



# The Impact of 5G Technology on the Aviation Industry

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**Abstract:** The aviation industry has undergone significant structural transformations in recent years due to digital transformation processes. In particular, 5G technology plays a critical role in the development of smart airport systems through its low latency, high-speed data transmission, and Internet of Things (IoT) integration capabilities. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of 5G-based smart airport systems on operational efficiency in the aviation sector. The study employs systematic literature review and secondary data analysis methods. Reports published by ICAO, EUROCONTROL, ACI, and SHGM, along with academic studies indexed in Scopus, were analyzed within the scope of the research. The findings indicate that 5G-supported digital infrastructures reduce flight delays, accelerate passenger processing procedures, and improve coordination efficiency in airport operations. However, cybersecurity risks, infrastructure costs, and standardization deficiencies remain significant challenges. The study contributes to digital aviation literature from an operational performance perspective.

**Keywords:** Digital Transformation, Management Information System, Aviation, Artificial Intelligence

## 1. Introduction

The global aviation industry has undergone significant structural transformations in recent years under the influence of digital transformation processes. In particular, advancements in communication technologies have enabled airport operations to become faster, more integrated, and increasingly data driven. Within this transformation process, fifth-generation mobile communication technology (5G) has emerged as a strategic technology for the aviation sector due to its high data transmission capacity, ultra-low latency, and ability to support massive device connectivity simultaneously (Kadia, 2026).

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With the increasing adoption of digital technologies in airports, the concept of the “smart airport” has gained substantial importance. Smart airports are defined as digitally integrated operational environments supported by the Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), biometric systems, and real-time communication infrastructures (Intel Market Research, 2024). Through these technologies, passenger flow can be optimized, baggage handling processes accelerated, security procedures digitized, and coordination among flight operations significantly enhanced (Khaled Alketbi, 2024). In this context, 5G technology plays a particularly critical role by enabling real-time data communication in mission-critical aviation operations, thereby contributing to more efficient airport management systems (Giannopoulou, 2026).

Operational efficiency in the aviation industry is considered crucial in terms of reducing flight delays, optimizing aircraft turnaround times, accelerating passenger processing procedures, and lowering operational costs. The exponential growth in passenger traffic and the increasing complexity of airport operations have compelled airports to abandon traditional manual processes in favor of advanced digital infrastructures. Accordingly, 5G-based smart airport systems—incorporating innovations such as autonomous vehicles (AVs), advanced sensor networks, and intelligent operational platforms—have become one of the core components of digital transformation in aviation.

However, a review of the existing literature indicates that studies on 5G technology in aviation have primarily focused on technical infrastructure, network architecture, wireless communication systems, and simulation models. In contrast, empirical and quantitative studies investigating the operational efficiency impacts of 5G-based smart airport systems through real operational indicators remain relatively limited. Particularly, there are significant research gaps concerning the integrated evaluation of operational performance indicators such as flight delays, passenger processing times, baggage operations, and real-time data coordination within holistic smart airport systems.

This study aims to address the aforementioned gap in literature. The primary objective of the research is to examine the effects of 5G-based smart airport systems on operational efficiency within the aviation sector. In this context, the study evaluates the impact of 5G technology on airport operations, analyzes digital airport applications, and investigates the relationship between 5G integration and operational performance indicators. Furthermore, the study contributes to the digital transformation literature in aviation by introducing an operational performance perspective. The findings are also

expected to provide practical implications for airport managers, policymakers, and digital infrastructure planners. In line with the digital aviation strategies supported by organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, EUROCONTROL, and Airports Council International, evaluating the operational contributions of 5G-based systems has become a critical necessity for the contemporary aviation industry.

## **2. Literature Review**

With the acceleration of digital transformation processes in the aviation industry, academic studies focusing on 5G technology and smart airport systems have increased significantly. Existing literature predominantly examines the effects of 5G infrastructures on real-time data communication, Internet of Things (IoT) integration, and operational coordination. However, the majority of these studies primarily concentrate on technical infrastructure and network architecture. In contrast, empirical research addressing operational efficiency, passenger processing performance, and airport operations management remains relatively limited, creating a significant research gap in the literature.

Within this context, this section examines the concepts of 5G technology, smart airports, digital transformation processes in aviation, and the relationship between these developments and operational efficiency based on existing academic studies.

### **2.1. Heading 5G Technology and Its Fundamental Characteristics**

Advancements in mobile communication technologies have become one of the fundamental building blocks of digital transformation processes. In particular, fifth-generation mobile communication technology (5G) offers significantly higher data transmission capacity, lower latency, and broader device connectivity support compared to previous-generation communication infrastructures. Owing to these characteristics, 5G technology has created a disruptive transformation not only in the telecommunications sector but also across various industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, and aviation (securelink, 2026).

One of the most significant advantages of 5G technology is its ultra-low latency capability, commonly referred to as Ultra-Reliable Low-Latency Communication (URLLC) (3GPP, 2023). While latency periods in conventional 4G/LTE infrastructures generally range between 60 and 200 milliseconds, 5G technology is capable of reducing this delay to approximately 42.9 milliseconds in practical applications and theoretically below 1 millisecond (Andrews, 2014). Such improvements provide substantial operational

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advantages, particularly in sectors where mission-critical and real-time data communication is essential. In the aviation industry, processes such as air traffic management, real-time flight coordination, baggage handling systems, and biometric passenger processing are directly influenced by low-latency communication infrastructures (Kadia, 2026).

Another notable characteristic of 5G technology is its massive machine-type communication (mMTC) capability. This structure enables nearly one million Internet of Things (IoT) devices per square kilometer to communicate simultaneously without interruption (5G-Based Smart Airport Systems, n.d.). In smart airport environments, systems including sensors, security cameras, automated baggage handling infrastructures, flight tracking platforms, and intelligent building energy management systems can operate more efficiently, autonomously, and synchronously through 5G-supported IoT networks (Öz, 2020).

A further critical advantage offered by 5G technology is the network slicing architecture. Through network slicing, multiple isolated virtual network structures can be established on the same physical infrastructure to serve different operational requirements independently (Leonardo Guevara, 2020). For instance, terminal security systems, passenger internet services, operational data communication, and air traffic control infrastructures can all be managed through separate network slices. This capability enhances operational security, ensures uninterrupted service performance, and improves resource optimization within airport operations.

Despite these advantages, the integration of 5G technology into the aviation industry also introduces several challenges and risks. The literature frequently highlights issues such as the high costs associated with large-scale infrastructure deployment (Tran, 2026), expanded cyberattack surfaces resulting from software-defined networking (SDN/NFV) architectures, cybersecurity vulnerabilities (Rossiter, 2025), data privacy concerns related to edge computing, and the lack of standardization among IoT devices. Moreover, potential signal interference between C-Band (3.7–3.98 GHz) 5G frequencies and radio altimeter systems operating within the 4.2–4.4 GHz range—which are used to measure aircraft altitude—has generated considerable regulatory debate and safety concerns, particularly in the United States and Europe (Sivil Havacılık Genel Müdürlüğü, 2022).

In this respect, although 5G technology offers substantial opportunities for maximizing operational performance in the aviation sector, its implementation requires the careful management of technical infrastructure processes, cybersecurity concerns, and administrative coordination risks, particularly between aviation and telecommunications authorities (Koroniotis, 2020).

## **2.2. The Concept of Smart Airports**

With the acceleration of digital transformation processes, the concept of the “smart airport” has emerged as a strategic approach within the aviation industry. Unlike traditional airport models, smart airports are defined as modern infrastructures in which information and communication technologies are integrated into operational processes, data-driven decision-making mechanisms are utilized, and passenger experience is optimized through digital systems (Alsaed, 2024).

The primary objectives of smart airport systems are to improve operational efficiency, enhance passenger satisfaction, reduce operational costs, and optimize security procedures (Khaled Alketbi, 2024). In this context, several core technologies constitute the foundation of smart airport infrastructures (Öz, et al., 2019).

The Internet of Things (IoT) plays a critical role through sensor systems, equipment tracking applications, and intelligent building management solutions. Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are widely used in data analytics, machine learning applications, and passenger flow forecasting processes (Cook, 2007). In addition, big data technologies support operational optimization, commercial planning, and decision-support systems by processing large-scale operational datasets in real time (5G-Based Smart Airport Systems, n.d.). Biometric systems, including e-gates and digital identity verification technologies, facilitate seamless passenger processing and accelerate terminal transitions (5G-Based Smart Airport Systems, n.d.). Furthermore, 5G technology enables real-time communication with ultra-low latency and high device connectivity capacity, particularly in mission-critical airport operations (5G-Based Smart Airport Systems, n.d.).

Data management occupies a central position in smart airport operations. Through real-time data analytics, passenger density within terminals can be dynamically monitored, cybersecurity and physical security threats can be identified more rapidly, and operational bottlenecks can be predicted before they disrupt airport processes.

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In large-scale international airports, digital infrastructures have become indispensable for maintaining operational coordination. Singapore Changi Airport and Heathrow Airport are frequently presented as leading examples of smart airport implementation. Changi Airport has attracted attention through the use of 5G-supported autonomous baggage vehicles and IoT-based airside management systems, which contribute significantly to operational efficiency. Similarly, Heathrow Airport utilizes Digital Twin technologies and artificial intelligence integration to optimize passenger flow and resource allocation while minimizing operational delays (Future Travel Experience., 2026).

The widespread adoption of smart airport applications has also transformed passenger facilitation processes. Self-service check-in kiosks, automated baggage drop systems, biometric passport control technologies, and digital boarding procedures have significantly reduced passenger processing times and improved airport capacity utilization.

Nevertheless, the existing literature demonstrates that the concept of smart airports has largely been examined from the perspectives of technological infrastructure, network architecture, and cybersecurity. Studies evaluating the concrete economic and operational impacts of integrated technologies such as IoT, artificial intelligence, and 5G on overall airport performance remain relatively limited. In particular, further empirical research is required to measure the effects of these technologies on operational performance indicators such as aircraft turnaround time, passenger throughput capacity, operational coordination, and delay management.

### **2.3. Digital Transformation in Aviation**

Digital transformation is generally defined as the process through which organizations restructure their business models by integrating information technologies into operational processes. In the aviation industry, digital transformation initiatives have generated substantial and structural changes across various areas, including operations management, passenger services, security systems, and air traffic control.

Particularly in the post-COVID-19 period, contactless processing systems, biometric verification technologies, and digital passenger management applications have become increasingly widespread in order to minimize health risks and provide greater flexibility throughout the travel process. During this transition, 5G technology has been regarded

as the core communication infrastructure of smart airport ecosystems due to its massive connectivity capacity and ultra-low latency capabilities.

The primary objectives of digital transformation in aviation can be summarized as follows;

- Enhancing operational efficiency,
- Reducing operational and capital expenditures,
- Improving cyber and physical security,
- Strengthening seamless end-to-end passenger experience,
- Enhancing real-time data management capabilities.

Within digital transformation processes, big data analytics occupies a central role. Large-scale operational data generated in real time at airports are extensively utilized in critical areas such as flight planning, passenger flow management, security analysis, commercial planning, and intelligent energy management systems.

In addition, artificial intelligence-supported analytical systems and Digital Twin technologies enable airports to predict operational bottlenecks and technical failures in advance through predictive maintenance approaches while dynamically optimizing resource allocation and operational planning (mustafa, 2025). These capabilities are particularly important for maintaining operational sustainability and safety in large international hubs with high passenger volumes, such as Istanbul Airport, Heathrow Airport, and Amsterdam Airport Schiphol.

Nevertheless, the existing literature indicates that a considerable proportion of studies on digital transformation in aviation primarily focus on technology adoption, cybersecurity perspectives, and system infrastructures. Empirical and data-driven studies examining the economic impacts of IoT, artificial intelligence, and big data integration on operational performance indicators—such as aircraft turnaround times, capacity utilization, and profitability—remain relatively limited. Therefore, there is a continuing need for more comprehensive and quantitative research investigating the concrete effects of digital transformation on operational efficiency within the aviation sector.

#### **2.4. Research Gap**

Recent years have witnessed a significant increase in studies focusing on 5G technologies and smart airport systems within the aviation sector. A review of the existing literature indicates that current research primarily concentrates on 5G network infrastructures, wireless communication systems, IoT integration, cybersecurity

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vulnerabilities, and technical architectural designs. In particular, engineering- and telecommunications-oriented studies emphasize the technical advantages of 5G technology, including high data transmission capacity, ultra-low latency, network slicing capabilities, and enhanced connectivity performance.

Despite these advancements, one of the most critical limitations in the literature is the lack of empirical studies examining the operational performance impacts of 5G-based smart airport systems. Existing studies predominantly rely on theoretical models, simulation-based analyses, and conceptual frameworks, while quantitative studies supported by real operational data remain limited. In particular, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding the effects of 5G technologies on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as flight delays, turnaround time, passenger processing time, baggage handling performance, and operational coordination efficiency.

Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that smart airport applications are generally examined from the perspectives of technology adoption and passenger experience. However, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the direct impact of digitalization on operational efficiency within airport processes. More specifically, data-driven analyses evaluating the economic contributions of 5G-supported digital infrastructures, operational cost reductions, and return on investment (ROI) in airport operations remain underdeveloped.

Another significant limitation is the geographical concentration of existing studies. Most research focuses on technologically advanced Western countries and the Asia-Pacific region (Nurlanuly, 2026). Studies investigating the digital transformation processes of airports in developing countries or strategically important transit hubs, such as Türkiye, remain scarce. Although research focusing on specific cases such as İstanbul Airport has recently increased, comprehensive studies addressing the integrated implementation of 5G-based smart airport systems are still highly limited (Filiz Mizrak, 2024). This situation reveals an important geographical and sectoral gap in the literature.

In addition, a lack of interdisciplinary perspective is evident in the current body of research. Existing studies are predominantly approached from engineering, telecommunications, and information systems perspectives, whereas the role of organizational mechanisms, institutional governance practices, and managerial structures in influencing technology integration and operational performance has not been sufficiently examined. Therefore, further studies evaluating the impact of 5G

technologies on aviation operations from both managerial and operational efficiency perspectives are needed.

Accordingly, this study aims to address these gaps in the literature by examining the operational efficiency impacts of 5G-based smart airport systems through real operational indicators, secondary data analysis, digital aviation reports, and KPI-based performance measurements. In this respect, the study seeks to contribute directly to the digital transformation literature in aviation from an operational performance perspective.

### **3. Methodology**

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#### **4. Findings**

This section presents the findings obtained through the systematic literature review and the examined case studies regarding the effects of 5G technology and smart airport systems on operational efficiency, passenger experience, and environmental sustainability. The analyzed studies indicate that 5G-supported digital infrastructures have created significant transformations in airport operations. In particular, real-time data communication, IoT integration, artificial intelligence-supported automation systems, and biometric applications have been found to contribute to the acceleration of operational processes, reduction of operational costs, and improvement of passenger experience.

Findings in the literature demonstrate that the high connectivity capacity and low latency offered by 5G technology considerably strengthen digital coordination within airport operations. Owing to 5G infrastructures capable of supporting nearly one million connected devices per square kilometer, smart airport systems are becoming increasingly integrated and autonomous. Existing studies emphasize that reducing application latency to approximately 42.9 milliseconds provides a critical advantage for real-time operational management (Giannopoulou, 2026).

The findings related to airside operations reveal that 5G-supported unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and intelligent sensor systems provide substantial time savings in runway inspection processes. Compared with traditional manual inspection procedures, digital inspection systems are reported to reduce operational durations by approximately 60%. Similarly, autonomous ground service vehicles and RFID-based baggage tracking systems have been shown to optimize operational processes by decreasing labor costs by nearly 25% and reducing baggage handling errors by up to 66%.

From the perspective of operational costs, airports utilizing private 5G network infrastructures and predictive maintenance systems demonstrate significant reductions

in operational expenditures (OPEX). Studies in the literature indicate that digital maintenance systems and real-time data analytics applications reduce equipment downtime while improving operational sustainability. In particular, IoT-based monitoring systems enable technical failures to be detected in advance, thereby contributing to more effective maintenance management processes.

Research findings also show that 5G-supported biometric verification systems and artificial intelligence applications have substantial effects on passenger experience. Facial recognition systems, smart checkpoints, and digital boarding applications are reported to reduce bottlenecks within terminal operations. Studies included in the literature demonstrate that biometric transition systems significantly decrease waiting times by accelerating security screening and boarding procedures.

Case studies conducted at Istanbul Airport and Dubai International Airport indicate that smart passenger management systems provide approximately 30% time savings during boarding processes while reducing waiting times at security checkpoints by nearly 40%. These findings clearly illustrate the direct impact of digital airport applications on operational flow.

Similarly, field tests involving 5G-supported artificial intelligence service robots and thermal camera systems implemented at Athens International Airport reported high levels of system reliability. It was also observed that passengers demonstrated a strong sense of trust toward digital systems and that these applications made significant contributions to contactless service processes .

The findings concerning passenger experience are not limited solely to increases in operational speed. The literature further suggests that the acceleration of terminal processes allows passengers to spend more time in commercial areas within airports. This situation contributes to increased spending in retail and food-and-beverage areas, thereby supporting the growth of non-aeronautical revenues.

From the perspective of environmental sustainability, 5G-supported smart airport infrastructures provide notable advantages in energy management processes. Through IoT-based intelligent energy systems, passenger density, weather conditions, and energy consumption data within terminals can be analyzed in real time, enabling the use of dynamic climate control and smart lighting systems. These applications are reported to significantly reduce energy consumption in large-scale airports.

The literature particularly emphasizes the positive effects of smart LED systems and HVAC infrastructures on energy efficiency. In the case of Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, the transition to smart energy management systems has reportedly generated considerable energy savings. Likewise, the integration of solar energy systems at Cochin International Airport has contributed to the reduction of carbon emissions and provided important gains in terms of sustainable airport management.

Overall, the research findings indicate that 5G-based smart airport systems:

- improve operational efficiency,
- support cost optimization,
- enhance passenger experience,
- increase energy efficiency, and
- contribute to sustainable airport management.

Nevertheless, the literature also emphasizes that cybersecurity risks, high infrastructure investment costs, and the absence of international standards continue to represent significant challenges for the widespread implementation of these technologies.

## 5. Conclusion

The integration of 5G technologies and smart airport systems within the aviation industry represents not only the digitalization of operational processes but also a structural transformation within the framework of the “Airport 4.0” approach. The academic studies and sectoral findings examined in this research demonstrate that 5G-supported digital infrastructures have significant effects on operational efficiency, passenger experience, and environmental sustainability.

The findings in the literature reveal that the ultra-low latency, high data transmission capacity, and extensive device connectivity provided by 5G technology considerably strengthen real-time data communication in airport operations. In particular, IoT-based smart systems, Digital Twin technologies, predictive maintenance applications, and artificial intelligence-supported operational management systems contribute to (Igor, 2024):

- the optimization of aircraft turnaround times,
- the enhancement of operational coordination,
- the more efficient management of maintenance processes, and
- the reduction of operational costs.

The research findings further indicate that biometric verification systems and artificial intelligence-supported passenger management applications improve efficiency within terminal operations. Smart transition systems and digital boarding applications, in particular, reduce passenger waiting times while accelerating operational flow within terminals. In addition, the literature emphasizes that digital airport applications positively influence non-aeronautical revenues.

From the perspective of environmental sustainability, the findings suggest that 5G-supported IoT infrastructures optimize energy management processes. Through intelligent energy systems and dynamic climate control applications, energy consumption and carbon emissions in large-scale airports can be significantly reduced. This demonstrates the strategic importance of digital airport systems in achieving sustainable aviation objectives.

Nevertheless, the research findings also indicate that 5G-based smart airport systems introduce several important risk areas. High infrastructure investment costs, data security concerns, cybersecurity threats, and the lack of international standards are among the principal challenges affecting digital transformation processes. Furthermore, the technical compatibility of 5G infrastructures with aviation communication systems remains an important issue highlighted in the literature.

The majority of the studies examined within the scope of this research primarily focus on technical infrastructure and communication systems, while empirical studies investigating operational performance through real-world operational data remain relatively limited. In this regard, the present study contributes to the digital transformation literature in aviation by evaluating 5G-based smart airport systems from the perspective of operational efficiency.

In conclusion, 5G-supported smart airport systems are regarded as a strategic transformation tool for:

- increasing operational efficiency,
- improving passenger experience,
- achieving cost optimization, and
- supporting sustainable airport management.

However, for this transformation process to be sustained successfully, technological infrastructure investments must be addressed together with security measures, standardization processes, and effective managerial coordination mechanisms.

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Based on the findings of the research, several strategic recommendations have been developed for aviation authorities, airport operators, and industry stakeholders.

First, expanding private 5G network infrastructures and strengthening IoT-based operational systems at airports are considered essential for improving operational efficiency. In particular, the development of real-time data communication infrastructures would contribute to more effective operational coordination processes. Second, cybersecurity infrastructures should be reinforced in order to ensure the secure continuation of digital transformation processes at airports. In this context:

- improving data security standards,
- establishing real-time threat monitoring systems, and
- expanding digital risk management practices

are considered highly important. In addition, the implementation of “Zero Trust” architectures within network security processes may contribute significantly to the protection of digital airport infrastructures.

Furthermore, airport digitalization investments should be carried out within the framework of long-term strategic planning. Increasing investments in areas such as:

- energy efficiency systems,
- Digital Twin technologies,
- predictive maintenance applications, and
- artificial intelligence-supported operational management systems

is particularly important for ensuring operational sustainability.

Additionally, data sharing among airport operators, airline companies, ground handling organizations, and public institutions should be strengthened. In this regard, the wider implementation of Airport Collaborative Decision Making (A-CDM) platforms would contribute to more coordinated operational processes.

Future studies are recommended to focus on:

- field studies utilizing real-time operational data,
- long-term performance analyses,
- empirical comparisons among different countries and airports, and

- the effects of artificial intelligence and 6G technologies within the aviation industry.

In particular, increasing academic studies on smart airport applications in Türkiye would contribute to addressing regional research gaps in the existing literature.

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