A Case Study on Critical Success Factors of AirAsia

Yerkezhan Mamrina¹, Daisy Mui Hung Kee², Aidos Tursunbay³, Dravyaayajnaah A/P Jayagopal⁴, Hanis Aribah Binti Mohd Athiyah⁵, Rouslan Muhamach⁶
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia¹,²,³,⁴,⁵,⁶
Correspondence Email: daisy@usm.my

ABSTRACT
Existing literature has frequently highlighted how important are critical success factors in an organization. In this paper, we consider how these critical success factors affect an organization. Organizational success becomes important for many companies because it is very difficult to reach it in this competitive world. This pushed the organizations to improve their structure, strategy and management, and AirAsia is not an exception. AirAsia is one of the biggest low-cost airlines in Asia. It was registered in 1993 but began its activities only in 1996. The Airline company was chosen as the best low-cost airline in the world according to Skytrax eleven times. However, there is still a need for changes and improvements for AirAsia to become better. The findings of this paper have important implications for the managers and practitioners. The implication and recommendations are presented.

Keywords: AirAsia, low-cost, organizational success, improvements, achievements, critical success factors.

INTRODUCTION
The airplane industry started its way less than 11 decades ago (Morris, 2017), but year by year the number of flights taken by people all over the world are rising constantly and going to reach about 40,000,000 in 2019. The number of passengers is also increasing and compared to 2016, it is forecasted to double and reach 7.8 billion in 2036 (Mazareanu, 2019). This is why many countries are developing this field and Malaysia is not an exception. There are many airline companies in Malaysia like Malaysia Airlines, Malindo Air, Firefly, and according to the Centre for aviation CAPA (2019), the largest airline in the country is AirAsia.

AirAsia is the low-cost airline that established its operation based on the “Now everyone can flight” slogan (Ming, 2018) and is coordinated by top-performing executives such as Tony Fernandes and Datuk Kamarudin Meranun. It now covers more than 150 destinations and even provides business-class services for the same price as a regular ticket for many other airlines. Moreover, the low price does not influence the service quality and food supply, because they are more focusing on customer satisfaction than profit. AirAsia is not only providing flight services but also helping to find a place to stay during the trip, different holiday packaging and activities information on their official site.

AirAsia has a few objectives to progress, and the primary objective is to turn into Asia’s biggest low-cost airline company, giving service to around 3-4 billion individuals. The subsequent objective is to make sure that their slogan is working. Also, they try to keep up great client connections by better media techniques and to continually advise clients about the improvement of the organization (JobDB, 2011).
By ongoing development and trying to follow these objectives, the AirAsia was regarded as the world's best low-cost airline for the last 11 years by the prestigious Skytrax World Airline Awards which considered a global standard of airline quality (Bernama, 2019). AirAsia was also named Asia's Leading Inflight Service (Nang, 2016).

There are a lot of factors that lead to the success of AirAsia, and in this research paper, more information about them is presented by a created methodology.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

The objective of the research is to investigate the critical factors and this section will help the reader to understand the methodology used in the study.

This research gives an explanation of these factors (independent variables) behind the success (dependent variable) of AirAsia. To create a methodology, the questionnaire was conducted, and 111 respondents were asked 3 questions:

1. Did you travel by AirAsia?
2. What did you like about AirAsia?
3. What AirAsia should improve in their operations/performance?

Using primary data from this questionnaire, the factors affecting dependent variable “success” were cheaper tickets, low cost, and managed employees and quality. This methodology is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

`Figure 1.1 Research methodology
The Critical Factors behind the Success of AirAsia`

`Figure 1.2 the bar graph of the result given by respondents on the perception of AirAsia`
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research analysis of the success of AirAsia, the total respondents are 111 and 1 respondent did not answer the description. Among 110 respondents, the majority of respondents - 90 respondents have traveled by AirAsia and 20 respondents did not. The highest independent variable is cheaper tickets which are 40% of those 90 respondents. This clearly shows that the main reason for choosing AirAsia is cheaper ticket prices. AirAsia also provides ticket promotions to travel domestically as well as overseas. The tagline "Everyone can fly" is the best description of success AirAsia. The second is the low cost of AirAsia with 32.2%. AirAsia focuses on minimizing operating costs to gain profits and launches a low-cost carrier. Lastly, the lowest is developed management teams and managed quality with 27.8%. Managed employees and good quality are important so that when passengers enter the plane, they feel satisfied and comfortable.

2.2 Factors behind the success of AirAsia
1. Cheaper tickets
The price of the tickets for AirAsia is almost half of its competitors. Also, domestic flights are more convenient as it takes less time and money. For example, traveling from Kuala Lumpur to Penang by plane takes about 1 hour and the price of the tickets purchased in advance is between 7 to 15 dollars. Using the bus for the same direction will take about 5 hours and cost from 10 to 12 dollars.

2. Low cost
AirAsia increases sitting capacity and minimizes services by not providing customers with food & beverages, earphones, movies and so on. By this, it cuts operating costs for about 33% and lowers the prices of tickets. Also, AirAsia, in most cases, does not use primary airports to pay lower fees.

3. The developed management team and good quality
The employees of AirAsia are very competitive and have good communication skills, diverse experiences, and knowledge in their working area. For example, they work cooperatively with the government, other airlines and even aircraft manufacturers like Airbus and gain advantages in the form of subsidies and sales. Moreover, it shows that it is possible to gain a low price and high quality.

2.3 PEST analysis
PEST analysis is needed to investigate the external factors affecting the company. It shows how political, economic, social and technological environments strengthen or weaken the company's operations.

| Political:                                                                                     | Economical:                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.Side deals increase operating costs of the airline and make restrictions in terms of airplane variety, the number of sits, and the number of flights. | 1.Oil prices are out of control of AirAsia. It is difficult to maintain cheap tickets when the cost increases. Even with the increased cost, the company must maintain the prices the same in the short term. |
2. People are concerned that asymmetric events such as aircraft hijacking (even if the number of such accidents decreased by 23% in the last 20 years) could be repeated and have a fear of flying (Ranter, 2019).

3. Political stability is playing a key role in customers’ choice of places to visit. The incidents like Bali bombings in 2002 or recent protests in Hong-Kong may decrease demand and number of flights to these areas. Governments can also prohibit international flights for some period of time. This will lead to additional challenges for the operations of organizations.

**Social:**

1. People’s concern about safety is increasing. In most cases, people tend to believe that price and quality are highly correlated and changing customers’ minds is a challenge for any company. This is the reason why AirAsia position safety at priority.

2. People may choose another airline with superior services for flights that take a longer time. This add difficulties to increase market share in countries that are located far away.

3. As people now count time as money, the need for fast transportation is becoming critical. This increases the number of passengers who use air transportation.

**Technological:**

1. Booking a flight through the internet can be very easily done through the main site of AirAsia. It helps to win customers of X Generation. Also, the way of organizing its additional services like hotel booking shows AirAsia’s ability to gain the advantages of technology.

2. AirAsia changed the aircraft to a bigger and more efficient Airbus A320. It decreased the use of fuel by 15% (AirAsia group Berhad, 2017).

3. The company is going to capitalize and use artificial intelligence (Tam, 2018) in its operations to cut costs. AirAsia is also using its app for giving points to frequent flyers and making them more loyal by providing bonuses (AirAsia Berhad, 2018).
2.4 Market opportunity analysis

AirAsia always finds ways to improve its current position. When China and India were attracting a lot of investments, AirAsia increased its operations in those countries and strongly positioned itself there (Waring, 2019).

The major part of AirAsia`s users is those with low wages. Their reason for using air transportation is to travel. Another niche is people from the middle class who use planes not only to travel but also in dealing with business meetings and other work responsibilities. This segment is forecasting to be the biggest till the next 5 years and now makes up less than half of the whole population in the world (Kharas & Hamel, 2018). This is a big opportunity for low-cost airlines to gain a larger market share.

AirAsia is not the only low-cost airline in Asia and it introduces competition among each other to win passengers. The major competitors are SpiceJet, EasyJet, Garuda Indonesia. Their revenues or number of employees are higher than Air Asia's (Owler, 2019).

As the weather in tropical countries like Malaysia and Thailand is always hot, people from 4 season countries travel to these countries a lot, so AirAsia can increase the number of travelers from Europe by starting its operations there. AirAsia can also partner with other European airlines to cut costs and link Europe with Asia. Moreover, the location of the capital city of Malaysia is very suitable to connect the western part of the world with far for them located countries like Australia.

3.0 Justification idea

AirAsia has a lot of competitive advantages that it performs better than any other competitor in the low-cost airline industry. It serves own customers at a high-quality level and tries not to be worse than airlines that provide a full package of services. However, even if AirAsia is one of the best low-cost airlines, it still has some challenges.

To identify strong and weak parts of the AirAsia`s operations, Porter`s 5 Forces model could be conducted. First of all, there is a chance for new companies' entrance. These new entrants could have strong support from its government in terms of subsidies and the elimination of some barriers. AirAsia also has a threat to be substituted by other full-service airlines or even its domestic competitor Malaysian Airlines. The bargaining power of suppliers and buyers is high enough, as they affect the cost and revenue parts in the income statement respectively. The rivalry among existing competitors is not so high yet, but this could be changed with the entry of other airlines or grow of existing airlines at any time and introduce new risks. These are the reasons why AirAsia needs to re-examine its current strategy and start growing before it would be done by other competitors.

Nowadays partnership among companies is accelerating and offering every side of a deal unique resources and ways of operating their business. The partnership of airlines allows achieving a higher level of international cooperation in commercial air travel. By doing operations together and joining forces, they can result in a better outcome as they have different perspectives and ways of doing things. To come up with one idea they will have to compromise and choose the best alternative.

The partnership also increases the market share for all sides and this is critical for companies that want to achieve high results. AirAsia is now performing for and serving
only Asia part and highly focusing on its niche. However, partnering with other airlines from Europe is a big opportunity for AirAsia to increase its market share and profits. By entering a new market, it can still position itself as a low-cost airline and provide the flight ticket from Europe to Asia and vice versa cheaper than any other airline company. It would not move far from its previous operations and brand positioning but will go deeper in its scope of work.

Nowadays there are 3 main and big alliances: Star Alliance, SkyTeam, and Oneworld. They are combining other independent airline companies to gain the advantage of working together to achieve superior performance. The companies save their independence and continue doing current activities, but should follow some common rules and restrictions related to the flight schedule, ticket selling and other aspects (Mironova, 2018). The biggest alliance consists of 27 airline companies, so many companies understood their benefits getting from joining together.

Another important thing to mention is building a brand that has a household name, that is recognized by people. By entering an alliance, AirAsia’s name would be spoken together with big and old airlines like Air Canada or Lufthansa.

As the main interest of AirAsia is their customers and providing them with the opportunity to travel by plane, the interests of users could also be a motivation for AirAsia to do this. The integration of companies gives some advantages for passengers. For example, a large number of connecting flights. The cooperation of airlines makes it easier for customers to buy tickets for flights with transfers around the world in one click. The combination of airline route networks provides many more travel opportunities. At the same time, passengers are not required to take their luggage or go through the check-in procedure again in the transfer points, so it reduces efforts put by passengers and increases their comfort and satisfaction level. Moreover, as AirAsia is focusing on cutting costs, the services provided are very limited, so by using the strength of partner companies, it can minimize the weaknesses.

Moreover, alliance airlines can offer more flights to a specific destination. This is because the same flight on different days can be performed by different companion carriers. For example, Lufthansa can fly on the route Berlin – Kuala Lumpur on one day, and AirAsia on the other. This will lead to a raised number of service users with substantially lower costs.

The integration of bonus programs between alliance companies can also benefit AirAsia. Frequent fliers can use bonuses from accumulated miles and spend on services of other airlines, which are also members of the alliance. New users of AirAsia can become even loyal customers who will regularly use their services. So there would always be a big part of permanent customers who will decrease the risk of unsold tickets or failure.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that about 10% of the whole world population lives in European countries. More than 64% who are from the middle class. As the culture in Europe, according to Hofstede, is mostly long term, the savings in these countries are very high, so they are willing to spend as little money on tickets as possible. This is a big movement towards becoming a worldwide known low-cost airline serving the poor and middle class of the whole planet. By having an opportunity to provide its services for more 450 million people, AirAsia can become the number one low-cost airline in the World.
The number of tourists visited Malaysia only reached almost 26 million in 2017 (Knoema, 2017). Only from the Western part of Europe, almost a half-million tourists visited the country. This figure increased by 17 percent compared to the data of 2016 (NST, 2019). It means that the interest of Europe to Asia is increasing year by year. Asian people visiting Europe is much higher. Even visits to France from Asia increased to 1.2 million from 2010 to 2015 and totaled to almost 6 million (Faure, 2017). This shows that AirAsia can diversify its customer base and serve customers outside the boundaries it has now.

However, the important point to be mentioned here is entering an alliance that has the same or at least similar target, because in another way AirAsia would lose its initial idea of letting everyone fly. Companies that value the same things and serve the same customers will find a meeting point much easier and will come up with innovative ideas to improve their services.

4.0 Idea application

Entering the airline alliances is not an easy task and needs to be managed very carefully. That is why AirAsia can start from partnering with only one European aircraft company first. There are several ways how AirAsia can partner. First, it can use codeshare, the operation that is becoming popular among other airlines. Codeshare is when 2 companies use information about the flight provided by the partner as its own (Lile, 2013). This is done by Malaysian Airlines now, and to grow and start being very competitive in the airline industry, AirAsia needs to broaden its operations area. Codeshare also benefits two sides by free advertisement provided to each other. Moreover, the regularity of flying will increase, and it will lead to additional revenue for 2 companies. At the same time, the company is not required to buy new aircraft or increase the number of employees, it can provide its customers with different and even complicated routes they would like to choose by partnering only. They protect common interests without a substantial loss of financial power.

Also, the foreign aircraft can fly from one country in Europe to Kuala Lumpur and then AirAsia can serve the customers to their final destiny in Asia or Australia. This is very advantageous to both sides as AirAsia has several subsidiaries like Philippines AirAsia, AirAsia X that can do this work in high quality.

By such schemes of flying both firms can cut costs and increase the number of satisfied customers by providing more choices to travel in different directions faster, cheaper and conveniently.

International Joint Venture (IJV) is another possibility to become partners. It means that two or more parties work separately and have their headquarters in their parent companies but manage some operations together. There are many reasons to do so, first of all, is to increase economies of scale that is to decrease costs. Also, to gain and transfer special knowledge and skills, especially local ones. This will allow working independently in new markets and become popular quickly in the future. Two companies can spread the risks and achieve a strong competitive advantage. Now AirAsia is using IJV successfully with Vietnam, so I could move to Europe also.

After gaining experience in partnership, AirAsia can apply its candidature to become an alliance member. This process takes time and to see the results of preparing, AirAsia should become a company everyone is willing to work with. Also, AirAsia should consider all the risks to complete the procedures successfully.
Partnering with other companies has not only benefits but also risks. First of all, the risk could arise at the very beginning of the 'preparation to enter' process. International Joint Ventures succeed and failures from time to time, and there is a possibility that different regulations or visions of 2 parent companies can build dualities and lead to a default. Managing the work properly is critical in this step, but the management team of the second company could be weak.

Also, when two companies operate with each other, in most cases their brand names are considered together, so damaging the brand image of the one company will affect another. This could decrease the possibility of future collaborations when there could be a huge need for it.

The customers can also be affected. Even a slight increase in price could lead to a loss of loyalty. This will affect the company’s image, as people could start blaming the company for the inconvenience. They could attack the company through social media and stop using the airline services and ban its operations.

The government of the partners’ country could complicate the working operations by introducing double taxation, having own policies that contradict the Malaysian government or AirAsia itself.

The next risk is not being accepted even after the huge work done. The reasons can vary from country to country. For example, Israeli airline was not able to enter the alliance because of political reasons: Israel has tension with the Middle East or Arab countries. When it comes to AirAsia, it could be deemed to be small or Malaysian Airlines presence in the alliance could be a barrier.

The biggest risk is to be taken over by a bigger company. The one that has more available resources in terms of labor, capital, superior performance or technology could absorb the smaller one, AirAsia in this case.

To make sure the idea will work, AirAsia should carefully manage the whole progress, construct a plan and be very flexible to any change. This idea could be applied only after thoughtful consideration and being confident in its abilities to tackle the risks and any issues that could come up.

CONCLUSIONS

Any collaboration, partnering or being in one alliance provides the company with many benefits and some drawbacks. For this strategic plan to be successful all the parties should take the responsivities for their actions and work hard to follow the rules.

First of all, before starting a partnership or entering the alliance AirAsia should analyze potential partner companies and list its possible benefits, difficulties, and solutions.

While talking to the candidates, AirAsia should understand that there should be clear goals and objectives of working together. Once they are set, the work can be started, however partnering for different purposes would lead to dualities and future misunderstandings while making a decision.

Also, all of the companies in the alliance should know each other’s strong and weak sides to use them while doing operations together. The tasks can be divided according to this information and be done in high quality. Every organization would focus on their strength and be responsible for this part, so no repetition of tasks and loss of resources would take place.
The most important part of working with others is the ability to communicate. AirAsia must have clear communication tools to solve issues, make innovations or give the report to each other about the work done. As companies are located far away from each other, the CEOs of each company should have face-to-face meetings regularly if the work is not done by a settled plan or from time to time if the work is going on accordingly.

By doing these tasks mentioned above, AirAsia can gain many advantages, lower the risks of failure and become a huge corporation known around the world.

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### Survey answers

| Choice option | Did you travel with AirAsia? | What do you like about AirAsia? | What AirAsia should improve in their operations/performance? |
|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 001030402014  | Yes                         | Cheapest price                 | Television                                               |
| 001030402015  | Yes                         | The ticket price               | Time management and internal maintenance                 |
| 001030402016  | Yes                         | cheap                          | services                                                 |
| 001030402017  | Yes                         | space                          |                                                         |
| 001030402018  | No                          | Accommodations                 | Be punctual                                              |
| 001030402019  | No                          | their service                  | their schedule of planes                                 |
| 001030402020  | No                          | Quality                        | Timing                                                   |
| 001030402021  | No                          | Cheap                          | Accurate departure                                       |
| 001030402022  | No                          | The seats are quite comfortable, although legroom is quite small. | The distance between the seats are tiny. |
| 001030402023  | No                          | Food                           | Washroom                                                 |
| 001030402024  | No                          | Price (the cheapest)           | Nothing, Everything perfect                               |
| 001030402025  | No                          | Service                        | Food                                                     |
| 001030402026  | No                          | The services                   | Priorities elderly and handicaps during queueing        |
| 001030402027  | No                          | the cheap flights              | timing of the scheduled flights                          |
| 001030402028  | No                          | Lower price for flight ticket  | promotion                                                |
| 001030402029  | No                          | Affordable ticket price        | Improve their customer service with more friendly way    |
| 001030402030  | No                          | The landing is smooth          | I dont see other problem in my perspective               |
| 001030402031  | No                          | The cost is cheap              | Provide food like snacks rather than no food             |
| 001030402032  | No                          | Facilities andOkay ticket price| All excel                                                |
| 001030402033  | Yes                         | Facilities and cheap ticket price| All good                                                |
| 001030402034  | Yes                         | Price ticket reasonable        | Provide baggage facility                                  |
| 001030402035  | Yes                         | Ticket price very cheap        | Nothing, All excel                                       |
| 001030402036  | No                          | Cheapest fare and promotion    |                                                         |
| 001030402037  | Yes                         | Travel many places include overseas | Improve economics class/seat must comfy                 |
| 001030402038  | Yes                         | Affordable price              | Nothing, all better                                      |
| 001030402039  | No                          | reasonable price, travel many places | Nothing                                           |
| 001030402040  | No                          | Cheap, air hostess talk politely | Provide food                                           |
| 001030402041  | No                          | Price ticket cheaper           | -                                                        |
| 001030402042  | No                          | Cost ticket is cheap           | Food should provide                                      |
| 001030402043  | No                          | Price tickets are cheap        | None                                                     |
| 001030402044  | No                          | Cheap air tickets              | Flight timings                                           |
| 001030402045  | No                          | Reasonable price               | Provide food                                             |
| 001030402046  | No                          | Cheapest ticket, comfy         | -                                                        |
| 001030402047  | No                          | Reasonable pricing ticket      | Facilities are good                                      |
| 001030402048  | No                          | Cheapest price especially domestic | Provide food     |
| 001030402049  | No                          | food                           | Service                                                  |

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| Service                                      | Facilities                                      |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Food                                         | Get a cheap flight ever                        |
| Its low cost                                 | Its really low cost                            |
| Management team in airlines is perfect      | Good management team and friendly with customers|
| Travel many countries, either domestic or international | With cheap price ticket can travel many countries|
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Improve the seating for economy class       | Good management team and friendly with customers|
| The staff and air hostesses are very good in communicating and friendly | Quality in economy class which have comply seat |
| With cheap price ticket can travel many countries | Nice staff, good management team and cooperating in excellent |
| Airasia is excellent                        | Airasia is excellent                           |
| Have entertainment like put movie when travel domestic place | Have entertainment like put movie when travel domestic place |
| They are good management team and friendly staff | Low cost                                      |
| Everything is perfect                        | Everything is perfect                          |
| Providing free food                         | Providing free food                            |
| Providing food for those travel              | Providing free food for those travel           |
| Good management team                         | Good management team                            |
| All is excellent                             | All is excellent                               |
| Cheaper price                                | Cheaper price                                  |
| Cheaper price                                | Cheaper price                                  |
| Cheaper cost of price ticket                 | Cheaper cost of price ticket                   |
| Cheaper cost of price ticket                 | Cheaper cost of price ticket                   |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Good management team                         | Good management team                            |
| All is perfect                               | The luggage should carry by own, if provide something trolley for put bag that |
| Good management team with friendly involvement| Good management team with friendly involvement |
| All is excellent                             | All is excellent                               |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Good management team                         | Low cost                                       |
| Providing simple free food for those travel   | The luggage should carry by own, if provide something trolley for put bag that |
| Good management team                         | Providing simple free food for those travel     |
| All is perfect                               | All is perfect                                 |
| Cheaper price                                | Cheaper price                                  |
| Cheaper price can traveling more than many countries | Cheaper price can traveling more than many country |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Good team management because can see from their team members cooperation | Good team management because can see from their team members cooperation |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Providing free food                          | Good management team                            |
| Good and perfect, no comment                 | Good management team                            |
| Excellent                                    | Cheaper ticket price and affordable             |
| Improve air facility by providing wifi, food for travelling in domestic | Improve air facility by providing wifi, food for travelling in domestic |
| None                                         | Good management team                            |
| Good management team                         | Good management team                            |
| Good management team and staff               | Good management team and staff                  |
| All is excellent                             | All are good with facility, staff communication and etc |
| Cheaper cost of price ticket                 | Cheaper cost of price ticket                   |
| Cheaper price                                | Cheaper price                                  |
| Cheaper price can traveling more than many countries | Cheaper price can traveling more than many country |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| Low cost                                     | Low cost                                       |
| None                                         | Good management team                            |
| Good management team                         | Good management team                            |
| Good management team and staff               | Good management team                            |
| All is excellent                             | All is excellent                               |
| Cheaper cost of price ticket                 | Cheaper cost of price ticket                   |
| All are good with facility, staff communication and etc | All are good with facility, staff communication and etc |

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