

The Impact of Personal Income on Airline Preferences

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Abstract

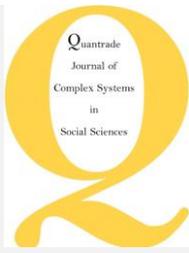
Speed, safety, and comfort are key determinants of airline preferences. Individuals opt for airlines when it comes to extended-distance and international journeys. The proliferation of airports, heightened competition, and promotional airfare offerings contribute to the rising demand for air travel. In the past, airline travel was primarily favored by individuals with higher income levels, but today, it is observed that individuals with lower and middle incomes also choose air travel. Therefore, this study investigated the effect of income on airline preferences. The sample consisted of 684 participants recruited using convenience sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire. Frequency, validity, reliability, correlation, and dissimilarity analyses were conducted. The results showed a positive correlation between income and travel frequency. Individuals with higher income levels travel more throughout the year. However, there was no significant correlation between income and airline preferences.

Keywords: Airline finance, airline preferences, personal income

1. Introduction

The transportation sector directly impacts a country's well-being and level of development (Tekin, 2014, p. 38). As one of the most important engines of the national economy, the transportation sector interacts with many sectors. Land, sea, rail, and air transportation play a pivotal role in enhancing both national and international trade while facilitating social and cultural growth. Sharing social and cultural activities brings individuals closer together and fosters interaction among them. Airline transportation, particularly in international travel, plays a vital role in facilitating the exchange of cultural activities (Topal, Şahin & Topal, 2019, pp. 119-120). Sociocultural activities contribute to social development, while bilateral cooperation agreements further facilitate international trade. Airline transportation stimulates employment, tourism, and trade, thereby fostering economic growth (Işıklar, Canöz & Ertek, 2021, p. 242; Archana & Subha, 2012, p. 50) because the airline transportation sector is directly impacted by global financial shifts (Okumuş & Asil, 2007, p. 153). Furthermore, government regulations in the airline transportation sector have a direct impact on its development (Mehta, Rice, Deaton & Winter, 2019, p. 1).

Technological advancements and structural reforms contribute to the development of the airline transportation sector. More and more people prefer flying when traveling long distances because it is faster, safer, cheaper, and more comfortable, thanks to advances in technology (Dayı & Ulusoy, 2018, p. 92). Progress in the sector has resulted in the creation of more fuel-efficient engines, a decrease in carbon emissions, and reduced aircraft noise pollution. Population growth results in increased settlement density, leading to the socialization and urbanization of cities. Trade and increasing economic prosperity have brought about changes in the lifestyles of individuals. The demand for airline transportation is rising due to factors such as the establishment of new airports, faster travel options, enhanced flight safety, competitive ticket pricing, and improved service quality. In 2003, Türkiye introduced a subsidy covering half of the domestic ticket tax, increasing demand for domestic airfares. As a result, prior to 2003, airline transportation was not a preferred choice for many, but post-2003, the demand consistently grew, contributing to the ongoing expansion of the sector. Present



pricing strategies and early booking discounts in the airline industry have made air travel affordable, comparable to the cost of bus tickets (Yaylalı & Dilek, 2009, pp. 1-3).

The aviation sector is undergoing a renewal in alignment with advancements in technology. Innovative systems play a critical role in ensuring competitiveness within the sector. Nevertheless, it is essential to carefully plan innovations well in advance. For example, in the five-year span from 2017 to 2022, there are plans to expand the adoption of various technologies and services within the aviation industry. These include facial recognition technology, contactless passport usage, in-flight sports equipment, dedicated children's play areas, home baggage collection and plane delivery services, the utilization of wider-body aircraft, and the development of airports with gardens, hotels, restaurants, and natural green spaces. Over the next decade, from 2017 to 2027, there are ambitious goals to implement innovations within the aviation sector. These goals encompass the introduction of standing passenger arrangements, the development of supersonic passenger aircraft, and the adoption of aircraft powered by biofuels. In the coming two decades, from 2017 to 2037, some concerns have been raised within the aviation industry. These include potential challenges related to safety measures and controls, more frequent delays due to escalating air traffic, and increased turbulence attributed to climate change. In the next five decades, spanning from 2017 to 2067, there are expectations that aircraft may be operated without the need for human pilots (Duygun & Yücel, 2018, p. 447).

The changes within the airline transportation sector are causing shifts in people's transportation preferences. Previously, people leaned toward traveling by ships and trains, but nowadays, they tend to favor land and air transportation options. The progress in trade has contributed to an improvement in the well-being of nations, accompanied by an increase in per capita national income. As individuals' income levels rise, their transportation preferences undergo changes. Therefore, this study investigated the potential correlation between individuals' income levels and their inclination toward airline transportation.

2. Literature

This section encompasses research on the factors affecting individuals' preferences for specific airlines.

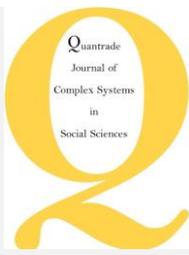
Sarılgan and Bakır (2023) surveyed 335 participants to explore the factors influencing students' preferences for airlines. They employed satisfaction analysis, interaction analysis, price analysis, and interpretive structural modeling. Their findings revealed that price alone did not exclusively dictate students' airline preferences. They suggest that airlines should pay attention to satisfaction and service quality to gain a competitive advantage.

Yalçın, Yamamoto, and Aydın (2022) investigated the factors affecting passengers' airline preferences, involving a sample of 408 individuals. They collected data through a questionnaire and conducted subsequent conjoint analysis. Their results indicated that price, comfort, service, and flight facilities all played significant roles in shaping passengers' preferences, with their relative importance varying among individuals.

Işıklar, Canöz, and Ertek (2021) explored the determinants influencing passengers' airline preferences. Their study involved a questionnaire of 1,200 individuals in Konya, utilizing methods such as frequency analysis, factor analysis, and ANOVA tests. Their findings indicated that factors such as reliability, comfort, and service quality played a significant role in shaping passengers' preferences for airlines.

Employing a questionnaire approach, Meriç and Meriç (2021) examined the factors impacting the airline choices of 249 Turkish Airline Miles&Smiles members. Their research involved frequency analysis, t-test, and ANOVA analyses. The results revealed significant variations in airline service preferences based on passengers' age, income, and occupation, although no significant differences were observed based on their level of education.

Yakut (2021), the researcher examined the factors influencing passengers' airline company preferences (n=500). Data collection was performed through a questionnaire, followed by various statistical analyses, including frequency analysis, normality test, t-test, ANOVA, and Chi-square analyses. The study's findings indicated that passengers' airline preferences



were influenced by factors such as gender, education level, and occupation, while age and income were not found to have a significant impact.

Savaş and Duran (2020) explored the factors that impact passengers' airline company choices among a sample of 386 individuals. Data were gathered through a questionnaire, followed by validity and reliability analyses to assess the collected information. The results indicated that passengers' airline preferences were influenced by factors such as flight schedules, safety, service quality, and ticket prices. Furthermore, they found that passengers were willing to pay higher prices for tickets from companies with convenient flight schedules and a reliable quality image.

Sönmezoğlu (2019) investigated the factors influencing passengers' preferences for airlines within a sample of 555 individuals. He collected data through a questionnaire and conducted frequency, factor, and difference analyses. The findings revealed that various factors played a significant role in shaping passengers' preferences for airlines, including operational competence, flight comfort, flight safety, access to services, in-cabin product quality, effectiveness in problem-solving, image, reputation, and convenience.

Canöz (2018) examined the preferences of foreign passengers for airlines by surveying 274 foreign college students from 60 countries residing in Konya. He then performed frequency analysis, t-test, and chi-square analyses. The results indicated that various factors, including safety, price, lost baggage, staff courtesy, flight delays or cancellations, and comfort, influenced passengers' airline preferences. Notably, safety emerged as the primary concern for the participants.

Yıldız (2018) surveyed 932 passengers to investigate the factors affecting their airline preferences. Data analysis involved the use of multiple logistic regression and ordered logit methods. The study revealed that market segmentation based on travel purpose, seat class, and price sensitivity had statistical significance. Furthermore, the research highlighted that the market segmentation model varied depending on socio-demographic variables and the criteria influencing airline preferences.

Duygun and Yücel (2018) surveyed 388 passengers to investigate the factors impacting their preferences for airlines. Data analysis encompassed frequency, factor, and difference analyses. The research revealed that three out of every five respondents preferred Turkish Airlines. Additionally, the study identified several influential factors in passenger preferences, including quality, expertise, safety, qualified staff, catering, image, ticket price, and flight time.

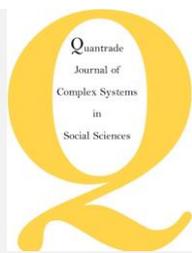
In a study by Law (2017), 600 passengers of a Thai airline were surveyed to examine the factors shaping their airline preferences. The data was subjected to statistical analysis. The findings revealed that price and promotional activities held significant sway over customer preferences and positively impacted their intention to repurchase. Furthermore, flight schedules and promotional strategies are crucial in passengers' ultimate decisions when selecting an airline.

Sanyal and Hisam (2016) conducted a questionnaire involving 200 Indian passengers to investigate the relationship between service quality, passenger satisfaction, and passenger expectations. The data were subjected to statistical analysis. The findings indicated that service quality played a significant role in influencing both passenger satisfaction and preferences.

Çalışır, Başak, and Çalışır (2016) surveyed 237 passengers to investigate the impact of airline image, satisfaction, price, and service quality on passenger loyalty. They employed a structural equation model for data analysis. The outcomes revealed that a substantial portion (71%) of passenger loyalty could be attributed to airline image, which, in turn, was influenced by satisfaction. Additionally, the researchers reported that service quality and price had positive impacts on passenger satisfaction.

Yayar and Tekin (2015) surveyed 506 passengers to determine the factors affecting their airline preferences. They analyzed the data using a multiple logit model. The results showed that affordable ticket prices, discounts for early ticket purchase, comfort, direct flights, ownership status of the company, catering, income, and individuals' attitudes towards risk influence their choice of airlines.

Milioti, Karlaftis, and Akkogiounoglou (2015) conducted a questionnaire involving 853 passengers to explore the factors affecting their choice of airlines. Data analysis was performed using the multiple probit method. The findings indicated



that fare, reliability, safety, security, and the helpfulness of the staff were influential factors in shaping passenger preferences.

Yaylalı, Dilek, and Çelik (2015) investigated the factors influencing passengers' selection of airlines. Their study involved a questionnaire of 2,473 respondents who were traveling from airports in ten different cities in Türkiye. Data analysis included frequency analysis, chi-square analysis, and logistic regression analysis. The findings indicated that respondents tended to prefer well-known and reliable airlines that offered company-specific loyalty programs and the option to purchase tickets in installments using credit cards while earning mileage rewards.

Çelikkol et al. (2012) surveyed 280 passengers to investigate the factors influencing their airline company preferences. They performed factor analysis on the data. They reported that reliability, service quality, flexibility, availability, convenience, safety, and comfort influenced their airline preferences.

Yaylalı and Dilek (2009) surveyed 569 passengers traveling from Erzurum to investigate the factors affecting their airline preferences. Data analysis methods included frequency analysis, chi-square analysis, and logistic regression analysis. The research revealed that passengers with higher incomes displayed a greater preference for airline transportation. Additionally, the study noted that older passengers tended to have a lower preference for air travel.

Gürses (2006) conducted a questionnaire among 504 passengers to investigate the factors influencing their airline preferences. The data was analyzed using frequency analysis. The findings indicated that education level played a significant role in shaping the participants' preferences for airline transportation. Furthermore, the researcher reported that passengers favored airline transportation primarily due to considerations related to safety, speed, and comfort.

3. Research Objective, Hypotheses, and Method

Numerous factors affect individuals' airline preferences. We think that income impacts people's choice of airline transportation and airlines. Therefore, this study argued that income affected individuals' airline preferences.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

H0: Income does not affect passengers' airline preferences.

H1: Income affects passengers' airline preferences.

Data were collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on Sönmezoğlu (2019). It consisted of two sections and 20 items. The first section consisted of items about sociodemographic characteristics and air transportation. The second section consisted of items eliciting information regarding the factors affecting passengers' airline preferences. The items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale. The sample consisted of 684 Turkish passengers who had traveled by air at least once. All participants were social media users. They were recruited using convenience sampling. The data were collected online and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v. 23.0) at a significance level of 0.05.

4. Results

Demographic findings, validity and reliability tests, correlation analysis results, and discriminant analysis results are given in this section.

4.1. Demographic Findings

This part presented the demographic findings. Table 1 shows the participants' gender distribution.

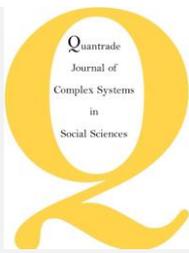


Table 1. Gender Distribution

Gender	N	%
Men	274	40,1
Women	410	59,9
Total	684	100

More than half of the participants were women (60%). Table 2 shows the age distribution.

Table 2. Age Distribution

Age	N	%
18-25	121	17,7
26-35	215	31,4
36-45	264	38,6
46-55	53	7,8
56-65	20	2,9
66 and above	11	1,6
Total	684	100

Participants were 36-45 (39%), 26-35 (31%), or 18-25 (18%) years of age. Table 3 shows the education levels.

Table 3. Education Levels

Education	N	%
Primary	33	4,8
High School	102	14,9
Associate Degree	71	10,4
Undergraduate	359	52,5
Master	93	13,6
PhD	26	3,8
Total	684	100

More than half of the participants had bachelor's degrees (53%). Less than a quarter of the participants had master's degrees (17.4%). Participants had high levels of education. Table 4 shows the income levels.

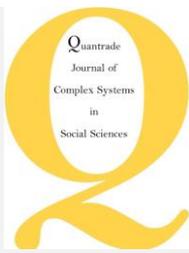


Table 4. Income Levels

Income	N	%
8.500₺ and below	123	18,0
8.501₺-17.000₺	267	39,0
17.001₺- 25.500₺	195	28,5
25.501₺-34.000₺	59	8,7
34.001₺ and above	40	5,8
Total	684	100

Less than half of the participants had an income of 8.501₺ to 17.000₺ (39%). More than half of the participants had an income of less than 16.999₺ (57%). Only forty participants had an income of more than 34.000₺ (5.8%). Table 5 shows the participants' marital status.

Table 5. Marital Status

Marital Status	N	%
Single	256	37,4
Married	428	62,6
Total	684	100

More than half of the participants were married (63%). Table 6 shows the participants' employment status.

Table 6. Employment Status

Employment Status	N	%
Public	356	52,0
Private	152	22,2
Self-Employment	26	3,8
Craft/Tradesman	25	3,7
Retired	17	2,5
Housewife	26	3,8
Others	82	12,0
Total	684	100

More than half of the participants worked in the public sector (52%), while more than a quarter of the participants worked in the private sector (22%). Seventeen participants were retired (2.5%). Therefore, we think that retirees prefer to travel by air the least. Table 7 shows the participants' reasons for traveling.

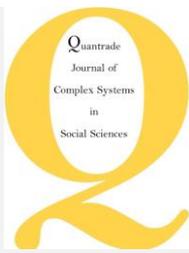


Table 7. Reasons for Traveling

Reasons for Traveling	N	%
Work	124	18,1
Vacation	320	46,8
Education	77	11,3
Health	19	2,7
Others	144	21,1
Total	684	100

Less than half of the participants flew on vacation (46.8%), while less than a quarter of the participants flew for work (18%). Seventy-five participants flew for education (11%). Table 8 shows the participants' airline preferences.

Table 8. Airlines

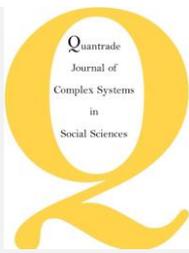
Airlines	N	%
Turkish Airlines	395	57,7
Anadolu Jet	126	18,5
Fly Pegasus	105	15,3
Sun Express	13	1,9
Onur Air	11	1,6
Others	34	5,0
Total	684	100

Participants preferred Turkish Airlines (58%), Anadolu Jet (18.52%), Pegasus (15.3%), Sun Express (1.9%), or Onur Air (1.6%). Most participants preferred Turkish Airlines. Table 9 shows the participants' frequency of traveling within a year

Table 9. Travel Frequency

Travel Frequency	N	%
1	405	59,2
2	136	19,9
3	51	7,4
4	41	6,0
5	10	1,5
6 and above	41	6,0
Total	684	100

More than half of the participants flew once a year (59%), while more than a quarter of the participants flew twice a year (20%). Only fifty participants flew three times a year (7.4%). Most participants flew once a year. Ticket prices were



prohibitively high, leading to a decrease in passenger numbers. Table 10 shows the classes of travel preferred by the participants.

Table 10. Travel Class

Travel Class	N	%
First Class	30	4,4
Business	32	4,7
Comfort	56	8,2
Economy	566	82,7
Total	684	100

Most participants chose to fly in Economy Class (83%). Fifty-six participants chose to fly in Comfort Class (8.2%). Thirty-two participants chose to fly in Business Class (4.7%). Thirty participants chose to fly in the First Class (4.4%). Table 11 shows the types of travel preferred by the participants.

Table 11. Travel Type

Travel Type	N	%
Domestic	585	85,5
Internationally	99	14,5
Total	684	100

Most participants flew domestically (85.5%), while less than a quarter of the participants flew internationally (14.5%). This is probably because international flight tickets are more expensive than domestic flight tickets.

4.2. Validity and Reliability

This section addressed the validity and reliability results. An explanatory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to test the construct validity of the scale. Table 12 shows the results.

Table 12. Explanatory Factor Analysis Results

Items	Factor Load	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The most important thing for me is to reach my destination as soon as possible.	0,571	3,87	1,109
2. I prefer to fly with world-renowned, well-known airlines.	0,581	3,63	1,093
3. I prefer airlines with staff who are effective in solving passenger problems.	0,813	4,21	0,808
4. A safe flight is my priority.	0,764	4,46	0,817
5. The benefits of frequent flyer programs influence my choice of airline.	0,735	3,92	0,972

6. Flight comfort affects my choice of airline.	0,815	4,14	0,823
7. Sales promotions and special offers influence my choice of airline.	0,718	4,08	0,926
8. Environmental friendliness affects my choice of airline.	0,704	3,94	0,941
9. I always prefer to fly with my own country's airline.	0,565	4,03	1,044

The items were loaded on one factor. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.852. The Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) was 0.896, for which Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2=2341.875$, $p=0.000$). The items explained 50.555% of the total variance. The results showed that the scale was valid.

4.3. Correlation Analysis Results

We think that there is a positive correlation between income and flight frequency, suggesting that, apart from business travelers, people fly more as their income increases. Therefore, we conducted a correlation analysis to determine whether there is a positive correlation between income and flight frequency. Table 13 shows the results.

Table 13. Correlation Analysis Results

		Travel Frequency
Income	Pearson	0,228**
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0
	N	684

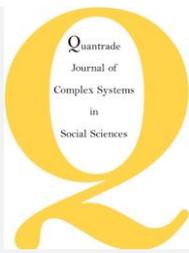
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results showed a positive correlation between income and travel frequency, indicating that people fly more as their income increases. Yaylalı and Dilek (2009) also reported that people flew more as their income increased. To further examine the relationship between respondents' income and flight frequency, we created a cross-tabulation of data. Table 14 shows the results.

Table 14. Cross-Tabulation

		Travel Frequency						Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6 and above	
Income	8.500₺ and below	69	28	11	2	4	9	123
	8.501₺-17.000₺	187	47	17	9	1	6	267
	17.001₺- 25.500₺	115	45	10	14	3	8	195
	25.501₺-34.000₺	23	8	9	11	1	7	59
	34.001₺ and above	11	8	4	5	1	11	40
Total		405	136	51	41	10	41	684

One hundred and twenty-three participants had an income of less than 8.499₺. Two hundred and sixty-seven participants had an income of 8.501₺ to 17.000₺. One hundred and ninety-five participants had an income of 17.001₺ to 25.500₺. Fifty-nine participants had an income of 25.501₺ to 33.999₺. Forty participants had an income of more than 34.000₺. Participants with an income of 8.501₺ to 17.000₺ flew the most. One hundred and eighty-seven participants with an



income of 8.501₺ to 17.000₺ flew once a year, while 47 participants with an income of 8.501₺ to 17.000₺ flew twice a year. Participants with an income of over 34.000₺ flew more than five times a year.

4.4. Discriminant Analysis Results

Discriminant analysis was performed to test the hypotheses. Discriminant analyses are determined according to whether the data shows a normal distribution or not. Kurtosis and skewness coefficients are checked to determine whether data show a normal distribution or not. Table 15 shows the statistical findings, including kurtosis and skewness coefficients.

Table 15. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Average	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Scale	684	4,0297	0,64618	-1,121	2,859

The items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale: 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The scale had a mean score of 4.0297 ± 0.646 . Skewness (-1,121) and kurtosis (2,859) coefficients between -3 and +3 indicate that the data is normally distributed (Sarıaslan, 1994, p. 251). Since the data is normally distributed, it is necessary to perform an ANOVA test. ANOVA analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. Table 16 shows the results.

Table 16. ANOVA Test Results

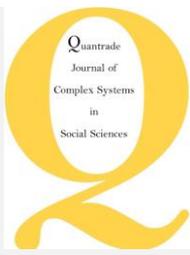
	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Intergroup	3,138	4	0,784	1,889	0,111
In-Group	282,048	679	0,415		
Total	285,186	683			

*Analyzed at a significance level of 0.05.

An ANOVA test was conducted to test the effect of income on airline preferences. The Hypothesis H_0 was accepted because the P value was $0.111 > 0.05$, indicating that income had no effect on participants' airline preferences. Meriç and Meriç (2021) found a similar result and stated that the service provided by airline companies varies significantly according to the income of passengers. In a similar finding, Yaylalı and Dilek (2009) stated that passengers prefer transportation by air as their income increases. In a different study, it was found that there was no significant relationship. Yakut (2021) stated that there is no significant relationship between airline preferences and passenger revenues.

5. Conclusion

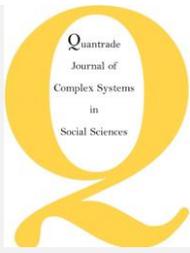
We surveyed 683 passengers to investigate the effect of income on airline preferences. More than half of the participants were women (60%) and married (63%). Most participants were 36-45 years of age. More than half of the participants had bachelor's or master's degrees (70%). Most participants had high levels of education. more than half of the participants had an income of less than 16.999₺ (57%). More than half of the participants worked in the public sector (52%). Less than half of the participants flew for vacation (46.8%). Less than a quarter of the participants flew for work purposes (18%). Seventy-five participants flew for education (11%). Participants preferred to fly with THY (58%), Anadolu Jet (18.52%), Pegasus (15.3%), Sun Express (1.9%), or Onur Air (1.6%). More than half of the participants flew once a year (59%). More than a quarter of the participants flew twice a year (20%). Only fifty participants flew three times a year (7.4%). In recent years, there has been a decline in the preference for air travel, attributed to the rising cost of flight tickets and a decrease in people's purchasing power. Most participants flew economy class (83%). Most participants flew



domestically (85.5%), while less than a quarter of the participants flew internationally (14.5%). International airfares keep climbing due to the increase in exchange rates.

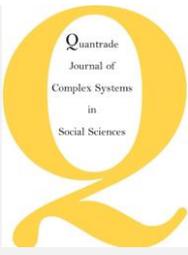
The results indicated a positive correlation between income and air travel frequency, suggesting that people fly more frequently as they make more money. One hundred and twenty-three participants had an income of less than 8.499₺. Two hundred and sixty-seven participants had an income of 8.501₺ to 17.000₺. One hundred and ninety-five participants had an income of 17.001₺ to 25.500₺. Fifty-nine participants had an income of 25.501₺ to 33.999₺. Forty participants had an income of more than 34.000₺. Participants with an income of 8.501₺ to 17.000 ₺ flew the most. One hundred and eighty-seven participants with an income of 8.501 ₺ to 17.000₺ flew once a year, while 47 participants with an income of 8.501₺ to 17.000 ₺ flew twice a year. Participants with an income of over 34,000 ₺ flew more than five times a year.

We assumed that income affected people's airline preferences. In other words, we believed that people would prefer to fly with more prestigious airlines as they made more money. People prefer to fly because air transportation is comfortable and fast. We conducted an ANOVA test to investigate the factors affecting our participants' airline preferences. The results showed that income had no impact on their airline preferences. Researchers should use nominal data to measure people's income and should recruit samples with a more balanced distribution of income and travel frequency.



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