1213.00	1171.50	1253.00	1035.50
Wilcoxon W	2525.50	2245.50	2478.50	2112.50	2422.00	2541.00	2430.00	2539.00	2497.50	2528.00	2361.50
Z	-0.18	-2.64	-0.53	-3.42	-1.42	-0.50	-0.90	-0.49	-0.80	-0.20	-1.75
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.86	0.01	0.60	0.00	0.15	0.62	0.37	0.63	0.42	0.84	0.08
a. Grouping Variable: gender											

Ratings for males and females were not statistically significantly different with regards to price, frequency, safety record, ease of reservation, online system reservation, online seat selection, friendly staff, free baggage and established airline (all p-values > 0.05). A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in ratings of convenience between males and females. The results are indicated in the boxplot depicted in Figure 2.
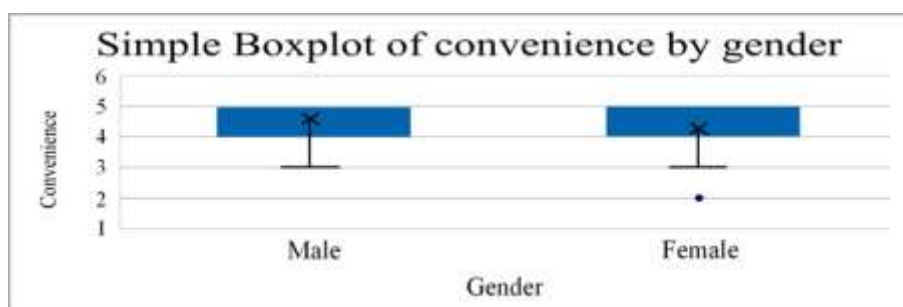
Figure 2. Simple boxplot of convenience by gender. (Source: Researchers' own construct)

Distributions of the ratings of convenience for males and females were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Ratings were statistically significantly higher in females (Mean rank = 59.58) than in females (Mean rank = 42.25), U = 837.50, z = -3.42, p = 0.001. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in ratings of on-time departure between males and females. The results are indicated in the boxplot indicated in Figure 3.
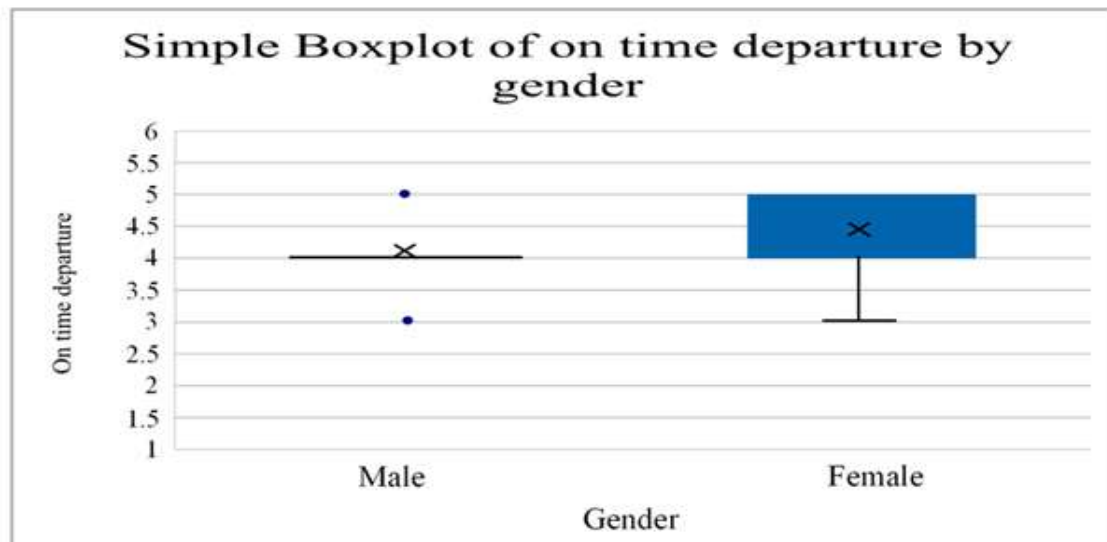
Figure 3. Boxplot of differences in ratings on-time departures in gender. (Source: Researchers' own construct)

Distributions of the ratings of convenience for males and females were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Ratings were statistically significantly higher in females (Mean rank = 59.58) than in males (Mean rank = 42.25), U = 837.50, z = -3.42, p = 0.001.

Conclusion

Time is money, specifically for business travellers who often rely on flights to accommodate their busy schedules. For many business travellers, the option to have same-day return flights assists in managing their time effectively. A total of 101 business people took part in the study to ascertain the importance of key drivers in the choice of same-day return flights from a community airport situated in George in the Western Cape of South Africa, to large airports such as Johannesburg and Cape Town, but also to smaller community airports such as PE and Durban.

The safety record of the airline and on-time departure was ranked the most important contributors for same-day flights amongst business travellers. Convenience rated third, indicating the importance for business travellers, as any delay will have a ripple effect on their planned schedule. Convenience in this study included the convenience and ease of online reservations and online seat selection, indicating that business travellers place high emphasis on factors that will eliminate the time they spend making travel arrangements. Staff was ranked the second lowest of the attributes suggesting that business travellers prefer on-line bookings and reservations as well as other time-saving measures, such as priority and self-help measures, to actual on the ground staff contact. Females differ from males on the ratings concerning convenience and online departure.

From an airline industry perspective, airlines wishing to compete for business travellers in the Western Cape, on the George – Johannesburg; George – Cape Town; George – PE, and George – Durban routes, could benefit if they have earlier departure and later return times to these destinations to accommodate same-day return flight business travellers. Unlike leisure

travellers, business travellers in this study are not swayed by the price of the airline ticket. Airlines could potentially increase their prices of flights if they increase the convenience of flights, which in this study encapsulates convenience and ease of online flights and online seat-selection. It is therefore important that airlines highlight these issues as unique selling propositions to business travellers and ensure that their online booking system is user-friendly and that their webpages contain relevant up to date flight details. Whilst George is mainly seen as a holiday destination, it is also considered the industrial and business hub of The Garden Route District (Garden Route Investment Properties, 2015). Current and potential airlines should incorporate community airport destinations and cater to the needs of both business and leisure travellers.

From an academic perspective, the research offers insights into the decision making of same-day flights of business travellers from community airports in South Africa. Recommendations for further research include a repetition of this study amongst business travellers in other large and community airports in South Africa for comparison purposes. Additionally, similar studies can be done in developed countries to compare the results with relation to community airports and business travellers, to that of developing countries.

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