Investigating Passenger Behaviour: A Model for Measuring Low Cost Carriers Service Quality

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Investigating Passenger Satisfaction: A Model for Measuring Service Quality of Low Cost Carriers

D'Silva, J.

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By

JACINTA DSILVA

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2015

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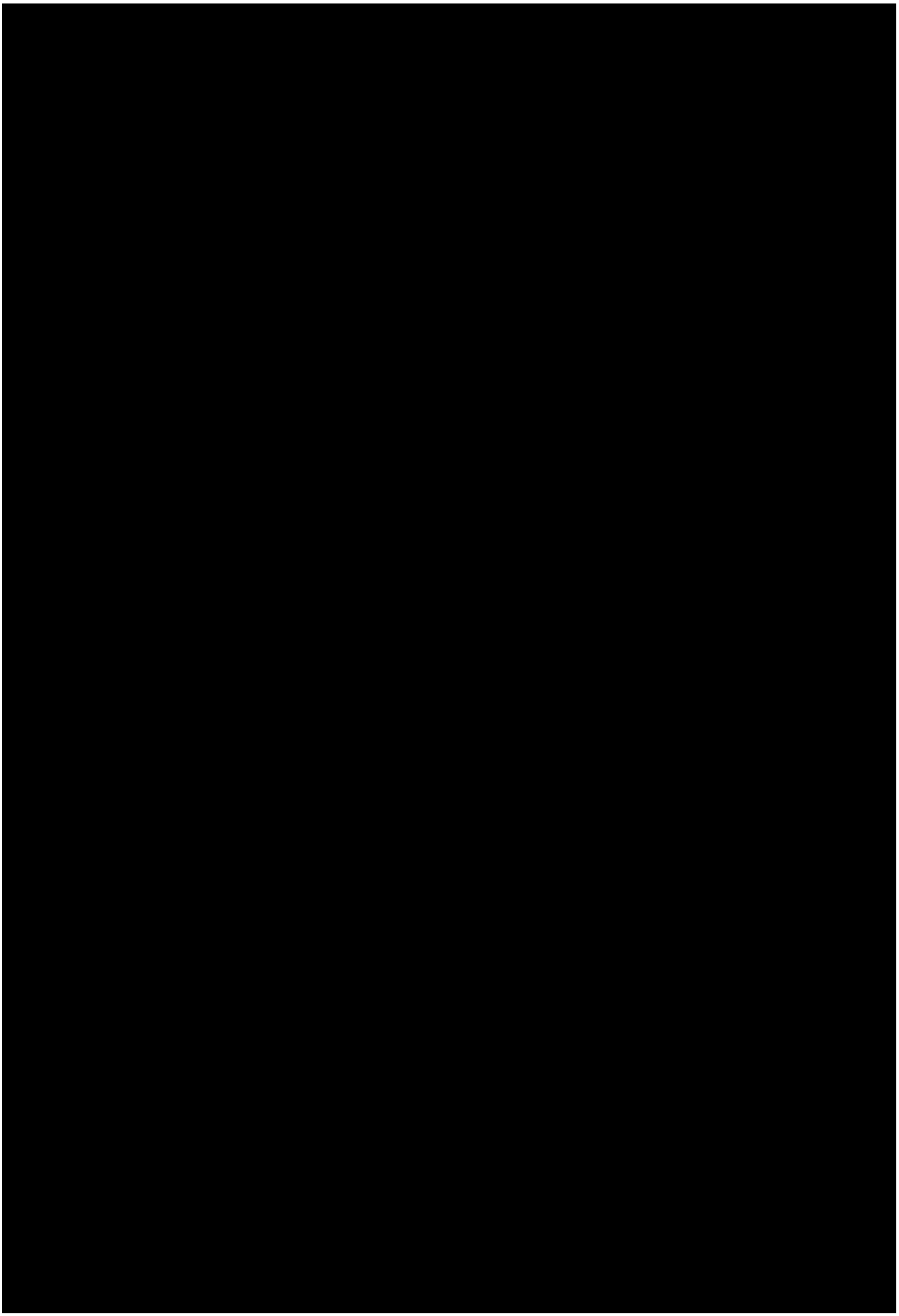
A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy



- **Low Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist**

- **Applicant Details**

Name JACINTA D'SILVA	E-mail JACINTADSILVA@YAHOO.COM
Department	Date JANUARY 27, 2011
Course PHD	Title of Project 'Investigating Consumer Decision Making of Economy Airline Travellers: Testing the SERVQUAL Model'

- **Project Details**

The objectives of the research are:

- To investigate the consumer decision making process of consumers who use low cost (budget) airlines
- Evaluate the perception of consumers who use low cost airlines.
- To analyze the marketing strategies used by low cost airlines, and do they take into account any research about consumer decision making
- To use SERVQUAL model of service quality framework in understanding various aspects including consumer attitude towards a low cost airline

Research Design:

- This research will include both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups will be the primary methods of collecting data for this study. Secondary data will be collected before primary research

Research Methodology:

- A survey based research will be conducted participants that have used low cost airlines will be invited to fill in research questionnaire, questions pertaining to customer choice, income group, life style, preferences will be asked
- The research will also aim to understand perception of the traveler and why he/she prefers low cost airlines
- A qualitative research approach will be the first primary method used. In-depth interviews and focus group techniques will be used as part of this research method

- **Participants in your research**

• Will the project involve human participants?	**Yes**	No

If you answered **Yes** to this questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Risk to Participants**

• Will the project involve human patients/clients, health professionals, and/or patient (client) data and/or health professional data?	Yes	No
• Will any invasive physical procedure, including collecting tissue or other samples, be used in the research?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk of physical discomfort to those taking part?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk of psychological or emotional distress to those taking part?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk of challenging the deeply held beliefs of those taking part?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk that previous, current or proposed criminal or illegal acts will be revealed by those taking part?	Yes	No
• Will the project involve giving any form of professional, medical or legal advice, either directly or indirectly to those taking part?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Risk to Researcher**

• Will this project put you or others at risk of physical harm, injury or death?	Yes	No
• Will project put you or others at risk of abduction, physical, mental or sexual abuse?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve participating in acts that may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve observing acts which may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve reading about, listening to or viewing materials that may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve you disclosing personal data to the participants other than your name and EAC as your contact and e-mail address?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve you in unsupervised private discussion with people who are not already known to you?	Yes	No
• Will this project potentially place you in the situation where you may receive unwelcome media attention?	Yes	No
• Could the topic or results of this project be seen as illegal or attract the attention of the security services or other agencies?	Yes	No
• Could the topic or results of this project be viewed as controversial by anyone?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this is **not** a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Informed Consent of the Participant**

• Are any of the participants under the age of 18?	Yes	No
• Are any of the participants unable mentally or physically to give consent?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to observe the activities of individuals or groups without their knowledge and/or informed consent from each participant (or from his or her parent or guardian)?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Participant Confidentiality and Data Protection**

• Will the project involve collecting data and information from human participants who will be identifiable in the final report?	Yes	No
• Will information not already in the public domain about specific individuals or institutions be identifiable through data published or otherwise made available?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to record, photograph or film individuals or groups without their knowledge or informed consent?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to use the confidential information, knowledge or trade secrets gathered for any purpose other than this research project?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project: Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Gatekeeper Risk**

• Will this project involve collecting data outside EAC buildings?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to collect data in shopping centres or other public places?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to gather data within nurseries, schools or colleges?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to gather data within healthcare premises?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this is **not** a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Other Ethical Issues**

• Is there any other risk or issue not covered above that may pose a risk to you or any of the participants?	Yes	No
• Will any activity associated with this project put you or the participants at an ethical, moral or legal risk?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Principal Investigator Certification**

If you answered **No** to **all** of the above questions, then you have described a low risk project. Please complete the following declaration to certify your project and keep a copy for your record as you may be asked for this at any time.

- **Agreed restrictions to project to allow Principal Investigator Certification**

Please identify any restrictions to the project, agreed with your Supervisor or the Dean of Postgraduate Studies to allow you to sign the Principal Investigator Certification declaration.

Participant Information Leaflet attached. Informed Consent Forms attached.

- **Principal Investigator's Declaration**

Please ensure that you:

- Tick all the boxes below and sign this checklist.
- Students must get their Supervisor to countersign this declaration.

I believe that this project **does not require research ethics approval**. I have completed the checklist and kept a copy for my own records. I realise I may be asked to provide a copy of this checklist at any time.	√
I confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.	√
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request a new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	√

- **Signatures**

If you submit this checklist and any attachments by e-mail, you should type your name in the signature space. An email attachment sent from your EAC inbox will be assumed to have been signed electronically.

- **Principal Investigator**

Signed **Jacinta D'Silva** (Principal Investigator or Student)

Date 27/1 2011

Students storing this checklist electronically must append to it an email from your Supervisor confirming that they are prepared to make the declaration above and to countersign this checklist. This-email will be taken as an electronic countersignature.

- **Student's Supervisor**

Countersigned **Dr. Ian Michael** (Supervisor)

Date 1/2/2011

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Declaration

This doctoral thesis is entirely my own work and no part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification other than for this part-examination for the PhD degree at Faculty of Business, Coventry University, United Kingdom. The copyright of this thesis rests with the author, although quotations from it are permitted, provided full acknowledgement is made. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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Jacinta D'Silva

October 2015

Abstract

Service quality is an integral part of the product/service offering provided to a customer. Along with continuously identifying customer expectations and perceptions about service quality, it is imperative for service providers to also investigate whether the service quality increases customer satisfaction and their behavioural intentions. This PhD study theoretically contributes by evaluating one comprehensive service quality model, SERVQUAL designed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), for its potential applicability. The study further contributes by identifying a gap in the literature that the original SERVQUAL model does not entirely represent LCC service quality therefore, LCCSQUAL is proposed: a revised conceptual model with twenty-five variables that reflect the industry-specific attributes of LCC services in the Middle East.

LCCs became a common feature in the West after the appearance of Southwest airline in 1971, however in the Middle East; LCCs are a relatively new phenomenon. LCCs are growing rapidly due to the current development of the aviation industry, deregulation and open skies policies in many parts of the Middle East. Most research to date has focused on LCCs in Western or Asian culture, whereas limited research has been conducted in the Middle East region, hence, this study will focus on highlighting the historical development of the Middle East's aviation industry and the phenomenal growth of the region's LCCs. This research is first of its kind in the Middle East to be conducted on the LCC service quality as well as in a new cultural background and therefore, it is important to consider that passengers' are influenced by their culture while making decisions, however; the original SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. in (1985) does not include culture as one of the influences in consumer. This PhD study, therefore, bridges another gap in the knowledge by testing the LCCSQUAL in Middle Eastern culture.

This PhD followed a multi methodology using both inductive and deductive approaches consisting of qualitative (interviews and a focus group discussion) and quantitative (a self-administered survey questionnaire) methods at Dubai International airport, which has a dedicated LCC terminal. A total of 540 questionnaires was distributed; however,

only 516 were finally employed for quantitative analysis. For qualitative analysis, nine in-depth interviews with senior executives of LCC airlines and seven LCC passenger interviews was conducted along with one focus group interview with seven Emirati ladies, first time LCC travellers. Content analysis and NVivo 10 were utilised for qualitative findings and descriptive analysis, Spearman's rank correlation, factor analysis and cross tabulation were employed to examine the quantitative results. Comparing the results of both methodologies indicated that, passengers experienced wider gaps in the tangibility, reliability and responsiveness dimensions of LCC service quality in the Middle East.

The findings of the study concluded that LCC passengers have higher expectations of the LCC services due to receiving luxury services for a long time in the Middle East region. The revised model; LCCSQUAL was tested in the Middle Eastern culture with additional variables and is recommended to be further developed to be culture and country specific. Factor analysis results also highlighted that there are gaps between the expectations and perceptions of the passengers travelling with LCC. This study concludes with several recommendations to LCC management, such as, on-time performance, well-trained staff and crew members, providing clear information to the passengers and providing quality services with low fares.

Keywords: Service, quality, Customer Satisfaction, Gap analysis, SERVQUAL Model, Low Cost Airlines, Aviation Industry, Middle East.

Acknowledgements

There is an old saying: “A single hand cannot tie a bundle”.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge those people you have made it possible for me to succeed in this endeavour. Primarily, I thank the almighty for giving me the courage to be determined throughout this period. Next, my heartfelt thanks go out to a number of individuals without whom it would not have been possible for me to complete this task.

A special thanks to My Director of Studies, Prof. Ian Michael, who has been supportive throughout by tirelessly providing guidance and direction to me in completing the process with success. I am also grateful to my Co-Supervisor Dr. Yang Dai, Department of Aviation, Coventry University, who provided me with useful insights, constructive comments and support.

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This study would not have been possible without the support of all the participants of in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and the senior-executives of Low Cost Carriers of Middle East and Asia. Mr. Mohammed of Qatar Airways for his expertise and knowledge about the Middle East Aviation Industry.

I am forever indebted to my beloved husband Agnel, my children Jenessa and Aaron for their unconditional inspiration, their affection and love towards me. My father and mother-in- law and all my family members for being a source of inspiration.

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List of Abbreviations

1. LCC – Low Cost Carrier
2. FSC – Full Service Carrier
3. LCCSQUAL – Low Cost Carrier Service Quality
4. GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council
5. MENA – Middle East and North Africa Region
6. ICAO – International Civil Aviation Authority
7. ASKs – Available Seat-Kilometres
8. PLFs – Passenger Load Factors
9. ATAG – Ait Transport Action Group
10. IATA – International Air Transport Association
11. CAA – Civil Aeronautics Authority

CHAPTER ONE:

Research Overview

1.1. Introduction

Today's business environment is much more turbulent than in the past centuries, including the service industry. It is widely recognised that, in recent times, marketers have become more dynamic than before, with the consumer having more control over the strategic decisions made by companies (Narteh, 2013). It is the organisation's responsibility to develop a culture where business ethics are followed, service value is provided and quality services are offered to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction (Khan, 2010).

It is essential to understand dynamic consumer behaviour, to achieve customer satisfaction. Nowadays, fulfilling customer requirements is considered a central business strategy (Carlson and O'Cass, 2011). Studying consumer behaviour is said to be an applied discipline that can be analysed at two different levels: i.e. the micro perspective, which involves understanding consumers to help an organisation accomplish its objectives; and at the macro or societal perspective, at which consumers can collectively influence economic and social conditions within an entire society (Perner, 2010; Hawkins, 2001).

It is critical for organisations to identify consumer behaviour in the market, since consumers are the focal point of all marketing functions. According to Solomon (1996), "the science of consumer behaviour is defined as the study of individuals, groups or organisations, and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products,

services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs, and the impact of these processes on consumers, organisations and society". It is evident that consumer behaviour affects every decision that managers take in an organisation, whether it is a manufacturing company producing new products, or a service provider providing services, such as a hotel or airline service, or major decisions such as opening new branches in a different country, flying to new routes or identifying unexplored markets (Avery and Norton, 2014).

Consumers generally act and react based on their perceptions rather than objective reality. However, what is more important is whether they are objective or subjective in their actions they take based on their perceptions. Consumers are influenced by many stimuli, including attitudes, perceptions, social status, culture, family life cycle, and external influences like quality of services, including customer service, comfort, reliability and brand positioning of product and services (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008), different variables make it challenging to understand consumer behaviour. Consequently, although this area has already been explored by many researchers such as (Oliver 2014; Hawkins et al. 2010; and Engel et al. 1995), it is still difficult to identify what goes on within the black box [consumer's mind] while deciding to buy a product or service (Engel et al. 1995).

The aviation industry is becoming increasingly dynamic, with recent developments, such as deregulation and open sky policies (Boeing report, 2013), leading to the entry of new airlines to serve a wider range of countries and smaller cities. A robust competitive environment has kindled the growth of the aviation industry, which has led to liberalised markets across the world (D'Silva et al. 2014). In particular, the new

environment has encouraged the establishment, growth and success of Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) worldwide. According to Ariffin et al. (2010), before the entry of LCCs, the industry was monopolised by Full Service Carriers (FSCs). Since then, however, LCCs have changed the competitive dynamics of the short-haul market, revolutionising the way business is conducted in the aviation sector by adopting a fresh approach on both strategic and operational issues. According to O'Connell (2007), compared to network airlines, LCCs universal principle of simplicity have allowed them to achieve substantial cost advantages, which have been passed on to the consumer in the form of lower fares.

Service quality conditions influence a firm's competitive advantage by affecting their ability to retain customer support, market share and, ultimately, profitability (Park et al. 2004). To provide good service to their customers, companies should understand their needs and expectations. In today's competitive marketplace, it is quite common to see marketers committed to exceed customers' expectations by providing a high quality service to satisfy their needs. In the aviation industry, delivering high quality service has become a basic requirement (Baker, 2013).

More specifically, O'Connell and Williams (2005) explored how LCCs have had a significant impact on the world's domestic passenger market, which was previously dominated by FSCs. LCCs have become profitable by providing quality services with a reasonable pricing strategy i.e. even though LCCs focus on lowering costs; passengers' expect an assured level of quality services to be provided. Therefore, an airline needs to understand passenger preferences and satisfaction in order to deliver a better service (Aksoy et al. 2003). LCCs have attempted to target the market using

competitive strategies of low cost but good quality service that make passengers satisfied with the offers provided to them (Kim and Lee, 2011).

Service quality is an integral part of a product offering that is provided to a customer. Hence, it is imperative for service providers to investigate along with identifying expectations and experiences of customers about service quality (Baker, 2013). If the service leads to or exceeds satisfaction, intentions to buy and re-buy as well as positive word-of-mouth about the brand have higher probabilities (D'Silva and Michael, 2011). The significance of the service quality concept has inspired researchers, and scholars address this issue and to investigate it further across different service sectors and cultural settings (Khan, 2010; Carlson and O'Cass, 2011; Al Bassam, 2013). As a result, service quality has become an established area in the marketing literature throughout the past two decades (Sureshchandar et al. 2002).

Currently, there are a number of key instruments available for measuring service quality performance of which, the SERVQUAL model has been the major generic model used to measure and manage service quality (Buttle, 1996; Park et al. 2005; Ladhari, 2010). The SERVQUAL model utilises five dimensions and twenty-two variables; to identify the gaps between the perception of the service provider compared to the expectations and experiences of the customer (Parasuraman et al. 1985). However, despite its wide use, a number of theoretical, operational, conceptual and empirical criticisms of the measurement model have been identified (Ladhari, 2008).

The validity of the SERVQUAL model as a generic instrument for measuring service quality across various service sectors is questionable. It is also argued that a

fundamental revision of the SERVQUAL items is inadequate for measuring service quality across different service settings (Buttle, 1996; Ladhari 2008). As a result, scholars suggest that developing industry-specific scales for measuring service quality would be more appropriate than a generic scale (Dabholkar et al. 1996; Ladhari, 2010). Consequently, a number of industry-specific instruments have been developed in recent years in different service settings and various countries and cultural backgrounds, which have contributed to the development of a strong research foundation (Ladhari, 2009; Narteh, 2013).

It is well known that culture shapes consumer behaviour (Nayeem, 2012) however, despite the recognition of its pivotal role; relatively limited research has been conducted in the domain of consumer behaviour and marketing. In addition, published research in marketing that has incorporated data collected outside the United States has been limited (Winer, 1986; Maheswaran and Shavitt, 2014).

This PhD research will investigate the historical developments of the aviation industry, particularly the significant growth of LCCs in the Middle East region, and investigate LCC service quality by developing a revised SERVQUAL model which is based on the expectations and perceptions of LCC passengers regarding LCC service quality as suggested by Ladhari 2008; Narteh 2013 as well as the revised SERVQUAL model will be tested in a new cultural background (Maheswaran and Shavitt, 2014) as very limited research has been carried in the Middle East on LCC service quality.

1.2. Research questions:

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the key service quality determinants of customer perceived service quality and customer satisfaction of LCCs in a new cultural background, i.e. in the Middle East?
2. Which LCC service quality dimensions are the best predictors of overall perceived service quality in the Middle East?
3. Which service quality model ensures the appropriate measurement of LCC service quality in the Middle East since it is culturally different?
4. Have demographic changes such as increased expatriate population influenced the growth of LCCs in the Middle East region?

1.3. Aims of the research:

The main aim of this PhD research study is to contribute in reducing the research gaps by providing a better understanding of the way customers evaluate services provided by LCCs in Arab cultural setting. This will be done by proposing a comprehensive industry specific revised model that supports to analyse the major antecedents of LCC service quality. The SERVQUAL model is utilised as a theoretical background, and the proposed model is based on a reformulation of the generic dimensions and variables of the conceptual SERVQUAL model into an industry-specific model. Moreover, the revised model can be implemented as a frame of reference for measuring service quality from a passenger's perspective in the specific industry context of LCC services.

1.4. Study Objectives:

1. To explore the key determinants of service quality in the Low Cost Carrier (LCC) in the Middle East region;
2. To propose a conceptual model for service quality of LCC services by identifying its key antecedents in a new cultural setting;
3. To conduct pragmatic primary research to determine the interrelationships between the expectations and perceptions LCC passengers have based on the industry specific proposed model;
4. To construct the conceptual linkages between constructs of service quality and customer satisfaction;
5. To recommend service quality dimensions influencing overall LCC service quality, leading to customer satisfaction;
6. To evaluate the impact of changes in the passenger demographic factors on the growth of LCCs.

1.5. Methods and Methodology

To effectively investigate the proposed research questions and the objectives, this PhD study used inductive-deductive method. The main aim of the field study is to identify the views of end users; i.e. passengers, therefore, both qualitative and quantitative, i.e. a multi methodology was used. Both will be explained in detail later in the research methodology chapter. The qualitative research was conducted by interviewing passengers travelling with LCC in the Middle East, senior-executives of LCCs in the Middle East as well as a focus group with Emirati [Arab] passengers. The quantitative

research was carried thereafter by a survey conducted with a structured-self-administered questionnaire adapted from the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al. 1988) and modified to investigate the LCC service quality. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot questionnaire was administered, and minor changes were made to the final questionnaire.

The multi methodology supported the development of a comprehensive model to evaluate industry specific LCC service quality in a new cultural setting. The revised LCC service quality model was named LOW COST CARRIER SERVICE QUALITY 'LCCSQUAL' since it is industry specific. While the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance were maintained in the proposed LCCSQUAL model, the variables were changed to industry specific measurement of LCC service quality.

The survey was self-administered by the researcher for the period of one week at Dubai International Airport, Terminal 2, a dedicated terminal for LCC in the UAE. After careful examination of the completed questionnaires, some were eliminated due to incomplete information, leaving 516 questionnaires for further data analysis from a total of 540 questionnaires collected at the waiting lounge of the Terminal 2, Dubai International Airport.

SPSS (Statistical Programme for Social Sciences) software was utilised to analyse the quantitative data, using descriptive analysis, Spearman's Rank Correlation, the Chi square test, factor analysis, and Cross-Tabulation. Finally, based on the statistical analysis, the data were interpreted to extract findings about expectations and

perceptions based on the newly developed variables, as well as the demographic information of LCC passengers.

The qualitative research methodology was conducted by administering in-depth interviews with passengers travelling on LCCs. Some of the respondents were approached while they were travelling aboard on LCC within the Middle East region, and other interviews were conducted using the researcher's friends, colleagues and relatives regularly travelling with LCC. In-depth interviews were further conducted with five senior executives of LCC from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region and four from Asian LCCs. An industry expert was as well interviewed for his immense knowledge about the growth and development of the airline industry in the MENA region and LCCs in particular.

The senior executives were approached during two different business conferences one in Singapore, and the other held in the UAE, in order to investigate senior management's perceptions about the service quality their carriers were providing to their passengers. One focus group with seven Emirati (Local ladies from the UAE) passengers were interviewed about their experience while travelling on LCC from UAE to another Middle East country. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim; content analysis and computer-assisted qualitative software NVivo 10 was employed in order to extract the key findings from the passenger, focus group and senior executive interviews.

1.6. Contribution to the research body:

The study will contribute in various ways to the existing body of knowledge in the field of marketing and service quality. The major areas of contribution are as follows:

- From a theoretical perspective, the study examines various service quality models before remodelling the SERVQUAL model to develop an industry-specific LCC service quality model in a new cultural background, i.e. in the Middle East region;
- To gain better knowledge of the commitment LCCs should have towards satisfying their passengers and increase customer satisfaction as well as gain competitive advantage.
- The study also examines passenger expectations relating to the service quality of LCCs, and their perceptions/experiences of the service received to evaluate service gaps, if any.
- The study majorly contributes by proposing and validating the LCCSQUAL; a revised model based on the SERVQUAL model in the aviation industry, specifically LCCs in the Middle East market a new cultural background, which has distinct service related features from those in other countries as well as having a different culture. This study will be first of its kind testing an industry specific revised SERVQUAL model in measuring the LCC service quality. The SERVQUAL model has not yet been tested in this market sufficiently. Therefore, it was imperative to revise the model to suit the industry-specific requirements to identify the benefits of improving the service quality levels of LCCs.

- This study uses a multi qualitative and quantitative approach which is the triangulation method of scientific research. The in-depth interviews conducted with senior LCC executives during the business conference will be considered unique and a great contribution to enrich the data, since this approach (data collection method) has not been used before by any research conducted in the MENA region.
- Finally, this PhD study implemented a recently designed scale development procedure suggested by Rossiter (2002) named C-OAR-SE.

1.7. The structure of the thesis:

This PHD dissertation outlines the importance of Low Cost Carriers service quality to enhance customer satisfaction and to increase positive behavioural intentions. Also highlighting the rapid developments experienced in the aviation industry worldwide, specifically in the Middle East. The problem identification phase followed a conceptual framework with support from the theory and literature to test empirical and conceptual validation. The overall outline of the thesis is also discussed in this section. The thesis consists of five chapters.

Chapter one: the **research overview** chapter explores the research questions, aims and objectives of the study, along with a brief discussion on the methods and methodology utilised for this PhD research, followed by the theoretical contribution it suggested to existing knowledge. It ends with an overview of all the subsequent chapters.

Chapter two: **literature review** focuses on the literature defining consumers and **consumer behaviour**. The chapter also discusses marketing orientation in order to contribute to the discussion about how important it is to identify the needs and wants of consumers to improve the profitability of any organisation. Furthermore, the chapter also discusses customer satisfaction to evaluate the relationship between behavioural intention and satisfaction of the customers.

The chapter further discusses importance of **service quality** and examines the relationship between the constructs involved, service quality models, particularly the SERVQUAL model and its development. The Grönroos model, the SERVPERF model and other multidimensional service quality models are discussed to prove that, SERVQUAL is the most appropriate model to be adapted and modified to suit the industry specific requirement in this PhD study.

It is also very important to discuss the development in the aviation industry in the Middle East therefore, this part will demonstrate the importance of the aviation industry in terms of its contribution to the GDP of many countries, and its development worldwide. The chapter mainly focuses on the development of the aviation industry across the world and in the Middle East region as well as the importance of service quality in the airline industry. This chapter also highlights the historical picture of the aviation industry in the Middle East region which is rapidly growing.

The next part of the literature review chapter will focus on the study area i.e. **Low Cost Carriers** which begins with defining Low Cost Carriers and further discusses

the difference between Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) and Full Service Carriers (FSCs). It provides a historical background of LCCs, growth and developments of LCCs worldwide and in the Middle East which is one of the major focuses of this study. Since there are certain preconceptions about LCCs and its service quality, this chapter further discusses the relevance to LCCs service quality and the importance of adapting the SERVQUAL model.

Chapter three**: research methodology** covers the fundamental philosophy of research and the purposes for which research is conducted and also describes social science research. The chapter then proceeds to identify the research problem, research questions and objectives. The chapter further discusses the research approach i.e. the positivist and interpretative paradigm as well as the deductive and inductive approach. The chapter also explains the role of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and how it has been utilised in the study.

A key discussion in this chapter is **triangulation**, i.e. the use of a multi methodology, and all the relevant issues. This chapter also includes the rationale for applying the multi methodology approach, as well as sampling, response rates, research instruments, survey data, interview techniques and the analytical tools applied to the quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter six also focuses on the data collection phase, the questionnaire and field work as well as the interview process conducted at aviation related conferences. The chapter further discusses the secondary data collection i.e. extensive literature review completed in the previous chapters.

The last section of the chapter discusses the methods used to interpret the data, including the statistical interpretation of the data. These methods were applied to test the overall measurement to verify the overall fit to the data and the theory. The key tests conducted were descriptive analysis, Spearman's rank correlation method, Chi-square test and cross-tabulation. This chapter as well covers the qualitative data analysis done with the support of content analysis and NVivo 10 software.

Chapter four: **Research Findings** consolidate the results derived from the quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It synthesises the data from in-depth interviews with individual passengers and senior-executives as well as the focus-group discussion with seven Emirati passengers' along with two sections of the questionnaire and some of the important demographic findings, before discussing the research implications for researchers and practitioners. This chapter importantly discusses the contribution to knowledge by proposing an industry specific model 'LCCSQUAL' and how it closes the gap in the research of LCC service quality in the Middle East.

Chapter five: **Discussion and** C**onclusion**: focuses on the discussion of key findings in order to achieve a final conclusion, with linkage to the theoretical model. It provides a final methodological reflection and offers recommendations to management for further consideration. The major limitations faced by the researcher during the research period. It then consolidates the answers to the research questions and objectives, summarises the overall study before drawing appropriate conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The literature review is designed to explore the theoretical foundations underpinning consumer commitment and its relationship to the specific areas discussed in the study. It also aims to explore the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction and demonstrate the importance of the expectations and perceptions of passengers of Low Cost Carriers (LCCs).

The aim of this chapter is:

- To review the relevant theories and supporting arguments about consumer behaviour, and create theoretical paradigm;
- To review the supporting evidence that provides more insights relevant to this study.

A review of the relevant literature is an essential feature of any academic research because an effective review creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, identifies areas where a plethora of research already exists and uncovers other areas where research is still needed (Webster and Watson, 2002). Several relevant literature was reviewed to organise this chapter; databases such as EBSCOhost, Science Direct, ProQuest, JSTOR business and Economics database as well as Journals such as Emerald, Taylor & Francis, Springer and Journals of Service

Marketing were employed to develop this extensive literature review and research methodology chapters.

This literature review chapter focuses on discussing **consumers and their behaviour**, because no organisation can survive unless they understand consumer behaviour well. The next section of the literature review chapter examines **service quality**, the constructs involved in service quality and their purported interrelationships. It also reviews the world famous service quality model, SERVQUAL, introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985, particularly gap analysis, the model's five dimensions and its relevant variables, as well as its applicability to various industries. Further, other service quality models are likewise discussed in order to evaluate whether the SERVQUAL model is the one that is appropriate for this study.

The third part of the review will focus on the **aviation industry**, [since the study is about this industry, it is important to discuss it in detail] including both global changes and developments happening specifically in the Middle East. The final part of the literature review chapter highlights **Low Cost Carriers**, and how they first entered into the global environment specifically in the Middle East. It also discusses the importance of service quality to LCCs. The final section justifies how the SERVQUAL model can be revised to make it industry specific to the LCC business model in the Middle East.

2.2. Consumer Behaviour

The term 'customer' is typically used to refer to one who regularly purchases from a particular store or company (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013) whereas 'consumer' more

generally refers to anyone engaging in any of the activities (evaluating, acquiring, using or disposing of goods and services) used in reference to consumer behaviour (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2006). It is important to note that every consumer is different and, therefore, behaves in a unique manner, while consumer behaviour has changed significantly in recent times due to technological advancement and globalisation. Thus, every business must study the ever-changing behaviour of individuals and groups of consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013).

Consumers play a vital role in the health of the economy since their purchase decisions strongly affect the market demand and supply. It is important to note that every consumer is different and, therefore, behaves in a unique manner, while consumer behaviour has changed significantly in recent times due to technological advancement and globalisation. Thus, every business must study the ever-changing behaviour of individuals and groups of consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013).

Consumer behaviour is defined as "behaviour that consumers display in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs" (Schiffman et al. 2010:5). Behavioural studies focus on how individual consumers and families or households take decisions to spend their available resources on consumption-related items. Therefore, businesses need to know about the needs and wants of their consumers; this is critical in today's ever-changing, rapidly growing and technologically improving markets (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013).

It is particularly important for the service industry to understand consumer behaviour due to its different characteristics compared to manufacturing. Specifically, since the

service industry deals face to face with consumers than manufacturers, they have to work even harder to analyse consumer behaviour to serve them better and exceed their expectations. The service sector provides a wide range of intangible products with certain key characteristics that distinguish it from manufacturing (Frochot and Hughes, 2000; Jiang, 2009). These distinguishing characteristics make it difficult to define and measure service quality (Akbaba, 2006). Four main characteristics of the service sector are: intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability. They are briefly defined below:

a. **Intangibility:** Measurement of effectiveness is subjective. Services are activities performed by the provider so, unlike physical products, they cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard or smelt before they are consumed (Beamish and Ashford, 2007, p. 240). The result is that manufacturing quality methods, such as final inspection, have no value in the service industry since it is by then already too late to alter outcomes for customers.
b. **Inseparability:** As just noted above, services are typically produced and consumed simultaneously, whereas physical goods are first manufactured into products, distributed through multiple resellers and only later consumed. Services, however, cannot be separated from the service provider so the service provider is an inseparable part of the service. Hence, the challenge for the service provider is to give equal importance to the service as well as the way it is provided.
c. **Variability:** Services are highly variable as they depend on the service provider, where and when they are provided. Each service must also be tailored to the particular customer. In addition, the variety and unpredictability of customer requirements mean that prescriptive procedures are less appropriate than in

manufacturing, while the subjective nature of the service makes reliable quality measurement difficult.

d. **Perishability:** this means that stocking to smooth demand is impossible with services since, service goes to waste if they are not consumed immediately; i.e. the value of a service exists only at the point when it is required (Beamish and Ashford, 2007, p.240).

2.3. Marketing Orientation

In the past, business followed a complete different approach to handling customers, known as the production concept phase; this was done by focusing on production and distribution efficiency while little emphasis and to neglect the customer (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013, pp. 31-33). The next phase of business was the product concept, where the product was given maximum importance, with businesses devoting themselves to make continuous product improvements and new product development, still without considering customer feedback. This was followed by the selling concept stage, where in businesses followed an ideology of large-scale selling and promotional efforts still not yet focusing on understanding consumer behaviour, especially, their needs and wants.

Finally came the marketing concept phase, where businesses began to understand the needs and wants of consumers in their target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions better than their competitors (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013, pp. 31-33). Marketing exists because of people's unfulfilled needs and desires (Kotler, 2005), with

the objective of delivering value to customers as well as building a long-term and mutually profitable relationship with them (Kanagal, 2009; Rust et al. 2001).

To be successful, marketing strategies require both market analysis of competitors and consumers, and internal analysis of the marketing mix (The 4P's namely; Product, Price, Place and Promotion), which leads to a competitive advantage, e.g., through relationship building or loyalty programs (Kanagal, 2009). Furthermore, according to Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2004), marketing orientation classifies service dimensions into intangibility, differentiation, type of customer, commitment and object of transformation.

An operations orientation, on the other hand, includes customer contact, customer involvement, labour intensity, degree of customisation and degree of employee direction. Service quality requires both of these orientations, marketing and operations, and hence both are explored in this study. Most recently, due to severe competition, new and dramatic developments in technology, businesses have now started focusing more on a societal marketing concept, i.e. the idea that marketing decisions made not only considers consumers wants, but also consumers' and society's long-term interests along with the company's own requirements (Kotler et al. 2011).

2.4. Customer Satisfaction

There is a great diversity of definitions of satisfaction across industrial and societal perspectives. Blackwell et al. (2006), for example, provide a consumer-based definition that satisfaction "is an evaluation of the consumption experience in response to the prior

beliefs with respect to the available alternatives." This definition is thus based on two factors: the consumer experiences, and the type of comparison standards utilised. Such an approach emphasises the cognitive processes that explain how a satisfaction judgement is made, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Process of Satisfaction

Source: Oliver 1980

The customer satisfaction and customer purchase intent model was proposed by Oliver (1980, p. 465) to explain customer satisfaction as a function of expectation and expectancy disconfirmation. It demonstrated that expectancy has the strongest link to satisfaction. Disconfirmation is defined as the difference between the customer's initial expectations and observed actual performance (Bhattacherjee and Premkumar, 2004).

A satisfaction decision emerges before the consumption period and becomes dominant when the consumption period is completed. With reference to Figure 1, a customer approaches the service encounter with an antecedent attitude which may have

developed through his/her previous experiences, word of mouth or the company's promotional techniques. The customer's intention to consume a product in the pre-purchase phase is assumed to be determined by the antecedent attitude. In the consumption phase, the consumer compares his/her expectations with the product/service performance, at which point disconfirmation may take place (Oliver 1980; Yuksel and Yuksel 2008).

The outcome of the complete process is favourable if the customer's expectations have been exceeded, unfavourable if the customer's expectations have not matched actual experience, and neutral if expectations and experiences are equal (Parasuraman et a1. 1988; Bitner and Wang, 2014). Hence, a satisfaction or dissatisfaction decision is the function of both expectations and the strength of the disconfirmation experience. Oliver (1980) further argues through the model that the customer applies his/her disconfirmation attitude at the later stage of intention to re-purchase the same product or service, based on the strength and direction of the disconfirmation experience.

According to Jogaratnam and Tse (2006), given the diversity of the consumer satisfaction field, it should be conceptualised as a multidimensional and subjective process based on the act of purchase. Oliver (1997) claims that satisfaction is the outcome of the product or service experience to the consumer. However, from a broader perspective, there are many other influences, such as product type, consumer type and situational influences. Therefore, a satisfactory decision and its relationship with other constructs can be explained by many different theories, although the expectancy disconfirmation theory has received the widest acceptance due to its broadly applicable conceptualisation.

The theory illustrated in Figure 2 provides an understanding that when expected and perceived performance is compared the result is satisfaction, neutral or dissatisfaction.

Figure 2: The Expectancy Disconfirmation Paradigm

Source: Hill (1986) "Satisfaction and Consumer Services"

Expectancy disconfirmation theory includes three key components for arriving at a satisfaction decision, namely expectation, perceived performance and disconfirmation. The expectation is an evaluation of products/services before the consumption process starts. Performance is the evaluation of a product/service experience, relative to

customer expectation. Disconfirmation is the discrepancy that occurs when product/service performance differs from expectations.

Customer satisfaction is a linear association of the disconfirmation process. If there is a discrepancy, either positive or negative, between customer expectations and performance, the outcome will be either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. That is, performance that meets expectations causes a positive outcome, i.e. confirmation. The simplicity of the model has been challenged by many researchers and other similar theories have emerged. However, this PhD study focuses on customer satisfaction since the outcome of a good service quality is positive customer satisfaction. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2013) long-term customer satisfaction builds customer loyalty towards a product or a service.

Customer satisfaction is a holistic concept, representing a customer's overall affective response after consumption, ranging from dissatisfied to satisfied customers. Pantouvakis and Lymperopoulos (2008) argue that, consumers evaluate each step of the buying process in comparison with their expectations, which may or may not lead to a judgment of satisfaction. Hence, level of satisfaction is the result of a comparison between perceived service quality and consumers' prior expectations.

According to Parasuraman and Grewal (2000), customers evaluate service or product quality and price to establish its perceived value, which in turn helps determine their loyalty to that service or product. The benefits of customer loyalty are potentially huge, as the loyal customer can be viewed in terms of a lifetime spending potential (Harrison and Hoek 2008). Since it is a significant means of differentiation from competitors,

service quality, if managed well, can be profitable for the company (Sachdev and Verma 2004). This is because, while price is a relatively easy factor for competitors to imitate, operational excellence, for example by providing quality service, can be much harder to duplicate (Pride, Hughes and Kapoor 2008 pp. 381).

Researchers like Wilson et al. (2008) have provided precise definitions and measurements of customer satisfaction and service quality. According to Wilson et al. (2008), satisfaction and service quality have certain things such as product quality and price in common, but satisfaction generally is a broader concept, whereas service quality focuses specifically on dimensions of service. Zeithaml et al. (2006) and Bolton, Warlop and Alba (2003) consider how other factors, such as price and product quality, can affect customer satisfaction, and how perceived service quality is a component of customer satisfaction.

Figure 3: Customer perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction

Source: Wilson et al. (2008)

As can be seen in the above Figure 3, it highlights the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality. Wilson et al. (2008) use this model to argue that service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the customer's perception of five dimensions, namely reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy and tangibility. Satisfaction, by contrast, is more inclusive, being influenced by perceptions of service and product quality, price, and situational and personal factors.

2.5. Behavioural Intention

Behavioural intention (BI) has been defined as the customers' subjective probability of performing a certain behavioural act (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Customer loyalty, positive, recommending behaviour, pays price premium, complaining behaviour and repurchase intentions are major components of behavioural intentions (Cronin et al. 2000). Most research on service industries has focused on repurchase intentions as the focal dependent variable (Jones et al. 2000). Specifically, Zeithaml et al. (1996) suggest that high service quality leads to positive BI and vice-versa. They also find that increasing customer retention or lowering the rate of customer defection, which are both indicators of BI, are critical to the ability of a service provider to generate profits.

There are three behavioural dimensions that can increase customer satisfaction, thereby supporting customer loyalty: word-of-mouth communication, purchase intention and price sensitivity. Word-of-mouth communication refers to people sharing experiences regarding a service, with people making use of this type of communication to relate their experiences to friends and relatives (Kim et al. 2009). A customer who is satisfied with the services or products of a given company is much more likely to remain loyal

to that company because of positive reinforcement, while other potential customers are encouraged to do business with the company (Liu et al. 2001). Thus, word-of-mouth communication is a primary indicator of a company's future success.

Communication can also be a vehicle for negative comments about poor customer experiences, which can lead to reduced loyalty and lower profits. Purchase intention, heavily influenced by customer satisfaction, refers to a willingness to purchase in the future. Better service quality leads to higher customer satisfaction and higher current and future sales revenues (Sima et al. 2006). Therefore, it is important to understand how consumers perceive the quality of services, as well as how these perceptions are transformed into customer satisfaction, behavioural intentions and loyalty.

The behavioural values of service quality intervene between service quality and the monetary gains or losses from retention or defection. When customers' perceptions of service quality are high, the behavioural intentions are favourable, which strengthens their relationship with the organisation (Wilson et al. 2008). Conversely, when service quality assessments are low, the customers' behavioural intentions are unfavourable and the corresponding relationships with the company deteriorate.

Satisfied customers tend to have a higher usage level of a product/service than those who are not satisfied (Bolton, Warlop and Alba, 2003; Diller 2008). Customers become price insensitive towards a favourable company and are ready to pay more whereas they might disagree with the pricing strategy of an unfavourable organisation. Behavioural intentions are affected by customer satisfaction and have been thoroughly studied by researchers, although they are not yet completely understood (Pérez et al. 2007).

According to Anderson et al. (1997), each dimension of service quality, independently influences customer satisfaction, and this influence also varies depending on the situation. Thus, according to Kim and Lee (2011), compared to other service-related industries, the relative impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in the airline industry is unique. Cronin and Taylor (1992) found that customer satisfaction increases favourable behavioural intentions. This was confirmed by Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Negi (2009), who reported that the more the customer is satisfied, the stronger the repurchase intention and the more the service is recommended to others.

Yang and Peterson (2004) found that when the level of satisfaction is high, then the level of customer loyalty will be high in online service users. They concluded that companies should focus primarily on satisfaction to increase customer loyalty. Ulaga and Eggert (2002) suggested that customer satisfaction has a negative impact on the search of the alternatives. In other word, as long as customers are satisfied they lack the motivation to find new service providers.

Most studies examine customers' behavioural intentions as a unidimensional construct specifically in the airline industry. SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al. 1988) emerged as an instrument to measure service quality consisting of the five dimensions of service quality viz. reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. But it had its own share of criticisms (Francis and Balasubramaniam, 2010). Therefore, to analyse key issues of service quality, this PhD study will identify gaps between customers' expectations and perceptions of the LCC service quality by developing a modified

service quality model named LCCSQUAL using the five-dimensional construct originally designed by SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al. 1988) of service quality.

In this PhD study, the LCCSQUAL model will be applied to analysing service quality of Low Cost Carriers in the Middle East. This study will be first of its kind in the Middle East since no research has been so far focused on LCC service quality in the region as the data researched from the databases such as Science Direct, JSTOR and Journals like Emerald, Journal of Service Quality, and Aviation Management Journals from the year 1980 till 2015 confirm this information.

2.6. Service Quality

Quality is an abstract, hard-to-define concept (Lagrosen et al. 2004) and this is due to features of quality as being objective and subjective at the same time; specifications among its factors can be measured, but others that only can be appraised; quality can mean a technical-efficiency level; and finally, it has both perceivable use effects and effects that the purchaser does not consciously perceive (Juran, 1992; Józsa et al. 2005, p. 68). Quality was originally related to tangible products as explained by Juran's "fitness for use" (Juran, 1988; Kahn et al. 2002). Succeeding developments were characterised by a shift towards the service quality of intangible products (Becser, 2007).

The word "service" is widely used to denote an industrial sector that 'does' things for you, they don't 'make' things (Silvestro and Johnson, 1990). "Service" also denotes organisations which meet the needs of society, such as the health service or the civil

service, which are categorically defined as a public service offered traditionally along bureaucratic lines in contrast to the industrial service sector. Most studies on service have noted that services are primarily experiential because they are, in general, intangible and difficult to measure (Wu, Liao, Hung and Ho (2012).

Service marketing researchers therefore view quality from the customers' perspective (Abu Hasan, et al. 2008), as (Zeithaml, 1988; Chang, 2008) position service quality as "the customer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority". Moreover, be it a product or a service, the ability to meet customer demands is a significant, if not the most important, element of the concept of quality. Clemes et al. (2008) reported that, "although the definitions of service quality vary, the definitions are all formulated from the customer perspective: that is, what customers perceive are important dimensions of quality".

According to Dobbs (2003, pp. 1), quality is a form of the overall evaluation of a product, while Zeithaml (1987) considers perceived quality to be the consumer's judgment about an entity's overall excellence or superiority. Service quality is a key requirement to effectively compete, remain profitable and survive in a competitive market (Angelova and Zekiri, 2011). Furthermore, they suggest, if performance is greater than expectations, then the perceived quality will be more than satisfactory, hence the customer will experience higher satisfaction.

Despite being considered as an elusive concept, service quality measurement has provoked considerable interest and debate in the research literature. Primarily, this debate has developed due to the intangible, variable, perishable and inseparable nature

of the service (Parasuraman et al. 1985; 1988). According to Albrecht (1992) and Simpson et al. (2001), the shift from an industrial to a customer-value paradigm places service at the heart of a company's efforts to improve profitability.

Zeithaml et al. (1990) and Saravanan and Rao (2007) agree that practically all organisations have to compete to some degree on the basis of service. Therefore, the need for survival and growth in ever increasing competitive markets is evident and critical factors in the search for providing superior service quality and achieving customer satisfaction. Negi (2009) and Ladhari (2009) in their research have proved that, providing high service quality to customers, retains them, attracts potential customers, improves the corporate image, encourages positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and, above all, profitability.

Customers are considered right when they say that a company's service quality is poor, because if they perceive something is wrong then it might actually be wrong (Schneider and Bowen, 1995). This means that, in order to keep the customer loyalty to the organisation, the service provider must provide quality service. Customer satisfaction is viewed as playing a key role in linking core service quality to repurchase intentions because it reflects consumers' overall, post-consumption affective responses: if they experience high levels of satisfaction, consumers will probably show greater repurchase intentions (Johnson and Fornell, 1991; Blery et al. 2009). Service quality has also been used as a component in understanding consumer behaviour; importantly a positive attitude concerning service quality that leads to greater profits (Simon and David, 2003; Kokku et al. 2011).

Service quality is an important area for researchers because of its relevancy to service companies so researchers have developed various models to measure it, even though some claim it is hard to measure because, as already mentioned, its intangibility makes it hard to quantify Eshghi et al. (2008). Delivering high quality in the service industry has been recognised as the most effective means of ensuring that a company's offerings are uniquely positioned in a market filled with "lookalike" competitive offerings, as argued by Parasuraman et al. (1991).

Defining service quality has always been a challenge, as Lovelock and Wirtz (2007, pp. 420) report, researchers argue that the nature of service quality requires a distinctive approach to identify and measure it. Service quality models have become significant in measuring the quality of services and have been developed by many researchers such as (Parasuraman et al. 1985; Grönroos 1984; Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

2.7. Service Quality Models

It is now quite clear, from a customer perspective, that service quality is determined by the (mis) match between customer expectations and customer experience during service delivery. However, what is not yet clear is what determines each of them. The complexity of service quality definition has led to the use of multidimensional models (Parasuraman et al. 1985). According to Johnston (1995), one of the pressing issues facing services research concerns the identification of the determinants of service quality, which is necessary in order to be able to specify, measure, control and improve perceived customer service quality.

Early studies during the 1980s focused on determining what service quality meant for customers and developing strategies to meet customer expectations (Chowdhary and Prakash, 2007). The early pioneers of services marketing in Europe were known as the Nordic school of thought. Grönroos (1984) contributed Nordic school of thought by developing a conceptual service quality model called the Technical - Functional model (Al Bassam, 2013). He indicated that managing service quality by matching expected service and perceived service is an important practice for a company in order to achieve ultimate customer satisfaction. Grönroos (1984) identified technical quality, functional quality and company corporate image as three dimensions of service quality. Lehtinen (1985) also contributed to the Nordic school of thought by adding more dimensions such as, physical and interactive quality to the service quality model.

The North American school of thought appeared, dominated by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) as they are considered the key contributors to the North American School and were the first to develop a service quality model, SERVQUAL (Al Bassam, 2013). Building on the pioneering work of the Nordic School of services management, particularly that of Christian Grönroos, Parasuraman et al. (1985) established that service quality is the core of services marketing.

In 1988, Parasuraman and team published empirical evidence using their seminal work; SERVQUAL model which was tested on five service industries and suggested that five dimensions; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance, more appropriately capture the perceived service quality construct. A detailed discussion of the SERVQUAL model will be done in the following section.

2.7.1. The SERVQUAL Model: Evolution (1985)

Early studies during the 1980s focused on defining what service quality meant for customers and developing strategies to meet their expectations, the meaning of service quality was defined by several researchers, such as Sasser et al. (1978) and Grönroos (1982). The study of Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) inspired Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry to undertake a comprehensive qualitative study to further define service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1985). An exploratory qualitative study was conducted by Parasuraman and his team to develop a conceptual model of service quality. They conducted in-depth interviews of executives of nationally recognised service firms and also a set of focus group interviews of consumers to gain insights about the research questions they designed (Parasuraman et al. 1985).

The authors' exploratory research revealed 10 evaluative dimensions or criteria's which transcended a variety of services and the conceptual service quality model was considered as gap analysis (Parasuraman et al. 1985). Their approach starts from the assumption that the level of service quality experienced by customers is critically determined by the gap between their expectations of the service and their perceptions of what they actually receive from a specific service provider (Donnelly and Dalrymple, 1996, Warren et al. 2002).

In their seminal research work, Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified 97 attributes of service related firms which were found to have an impact on service quality. These 97 attributes are important in assessing customer's expectations and perceptions on delivering service (Kumar et al. 2009). In the first stage, these attributes were

categorised into ten dimensions (Parasuraman et al. 1985), which were tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding, knowing, customers, and access (Daniel and Berinyuy, 2010). Later, these ten dimensions were purified by (Parasuraman et al. 1988) into five dimensions by using factor analysis: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Mokhlis, 2012).

2.7.1.1. The GAP analysis as part of SERVQUAL model (1985)

The SERVQUAL model was designed to measure the gap between customers' expectations of service and their perceptions of the actual service delivered, based on 10 dimensions, namely: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, and understanding/knowing the customer. The model is based on four gaps that are the major contributors to the fifth gap i.e. perceived service quality gap (Parasuraman et al. 1985; Al Bassam, 2013).

Gap 1: This gap is named as **the Consumer Expectation–Management Perception Gap**. It is devised to evaluate service delivery policy; if the management does not appropriately perceive or interpret consumer expectations, it is clearly reflected in the service provided by staff, as they (staff) are less aware of the policy (Daniel and Berinyuy, 2010; Al Bassam, 2013).

Gap 2: This gap, **Management Perception–Service Quality Specification**, assumes that the management does not clearly predetermine the service policy through rules and guidelines. As a result, employees are unaware or are not given clear instructions about the policy (Daniel and Berinyuy, 2010; Al Bassam, 2013).

Gap 3: This gap is called **Service Quality specification–Service Delivery**, occurs when employees do not appropriately interpret the rules or convert guidelines into action. This could be due to a lack of training and development facilities provided by the company. A lack of communication between the senior, middle and lower management could also be a factor (Daniel and Berinyuy, 2010; Al Bassam, 2013).

Gap 4: **the Service Delivery–External Communications Gap** develops when the company's promises to customers made through external communications do not match the actual service delivery (Daniel and Berinyuy, 2010; Al Bassam, 2013).

Gap 5: Organizational design is traditionally held responsible for these four gaps, which are distributed throughout the organisation between Frontline staff, managers, top management and customers. This in turn contributes to the fifth gap: **the mismatch between customers' expectations and their perception of the service actually delivered**.

Figure 4: The GAP Analysis

Source: Parasuraman et al. (1985)

In Parasuraman et al. (1985) study, ten determinants of service quality were identified:

1. **Reliability**: This refers to the consistency of performance and dependability; whether the company gives the service in the right way, the first time and keeps its promises.
2. **Responsiveness**: This concern to what extent employees are ready to provide the service. The factors involved are mailing a transaction slip immediately, calling a customer back quickly, and giving prompt service.
3. **Competence**: This is connected to the knowledge and skills of contact personnel and the operational support personnel that are needed for delivering the service.
4. **Access**: This factor is connected to approachability, such as if operating hours and location of the facilities are convenient, whether waiting times are short, and if there is easy access by telephone.
5. **Courtesy**: This involves politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact with personnel, including the front office staff.
6. **Communication**: This is about keeping the customer informed in a language they can understand, and also listening to the customer. Companies may have to make some adjustments in order to include foreign customers.
7. **Credibility**: Factors such as trustworthiness, believability and honesty are included. Factors affecting the credibility of the company include the company name, reputation and personal characteristics. It also indicates how much the company has the customer's best interests at heart.
8. **Security**: This refers to freedom from danger, risk or doubt. Factors included are physical safety, financial security and confidentiality.

9. **Understanding the customer**: This concerns making an effort to understand the customer, which involves learning about their specific requirements, providing individualised attention and recognising regular customers.
10. **Tangibles**: These include physical aspects of the service, such as physical facilities, the appearance of personnel, tools or equipment used to provide the service (Parasuraman et al. 1985).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) measured the gaps in various industries using the SERVQUAL instrument (Khan et al. 2007). The main advantage of the model is that it actually provides an opportunity for management to identify gaps in service quality at various levels, especially those directed towards the customer. Liu et al. (2000) also argue that the relative importance of the service quality dimensions can provide beneficial insights into how companies should manage resources for different customers.

2.7.2. Revision of the SERVQUAL Model (1988)

Parasuraman et al. (1988) engaged in a refining stage after their original model received several criticisms, they concentrated on condensing scale dimensionality and reliability. Based on the five dimensions Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed a global measurement for service quality, namely SERVQUAL (Donnelly and Dalrymple, 1996). The scale was developed and tested across four service environments: banking, credit card services, repair and maintenance, and long distance telephone services.

In its final form, SERVQUAL contains 22 pair of items in two parts; the first part (expectations) measures consumers' expected level of service for a particular industry. The second part (perceptions), with 22 matching items, measures consumer perceptions of the present level of service provided by a particular organisation (Parasuraman et al. 1988). Both sets of items are presented with a seven-point Likert response format, with the anchors "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree".

Service quality is measured on the basis of the difference scores by subtracting expectation scores from the corresponding perception scores. Figure 5 below presents the resulting SERVQUAL dimensions related to the Gap Analysis identified by Parasuraman et al. (1988):

Figure 5: The SERVQUAL Dimensions

Source: Kumar et al, 2009

SERVQUAL meets the challenge of reliably measuring perceptions in the service industry by proposing that Service Quality = Expectation – Perception (Kumar et al. 2009). The SERVQUAL approach was modified (Parasuraman et al. 1998) in response to criticisms concerning conceptualisation issues (Donnelly and Dalrymple, 1996), and has been successfully utilised to measure service quality. It has attracted considerable attention since it was first introduced, with many researchers applying, testing, evaluating and criticising the model (Bateson and Hoffman, 2011; Carrillat et al. 2007; Chau and Kao, 2009; Gilmore and McMullan, 2009; Kang et al. 2002; Kasper et al. 2006; Kueh and Voon, 2007; Ladhari, 2008). The five dimensions can now be considered in more detail:

2.7.2.1. TANGIBILITY

This dimension focuses on the physical facilities, tools or equipment used to provide the service, and the appearance of personnel and other customers with the service facility in a relevant industry (Parasuraman et al. 1985). This dimension is completely adaptable to LCCs in terms of the physical facilities related to an aviation service such as: on-board comfort, seating arrangements, leg room, quality of food, and co-passengers travelling on the flight are all considered important indicators of the quality of an airline service (Park et al. 2005).

The tangibility dimension can be further divided into sub-dimensions or variables to identify exact gaps in service quality. For example, while LCC passengers might not expect the latest aircraft, they have other expectations, like good leg room and hygiene in the aircraft. In other service industries, such as the hotel industry, tangibility can be

a most important factor for evaluating a company's service quality (Blešić et al. 2011). In a research conducted by Zakaria et al. (2010) in Malaysia found that, public transportation customers gave importance to tangibility dimension i.e. cleanliness and comfortability of the physical facilities.

According to research conducted by Prabaharan et al. (2008) in Kerala, India, tangibility dimension of SERVQUAL was considered as a mediating factor for service quality as well as it influenced the domestic tourists the most. Further, it was also considered important for sustainable tourism development in India. Another research conducted by Chikwendu et al. (2012), on Nigerian airline utilising the SERVQUAL model found that the airline exhibited good service quality in the empathy, responsiveness and the technical dimension, however; reliability and tangibility showed a poor score and needed lots of improvement.

2.7.2.2. RELIABILITY

According to Caruana and Pitt (1997), the reliability dimension involves consistency of performance and dependability, in a service context, reliability can be defined as the firm's ability to provide the service correctly the first time. It also means that the firm honors its promises made to the customers regarding accuracy in billing, keeping records correctly and performing the service at the designated time (Parasuraman et al. 1985). No matter which type of service is purchased, customers value service reliability and in most purchases, consumers will be satisfied or even develop brand loyalty due to the reliability of the product or services.

Hensley and Utley (2011) have proposed a service reliability framework for classifying technical reliability tools such as; failure rate, consistency and error prevention, so that managers can recognise how to utilise them in practice. If the same were applied to the airline industry, the most important reliability variable would be the ability to perform accurately and dependably in terms of safety, most crucially through pilot's performance. The principle attraction of LCCs is on-time performance, therefore, customers will be loyal to an airline that gives importance to this variable, and perceive the service quality of such an airline as high.

The organisation will be considered reliable if they attach considerable importance to factors like safe transactions, keeping promises and effective communication in times of need. In a research study, conducted by Ariffin et al. (2010) on Malaysian airlines found that the three most important dimensions, namely, Caring and Tangible, Reliability and Responsiveness are considered as the standard or "must-have" dimensions of service quality in the airline industry in Malaysia.

2.7.2.3. RESPONSIVENESS

Responsiveness refers to the willingness or readiness of employees to provide a service. For example, it can involve timeliness of service pertaining to mailing a transaction receipt immediately, returning calls as soon as possible and providing prompt service, such as fixing an appointment quickly (Parasuraman et al. 1985). A study conducted by Prabaharan et al. (2008) highlighted that, India, tangibility and responsiveness were very important for sustainable tourism development in Kerala, India. Further, the study revealed that the foreign tourists gave importance to responsiveness dimension.

According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2000, p. 287), the interactive nature of service delivery places service employees in a very critical position regarding the delivery of quality services. Similarly, Wilson and Frimpong (2004) found that delighted customers are associated with higher perceived quality and the extra behavioural efforts (responsiveness) of service personnel. This dimension is important for service oriented organisations where there is a high level of interaction between the employees and customers.

In the aviation industry, responsiveness mean a willingness to assist passengers and provide prompt service, both by ground staff and flight crew. Every passenger wants to be treated like an individual irrespective what he/she has paid for the service obtained. The customer expects that whenever he/she needs help it will be provided with care and attention, not just as a duty or obligation. Most customers believe that proactive staff can exceed customer expectations about the level of service, which in turn will reduce the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions concerning that particular organisation's responsiveness.

For example, Pakdil and Aydin (2007) in their study of airline service quality at a Turkish airline using SERVQUAL identified that responsiveness dimension was the most important for the passengers compared to availability dimension. Another research conducted by Huang (2009), on Taiwan airline concluded that, importance-performance analysis (IPA) results indicated that responsiveness is the most important airline service quality attribute in passengers as they valued efficient check-in, baggage

handling service, quality of the reservation services, employees' willingness to help, employee behaviour to delayed passengers.

2.7.2.4. ASSURANCE

This dimension includes competence, courtesy, credibility and security, knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence (Shahin, 2005). Once the customer has a negative experience, they will inevitably question the competence of the company's systems and its security, credibility and courtesy. For example, nowadays, consumers use credit cards for most of their transactions, with most of these being done online due to technological advances, consequently, customers always want their transactions to be safe and secure (Niranjanamurthy and Chahar, 2013). However, modern technology carries some risks, such as hacking of online accounts; customers prefer to deal with organisations that care about the confidentiality and security of their customers' information.

Abu Hasan et al. (2008) found, studying students of two private universities in Malaysia, empathy and assurance make the greatest contribution towards students' satisfaction, meaning that students in higher institutions are actually concerned with the knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence. A study conducted in Thailand on airline service quality affecting post purchase behavioural intention by Lerrthaitrakul and Panjakajornsak (2014), highlighted that assurance dimension referring to customers' feeling of security and their trust together with knowledge of airline staff had significant influence on consumers' post purchase behavioural intentions.

2.7.2.5. EMPATHY

Empathy dimension is about providing individual attention and care to customers (Somwang, 2008). Customers are delighted to deal with companies where the staff is approachable, the system is easy to access, and the organisation is willing to understand customers' requirements and provide thoughtful services. This factor is dependent on how well-organised, courteous and approachable when needed, the company's staff are. In countries like Japan, it is a part of the culture to be courteous to customers; otherwise, customers stop dealing with that organisation.

Approachability is an important variable for customers since they feel more confident and comfortable in the company of friendly staff and systems. A research conducted by Degirmenci et al. (2012) on Turkish airline indicated that, empathy dimension was the third highest customer satisfaction with SERVQUAL score -0.658. This dimension consisted of two properties: behaviour of staff in the unexpected situations and behaviour in needs. This highlighted that customers' needs in these two properties were met by the Turkish airline staff.

The above few sections discussed the dimensions mainly the SERVQUAL dimensions are focused on the human aspects of service delivery (responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy) and the tangibles of service. Ladhari (2009) recommends the SERVQUAL model as a good scale to use when measuring service quality in various specific industries, but that it is also appropriate to choose the most important

dimensions from a model that fit the particular service being measured in order to gain more reliable and valid results.

The organisation's ability to meet a diversity of customers' needs determines the degree of perceived service quality. The significance of the service quality concept has inspired researchers to address this issue and to investigate it further across different service sectors and cultural settings (Khan 2010; Carlson and O'Cass, 2011).

Yi and La (2003) acknowledge that each quality factor influences customer satisfaction differently, and a company's performance is judged by evaluating the relative perceived service quality based on customer satisfaction. Since service quality is an important factor for airlines, several researchers have applied service quality related theories and methods in the airline industry (Alotaibi, 1992; Chan & Yeh, 2002; Chen, 1997; Ostrowski et al. 1993; Sultan and Simpson, 2000; Park et al. 2005; Saha and Theingi, 2009).

Most of the previous airline service studies have used the SERVQUAL method to evaluate service quality, however, the 22-item scale of SERVQUAL is not appropriate for measuring all aspects of airline service quality due to the characteristics of airline service quality. According Park et al. (2005), airline service quality is different from services in other industries; an airline service comprises tangible and intangible attributes. Since, delivering high service quality is the key process of a company's marketing strategy; the marketer must have the means to measure it (Hui et. al, 2008).

Therefore, following the recommendations of several researchers such as Park et al. (2005) and Sultan and Simpson (2000), the SERVQUAL model will be modified for the suitability of this PhD study since it takes into account passenger expectations of LCC service as well as perceptions of the service, which is the best way to measure service quality in the service sector (Shahin, 2005). Also, as suggested by Ladhari (2008); Khan (2010) and Carlson and O'Cass, (2011), this PhD research will be investigated in a new cultural setting of the Middle East where the service quality model such as SERVQUAL have been studied limitedly.

2.7.3. Criticisms of the SERVQUAL model and its scale

The SERVQUAL instrument continues to attract the attention of both academics and practitioners in spite of several theoretical and operational criticisms (Caruana et al. 2000, Carman, 1990, Cronin and Taylor, 1992, Cuthbert, 1996, Lee et al. 2000). Further, Buttle (1996) divided the criticisms into theoretical and operational. For theoretical criticisms, he described SERVQUAL as a disconfirmation rather than attitudinal paradigm because it is not a universal model since it is not based on any grounded theories. He was also critical of SERVQUAL for not developing a link between economic, statistical and psychological theory, arguing that there is little evidence that customers actually assess service quality in terms of P-E gaps.

Buttle (1996) operational criticisms, claims that the dimensions are unstable, and depends on the industry the model is applied to. Akbaba (2006) concluded that modifying the variables produces a higher degree of variance than the model's original constructs, while Carman (1990) raised the practical difficulty of measuring

expectations reliably in that, while seeking customers' views of their 'expectations', it is debatable whether it is assessing this or rather 'desires' or 'wants', 'hoped for', 'adequacy' or 'excellence'.

Coulthard (2004) argues that SERVQUAL does not fully capture the distinctive aspects of non-Western cultures. The variables tested in European markets have proved that SERVQUAL mostly represents western culture since European culture is probably not very different from North American culture (Winsted, 1997; Imrie et al. 2000; and Raajpoot, 2004). This criticism has been taken as a challenge by researchers from Asian countries (Gilbert et al. 2003; Hui et al. 2008; Carrillat et al. 2007) to prove that the dimensions of service quality not only are applicable to western countries but can also be successfully applied in the Asian market. For example, Abdulla et al. (2007) tested the model with an additional Tourist Needs and Expectations Matrix (TNE-Matrix) to represent the idea that dimensions of service quality are not only restricted to a western background but can also be applied to other parts of the world (Sultan and Simpson, 2000).

A recent qualitative study conducted by D'Silva et al. (2014) on LCC passengers in the GCC market proved that Arab culture influences the way passengers evaluate the service quality of LCC. This PhD study contributes to new knowledge by conducting the study in the Middle East or Arab culture and claims that SERVQUAL can be applied not only in the European or North-American culture but also in the Arab culture. This study further supports the claims of Buttle (1996), that SERVQUAL can be operated only if it is modified based on the industry specific and provides a solution to measure the LCC service quality by providing a modified scale named LCCSQUAL.

Imrie et al. (2002) also claimed that Parasuraman et al. (1988) failed to consider the fundamental role of culture in the model, assuming that past experience, communication and personal needs are more important in identifying consumer expectations. However, culture is an integral part of an individual's personality; or rather, an individual's personality is formed and transformed based on the culture he/she comes from.

Winsted and Frazer (1997), in a cross-cultural study comparing US and Japanese culture, revealed that different dimensions were given different degrees of importance in the two cultures. Furthermore, Brian (2002), adopting Winsted's constructs, concluded that even the Japanese and Taiwanese do not share the same ideas when it comes to variables like sincerity or authenticity. They therefore suggested developing a framework that is specific to global cultural similarities and dissimilarities. Although subsequent research has led to methodological questions about the SERVQUAL, most critics seem to agree that SERVQUAL has a fairly good face and content validity (Babakus and Boller, 1992; Wisnieski, 2001).

According to Chowdhury (2000), generalisations are difficult to make using a service quality model since there is variation in the basic nature of services, i.e. labour- or capital-intensive, and that the type of industry affects the design of the service. More specifically, empathy and responsiveness are more important for labour-intensive industries whereas tangibility and reliability affect the assessment of quality dimensions for capital-intensive services.

According to Carman (1990), the original SERVQUAL instrument is not as well fitted as was expected in four different sectors he researched and therefore, he recommended that the wording of the SERVQUAL be customised to each service setting. This PhD study follows recommendations made by Carman (1990) as well as Ladhari (2008) by changing the wording of the SERVQUAL and making the SERVQUAL model more applicable by making it industry specific since the LCC service industry is different than other service industries.

2.7.4. The SERVQUAL model applied in different markets

Lee et al. (2000) argued that the relative importance of all service quality dimensions for customer satisfaction varies according to industry. Certainly, the results have varied in each market when SERVQUAL's five dimensions have been tested in different markets. For example, Akbaba (2006) found that in the hotel industry in Turkey 'tangibles' emerged as the most important dimension, especially the 'food and beverages served in the hotel' were the most important attribute for the customers of the hotel. Whereas Knutson et al. (1990), studying a US hotel setting, found that reliability was given the highest preference. In the banking industry, Jabnoun and Al Tamimi (2002), studying an Islamic bank in the UAE, found that personal values and empathy played major roles in the service quality of commercial banks.

For the food industry, Namkung and Jang (2007) reported that presentation and taste i.e. tangibility, are the most significant contributors to customer satisfaction, whereas in the entertainment park industry, tangibles, such as qualities of rides, are the most important dimension. Whether it's an aerobics school or an investment-consulting firm, responsiveness is a very important dimension.

Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) compared the relative importance of perceived service quality between the casino industry and the sports industry, and found that, the perceived service quality of facility cleanliness was the most important factor in the casino industry, but only a modest factor in the sports industry since a customer may spend more time in a casino than in a sports stadium. Despite these differences, Parasuraman et al. (1988) argue that, regardless of the types of service, consumers evaluate service quality using similar criteria, which can be grouped into different dimensions identified in the SERVQUAL scale.

The SERVQUAL scale has been a very useful construct conceptually, although it needs to be adapted for the specific segment, area or industry it is applied to (Ladhari, 2008). SERVQUAL has been used as a measurement tool in numerous studies and tailored to fit particular sectors and contexts. For example, Mei et al. (1999) examined the dimensions of service quality in the Australian hotel industry by adapting the SERVQUAL model to create the HOLSERV scale, which represented the three dimensions of employees, tangibles and reliability instead of SERQUAL's five dimensions.

Using SERVQUAL as a foundation, Knutson et al. (1990) developed LODGSERV, an instrument designed to measure service quality in the hotel industry, E-S-QUAL for the electronics sector (Parasuraman et al. 2005) and SERVPERF for service preference (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). While FAIRSERV (Christopher, 2007) applies organizational fairness (justice) theory of the relationship between the service consumer and provider, and Ekiz et al. (2009) developed RENTQUAL for car rental services.

SERVPERF was further tested by Forgarty et al. (2000) with further modifications of testing 15 variables instead of the suggested 22 variables and named the new model SERVPERF-M. E-S-QUAL designed by (Parasuraman et al. 2005) was validated by Santouridis et al. (2012) in their study conducted in Greece and identified that it produced similar results to those of the initial research.

Dabholkar et al. (1996) presented a hierarchical model of service quality, consisting of three levels. The first level is consumers' overall perception of service quality. The second level includes five quality dimensions (physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving and policy), while the third level is a sub-dimension of the second dimension. Staples et al. (2002) found that not all dimensions of service quality are applicable in the virtual organisation environment, for example, their study of a call-centre environment found that, a customer never learns the physical appearance of a call-centre therefore, tangible criteria do not apply in this case.

Hui et al. (2008), who studied a restaurant setting in Malaysia, identified four primary categories of service quality (interaction quality, physical environment quality, outcome quality and personalization quality). Interestingly, their classification of the data suggested that service personalization is an extremely important dimension of service evaluation in the restaurant industry.

Negi (2009) tested the SERVQUAL model to determine customer satisfaction through perceived quality in the telecommunication industry and found out that reliability, empathy and network quality have a significant effect on overall service quality and

overall customer satisfaction with mobile services. While Babakus and Mangold (1992) evaluated SERVQUAL in the health care sector for SERVQUAL's potential usefulness in a hospital service environment. They concluded that the model is a concise and practical instrument for health environment.

Another study conducted in health spa centers in the West Morava river valley region in Serbia (Ivana, 2010) showed that there is a major gap between the manager and the customers' perception. Managers prioritised perceptibility, reliability and responsibility, guest's prioritised safety first, followed by responsibility and reliability.

Gwo-Guang (2005) used a modified version of the SERVQUAL model to identify the main influences on online shopping service quality, the results highlighted that the dimensions of web site design, reliability, responsiveness, and trust affected overall service quality and customer satisfaction. While Mukesh et al. (2009) combined a dominance analysis approach with SERVQUAL to analyse the banking sector in Malaysia and found that, expectations of competence and convenience are significantly different between conventional banks and Islamic banks, whereas the perceptions on tangibility and convenience are found to be significantly different between these two types of banks.

Akbaba (2006) also adapted the SERVQUAL model for the hotel industry by changing certain dimensions like adequacy in service supply, understanding and caring, assurance, and convenience. His research revealed that, in a new dimension, convenience was prioritised by business travellers. Further, Brown and Swartz (1989)

expanded the model and found that service providers do not understand the level at which customers evaluate their experiences.

Bigne et al. (2003) found that SERVQUAL is a valid, reliable model for testing the quality of service received in travel agencies. Other studies indicate that there is scope for SERVQUAL to be further modified for universal standardisation (Parasuraman et al. 1991). This PhD study follows the suggestions made by Parasuraman et al. (1991) and modifies the original SERVQUAL model into LCCSQUAL to validate the model in the LCC service quality.

Improving service quality is considered as the best way for organisations to derive competitive advantage (Johnston and Heineke, 1998; Kokku et al. 2011). The travel expectations of long-haul Chinese outbound tourists were examined by Li et al. (2010), with an emphasis on five areas: accommodation, food, restaurants and tour guides and itineraries, entertainment and activities, and transportation. They learned that Chinese outbound travellers highly value cleanliness and safety. The study also suggested that culture is a critical factor in shaping tourists' travel expectations.

Prabaharan et al. (2008), studying both domestic and foreign tourists in Kerala, India found that the tangibility dimension of SERVQUAL influences domestic tourists while the responsiveness dimension influences foreign tourists. Kumar et al. (2009) used the SERVQUAL model to determine the relative importance of critical factors in delivering service quality of banks in Malaysia. They modified the SERVQUAL model to include six dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and

convenience using 26 statements. The results proved that among the dimensions tested tangibility dimension had the smallest gap whereas, convenience had the largest gap.

Further, Samen et al. (2013), studying the Jordan's mobile service industry, found that three dimensions i.e. reliability, tangibility and interaction quality were more suitable than five. Aiming on both customer and manager perceptions, they found that customers favoured reliability, tangibility and interaction quality, whereas managers viewed empathy, tangibility-reliability and responsiveness- assurance as more important.

SERVQUAL has been applied by several researchers in the aviation industry such as Sultan & Simpson (2000) applied the model to determine, if consumer expectations and perceptions of airline service quality vary by nationality. This was done by comparing the expectations and perceptions of European and US passengers and the empirical evidence of their research findings highlighted that service quality expectations and perceptions vary based on nationality.

Another study conducted by Park et al. (2005) in Australia investigated how individual dimensions of airline service quality determine the airline's image and passengers' future behavioural intentions. The study found that, there were significant relationships between the variables such as the dimension of in-flight service and the dimension of convenience and accessibility were found to have a positive effect on the airline's image which was directly related to Australian International passengers' future behavioural intentions.

Likewise, many other studies have been conducted by various researchers in the aviation field such as Saha and Theingi (2009) on service quality in Thailand, Kim and Lee (2011) customer satisfaction of LCC and Lertthaitrakal and Panjakajornsak (2014) in Thailand on post purchase behavior of airline passengers.

A recent study conducted by Hussain, Nasser and Hussain (2015), investigated the linkage among service quality, service provider image, customer expectations, perceived value, customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in a Dubai-based airline. The study was conducted on one full fare airline and suggested that service quality, perceived value and brand image have a positive impact on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. It is important to note that the research conducted by Husain et al. (2015) has the limitations of conducting this study on a small scale and just one full fare airline studied. Secondly, the sample size was not representative of an aviation industry of the Middle East.

This PhD study, which has a bigger sample size as well as focuses on more than one LCCs in the Middle East contributes by modifying the SERVQUAL model and making it industry specific and investigating it in a new cultural setting and using a multi methodology to make it reliable than the small study conducted by Hussain et al. (2015).

2.7.5. Concluding remarks on the SERVQUAL Model and its conceptualisation of service quality

This study focuses on investigating the constructs/variables that fit the SERVQUAL model when it is modified and applied to LCCs in the Middle East region and

furthermore, create new constructs that will be unique to a Middle Eastern culture. While also acknowledging that SERVQUAL model has weaknesses due to the elusive nature of the service quality concept, where services are intangible, heterogeneous and inseparable from production and consumption (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

This model supports the dimensions of service quality measurement, however, would modify the SERVQUAL instrument for the suitability of LCC service quality. It also provides a very practical approach for investigating service quality and customer perceptions of the services provided. It also assists the service industry to measure the gap between consumer expectations and perceptions and accordingly companies can improve the quality of their services offered by reducing the gaps.

In this PhD study, the five dimensions proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) will be utilised since all are found to be relevant for measuring the service quality of LCCs based on the literature review. However, specific variables have been redesigned to create an industry specific model to suit the aviation industry, especially LCCs in the Middle East.

It is also important to note that, SERVQUAL has been limitedly tested in the Middle East in hospital performance in Saudi Arabia (Al Borie and Damanhouri, 2013). Another study conducted by Al Bassam (2013) also in Saudi Arabia in the Internet Banking services. Most of the other studies in the Middle East are conducted on mobile and banking industries (Abu-El Samen et al. 2013; Ramez, 2011; Jabnoun and Khalifa, 2005) as well as a study on one luxury airline in the UAE by Husain et al. (2015).

Therefore, it is evident that, in such an emerging market, the SERVQUAL model should be modified and developed to closing the gap of applying in a non-western culture, i.e. Arab- Eastern or Middle Eastern culture and to demonstrate an industry specific model as suggested by Buttle (1996); Ladhari (2008); Khan (2010) and Carlson and O'Cass, (2011).

2.7.6. The Grönroos Model

The original service model, developed by Grönroos (1982), applied a traditional CS/D (Customer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction) model to explain service quality. Grönroos (1984:36) one of the leaders of the Nordic school in the service literature, claims that a proper conceptualisation of service quality should be customer-based (Grönroos, 1984:36). Consequently, customer perceptions of service quality are the main feature in his service quality model, while it also includes other determinants of service quality.

There are two service quality dimensions, i.e. technical quality and functional quality (Keyser and Lariviere, 2014). Technical quality focuses on the outcome of the service, or what the customers received from their interactions with service providers to satisfy their basic needs. The functional quality or process-related dimension represents the process of evaluating the manner of delivery of the service.

Although the latter quality is harder to define due to human aspects, such as interactions occurring during the service process (Grönroos 2007, Răisănen and Grönroos 2012). Figure 6 below represents the Model (1982, 1984 and 1988).

Figure 6: The Grönroos Model

Source: The Grönroos Model 1990

It should be noted that this model measures service quality through performance scores only after recognising the difficulties in making independent measurements of customer expectations. Many aspects of the model proposed by Grönroos (1984) have been generally accepted by various researchers, especially the way in which customers perceive quality.

The model has been applied by researchers such as Kang and James (2004) and Lasser et al. (2002). However, others, such as Kang (2008), argue that the dimensions of technical and functional quality do not adequately describe all the elements of a service. It is also believed that neither of these two dimensions should have preference over the other. The last concern is that, because the model is based primarily on services in which human interaction takes place, it cannot be applied to services in which physical and technological elements play an important role.

2.7.7. The SERVPERF Model

One of the better known adaptations of SERVQUAL is the SERVPERF instrument, **'**performance only' model (Cronin and Taylor, 1992), which measures only the experiences of customers without asking them about their expectations. SERVPERF therefore only uses the perception part of the SERVQUAL scale. Cronin and Taylor argue that service quality is better predicted by perceptions of actual service received rather than the difference between perceptions and expectations as suggested by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988).

In the SERVPERF model, customer experiences are measured over a range of attributes developed to describe the service as conclusively as possible. They do not disagree with the constructs and definition of service quality presented by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988), however, they do differ regarding how to measure service perceptions. According to Kelkar (2010), the model assumes that performance rather than 'performance-expectation' determines service quality. Kelkar, (2010) also argues that customer expectations are built into performance therefore, it is unnecessary to measure it separately.

Carrillat et al. (2007) found that SERVQUAL and SERVPERF have been equally cited in recent years. They concluded that both scales are reliable and equally valid predictors of overall service quality, although they suggest that the SERVQUAL scale has a greater interest for practitioners. Several other researchers have tested SERVPERF, finding it to be reliable across various industries (Jain and Gupta 2004; Carrillat et al. 2007; Pěrez et al. (2007); Qin et al. 2010).

2.7.8. Other multi-dimensional service quality models

Some of the other service quality models with a similar theoretical basis to SERVQUAL will be briefly discussed here since, it is valuable to understand that most of the models draw on similar dimensions to those of Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) and focus on the customer's point of view, although they might be more specific in some cases and more generic in others. Rust and Oliver (1994) developed a two-dimensional model following the Grönroos (1984) model. In this model, functional quality, i.e. tangibles (environment), are considered as a single dimension, unlike the Grönroos model. While they did not test their conceptualisation, their model gained support from Brady and Cronin (2001) and Martinez and Martinez (2010).

Philip and Hazlett (1997) designed a model named the P-C-P service attribute model, claiming that SERVQUAL and other models do not adequately address some of the critical issues associated with the assessment of individual services. Their model proposes a hierarchical structure based on three main classes of attributes: pivotal, core and peripheral. The core and peripheral groupings in the P-C-P model combine the SERVQUAL dimensions while the pivotal grouping is part of the technical quality of services advocated by Grönroos (1984). This model, however, has not found much support in the literature.

Dabholkar et al. (2000) developed an antecedent's model, arguing that service quality is better visualised by its antecedents rather than its components. In addition, to including the specific determinants of service quality, this model also includes a global

measurement. Brady and Cronin (2001) attempted to integrate the Nordic and American schools by designing a multidimensional hierarchical construct. The first two dimensions, technical quality and functional quality, were adapted from Grönroos (1988) but renamed as outcome and interaction (Harmse, 2012). The third dimension was influenced by the empirical evidence of Rust and Oliver's (1994) three-component conceptualisation of the service quality model.

Brady and Cronin (2001:37) found that the three primary dimensions, namely interaction, environment and outcome, had three sub-dimensions. That is, customers first make an assessment of the three corresponding sub-dimensions before they evaluate the primary dimensions. The customers' assessment of the sub-dimensions therefore influences their evaluation of the primary dimensions, with these perceptions leading to an overall service quality perception (Brady and Cronin, 2001:37). From this, they concluded that a hierarchical conceptualisation of service quality seemed more appropriate (Brady and Cronin, 2001:44).

Kang and James (2004) also based their model on Grönroos in an attempt to capture the perspective that conceptualises service quality in relation to functional quality, technical quality and image. Kang (2006) claimed that his study, consisting primarily of the technical quality and functional quality components, offers the first empirical evidence for the Nordic (European) perspective of service quality.

Carr (2007) argued that an important deficiency of SERVQUAL is that it does not include equity theory as the basis for any of its scales, even though it is clear from previous research that equity (fairness) is often evaluated in service encounters. Carr

(2007) therefore, proposed FAIRSERV as an extension of the SERVQUAL conceptualised on the basis that, customers not only evaluate services against the five SERVQUAL dimensions, but also against norms of fairness, such as distributive, procedural, interpersonal, informational and systemic fairness.

Various other industry-specific models have been developed and tested during recent years are also worth mentioning. Parasuraman et al. (2005) developed a multiple-item scale (E-S-QUAL) for measuring the service quality delivered from websites, while two other models developed by Collier & Bienstock (2006) and Fassnacht & Koese (2006) focused on testing e-service quality in online shopping and e-banking respectively.

Baurer et al. (2006) developed a model named eTransQual, as a transaction process-based scale for measuring online shopping service quality, while Dagger, Sweeney and Johnson (2007) developed a health service quality model consisting of three levels, and Kersten and Koch (2010) developed a new approach to measuring logistics service quality, called the structural equation model.

Another new model, consisting of a 29-item questionnaire, was developed by Abdullah et al. (2011) specifically for the unique nature of the banking sector, while Senthikumar and Arulraj (2011) developed the SQM-HI model for education (service quality in higher education in India). Several conceptual models have also been developed for the airline industry specifically. Robledo (2001) developed SERVPEX, which measures disconfirmation in a single questionnaire. This was tested by Ling et al.

(2005) on airline service quality, who found that it provides the most accurate results for the airline industry (Wu and Cheng 2013).

That being said, there are no substantive differences between SERVPEX and SERVQUAL (Lee et al. 2004). By combining the work of Brady and Cronin, 2001, Chen et al. 2011 and Rust and Oliver 1994, Wu and Cheng (2013) developed a hierarchical model that incorporates the specific characteristics of the airline industry.

2.8. Justification of adapting the SERVQUAL model in this research

Having carefully examined the various service quality models discussed above, it is clear that the majority of service quality models uses all or some of the SERVQUAL dimensions to measure service quality in different sectors, whether services or other industries. Thus, Ladhari (2008) found that SERVQUAL was utilised as a starting point for the development of the item pool in 30 industry-specific scales of service quality.

For the purposes of this PhD research study, it is not only necessary to have a thorough understanding of what is meant by service quality, but it is also essential to develop an appropriate tool to measure perceived service quality, so that LCCs can use this to investigate the expectations and perceptions of their passengers in Middle Eastern cultural setting.

Much of the literature suggests that airline passengers perceive service quality as a multi-dimensional construct, which is in accordance with SERVQUAL's conception of service quality (Saha and Theingi, 2009). Therefore, this study will modify the

SERVQUAL model into LOW COST CARRIER SERVICE QUALITY (LCCSQUAL) the measurement scale with its five dimensions designed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) with necessary adaption suggested by Zagat, an aviation research firm, the US Department of Transportation (DOT); Tiernan et al. (2008) and Ladhari (2008) in order to transform it from a generic service quality model into a model specifically for the LCC industry in a new cultural setting as suggested by O'Cass and Carlsson (2011).

2.9. Aviation Industry

The service sector is playing an increasingly significant role in every sector of the economy, as significant recent growth in the service industry has far exceeded growth in manufacturing. Services now contribute substantially to the global GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and exports. For example, the UAE's service sector is a key driver of growth, with most figures revealing it accounts for as much as 74 per cent of GDP, according to Alan Harpham, Chairman of APMG-International, a global examination institute (Emirates 24/7.com August 2012).

This global phenomenon of significant, sustained service growth has led to an ever-growing array of questions that need to be addressed; mainly questions that have significant implications for the success of firms, the well-being of societies and the quality of consumers' living worldwide (Bitner and Brown, 2008).

The aviation industry is a large, rapidly-growing sector among service industries that has gone through drastic changes on both the supply and the demand side. It can be defined as 'activities that are directly related to the transporting of people and goods by air from one location to another' (Air Transport Action Group, 2012). According to

Perovic (2013), the airline industry plays a vital role in every country's economic development by opening up its market both to local and foreign investors globally.

In the aviation industry demand is anticipated to grow, according to the forecast for 2013-2017 released by The International Air Transport Association (IATA), which highlights that, 'airlines expect to see a 31% increase in passenger numbers between 2012 and 2017. By 2017, total passenger numbers are expected to rise to 3.91 billion — an increase of 930 million passengers over the 2.98 billion carried in 2012'. This means that, the expectations of the passengers will also increase, which is an important issue for any airline (Roesler, 2014).

Within the industry, LCCs are growing rapidly and posing challenges to legacy carriers (Najda, 2003). However, LCCs need to cater to passenger needs and provide quality service and still sustain with low prices, to maintain their competitiveness and continue growing in the current market. In relation to LCC, this study investigates passenger expectations and perceptions of LCC service quality. This chapter focuses on investigating the importance of the aviation industry, global developments, with particular focus on LCC developments in the Middle East aviation market.

2.9.1. The Importance of the Aviation Industry

Air travel is one of the world's largest industries, generating more than US$872 billion in ancillary revenues and catering for more than 500 million international and 1.6 billion domestic passengers a year. Its effect is widespread, with a major influence on tourism, world trade, international business and economic growth (Fuller, 2013).

According to the US Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics 2011 Airline Financial Data, the total third quarter 2011 airline revenue of USA from all ancillary sources that can be identified, including fees and frequent flyer sales, was $2.3 billion. This growth has occurred in most service industries as many service providers are now seeking to lower the cost of providing services while increasing access time (Staples et al. 2001).

The aviation industry supports tourism and international business by providing the world's only rapid worldwide transportation network. Airlines transported 3.6 billion passengers and 781 million tonnes of air cargo in 2015, connecting the world's cities with more than 49,000 routes (Air Transport Action Group, 2015). By providing these services, the aviation industry plays an important role in enabling economic growth and providing various economic and social benefits.

In 2015, the aviation sector directly contributed to 63 million jobs and US$606 billion to the global economy (ATAG, 2015). In a majority of the developed nations studied, aviation was founded to contribute at least 2 percent to GDP, suggesting that the aviation industry and a high level of development mutually reinforce each other (IATA, 2015). Aviation's total global economic impact was $2.7 trillion including direct, indirect, induced and the catalytic effects of tourism (IATA, 2016).

The aviation sector also contributes to other industries by facilitating their growth and supporting their operations, For example, air transport acts as a catalyst for wider benefits in its role as a critical component and facilitator of global business and tourism. Through its speed, convenience and affordability, air transport has increased the

opportunities for both leisure and business travelers to experience a host of geographies, cultures and markets. With 3.6 billion of international tourists traveling by air (ATAG, 2015), the aviation sector is critical to the tourism industry, which in turn is an important source of economic growth in many countries, particularly developing ones.

2.9.2. Developments in the aviation industry across the world

The global aviation industry has multiplied into 1,397 commercial airlines, 25,332 aircraft in commercial service, 3,864 airports and 36.4 million commercial flights worldwide (IATA, 2013). International revenue passenger kilometers (RPKs) were up 5.4 percent in January 2015, airlines in emerging markets continue to record strong growth, with carriers in the Middle East and Latin America up 11.4 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively. Middle Eastern economies are comparatively well-placed to withstand the plunge in oil revenues and regional airlines continue to gain market share.

The number of aircraft departures reached 33 million globally during 2013, establishing a new record and surpassing the 2012 departure figure by more than one million flights. Global air travel was 4.6 percent in January 2015 compared to a year ago, a slower start to the year when compared to the strong 5.8% expansion in 2014 overall (IATA, 2015).

The aviation industry has experienced significant growth and currently contributes 3.4% to world GDP (ATAG, 2014). Air transport has experienced rapid expansion since the Second World War as the global economy has grown and the technology of air transport has developed to its present state. The result has been a steady decline in airline operating costs and fares per unit of traffic (measured in passenger-kms) in real

terms, which has stimulated traffic growth (International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO, 2001). The aviation industry supports the world economy by generating jobs, according to ATAG report, 58.1 million jobs were supported by aviation worldwide (ATAG, 2014).

Air transport is a major contributor to global economic prosperity; it provides the only rapid worldwide transportation network, which makes it essential for global business and tourism. Aviation industry also plays a significant role particularly in the developing countries. Air transport facilitates world trade by supporting the countries to participate in the global economy by allowing international trade and globalization of production. In 2014, the total value of goods transported by air represented 35% of all international trade. Aviation industry also contributes to the tourism industry; globally, 52% of international tourists travel by air according to ATAG (2014).

Traditionally, the airline industry was highly regulated by national governments regarding where and how airlines could operate (Piercy, 2001). However, the USA's 1978 Airline Deregulation Act changed the industry's competitive structure (Sullivan, 2014) which had been regulated for nearly forty years by the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA). The deregulation policy introduced limited freedoms, such as permission to set prices and enter or exit the industry upon meeting insurance and safety standards.

This change led to many new entrants into the airline market, with the industry becoming very dynamic due to deregulation and open skies policies in many European, American and Asian countries. Such changes have enabled airlines to enter and serve

different countries as well as smaller cities, for instance Alexandria in Egypt (D'Silva et al. 2012). LCCs are a by-product of deregulation in many countries like South Korea. Deregulation brought forth a variety of domestic discount carriers, of which Southwest (US) and WestJet (Canada) are the most successful survivors (Mentzer, 2011).

The major reason for growth in the aviation industry has been a robust competitive environment that has led to a more liberalised market across the world. This trend has acted as catalyst for the consequent establishment, growth and success of LCCs worldwide, when previously the aviation industry was dominated by full-fare airlines (Ariffin et al. 2010). During a panel discussion, the Secretary General of Arab Air (2011) mentioned that, expansion in the aviation industry has significantly supported the economic development of the Middle East.

Alderighi et al. (2004) and Doganis (2006), state that, unlike other industries, aviation is not only affected by technological factors, but also by political, legal, institutional and cultural developments. These improvements such as technological developments, better airports as well as policy improvement have also been noticed in the Middle East aviation industry since countries like the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain have liberalised their policies and are working closely towards implementing an open skies policy (GCC Aviation Report, 2015).

According to FTE Asia Conference and Exhibition (2014) the conference chair discussed some of the key changes that will affect the aviation industry. One of these is innovative technologies playing new and most noteworthy role in the airport journey

and in the near future these technologies may take the airport experience out of the airport, such that, passengers will spend much less of their time there.

Airports and airlines are becoming passenger-centric by personalising the passenger's experience through providing flexible and customised options for different passenger segments with different needs. Airlines are continually introducing various measures to improve their service profile, like e-tickets, internet booking, in-flight entertainment and higher safety standards (Lau et al. 2011). Yet, there is a need to continually review the dimensions of service that customers expect from an airline.

2.9.3. Developments in Aviation in the Middle East

The Middle East aviation market comprises of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen (World Tourism Organisation, 2005). Of these, the six main countries classified as the engines of growth in the Middle East are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which together form the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries. According O'Connell and Williams (2010), the Middle East has been seen as the geo-economic epicentre of the world for various reasons; one of the major reasons for international attention is a tectonic shift in the global air transport market, mainly due to the particular rise of the Arabian Gulf-based airlines.

In 2007, for example, while Middle East air transport constituted a mere 4.5% of the world market, its passenger traffic had a 7% share, according to the International Civil

Aviation Organization (ICAO). The total air transport market in the Arabian Gulf stood at around 125 million passengers and around 2.2 million tonnes of cargo in 2007. The Middle East remains the fastest growing air transport markets in the world, with its traffic, expanding by 11.2 per cent in 2013 compared to 2012, accounting for 9 per cent of global RPKs. Figure 7 below highlights the growth in the Middle East's aviation industry's international and domestic market worldwide in 2014.

Figure 7: Region Capacity, Growth traffic and Capacity Growth, Market Shares and Load Factors

Source: International Civil Aviation Organisation, 2014

The Middle East's air transport system was heavily regulated by strict policies for decades (O'Connell and Williams, 2010), and had stagnated because of its over-reliance on the oil industry, low levels of intra-regional trade and institutionalised protection of its national carriers. Recently, however, there has been a gradual progression towards

liberalisation in the domestic, intra-regional and international markets of the Middle East. The early wave of liberalisation triggered the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Lebanon to expand their open skies policies and allow foreign and newly established carriers the right to operate unlimited services in their territories (ACAC, 2004).

According to the Boeing current market outlook (2014), the GCC aviation industry in the Middle East has grown steadily over the past few decades and outpaced most other regional markets owing to favourable demographics and strong infrastructure. For e.g.: Dubai International Airport and DWC-Al Maktoum International airport forecasted at the Arabian Travel Market (2011) that Dubai International Airport would become the world's busiest airport by 2015 and the projections of 2015 highlight that Dubai Airports has secured its number one position as the world's busiest for international passenger traffic beating London's Heathrow airport by handling 70 million passengers in 2014.

Bahrain International Airport predicted that it would manage more than 9 million passengers in 2012, with total passengers travelling at 8.4 million in 2012 and 7.3 million by the end of 2013, according to the official website of Bahrain airport. Sharjah International Airport forecasted that, it would handle more than 6 million passengers in 2012, recording 4.24 million passengers in the third quarter of 2009, while 8.5 million passengers had travelled through Sharjah airport by the end of 2013 and 9.5 million passengers by the end of 2014.

Thus, the Middle East aviation market has shown tremendous growth. Toby Stokes, EMEIA (Europe, Middle East, India and Africa) Leader in Aviation at Ernst and Young

argue that, the traditional global players from America and Europe are facing their sternest challenge to date from the new players emerging from the Middle East. The growth in the aviation industry has been aided by increased flights, additional airports, reasonable ticket prices and greater flexibility for passengers.

2.10. Low Cost Carriers

The term 'Low Cost Carriers' originated in the seventies by the American domestic carrier Southwest within the airline industry to refer to airlines with a lower operating cost structure than their competitors (Francis et al. 2006). An LCC provides no-frills services, without seating assignments, no complementary in-flight meals, no entertainment and no airport lounges. Instead, they offer high-frequency services on short-haul, point-to-point domestic and international routes, quick turnaround times, low distribution costs through internet booking, and use of single type aircraft (Macário et al. 2007).

LCCs are not just cheaper, but follow their own specific business model, which is mainly characterised by a complete avoidance of network effects. Instead, they just utilise point-to-point routes, starting very often from one main airport characterised by its cheaper costs (Tiernan et al. 2008). Very often, these are secondary airports of major countries, like Terminal 2 at Dubai International Airport.

The advantage of using secondary airport is not just that it costs less to use these airports, but also that delays are reduced because traffic is limited at such airports. These practices allow simple processes with reduced costs. Shorter turnaround times

used by LCCs, in some cases less than 20 minutes, and low distribution costs by using e-ticketing and internet distribution are other important elements which save money for the passengers and cuts cost of the LCCs (O'Connell and Williams, 2005).

In most cases, LCCs don't develop their own traffic flows by opening new markets. Rather, they concentrate on, and try to take, as much of the market share in existing markets as they can (Campbell and Jones, 2002). Moreover, LCCs prefer orchestrating the configuration of the aircraft fleet, using one type of aircraft generated in order to minimise manpower, training and spares costs.

Most successful LCCs employ a discount pricing strategy, however they face the problem of selling inventory by a fixed date with no ability to reorder and no recover value for unsold seats (Marcus and Anderson, 2008). Revenue management is applied in such industries characterised as having fixed capacity, uncertain demand, perishable inventory, an appropriate pricing structure, and market segments with varying customer sensitivity (Cross, 1997). Revenue management involves dynamic capacity allocation or service configuration, driven by the changing demand of customers or the business to maximise profitability (Vinod, 2006). Revenue management experts recommend companies especially following the low cost model to operate at their optimal capacity or even near capacity to capture opportunities in the market (Dai, Raeside & Smyth, 2005).

LCC operating and management structures are minimal and efficient (Bao moi, 2011; Berrittellar et al. 2009). Undoubtedly, low fares are one of the crucial ways to satisfy customer needs and inspire them to buy again (Hidalgo et al. 2008). According to

qualitative research conducted by Yang et al. (2012) it is found that, LCC passengers are also influenced by service quality and not just price.

2.10.1. Difference between a Low Cost Carrier (LCC) and Full Service Carrier (FSC)

Airlines can be divided into two groups based on their activity: passenger airlines and freight airlines (Airline Business Models, 2008). Freight airlines are outside the scope of this research, and classification of passenger airlines can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Passenger airlines classification

Source: Tolpa E. (2012) Measuring Customer Expectations of Service Quality: case Airline Industry

The business model utilised by LCCs is that of price leadership (Tiernan et al. 2008). In direct contrast, the traditional scheduled carriers, also known as Legacy Carriers or Full Service Carriers (FSCs), have pursued a full-service differentiation strategy with an emphasis on the hub and spoke networks, primary airport use and frequent flyer programmes, all augmented through alliance membership (Tiernan et al. 2008). Legacy carriers mainly target short- and long-haul, leisure and business passengers.

The cost structure of FSC operations, such as aircraft maintenance, is generally higher than for LCCs. Although in theory, there are clear differences between LCCs and FSCs, in reality, these differences aren't as clear as they might seem. For example, some LCCs are starting to offer different services on their flights, such as: Fly Dubai offers business class seats to the passengers preferring to not associate with economy class, while FSCs are operating more flights according to the low-cost model. And to make things even more complicated, charters have started to offer flights all year, regional carriers have started operating more internationally, and both have adopted the low-cost model to suit their own needs (O'Connell, 2005).

2.10.2. Historical Background of Low Cost Carriers

More than 38 years ago in 1977, Rollin King and Herb Kelleher started a different kind of airline, beginning with one simple principle: 'If you get your passengers to their destinations when they want to get there, on time, at the lowest possible fares, and make sure they have a good time doing it, people will fly your airline'. A humble beginning as a small Texas based airline has now grown to become one of the largest airlines and trendsetters, both in the USA and worldwide (www.southwest.com).

In 1971, Southwest Airlines began with LCC services between Dallas, Houston and San Antonio. By 1974 i.e. in just 3 years, its passenger numbers had already reached one million, while today, 40 years later, it flies over 100 million passengers a year to 97 destinations in 41 cities across the USA and to 6 other countries, with more than 3,200 flights a day. The airline's fleet of over 500 aircraft is one of the youngest in the USA, with an average age of approximately nine years. According to the official website of Southwest airlines, it has the most dedicated employees, which has made Southwest one of the most successful LCCs. Since 1987, it has consistently led the entire airline industry with the lowest ratio of complaints per passengers boarded. It also led the way with the first airline web page at (www.southwest.com).

Low Cost Carriers have restructured the competitive environment within newly liberalised markets and have made a significant impact on the world's domestic passenger markets, which had been previously dominated by full service network carriers (O'Connell and Williams, 2005). The advent of LCCs has been one of the most striking developments in the air transport industry, including in Europe since its liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Burghouwt et al. 2015).

These carriers brought a number of innovations to the industry, perhaps most obviously in relation to simplifying the consumer product in return for a lower fare. As mentioned above, Southwest Airlines was the first to introduce the concept of the Low Cost Carrier (Bieger and Laesser, 2004) and has been among the leading companies driving change, while in Europe it has been Ryan Air, founded in 1985, and EasyJet, founded in 1995. Since then, the trend has spread to other countries. For example, new companies were established in continental Europe, notably Air Berlin (operating as a low-cost airline

since 1998), Germanwings (part of Lufthansa), and German Express and Helvetic (a Swiss-based company).

According to Liang and James (2009), the LCC model in Asian countries have rapidly grown, Skymark from Japan started to emulate Southwest during the mid-2000s, followed by Thailand and Cambodia in Southeast Asia, however, Malaysia based AirAsia successfully repositioned itself as a no-frills airline. According to Graham and Vowles, (2006), the most dynamic growth of LCCs has occurred in India and then in China. LCCs have now entered the Middle East and Africa market since 2003 when Air Arabia began operations based in the United Arab Emirates.

While Air Arabia created a milestone as being an LCC in the Middle East, it was soon joined by Jazeera Airways in 2005, RAK Airways in 2006 (relaunched in 2010), Saudi's Nasair in 2007, Yemen's Felix Airways in 2008 and Fly Dubai in 2009. The Middle East is not a small market, although it still has a long way to go to fulfil its potential. Jain (2011) reported the Middle East Business Aviation Association (Mebaa) forecast that, the Middle East business aviation market is likely to grow by15 to 20 percent annually over the next six years to become a $1 billion-per-year industry by 2018, making it one of the world's fastest-growing business aviation markets.

2.10.3. Growth and Developments of Low Cost Carriers worldwide

The major reason for the growth in the aviation industry has been the robust competitive environment that has led to a more liberalised market across the world, and acted as a catalyst for the subsequent birth, growth and success of LCCs world-wide. Previously,

the aviation industry was dominated by full-fare airlines (Ariffin, et.al 2010). At present, in the industry, there is a strong focus on low-fare, LCCs, since the first appearance of the LCC model in the 1990s.

The entry of LCCs within the Middle East region can be attributed to the deregulation policies of various governments and authorities (GCC Aviation Report, 2015). The entry of LCCs into the aviation industry has changed the competitive dynamics of the short-haul market, revolutionising the way that business is conducted in the aviation sector by adopting a fresh approach on both strategic and operational issues. According to O'Connell (2007), simplicity has become their universal principle over network airlines and consequently they have achieved substantial cost advantages that are being passed onto the consumer in the form of lower fares.

The entry of LCCs into the aviation industry has changed the perception of travellers, since more people are now able to travel by air (many for the first time) with a reduced fare and a compromise on services (Gures et al. 2011). Prior to 1967, it was impossible for middle- and low-income travellers to undertake air journeys, mainly because of unaffordable high prices (Baker, 2013). The appearance of LCCs created affordable and accessible travel for middle- and low-income passengers.

LCCs continue to develop due to passengers' need for low cost air travel. Particularly, low fares are a major motivator for expatriate travellers, who work in a different nation than their original position, travelling back home at the close of the contract, or visiting friends and relatives (VFR), annual holidays, or to visit another destination for both short and long vacations.

A report created by Al Masah Capital Management Limited (2015) has found that LCCs have increased the volume of low-income travellers globally, especially within the Middle Eastern region. Ryan air from Ireland and Air Asia from Malaysia, besides attracting passengers from buses and ferries, have attracted a heavy ratio of first-time flyers, mostly due to the low fares on offer (O'Connell and Williams 2005).

In the Middle East, a new segment has also emerged within the aviation industry of low-income passengers because of LCCs. In an interview with Mohammed El Emam, Country Manager Qatar Airways, discussed that, the travel and travellers' trends have changed significantly and the number of potential travellers has increased since the entry of LCCs.

GCC countries have approximately 50 million total population of which 52% are nationals and 48% are expatriates. This influx has developed a trend of passengers traveling to their home country at least once in a year, and also for short breaks such as weekends combined with holidays like Eid. Now there are opportunities for people to travel to nearby destinations like Qatar or Bahrain with or without a visa (Mr. Mohammed, Qatar Airways; Al Masah Capital Management Limited (2015).

2.10.4. Growth and Development of Low Cost Carriers in the Middle East

The entry of low cost airlines within the Middle East region can be attributed to the deregulation policies of various governments and authorities within the region. LCCs

are a relatively new phenomenon in the Middle East region, with three airlines, Air Arabia, Menajet and Transgulf Express, being the first LCCs to register in the first half of 2003. All these airlines were based in Sharjah (UAE) and began operating in Gulf, Indian and North African destinations (Francis et al. 2006).

However, two of them, Menajet and Transgulf, were unable to begin operations due to a lack of support from the local authorities, Sharjah Department of Civil Aviation (SDCA) and the federal authorities of the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), due to the airlines' poor safety standards of the aircraft. This left Air Arabia to become the first company to launch a low cost airline in the Middle East region, beginning operations from Sharjah, one of the Emirates (states) of the UAE in 2003.

The airline [Air Arabia] started with two leased Airbus 320 aircraft and its maiden flight was from Sharjah to Bahrain. By 2012, the airline had become one of the largest and most successful in the MENA (Middle East North Africa) region. According to company reports, Air Arabia became profitable in its first year of operations.

In 2010, Air Arabia Egypt was launched as a Joint Venture (JV) between Air Arabia and the Egyptian Travel and Tourism Company, part of the Travco Group. According to the official website of Air Arabia, the first quarter of 2015 reported a net profit of AED 85 million, an increase of 13% compared to AED 75 million in 2014. The airline carried over 6.8 million passengers in 2014 which was 12 percent more than 2013.

Jazeera Airways, based in Kuwait and established in April 2004, was the first non-government-owned airline in the Middle East and now continues to be one of the few

Middle-East-based non-government-owned airlines. It currently flies to 18 destinations across the Middle East. Jazeera Airways has grown from a low cost concept airline into a hybrid LCC, with two classes of economy and business. The airline now provides complimentary meals and allows 40 kilograms of baggage per passenger.

In 2011, Jazeera Airways carried 1.2 million passengers to destinations such as Dubai, Bahrain, Beirut, Alexandria, Amman, Damascus, Istanbul, Sharm El Sheikh, Assiut, Aleppo, Deir Ezzor, Luxor, Mashhad, Sohag, Jeddah, Riyadh, Kuwait, and Cairo. Its passenger segments include high-demand business, leisure, family, and weekend travellers. In the first quarter of 2015 Jazeera Airways announced a profit of $ 9.9 million, which 44.6 percent rise than the same time in 2014 (Gulf Aviation, June 2015).

The second LCC launched from the UAE was RAK Airways, based in Ras- Al-Khaimah, another UAE Emirate. RAK Airways entered the LCC market in 2006, but due to the financial crisis of 2007-2010, it closed its operations in 2009. It has since re-launched in 2010 using the same brand name, with a hybrid LCC model similar to Jazeera Airways. RAK Airways were the first LCC in the Middle East to use social media like Twitter and Facebook to communicate with its passengers directly. The Airways management was optimistic about improving its image of being more than a budget carrier, however, it closed all its operations abruptly since December 2013. Since then Air Arabia has taken over the operations and now flies from Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah.

In 2007, National Air Services based in Saudi Arabia (KSA), launched a domestic LCC called Nas Air, flying to 27 cities in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. However,

due to the high barriers to entry in the Saudi market, there have been few developments in its aviation industry. In 2013, Nas Air underwent a complete makeover from changing its brand from Nas Air to Flynas as well as moving from a low cost carrier image to a hybrid model offering business class seats (Cornwell, 2013).

The latest entrant was Fly Dubai, an LCC based in Dubai, which began its operations in 2009, initially supported by Emirates Airlines. It began with its first service between Dubai to the cities of Beirut and Amman. Since then, the airline has expanded its destinations and services quite rapidly, now flying to 90 destinations around the Middle East, Asia and some destinations in Europe. Fly Dubai, in its sixth year of operation, announced its annual results for 2014 and reported a net profit of AED 250 million (USD 68 million) an increase of 12% compared to 2013 and 7.25 million passengers travelled via fly Dubai (flydubai Official website).

The Middle East's LCC sector has seen dramatic growth in the past decade. According to OAG, the market leader in airline schedule data, LCCs have grown at an average annual rate of 52% in the last decade, compared to traditional carriers, which have grown at an average rate of 7%. LCCs in the Middle East have also delivered consistently higher growth than LCCs in any other region in the past 10 years.

Figure 8: Growth of LCCs in the Middle East

Source: http://www.trbusiness.com/regional-news/middle-east/exclusive-the-middle-easts-low-cost-revolution-led-by-flydubai/35566

LCCs have been expanding quite rapidly in the GCC region over the last few years. Even though some of the low cost airlines began their operations during the financial downturn, they have achieved success. Commentators suggest that reasons for this include good service levels, such as on-time performance, and efficient and safe travel.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the Middle East aviation market is one of the fastest growing markets in the world, with passenger demand in the Middle East is increasing to 11.2 per cent despite the recent economic downturn in the global economy, while most airlines in other regions in the world experienced a decline.

The IATA association predicted that, by the year 2014, the Middle East region will grow 9.4 percent, however, by the end of 2014 the growth rate had been 11.7 percent. The Middle East airline industry is dominated by hub airports, unlike in the US and Europe. However, some countries, like Israel and Palestine, are passing through a difficult phase of political unrest, which continues to disturb the region with obvious short-term effects on the aviation industry.

With a growing number of low cost carriers in the Middle East market it is evident that there are a number of challenges in the future market (IATA, Vision 2050). One of the challenges identified is service quality and the growing needs and perceptions of passengers towards these budget airlines. The passengers of today are very much aware of their needs and can compare the services provided from one service provider to the other. A major threat is technology, which could be an advantage as well.

Easy access and e-ticketing could be considered as benefit of technology, whereas social networking could pose a threat if the service provided is not up to the standards promised by the service provider. The passengers are constantly hooked on to their social messaging and can post comments if they did not like a specific service or an airline (Kirby, 2011). This issue suggests the need to conduct quality checks of both the services provided and the perceptions and experiences of the passengers during their journey (Ringle, Sarstedt, & Zimmermann, 2011; Roades & Waguespack, 2008).

Low fares are a major motivator for expat travellers traveling back home in cases of end of contract travel, visiting friends and relatives (VFRs), annual holidays, or to visiting a destination for both short and long holidays. LCCs have increased the volume

of low income travellers globally and within the Middle Eastern region. SKYTRAX, the world's leading airline and airport review site (airlinequality.com) for over 681 airlines and 725 airports, found that service quality cannot be ignored.

If LCCs are focusing on penetrating and growing in the market, they will have to concentrate on both reduced fares and decent, good-quality service. Though passengers traveling with LCCs do not expect a very high level of service quality, they do expect a clean and well-maintained aircraft, on-time take-off and landing, and empathy towards the passengers.

The following section discusses the birth and growth of LCCs, highlighting the changes over the years due to rapid developments in the aviation industry in the Middle East region. It also highlights the need to improve service quality levels for long term survival in the market since passengers now expect good quality at a reasonable price on LCC airlines.

2.10.5. Importance of service quality in the airline industry

Service quality has become a more significant driver of passenger satisfaction, loyalty and choice of airline in today's competitive situation (Sultan and Simpson, 2000; Chang et al. 2002, Gilbert et al. 2003; Rust et al. 2006). As a major service provider, the industry faces the challenge of meeting the objectives of profitability and customer satisfaction. Zeithaml (1988) claims that perceived service quality is a more significant attribute than price, which is often ignored. Similarly, Gilbert and Wong (2003) argue

that perceived service quality is an important factor affecting airlines in a highly competitive market.

Park et al. (2004) found that, the perceived quality of an airline has a positive effect on passenger satisfaction, in terms of its image and service value, although the relative importance of service quality is not always investigated, because of that, airlines need to understand the passengers' needs and expectations. According to Aydin and Yildirim (2012), in practice, most airlines measure passenger perceptions of their service offerings to understand the company's performance levels, without having clear knowledge of passenger expectations for service.

Grönroos (2000) "Service Management and Marketing", explicitly states the four aspects that airline passengers consider most significant in their flying experience. The first is Care and Concern, in that passengers should feel that the airline, its employees and its operational systems are dedicated to solving their problems. Second is Spontaneity, which means the passengers think that the employees show willingness and readiness to reach out to passengers and deal with their problems. The third aspect is Problem Solving, in that passengers expect that employees should have enough knowledge and skills to perform their duty by following standards if passengers approach them. The fourth and last aspect is Recovery, which means that contact employees should be able to take the necessary action to deal with the situation and find a solution if something unexpected occurs.

According to Chen (2008), providing passengers with a high quality of service is the core competitive advantage contributing to an airline's profitability and sustained

development in a highly competitive market. Further, Mustafa et al. (2005) believed that, the most important factor is improvement of service quality for passengers. Providing superior service quality is thus a priority for all airlines to remain competitive. The increasing competition from LCCs, which has challenged the traditional full-service carriers (Chen et al. 1994; Cerasani, 2002; Gillen and Morrison, 2002; Sayanak, 2003; O'Connell, 2005; Pant, 2006), has reduced the average quality of service (Chan, 2000; Kandampully and Butler, 2001; Mazzeo, 2003; Morrison, 2004; Manuela, 2007).

In addition, airline regulators interfere in price competition because it often results in reduced service quality or even flight safety. Thus, the price is not the only factor determining an airline's competitive advantage. Rather, in a highly competitive environment, where all airlines have comparable fares and matching frequent flyer programs, therefore, each airline's competitive advantage lies in its service quality as perceived by customers (Chen and Chang, 2005).

Quality measures are mostly used to examine the relationships between service quality and related issues, such as airline choice, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, passenger type, airline type, airline class, aircraft type and total transportation service offering (Alotaibi, 1992; Young et al. 1994; Andotra et al. 2008). Empirical studies demand for airline services show that service quality is central to the choice of airlines for both business and leisure travellers (Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics, BTCE, 1994).

As in other sectors, the problem in the airline sector is whether management can correctly perceive what customers want and expect (Park et al. 2005). Somwang (2008) therefore believes that, airline managers need to understand the passengers' expectations with respect to service failure and recovery. Further, the study also highlights that understanding how well an airline meets or exceeds passenger needs can enable the airline marketer to improve passenger retention rates. Whether an airline is full-service or low-cost, it is made up of a very complex mix of intangible services (Gursoy et al. 2005; Ahmad et al. 2010).

Tsaur et al. (2002) claim that, since a service industry is characterised by intangibility, perishability, inseparability and heterogeneity, it is more difficult to measure service quality. Nevertheless, airlines need to have valid and reliable measures to better understand the variables likely to impact on customers' perceptions of the service quality being offered to them. Expectations serve as a major determinant of a consumer' service quality evaluations and satisfaction (O'Connor et al. 2002). Therefore, airlines need to measure, not only customer perceptions, but also their expectations.

Important variables for passengers include ease of bookings through the websites or call centers, hassle-free check–in, efficient ticketing staff, regular announcements during flight delays at the airport, on-time performance of flights, good in-flight experience, efficient baggage handling and value for money (Sultan & Simpson, 2000). If there are major differences in the perceptions of airline passengers, e.g. in service quality on different flights, then the organisation has to implement changes in the marketing mix to improve quality or customers' perceptions.

In recent years, the speed and intensity of change in service offerings has accelerated tremendously within the airline industry (Atilgan et al. 2008). For e.g. challenges in the airline markets are becoming globally tough as the passengers' needs and wants are going in a variety of directions (Ariffin et al. 2010). In general, passenger inconvenience has increased since the September 11 attacks (Leone and Liu 2003; Gkritza et al. 2006). Passengers find it harder to trust airlines due to increased sensitivity about terrorist attacks, accidents and emergency landings. Such incidents have created a gap between the perceptions of passengers and service providers that needs to be reduced.

On the basis of a review of published research on service quality in the airline sector, researchers have concluded that most often statistical methods are employed to evaluate the perceptions of both passengers and service providers (Abdlla et al. 2007). Therefore, it is evident that airline service quality needs to be measured using a valid instrument which has relevant airline related variables or items. This PhD study creates an LCC service quality instrument which closely measures the service quality of LCCs and can be adapted in different cultural settings.

2.10.6. Service Quality and Low Cost Carriers

It has been found that airlines have introduced various measures to improve their service profile, such as the introduction of e-ticketing, internet booking, in-flight entertainment and enhanced safety standards (D'Silva et al. 2012). However, there is

a need to continually review the dimensions of service that customers look for in an airline.

According to Aksoy et al. (2003), an airline needs to understand passenger preferences and satisfaction in order to deliver better service. The service quality concept is an integral part of the product offering to the air traveller. Hence, measuring service quality is important for LCCs to enable them to improve their product offering and garner a greater number of passengers.

Somwang (2008) found that in Thailand aviation industry, there are many questions in the mind of the passengers; rather, there were many misconceptions about LCCs. The first question in Thailand related to LCCs was "Are they flying old planes?", "Do they have well trained and qualified personnel?", and "What service can one expect?" Air Travel Consumer Report mentioned in Somwang (2008) revealed that LCC passengers complained about in-flight problems, ticketing problems, refunds, fares, customer service and advertising.

In addition, Suzuki (2004, p. 26, cited in Somwang 2008) reported that passengers of Thai LCCs experienced service failures regarding seat denials, flight delays and baggage mishandling, such as lost, damaged, delayed or stolen luggage. Thus, understanding passengers' carrier choice behaviour is a significant issue for LCCs. Saha and Theingi (2009) pointed out that the emergence of low cost airlines has raised concerns about how satisfied the customers are with the services provided. If airlines learn how passengers' carrier choices are affected by ticket prices and service quality, they can make more effective decisions on pricing and marketing strategies.

According to Balcombe et al. (2009) and Hidalgo et al. (2008), price is not the only factor because service quality also triggers passengers' behaviours. In fact, price is a point of parity for all the LCCs to survive in the industry; what differentiates them is service quality. Therefore, airlines are making an effort to maximize their profits by adjusting price to be comparable with competitors' fares.

LCCs are focusing on quality of service to differentiate their product from the other LCC airlines and target customers. Jou, et al. (2008) reported that passengers consider service quality and price when choosing airlines. However, Holtbrugge et al. (2006) found that, many airlines are aiming to provide a high level of service quality to enhance customer satisfaction and to increase the efficiency of airline brands to displace the generic reputation of LCCs as offering just low fare benefits. When prices change, LCC passengers are more sensitive to changes because price is a major driving force of the passengers' demands.

Li et al. (2010) suggest that, even though LCCs are price conscious, service quality still exerts the second largest effect and agree that the airlines have to devote themselves to improving service quality to attract leisure and business passengers. Saha and Theingi (2009) consider the importance of the relative effect of quality instead of the overall judgment of service quality. For example, the importance of check-in and check-out speeds varied depending on the reason for travel, such as between leisure or business passengers.

The global introduction of new technologies meant that using technology is the best way for LCCs to improve their services at reasonably low price. As O'Toole (2004) predicts, "air travel could become world's first web-enabled industry as online sales, e-tickets and range of new technologies gain ground with increasing speed". The dramatic growth of the web and self-service technologies permits customers and airlines to bypass the complexity of booking their tickets through a physical travel agency and eliminate the cost of old legacy systems (McIvor et al. 2003). Based on the official website of Southwest airlines, the American based Southwest Airlines were credited with offering the first e-tickets for passengers in 1994 and thereafter there was no looking back for them and now for others.

According to Somwang (2008), the factors that influence passenger choice of LCCs are market presence, service quality, frequent flyer membership, fare levels and travel restrictions, and scheduling convenience. Gilbert & Wong (2003) found that, service quality cannot be ignored, if LCCs are focusing on penetrating and growing in the market, they will have to concentrate on both reduced fares and decent and good quality service. Gupta et al. (2004) state that a 1% increase in customer retention rate has a 5% influence on the firm's value. Hence, understanding passenger satisfaction is critical for passenger retention in the Middle East LCC market.

LCCs in the Middle East region need to create awareness about their product, the core being no frills. Since passengers in this region have always travelled with full service airlines and are used to a higher level of service, they expect somewhat similar service from LCCs. According to an article cited in economist Mr. Marwan Boodai, chairman

of Jazeera airways [a Kuwait based LCC] discussed that, "*In this world [Middle East], you don't have a one-size-fits-all model*".

Further, according to him it is not easy, '*our customers have high expectations with the low-cost model*'. Therefore, local and federal authorities in the Middle East should give more freedom through open skies policies and deregulation to LCCs to provide better service and allow more freedom for other airlines to enter into the market.

LCCs should attract more Arab national passengers by understanding the nature of service based on their culture. National culture has been investigated and defined in many studies. One of the most widely-used definitions of national culture is by Hofstede (2001), who defines national culture as the collective mental programming of the people of any particular nationality. According to Hofstede, people share a collective mental programming which distinguishes their culture from others. This mental programming shapes the attitudes, values, behaviour, competences, and perceptions of priority of that nationality.

Hofstede (2001) found that different cultures have varying levels of "power distance". The power distance index measures the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions [like the family] accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Nations with a large power distance, where inequality is accepted, emphasise a dependency relationship, with Arab countries scoring 80 out of 104 (a high level of power distance) and ranked the seventh of 50 countries in Hofstede's study.

The last decade has seen numerous studies examining LCCs, but most of them have focused on airlines in the US and EU market (O'Connell and Williams, 2005). Therefore, there is an urgent need to study the developments and experiences of LCCs from the Middle East region. Because LCCs are relatively a new feature in the MENA region, not much research has been conducted so the assumption is very much that low cost means lower quality. The awareness should be created by the LCCs in the region that these airlines are competing on the basis of low operating costs, however not compromising on quality levels or the standard level of quality to their passengers.

2.11. The aviation industry and the SERVQUAL model

In the service industries, customer satisfaction is a compelling issue because customer retention is more important than attracting new customers (Park et al. 2004; Kim et al. 2009). According to Agarwal and Dey (2010), initial studies of airline service quality appeared in 1988 (Gourdin, 1988). Further, Fick and Ritchie (1991) and Gourdin and Kloppenborg (1991) were the first to apply the service quality gap model to the airline industry. Fick and Ritchie (1991) used the SERVQUAL scale to measure perceived service quality within several service industries such as the airline industry.

According to Ostrowski (1993), in the case of commercial airlines, customers may not receive the services they have perceived before the actual service experience. In general, the service quality of an organisation either falls below or above customer expectations. When the service quality meets or exceeds expectations, it is considered to be high quality and this can create word-of-mouth communication. However, the same could be disappointing when the service experienced by a passenger is below their

expectations as it can damage the image of the airline and reduce repurchasing (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). The notion that service quality and customer satisfaction are distinctive variables has achieved some degree of consensus among researchers (Saha and Theingi, 2009).

The individual dimensions of airline service quality are considered as an important variable in the study conducted by Rodger et al, (2005). In a study by Agbor and Eriksson (2011) discussed the link between customer expectations and service quality and identified that price is not the only factor that influences passengers' perceptions of service quality.

According to Park et al. (2005), previous airline service studies often ignored the effects of individual dimensions of airline service quality. This led them to investigate the effects of individual dimensions of airline service and improvement of air passengers' future behavioural intentions; they proposed a conceptual framework which considered airline service quality, airlines corporate image and passengers' future behavioural intentions.

Zeithaml et al. (1990) commented that SERVQUAL research recognized reliability as the most essential and tangibles as the least essential of the five dimensions influencing overall service quality ratings of service companies. A similar study of US and European passengers confirmed that reliability is the most important dimension in measuring international airline service quality, followed by responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility (Sultan and Simpson, 2000).

Another study indicated that passenger's nationality played a significant role in the selection of variables in the SERVQUAL model (Gilbert and Wong, 2003). Tsaur et al. (2002) found that customers in Taiwan were mainly concerned about the courtesy of attendants, then safety, comfort, seat cleanness and attendant responsiveness. Park et al. (2005) confirmed the strong relationship between the dimensions of convenience and accessibility, the dimensions of in-flight service, airline's image and behavioural intentions in Australian International passengers'.

Lowest fares of LCCs may be one of the major determinants of a passenger's decision (Jou et al. 2008). However, the LCC's quality is as much vital factor as low fares since quality is the key factor attracting passengers (Balcombe et al. 2009). Thus, according to Assaf (2009), price may not be a prominent factor in choosing an airline, even among LCCs.

2.12. The SERVQUAL model study of LCCs:

Somwang (2008) evaluated the service quality of Thailand's LCC and found that, service quality is a key component for LCCs ability to compete effectively, remain profitable and survive in a competitive market. The main purpose of Somwang's study was to identify differences in the expectations and perceptions of passengers flying with Thai LCCs, to examine the passengers' perceived service quality for both international and domestic flights, and to determine the influence of demographic variables on passengers' perceived service quality. The study also made use of an adaptation of the SERVQUAL measuring tool and the GAP model to examine service quality and segment passengers' expectations.

The first 22 variables of the SERVQUAL scale were used to measure customer expectations of service while the other 22 variables were utilised to measure the perceived level of service provided by Thailand LCCs. (Somwang, 2008) The findings indicated that, passengers today are well-updated and knowledgeable with a high expectation about service quality regardless of whether they are using an FSC or LCC. This clearly indicates that all commercial airlines, irrespective of being FSC or LCC, have to give importance to service quality. The study by Somwang (2008) found that it is necessary for LCCs to understand the passengers' expectations, perceptions and perceived service quality in Thailand.

Yang et al. (2012) in their study on Taiwanese LCC, found that service quality had the greatest effect on behavioural intentions, especially in terms of reliability, tangibles, responsiveness and assurance, suggesting that customers care not only about low prices, but also about other service quality issues.

According to Neal and Kassens (2011), studied a Spanish secondary airport, Girona-Costa Brava Airport and found that, LCCs have increased their business class traffic. They identified distinct associations between travel experience and valuation of flight characteristics for business and leisure travellers. Further the study found that, business travellers gave importance to flight quality than price, whereas the tourists, on the other hand, focused on flight quality and proximity of airport to destination, but not price.

LCCs in the South Korean domestic aviation market began by providing low fares and levels of service quality on par with full service carriers (FSCs). In a study of the South

Korean LCC, Kim and Lee (2011) determined passengers' assessments of the relative importance of perceived service quality and explored the relationship between customer satisfaction and specific types of behavioural intentions in the South Korean LCC market. They found that the South Korean LCCs continued to increase despite the global economic crisis (CAPA – Centre for Aviation, 2009).

The results of a research in South Korea found that two dimensions (tangibles and responsiveness) of perceived service quality are significant antecedents of customer satisfaction. In particular, responsiveness have the strongest effect on customer satisfaction. In other words, it can be assumed that LCC passengers regard the 'responsiveness' factor as the most important service factor that an airline should provide, meaning that a newly-emerging LCC anywhere in the world must take all measures to ensure responsiveness toward its passengers (Kim and Lee, 2011).

The SERVQUAL model and its scales have been one of the most widely used to measure perceived service quality from the time of its inception (Bigne et al. 2003). Measuring passenger experiences in airline service quality are a theoretically valid way of measuring perceived quality (Grönroos, 1993). Therefore, the SERVQUAL model has led to the use of survey questionnaires to collect data for analysis (Liou et al. 2010). While some researchers in service quality claim that there is a lot of controversy surrounding the application of the SERVQUAL measurement tool, most agree that it is an appropriate instrument for examining the perceived service quality in the airline sector despite limits in its validity and reliability (Aksoy et al. 2003; Sultan and Simpson, 2000; Park et al. 2004).

This PhD study, therefore, will focus on developing LCC service related variables to measure the service quality based on passengers' expectations and perception in a new cultural setting in the Middle East. The Middle East culture is found to be different than European, Western and Asian culture. According to Furrer et al. (2000); Khan, (2010) and Carlson and O'Cass, (2011) culture will have influence on customer perception and service quality should be investigated based on different cultural settings.

2.7. Chapter Summary

In summary, the customer defines every element of an organisation and increasing competition in every field is forcing businesses to pay ever more attention to satisfying customers and this includes; providing strong customer service. The service industry is growing rapidly because of internationalisation, which means that customers in the international market expect service quality to be of a good standard everywhere. In the last few years, service marketers have realised that competition can be well-managed by differentiating through quality (Sachdev and Verma, 2004).

The recent changes such as deregulation policy have been necessary to allow the aviation industry to grow and develop, and demonstrate that, unlike any other industry, aviation has not been slow to embrace recent technology advances. Finally, the importance of service quality in the airline industry was discussed to confirm that, as a part of the service industry, aviation also has to follow the necessary requirements of satisfying its passengers, which is impossible without evaluating and providing the best service to retain existing passengers and attract potential passengers.

LCCs have developed rapidly world-wide, including in the Middle East. The trend of LCCs began in 2003 in the Middle East and successful LCCs such as: Air Arabia, AL Jazeera and Fly Dubai are increasing their routes in different destinations very quickly. Even though LCCs are cost leaders, service quality plays a major role in ensuring their growth and profitability especially in the Middle East. Therefore, LCCs should continuously measure their service quality (Yang et al. 2012). The SERVQUAL model is an appropriate scale to evaluate the service quality (Park et al. 2004) however, the scale needs to be modified and made industry specific which in case of LCCs will be beneficial (Ladhari, 2008) and should be investigated in a new cultural setting (Khan, 2010; Carlson and O'Cass, 2011).

CHAPTER THREE:

Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The methodology chapter will discuss both the theoretical and practical reflections for this study, including the research objectives, research questions and the research methodology employed to analyse the findings of this study. Reid (2001) suggests that, in order to propose a theory, the researcher needs to have a sharp grasp of the relevant theory as well as knowledge of contemporary issues. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) mention that a researcher should investigate what has been done before in his or her field. This background work allows the researcher to focus on particular areas that previously may have been unclear.

The chapter investigates the research methodology and to identify the appropriate research design for this PhD study. The chapter is further organised by describing the general research philosophy; including the research questions, the research objectives and the research approach. A brief background discussion on the research process and the methods utilised to address the research questions.

This study employs a scale development procedure by Rossiter's C-OAR-SE model, it is hence necessary to discuss the concepts behind the scales and the process of scaling. Scaling techniques, which forms the basis of this research methodology, are explained in detail later in this chapter. Finally, the chapter compares rating scales employed in the measurement of service quality in order to justify the choice of rating scale for this study.

3.2. Research Philosophy

Research, in common parlance, refers to a search for knowledge, while the Advanced Learner's dictionary of current English defines research as 'a careful investigation or inquiry, especially through the search for new facts in any branch of knowledge' (Kothari, 2004:1). When confronted with the unknown, we become more and more inquisitive, which makes us probe and seek understanding of the unknown. This inquisitiveness is the mother of all knowledge, while the method one generally employs to obtain knowledge of the unknown can be termed 'research'.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), research is a systematic and organised effort to investigate a specific problem that needs a solution. It is a series of steps designed and followed with the goal of finding answers to the issues that are of concern to us in the work environment. Further, Cooper and Emory (1995) define research as systematic inquiry aimed at providing information to solve problems. The authors state that, academic research needs to go beyond mere description, rhetoric and sales stories. Hence questions need to be posed and investigated; themes need to be analysed. These definitions clearly state that there is a need for a systematic and organised method to investigate a problem needing a solution and is done by using a series of steps with the objective of achieving certain research aims.

Kohlbacher (2006) states that, the researcher must understand theoretical issues, as judgments have to be made during the data collection phase. Simon (1994) recommends a review of the literature as an integral component of the exploratory phase

of data collection while Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress the need to get a grip on the knowledge of the literature in gaining "theoretical sensitivity". They define theoretical sensitivity as "a personal quality of the researcher" indicating "an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of the data". An extensive review of the existing literature into a phenomenon helps in building theory (Carson et al. 2001). For a researcher to gain true empirical insight, the theory-building phase of the research should be given explicit and careful attention Sultan and Simpson (2002).

The purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of scientific procedures. Research can be undertaken for two different purposes. One is to solve a currently existing problem in the work setting, termed as action or applied research (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010). Such research is common in resolving a management-related problem where limited time is available and it is unlikely to generalize to similar problems to other organisations. The aim of applied research is to understand more about certain phenomena and problems that occur in organisations and industries, and how they can be solved (Sekaran, 2006).

The second purpose of research is to add or contribute to the general body of knowledge in a particular area of interest to the researcher. The main purpose of conducting basic research is to generate more knowledge and understanding of phenomena and to build theories based on the research results. Such theories subsequently become the foundation for further study of the phenomena. This process of building on existing knowledge enables theory building in the management area (Sekaran, 2006). Although research is important in both business and academic activities, there is no consensus in

the literature on how it should be defined. One reason for this is that research means different things to different people.

3.3. Social Science Research:

Social sciences are the study of human society, social groups and individuals in their social relationships in and to society. Social science is the scientific discipline that deals with the study of fields such as: anthropology, economics, political science, sociology and history (Worcester et al. 2001). Social science studies are very important to society since they inform us about the society we live in and the things we are surrounded by.

Social research is defined as 'the systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalisation, principles or theories resulting in prediction and possibly ultimate control of events in society'. It attempts to answer questions or solve social problems (Kundu, 2009).

'Social research is a scientific undertaking which by means of logical methods, aims to discover new facts or old facts and to analyse their sequences, interrelationships, casual explanations and natural laws which govern them' (Bryman, 2004). According to DeVaus (2002), the aim of a social researcher is to answer two fundamental questions from different perspectives: What is going on? and Why is it going on? The former approach is exploratory whereas the latter is explanatory.

In research, a theory is an essential part of social research, since 'theories help to interpret the meaning of observations and pattern highlights their significance'. They help us 'realise what one finds' (DeVaus, 1991). Further, simply to collect a number of facts gives

no idea about how they relate to one another. Only theories can provide a way of ordering observations and producing plausible accounts of how they interrelate (DeVaus, 1991:22). From the point of view of theory development, researching a problem and finding a solution is an attempt to understand and explain the social world around us. It should be noted that, whatever research process is employed, there is no ultimate explanation of the social world. Therefore, social theories should not be judged as true or false but only useful. In general, the more that a theory can explain a wide range of phenomena accurately, the more useful it should be considered (Gomm, 2009).

3.4. Identification of Research Problem:

A research problem is the topic a researcher would like to address, investigate, or study, whether descriptively or experimentally. It is the focus or reason for engaging in research. It is characteristically a topic, phenomenon, or challenge that the researcher is interested in and with which he may be at least somewhat familiar (Shoket, 2014). Empirical studies have highlighted that service quality is given importance in both manufacturing and service industries.

In today's highly competitive and technologically driven environment, customers have advanced their knowledge regarding their needs and have alternatives to satisfy themselves in different ways (Nair and Nair, 2013). Organisations should therefore give due importance to service quality to gain a competitive advantage over competition. Service quality measurement is mostly possible through the identification of a gap between the expectations and perceptions of the customers of the organisation (Parasuraman et al. 1985). This study focuses on the LCC market in the Middle East and

investigates the LCC service quality by modifying the SERVQUAL model and its measuring scale to suit the LCC service quality measurement along with the valuation of Middle Eastern culture.

This study also aims to further develop the SERVQUAL dimensions and variables to make it industry specific (Ladhari, 2010) in measuring service quality levels of LCCs and investigate in the Middle East a new cultural setting as suggested by Khan, (2010) and Carlson and O'Cass, (2011). That is, the study is confirmatory; it attempts to validate that these evaluative dimensions actually exist and are used to judge service quality and create new dimensions the LCCSQUAL model in a new cultural setting.

The purpose of this study is not to dispute the existing models, but to attempt to authenticate the content of their dimensions and assess their practicality in assessing LCC service quality using different methodologies in a different cultural setting than previously studied. The research problem can be formulated as follows:

Are the generic service quality dimensions, specifically the five dimensions, reliable and valid for the evaluation of Low Cost Carriers in the Middle East? as well as **to add new constructs to the SERVQUAL model and develop LCC service quality (LCCSQUAL) model.** The five dimensions tested are Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance, Empathy and Responsiveness however, the variables are modified to suit the industry specific LCC service quality model in the Middle East.

3.4.1. Research Questions

The following research questions were identified, from the research problem to specify the scope of this research study:

1. What are the key service quality determinants of customer perceived service quality and customer satisfaction of LCCs in a new cultural background i.e. in the Middle East?
2. Which LCC service quality dimensions are the best predictors of overall perceived service quality in the Middle East?
3. Which service quality model ensures the appropriate measurement of LCC service quality in the Middle East since it is culturally different?
4. Have demographic changes such as increased expatriate population impacted the growth of LCCs in the Middle East region?

3.4.2. Research Objectives

After reviewing the literature on service quality, customer satisfaction, SERVQUAL and LCCs, a number of research objectives were framed to answer the research questions.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore the key determinants of service quality in the Low Cost Carrier (LCC) in the Middle East region;
2. To propose a conceptual model for service quality of LCC services by identifying its key antecedents in a new cultural setting;
3. To conduct pragmatic primary research to determine the interrelationships between the expectations and perceptions LCC passengers have based on the industry specific proposed model;
4. To construct the conceptual linkages between constructs of service quality and customer satisfaction;

5. To recommend service quality dimensions influencing overall LCC service quality, leading to customer satisfaction;
6. To evaluate the impact of changes in the passenger demographic factors on the growth of LCCs.

The above mentioned research objectives will be achieved by employing qualitative and quantitative research methods i.e. interview with passengers as well as with the managers/executives of the LCCs, a focus group interview with Emirati passengers following a self-administered questionnaire. The sampling techniques, scaling processes and data collection techniques are further discussed in the next sections.

3.5. The Research Approach:

The term 'paradigm' is 'a basic set of beliefs that guides action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry' (Guba 1990:17; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Sarantakos (2005:30) distinguishes between a paradigm, a methodology and the methods used in a research study. A methodology according to him 'is a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted' while methods are tools or 'instruments employed in the collection and analysis of data' or the interpretation and re-construction of empirical materials such as; survey questionnaire, observation and Interviews. Thus, a paradigm is the overall view of the way the world works.

The methodology is the complementary set of guidelines for conducting research within the overall paradigmatic view of the world; the methods are the specific tools for data

and/or empirical material collection and analysis/interpretation that a researcher uses to gather information about the world in order to build a 'theory' or knowledge' about the world (Sarantakos, 2005:30). The research process therefore involves a decision on the methodology to be used by the researcher.

There is no one correct method set of methodological choices or best strategies that will guarantee the success of the research study. There are two basic research paradigms that have dominated major research studies in social sciences: the positivist view, which is associated with the quantitative paradigm, and the constructivist (interpretivist) view, which is synonymous with the qualitative paradigm (Desphande, 1983). The two paradigms are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: Differences between Positivist and Interpretive Paradigms

Source: Adapted from Cepeda and Martin (2005)

3.5.1. Positivist Paradigm:

Positivism is grounded in the physical sciences and views the world or reality as very organised or structured, and based on rules that guide actions in both the natural and the social world. Ontologically (How is the world perceived?), the social world is perceived as being organised by universal laws and truths where human behaviour is considered predictable because it is influenced by external forces (Jennings, 2010:36).

The relationship between the researcher and the subject of research is objective and value-free based on epistemology. That is, it is assumed that the researcher should not influence the findings; hence research follows strict procedures to ensure objectivity. This encourages other researchers to replicate the same research to obtain the same findings (Jennings, 2010:36). The epistemological basis is important for this study since many researchers have worked successfully on investigating service quality using the SERVQUAL model in different fields apart from the aviation industry, so it is imperative that the findings can be generalised and similar results obtained.

This PhD study utilises the positivist and interpretivist approach by further investigating the SERVQUAL model and developing it further by adding new variables to make it industry specific to measure the service quality of LCCs based on passengers' perceptions in the Middle East.

A positivist researcher primarily uses quantitative methods of data collection, such as questionnaires, observation, documentary evidence, experiments and quasi-experiments. Analysis is conducted using statistical calculations such as SPSS, structural equation modelling or AMOS, which transform the units of study into

numerical representations (Jennings, 2010:37). According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), from a positivist perceptive, knowledge is intrinsically valued, as is the seeking of the same as an end in its own right. Therefore, on an axiological basis, propositional knowledge is valued, meaning knowledge that proposes or declares facts or realities rather than beliefs.

3.5.2. Social Constructionism or the Interpretative Paradigm:

Ontologically, social constructionism, which was developed by Berger and Luckmann (1971), Watzlawick (1984) and Shotter (1993), focuses on the way people make sense of the world, especially through their experiences with others via the medium of language. In the Handbook of Action research, (2006:96) according to Habermas (1970), the role of the social researcher is to appreciate how people construct meanings based on their experiences rather than gathering facts and measure how often the certain patterns occur.

In the constructive or interpretative social science paradigm, therefore, the researcher is obliged epistemologically to become a part of the situation, i.e. to enter the social setting and become one of the social actors acting in that setting (Bulmer, 1984; Blanche et al. 2006). The researcher gathers empirical material or information using a qualitative methodology such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, case studies, focus groups and appreciative inquiry (Methodological basis). Axiologically, the social science researcher acknowledges that values are an integral part of the research process as it is a social process so that the researcher is subjectively involved in knowledge making (Blanche et al. 2006).

In the current study, the constructivist or interpretivist view was used to begin the research process, with observation and in-depth interviews with passengers travelling with LCCs being conducted to gather rich data from which ideas were induced. According to Amaratunga et al. (2002) quantitative data can be supported by the qualitative side of a study during design by finding a representative sample, while qualitative data can benefit the quantitative side of the study during design by supporting the conceptual development and instrumentation.

3.5.3. Deductive and Inductive Approach:

The deductive research approach is associated with the positivism paradigm, whereas inductive research approach is associated with interpretivism (Gill and Johnson, 2010). Understanding of both approaches is essential to support the choice of appropriate research approach. Research in which reasoning begins with a general idea or a theory and moves towards more specific information is said to follow the deductive approach (Gill and Johnson, 2010). It means that the conclusion follows logically from the premises. The deductive approach is more knowledge-driven (making sense) whereas the inductive approach focuses more on detecting the features of the phenomenon (using instruments).

Inductive approach is the process of arriving at conclusions by logically interpreting the meaning of the results of the data analysis. This approach moves from specific observations to identify a pattern and connect the links between the information and variables observed (Gill and Johnson, 2010). Based on the pattern designed or

identified, the study builds on the tentative hypothesis, which is then connected to the relevant theory in the field by identifying the right theory through various sources.

The inductive approach looks like a "bottom up" approach, which is based on the observation that we detect patterns and formulate some tentative hypothesis that later can be explored through developing some conclusions or identifying the relevant theory (Ridenour et al. 2008). This method of reasoning is more open-ended and exploratory, especially at the beginning. The benefit of this approach is that the conclusion is likely to be based on premises. However, this method of reasoning involves uncertainty as it generally moves from specific instances to general conclusions.

Saunders et al. (2007) has claimed that by using both approaches it is very easy to estimate a logical and correct result, but it is necessary for the research to combine correct piece of these approaches. Therefore, this PhD study followed the guidelines of Saunders et al. (2007) and used both inductive and deductive approaches. The deductive approach assisted in creating the general understanding of the subject of study and the inductive approach was utilised to specific observations to form the pattern about the service quality of LCC, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions i.e. re-purchase behaviour of the LCC passengers.

3.6. Research Method:

Research method is defined as "the techniques and procedures used to obtain and analyse research data, including such as questionnaires, observation, interviews, and statistical and non-statistical techniques" (Saunders et al. 2007). In most research

studies, quantitative, qualitative and multi methods are widely used. The following section describes each method and justifies the choice of the techniques for this study.

3.6.1. Quantitative research:

Quantitative research involves quantifying relationships between variables. The variables are measured on samples like tissues, and cells. It expresses the relationship between variables using statistical tools like means, standard deviations, frequencies, correlation, regression, and other descriptive tools. The objective of such research is to establish a relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable in a population (Bryman, 2006).

In social sciences, quantitative research has equal importance to qualitative research. Quantitative research has been used in subjects like economics to determine demand and supply, in political science to gain knowledge about the number of votes a candidate may get, and in psychology. Qualitative research produces data that are based on a hypothesis or is more generalised in nature (Creswell, 2013:155). The quantitative approach assists in analysing the hypotheses and the data collected to give appropriate results as to whether the hypotheses selected are true or false. That is, quantitative research complements qualitative research since the former helps the latter to measure how many people feel, think or act in a particular way regarding a specific thing.

Quantitative research can fit into a social science study when there are variables to be measured. Researchers prefer a quantitative approach when the sampling technique is random or convenience sampling and they use quantitative research when they need to

be more accurate than in other social science studies. Research carried out with quantitative methods is more accurate (Smith et al. 2008:234). However, this method might be very costly since it needs statistical software or mathematical models to test the hypotheses. It is also possible that the population may choose variables that are not included in the study. If the data is collected through a closed-item survey measurement is uncomplicated since the data is simple and can be related to the statistical tool (Smith et al. 2008:234). However, long answers or having more than one variable in the answer can make it hard to reach a final result.

3.6.2. Qualitative Research:

Qualitative research, referring to unquantifiable data collection methods, and also is very popular in social science (Smith et al. 2008:172). One of the major reasons for doing qualitative research is to become more knowledgeable about the phenomenon the researchers are interested in and to gain insight into individual behaviour, motivations, culture, preferences and attitudes (Merriam, 2009:13).

There are various methods of data collection in qualitative research that can range from short answers to direct questions or long descriptions to open-ended questions, interview transcripts, videos and feedback forms. 'Focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis, ethnography, evaluation and semiotics are among the many formal approaches that are employed but qualitative research also involves the analysis of any unstructured material, including customer feedback forms, reports or media clips' (Gummesson, 2000:1).

Qualitative researchers conduct research in a different manner compared to physical scientists. They avoid designing artificial experiments since the setting is already available naturally in the social world. They also make few assumptions or hypothesis acceptable to generalise the appropriate results (Creswell, 2003). They generally prefer to work over a longer time frame, since it takes time to become involved in the social settings under study.

Qualitative research undoubtedly excels at generating information that is very comprehensive, which can have both positive and negative impacts. Positively, qualitative research can explore more deeply the lives of the individuals being studied, and can collect qualitative data that sometimes mean that there may be no right or wrong answer. The negative impact is that the researcher can be biased while selecting the sample size or may not interpret the raw data correctly, the research might become directionless, and the magnitude of error cannot be measured (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004).

3.6.3. Triangulation or Multi Method:

Triangulation is a term used to describe the use of a number of different research methods in addressing the validity of research (Bryman, 2011). Methodological triangulation of multi research method refers to the implementation of both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools and analysis procedures during the research process (Saunders et al. 2007). The metaphor of triangulation was taken from navigation and military strategy, which 'use multiple reference points to locate an object's exact position' (Smith, 1975; Jack and Raturi, 2006).

According to Schimmack (2010), this approach was originally used in the social sciences and psychology by Campbell and Fiske (1959) in their work. After the early efforts of Denzin (1970), triangulation studies have gone beyond the initial aim of reducing weaknesses in any one method and have been used in management studies to resolve problems in interpretation and theory building. The Figure 9 below highlights the mix of methods and methodology in triangulation.

Figure 9: Methods and Methodology used under Triangulation

Source: Tillyer, (2011) Methods of Triangulation

The general assumption in triangulation is that its effectiveness rests on the premise that the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated for by the counter-balancing strengths of another (Amaratunga et al. 2002). Researchers have mixed views on the uses of triangulation in research. According to Olsen (2004), some authors consider triangulation to be just a method for increasing the knowledge from studying a phenomenon.

Others (Hussein, 2009; Golafshani, 2003), however, delineate it as 'a validity procedure where researchers look for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study. Further, according to Bryman, (2004) triangulation 'is defined as the use of multiple methods mainly qualitative and quantitative methods in studying the same phenomenon'.

The researcher should ensure that the final product maximises the strengths of a multi method approach. According to Jack and Raturi (2006), there are five types of triangulation, namely data triangulation, investigator triangulation, multiple triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation these are illustrated in Table 3:

Table 3: Description of the five types of triangulation

This item has been removed due to 3rd Party Copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be found in the Lancester Library, Coventry University.

Source: Adapted from Jack and Raturi (2006)

3.6.3.1. Challenges of Triangulation:

Every paradigm has its strengths and weaknesses and it is applicable to multi methods i.e. triangulation approach as well. The process of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study is challenging in itself (Foss and Ellefsen, 2002), furthermore, other challenges of adopting triangulation in a research study are:

- The application of this process, however, may not always be possible due to limited factors such as time and money;
- Researchers' expertise could be challenged;
- Qualitative data creates large amounts of textual data which might pose transcribing challenge to the researcher.
- Data collection should be systematically planned and executed.

3.7. Justification for Adopting Triangulation or Multi Research method:

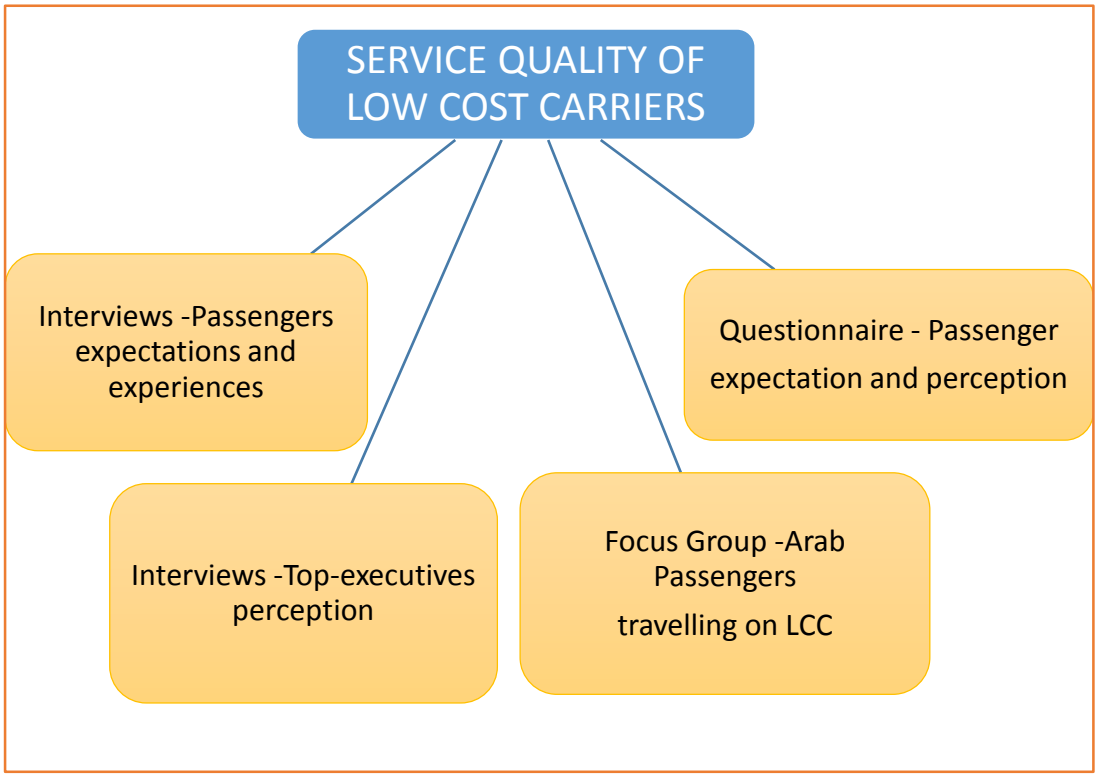
In conclusion, the choice of a paradigm is critical as it requires the researcher to decide whether to construct theories and models first before continuing the study by investigating the world through empirical research or whether to take the opposite approach and let theory follow empirical research (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Although differences in these two paradigms cannot be dismissed, further, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), neither is superior as they offer different philosophies.

Foss and Ellefsen (2002) state that ideally, the researcher should understand the advantages and disadvantages of both paradigms and their relative strengths and weaknesses. Creswell and Clark (2007) argue that the use of multi-method (triangulation) may be a fruitful approach to ensure the validity of the study. Therefore,

the criteria for choosing a research design rests ultimately on the personal preference of the researcher and the aims or context of the research study (Smith et al. 1995:40).

The research approach for this study (see Figure 10) therefore uses triangulation (multi method), since it can combine the advantages of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Figure 10: The Triangulation Method used in PhD study



Source: Author, 2015

The primary aim of the research is to develop a modified version of SERVQUAL adding variables suitable for measuring LCC service quality and investigate the expectations and perceptions of passengers travelling with LCCs in the Middle East. Therefore, the approach includes individual passenger interviews and focus group

discussion with passengers travelling on LCC (a qualitative method), individual senior-executive interviews (a qualitative method), a questionnaire adapted from the SERVQUAL model and scales followed by statistical analysis (quantitative method).

3.8. Research Design:

The research design is a plan or framework for conducting the study by collecting data. It defines the specific methods and procedures employed to acquire the information needed, involving a series of rational decision-making choices (Sekaran, 2006). The researcher further notes that, research design can be either exploratory in nature, or descriptive, and/or conducted to test a hypothesis. It depends on the nature of the study and the state of knowledge in the research area. As research proceeds, the design decision becomes more rigorous from exploratory to descriptive.

3.8.1. Secondary Research:

In this PhD study, in the initial period extensive preliminary/secondary research, i.e. literature review was conducted on various topics such as the service industry, customer satisfaction, service quality, the SERVQUAL model, the aviation industry and Low Cost Carriers. The literature review was supported by a variety of secondary sources such as:

- Academic Journals and various databases, such as Emerald, Ebsco, ProQuest, Science direct, Sage Publications and many other on-line sources;
- Journal paper sources from various universities and public libraries, for example: Journal of Service Quality, Journal of Aviation Management and several other such academic Journals;

- Textbooks on marketing, consumer behaviour, service quality management and research methods;
- Management-based journals and magazines, both on-line and off-line, including Harvard Business Review, Aviation Weekly, Low Cost Regional Airline Business;
- Daily regional newspapers, such as Gulf News, Khaleej Times.

After surveying the literature on service quality, it was resolved that the SERVQUAL model would be appropriate for this study to get a scale for LCC service quality, however, SERVQUAL is a generic model and needs to be changed to be made industry specific as suggested by (Caruana et al. 2000; Ladhari 2008) and to be investigated in a new cultural setting (Khan, 2010; Carlson and O'Cass, 2011). The questionnaire was designed by the researcher of this PhD study based on the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al. 1988) and were further developed to add more variables to investigate the LCC service quality.

The primary purpose of the study was to develop a scale to measure LCC service quality in the Middle East and evaluate how passengers from Middle Eastern culture perceive the service quality of the LCCs. This industry specific, i.e. The LCC service quality model developed in this study has five dimensions and twenty-five variables suitable to LCC service quality. The five dimensions, i.e. Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance, Empathy and Responsiveness are valuable for the evaluation of LCCs service quality in the Middle East region due to its cultural difference.

3.8.2. Primary Data Collection Method:

Once the research approach and design were finalised, one or more data collection techniques were used. Typically, a researcher will choose one (or multiple) data collection techniques while considering their overall appropriateness of the research (Lyberg and Kasprzyk, 1991; Sekaran and Bougie, 2010). It is naturally possible that a given research question may not be satisfactorily studied because specific data collection techniques do not exist to collect the data needed to answer such a question (Kerlinger and Howard, 2008; Corbetta, 2003:152). The most popular data collection techniques include surveys, secondary data sources or archival data, objective measures or tests, and interviews.

The challenges of measuring service quality in LCCs are its dynamic nature of service, therefore, a survey instrument was required which could capture the dynamic nature of the LCC service concepts. In this work, the exploration of prior theory via an extensive literature search was used as the basis for framing the subjects of the study. However, it should be mentioned that prior theory only guides and loosely frames the research.

The overall aim of this study is to assess the relationship between expectations, perceptions and customer satisfaction of LCC passengers, and to develop a scale to measure the LCC service quality in a new setting i.e. the Middle East region having cultural difference. This study adopted methodical triangulation so both qualitative tools, in the form of in-depth interviews with LCC passengers and LCC senior-executives, a focus group interview was employed, a quantitative tool, namely a survey instrument, was developed based on the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

The information was then analysed with the assistance of SPSS computer based software and NVivo qualitative computer based software to reach the overall findings of the inquiry. The data collection technique and the instruments are discussed in the sections below.

3.8.2.1. Questionnaire Design:

It is the practice of social research studies to operationalise the variables by asking people questions as a means of getting data for analysis and interpretation (Babbie, 2004). In the present study, care was taken while selecting the research instrument and administering the questionnaire. The sample population, co-operation issues and geographical dispersion will be briefly discussed below, while importance was paid to understanding the literacy level of the respondents as well as language issues. Since passengers travelling in LCCs are generally of medium- or low-income populations, utmost care were taken to word the questionnaire without any/less jargon while avoiding technical terminology as far as possible.

The exploratory research led to the development of a dynamic, paper-based questionnaire, adapted and modified from the original of Parasuraman et al. (1985-88) for this PhD study. The original SERVQUAL questionnaire has been successfully used in several studies in various fields after some modifications. The adapted survey questionnaire was developed after an extensive literature search supported by data collected in interviews. The research objectives were strictly followed to design the appropriate questions in the questionnaire.

According to Curwin and Slater (2007:58), a questionnaire needs a coherent construction and well-thought-out questions. The speech has to be kept very simple, as per the guidelines provided by Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen (1996), since the questionnaires would be answered by LCC passengers, who in many instances would be blue collared workers with little knowledge of the voice communication.

The researcher administered the questionnaire at the airport as she holds the knowledge of some of the Indian languages such as Hindi (Urdu), Marathi, Gujarathi, Tulu and Kannada as well as has basic understanding of Arabic. Secondly, the structure was assembled in a tabular form to give the respondents a clear, simple view. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure all variables in both the sections of the questionnaire. Detailed instructions were included at the beginning of each section to assist the participant's responses.

Researchers have found that the SERVQUAL questionnaire is very useful for testing service quality in various fields, however, needs further adaptation based on industry specific (Ladhari, 2008; Ladhari, 2010). Since LCCs in the Middle East is a recent development there are almost no studies being carried out in this region, therefore, this PhD research focuses on developing the SERVQUAL model further by adding new variables to make it industry specific and to measure the perceived service quality of LCCs in the Middle East which also is culturally different.

The new industry specific model is called LCCSQUAL (Low Cost Carrier Service Quality), the five original dimensions were adapted and new variables were added using

it a new market with different culture. The adapted questionnaire was redesigned based on the specific variables identified by qualitative research, i.e. interview participants and a focus group discussion, an extensive literature search on service quality, and from the original SERVQUAL instrument. The questionnaire was divided into three sections; part one had 25 questions focusing on passenger expectations. These 25 questions were divided into 5 dimensions: Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance, Empathy and Responsiveness.

The second section of the questionnaire dealt with passenger perceptions/experiences, evaluating the same dimensions as in part one. In section three of the questionnaire demographic information, such as age, gender and other demographic information were asked. Sections I and II of the questionnaire were each divided into five dimensions; in section I, the respondents were asked to analyse what would they expect about service quality while travelling with an LCC. In section II, the same dimensions were focusing on perceptions/experiences, specifically the respondents' experiences while travelling with regional LCCs.

The variables included in the questionnaire under each dimension were industry specific and were identified through several sources, mainly the qualitative research conducted before the survey. The dimensions and variables are as follows:

Dimension one: TANGIBILITY

1. Reliable aircraft which are safe to travel in.
2. Physical facilities of the aircraft

    2.1. Leg Space

2.2. Noise Level in the aircraft

2.3. Clean Toilets

2.4. Comfortable Seats

2.5. Food (on board or on sale)

2.6. Entertainment (Magazines, TV and/or Music)

3. Clear information to passengers regarding policies, timings, offers and any changes.
4. Careful attention to aircraft safety and security equipment
5. Maintaining a required level of hygiene (cleanliness) in the aircraft during flights
6. Professionally dressed employees (pilots, cabin crew and ground staff)

Dimension two: RELIABILITY

1. Keeping promises
2. Passenger safety and security when dealing with the airline and its staff.
3. Priority to on-time performance.
4. Correct performance of tasks by airline staff
5. Easily accessible airline website with correct information regarding flight timings, etc.
6. On-time and problem-free arrival of luggage

Dimension three: ASSURANCE

1. Friendly, accessible airline employees who are able to assist customers
2. Employees that inspire confidence in the customers
3. Polite and courteous employees at all times

Dimension four: EMPATHY

1. Frequent communication with passengers in case of any problems or delays
2. Employees that can develop trust by their passengers
3. Positive attitudes of employees towards customers

4. Personal attention to each passenger by employees
5. Employee knowledge of the needs of individual customers

Dimension five: RESPONSIVENESS

1. Sincere efforts in solving customer problems
2. Required skills and knowledge to answer customer questions of customers
3. Special preference to special-needs passengers like elderly, disabled or families with infants
4. Crew On-board is more relaxed compared to full fare airlines
5. Good value for money (VFM) compared to full fare airlines

A Cronbach Alpha reliability test was conducted on the questionnaire items showed that the questions had high reliability of 0.95, which means that all the items in the questionnaire measured the same construct. This reliability test is conducted to test the relatedness of the items or questions with each other. The value should be higher than 0.70, as being closer to 1 shows that the constructs have high reliability.

3.8.2.2. Ethics Approval

Research that involves human subjects or participants raises unique and complex ethical, legal, social and political issues. Research ethics is specifically interested in the analysis of ethical issues that are raised when people are involved as participants in research (Pruzan, 2016). There are three objectives in research ethics. The first and broadest objective is to protect human participants. The second objective is to ensure that research is conducted in a way that serves interests of individuals, groups and/or society as a whole. Finally, the third objective is to examine specific research activities

and projects for their ethical soundness, looking at issues such as the management of risk, protection of confidentiality and the process of informed consent.

Ethics approval was given utmost importance in this research study, therefore, once the questionnaire was pilot tested it was sent to the research committee, Coventry UK for ethical approval. One the ethics approval was received, the questionnaire was then sent to the learning and development department of Dubai airports for verification and security checks. This approval was very important as this study was conducted at the airport and therefore, the department at Dubai airports wanted to assure that the questionnaire was following all the required criteria.

3.8.2.3. Sampling Selection:

Sampling is the process of selecting a sufficient number of elements from the population so that the researcher can conduct the study on the characteristics of the sample before generalising these properties or characteristics of the population (Sekaran, 2006:267). Sample design is an important issue in relation to the reliability of statistical findings. The primary objective of any sampling plan is to offer guidelines for selecting a sample that is representative of its underlying population, so that the required information about the population is provided at minimum cost and the findings can be generalised across the population. According to Sekaran (2006: 265), 'population refers to the entire group of people, events, or things, of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate'.

Convenience sampling involves drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study. Two types of convenience samples are captive samples and volunteer samples (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). For this study, convenience sampling method was utilised, specifically captive sampling, since, according to Sekaran (2006: 267), this gives each of the N units in the population a calculable probability of being chosen. This decision can also be influenced by the amount of time, money and human resources the researcher has available. The data were collected at Terminal 2 of Dubai International Airport with LCC passengers.

Dubai International Terminal 2 is a dedicated terminal along with Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah airports, for LCCs in the UAE. Many LCCs arrive and depart through the Dubai Terminal 2 and therefore, it was an advantage to complete the field work among the passengers. Random passengers were approached at the waiting lounge at the departure gates of the terminal since, the passengers were waiting for their flights and therefore, they were relaxed and were ready to fill the questionnaire.

For quantitative researchers, an important question is how large the sample should be whereas qualitative researchers need to decide how long to collect data from participants. In response to the above questions on quantitative research, Jennings (2010:146) argues that the following points need to be considered:

- The first is the size of the population;
- Understanding the nature of the population;
- The approachability of the population.

Other considerations that influence the sample size is the time available to conduct the study, the funds available and the number of personnel allocated to the research.

3.8.2.3.1. Sample size for Triangulation Method:

There is no agreement in the literature on the ideal sample size required to ensure statistical significance. Veal (2005:201), for instance, argues that the sample size should bear some relationship to the overall size of the study population, such as the sample being 10-20% of the population. However, he also asserts that it is the absolute size of the sample that is important when using sampling such as probability.

Table 4: Sample Size for a Given Population Size

Source: cited in Sekaran (2006: 294)

The Table 4 above supports and reduces the difficulty of new researchers from the dilemma of identifying the correct sample size. According to Cornish (2006), one crucial aspect of study design is deciding how big the sample should be. If the sample

size increases than it escalates the precision of the estimates, which means that, for any given estimate / size of effect, the greater the sample size the more "statistically significant" the result will be. In other words, if an investigation is too small then it will not detect results that are in fact important. Roscoe (1975) proposed an even simpler heuristic for determining the appropriate sample size for probability sampling decisions; namely that sample sizes larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research. Therefore, for the present study, it was decided to obtain a sample size of 550 fully-completed questionnaires.

As already noted, a qualitative researcher is generally concerned about how long to collect empirical material from participants. According to Ateljevic et al. (2007:199), empirical materials should be collected until there is redundancy of information, also known as reaching a 'qualitative isomorph' or 'theoretical saturation'. This requires a cyclic process of empirical material collection and interpretation that continues until no new insights are gained, but only a confirmation of previous 'theories' (Punch 2005: 214-15).

In the current study, this was accomplished by conducting seven in-depth interviews of passengers who had travelled with LCCs in the Middle East within the last one year and one focus group discussion with seven Emirati females; first time travellers with LCC in the Middle East. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with nine senior-level executives at two different business conferences since no prior appointment was required to interview them. Six of senior executives were from the LCCs in the Middle-East, while the other three executives were from Asian LCCs. The senior executive and passenger interviews were significant for this study since it was

important to understand the perception of passengers travelling on LCC as well as the perception of the senior executives about the service they provide.

3.9. Scale Development:

Measurement of the variables within the theoretical framework is an integral part of research and an important aspect of research design (Sekaran, 2010: 174). To develop a measurement scale that can produce valid and reliable results is a challenging task in any research field as it takes time and reflection. Both DeVellis (2003) and Netemeyer et al. (2003) argue that effective measurement is a cornerstone of scientific research and is a central component in the accurate assessment of latent variables. The underlying phenomenon or constructs that a scale is intended to measure is known as the latent variable.

Reynolds (2010) also claims that the ability to measure variables accurately is a foundation to progress in a social science discipline. DeVellis (2012) argues that theorizing in the social sciences is different to the physical sciences, since some of the variables of interest to social and behavioural scientists are not directly observable, such as attitudes, values, motivation and personality. In such a situation, a theory plays an important role in defining the social construct under examination and its relationship with other constructs.

According to Ekinci (1999), if something is to be measured statistically, it should be defined. This process enhances the conceptual meaning of the measured construct and its relationship with other variables and constructs. In a typical study, researchers are

interested in constructs rather than items or scales because scale items are usually just a means to the end of construct assessment, which means many constructs cannot be assessed directly (DeVellis, 2003).

According to Dunn-Rankin et al. (2004:3) scaling consists of ordering things in some meaningful way. Trochim (2006) emphasises that a set of rules is always required in judging the usefulness of a scale. He also notes that scaling is the assignment of objects to numbers according to a rule.

3.9.1. The Process of Constructing a Scale:

According to Hinkin et al. (1997), there is no well-established framework or guidelines for the scale development process. Constructing a scale involves a lengthy process, consisting of a series of stages. Each stage is cumulative and must be planned and managed carefully. Traditionally, researchers have followed Churchill's (1979) model of scale development, which is a development of Nunnally's (1978) as well as Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) version of psychometric theory. DeVellis (1991; 2003) also developed an eight-stage scale development model. However, Rossiter (2002) has criticised Churchill's method of scale development procedure for being misleading, since it ignores the basic requirement of measure-content validity so researchers try to 'prop up' and justify low content-valid measures by claiming that the scores from these measures meet widely-agreed statistical criteria.

Rossiter (2002) believed that a new scale development procedure is required in marketing. Therefore, he proposes a new procedure for scale development, i.e. the

generation and selection of items to form a scale to measure a construct which will be discussed in the next section of the C-OAR-SE model.

3.9.1.1. C-OAR-SE Scale Development Model

Rossiter's procedure is acronymically summarised as C-OAR-SE, which stands for Construct definition, Object classification, Attribute classification, Rater identification, Scale formation and Enumeration and reporting. According to Alexandrov (2010), the focus in C-OAR-SE is content validity, while Rossiter (2008) claims that this is the only validity needed in scale development so that the generally followed process of item purification through statistical procedures, discussed in Churchill's (1979) model, is not necessary or appropriate since it can change the meaning of the measured concepts. In short, according to Rossiter (2008, cited in Alexandrov, 2010), so long as a scale has a precise definition, there is no need to examine other types of validities.

An important practical assertion understood explicitly by raters (the respondents) is that it is not necessary to use multiple-item scales to measure; a single-item measure is sufficient. This is a radical shift from the traditional scale development procedure outlined by Churchill, which Diamantopoulos (2005) and Finn and Kayande (2005) claim is more flexible, providing a 'fresh breath' for developing scales in marketing.

However, Finn and Kayande (2005) also argue that, whilst Rossiter's method fills an important gap in the scale development literature, it may create another important problem since it puts too much emphasis on context and expert judgement while ignoring empirical validation of the conceptualisation of constructs; i.e. it does not use

any statistical analysis. To solve this, Finn and Kayande (2005) suggest using multivariate generalizability theory (GT), which can be integrated with the C-OAR-SE model to achieve better validity and reliability. However, their procedure has in turn been criticised as complicated and difficult to apply in different environments (Chikweche and Fletcher, 2007).

This study will therefore utilise the new C-OAR-SE procedure suggested by Rossiter, however, only the first four steps will be tested since it is reasonable to assume that the Likert rating scale is an appropriate scale for this kind of research as the Rater entity since in this case are passengers waiting for their flights and it is better to keep the scale as simple as possible as suggested by Kokku (2011). That is, passengers using the questionnaire understand the scale and it is a convenient method for collecting data. The relevant individual steps in Rossiter's C-OAR-SE model will now be considered in more detail.

3.9.1.1.1. Step one: Construct Definition

The first step in C-OAR-SE is to properly and comprehensively define the construct to be measured. A construct is 'a conceptual term used to describe a phenomenon of theoretical interest' (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000:156-157). In C-OAR-SE, a construct has three necessary elements: (1) the OBJECT to be rated (2) the ATTRIBUTE on which it is to be rated, and (3) the RATER ENTITY, which is the person or group who provides the ratings.

Many constructs in the social sciences are 'abstract', meaning that the object, the attribute or both, have multiple meanings rather than a single concrete meaning (Rossiter and Bergkvist, 2009). In the construct of LCCSQUAL, the object has multiple meanings, referring to the constituent stages of LCCs' overall service quality processes. Similarly, the construct SERVICE QUALITY has multiple meanings. For this study, it is imperative to look at 'Expectations and Perceptions of the Passengers on Middle East LCC Service Quality'.

3.9.1.1.2. Step two: Object Classification

The object part of the construct can be singular or a collective of constituents, or have multiple components (Rossiter, 2002). The object means the focal object being rated, with its constituents as sub-objects that form the parts of an abstract collective object, denoting what the object includes. This research will focus on an abstract collective object since the service quality construct is *abstract* with several dimensions and many constituent variables forming the abstract collective object.

LCC service quality is defined as the 'object' in this case and the dimensions of service quality, as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988), will be considered as the 'abstract collective object' since the five dimensions in SERVQUAL define LCC service quality. The constituents will be the variables within each dimension, which are separated for the rater to make the rating of a specific dimension clearer.

In the present study, the main object is 'LCC service quality in the Middle East'. All dimensions were given due consideration before including them in the questionnaire.

Each dimension in the questionnaire was further divided into variables which evaluate LCC quality of service provided in the Middle East. For instance, under the Tangibility dimension, variables were clearly defined to investigate what passengers' expect from each variable within tangibility, such as a comfortable seat, sufficient legroom, clean toilets, food, entertainment, reliable aircraft and uniformed staff.

The Reliability dimension variables were LCC promises, safe and secure dealing, on-time performance perform the task correctly, friendly website, and luggage received. While the Assurance variables were friendly and accessible employees, airline inspiring confidence and polite and courteous staff whereas, under Empathy the variables were, frequency of communication, developing trust in the passengers, positive attitude of staff, personal and individual attention by the staff.

In the Responsiveness dimension the variables were, the sincerity of the staff in solving the passenger problems, skill and knowledge of the staff, special preference to special needs passengers, relaxed and stress free Crew and value for money compared to full service carriers.

3.9.1.1.3. Step three: Attribute Classification

This step in C-OAR-SE classifies the attributes in the construct, which is the element on which the object is being judged. Attribute classification is further divided into concrete (singular), (abstract) formed and (abstract) eliciting. This study used the formed attribute, conceptualizing SERVICE QUALITY OF LCCs, as concrete from the perspective of the passenger raters. SERVICE QUALITY is the sum total of the

specific activities that make up the overall performance of a particular industry's service (Rossiter, 2002).

In this study, it was assumed that target raters are likely to make summative judgments regarding LCC service quality, so SERVICE QUALITY OF LCCs is a second-order formed attribute. Similarly, the service quality components, such as Reliability, are formed attributes. According to Rossiter (2002), it is not necessary to use a statistical tool to identify the attribute, i.e. a specific dimension, or the variables within each dimension. Instead, he argues that researchers should use their own expert judgement to identify the attributes based on previous literature or from the key attributes identified by interviewees. This suggestion has been followed by the researcher of this study by using own judgement based on the review of the literature on service quality and responses given by interviewees and focus group discussion.

Stage component identification in C-OAR-SE requires researchers to evaluate each stage within the overall service quality. When measuring LCC service quality, there are three stages: airport departure, travel on board the airline for e.g. Fly Dubai experience and airport arrival, which are all crucial for the overall service quality. However, in the case of LCCs, the service quality at both airport stages may indirectly influence the passenger's rating of the LCC's service quality.

In most cases, the airport and the airline belong to two different entities so it was necessary to ensure that the wording of the questionnaire clearly mentioned 'airline staff' or 'airline service' wherever possible to help the passengers participating in the

survey to understand that their perceptions should be about only the airline's service quality.

3.9.1.1.4. Step four: Rater Entity Specification

This is the final step of construct's definition in C-OAR-SE: identification of the RATER ENTITY (RT). Constructs differ depending on whose perspective they represent. Thus, service quality perceived by MANAGEMENT (RT) is different from service quality perceived by CUSTOMERS (RT). This study focuses on RT of current LCC passengers, even though Rossiter (2009), in his study of SERVCOMPSQUAL, the service quality of e-retailing services, considers that researchers have to survey both current and potential customers.

The researchers should acquire information from potential customers regarding what is expected by the service and from current customers to identify what is right with the service. However, for the present study, it was assumed that current customers can give information about both 'right' and 'wrong' in service quality of LCC, so there is no need to separately identify potential and current customers. Thus, this study focused only on current passengers.

In the initial part of the research, effort had been made to interview both current passengers and senior-level executives to explore their beliefs about the quality of service the LCCs are offering. Figure 11 presents the discussion so far in diagrammatic form:

Figure 11: Application of the C-OAR-SE Model of Scale Development

This

Source: Author adapted by Rossiter's (2002)

3.9.1.1.5. STEP FIVE: Scale Formation:

'A scale is a tool or mechanism by which individuals are distinguished on the variables of interest to the study, in some form or the other' (Sekaran, 2010:185). There are four main types of scale: nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. A nominal scale allows the researcher to assign subjects to certain categories or groups, while ordinal scales rank-order the categories in some meaningful way to denote differences between values of one variable.

An interval scale allows the researcher to perform certain mathematical operations on the data collected, such as calculating means and standard deviations, while a ratio scale not only measures the magnitude of the differences between points on the scale but also the proportions in the differences. This study uses an interval scale to enable

data to be analysed statistically in order to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Specifically, this study uses Likert scales, which are also known as summative scales, being a simple type of scaling technique that respondents find easy to understand (Johns, 2010).

Although Rossiter (2002) claims that Likert scales can produce unreliable scores because they are not clear, the researcher of this study does not agree with Rossiter and has therefore utilised a five point Likert scale, where '1' means 'strongly agree' and '5' means 'strongly disagree'. This researcher follows the advice of Babakus and Mongold (1992) and Kokku et al. (2011), who suggest that a five-point Likert scale should be used in service quality measurement as opposed to the common alternative of a seven-point scale because this reduces respondents' frustration, which increases the response rate.

With a Likert Scale, the categories form a specific order. For example, in the present study, people who choose '1' agree more with the statement than people who choose '2', while people who choose '2' agree more than people who choose '3', and so on. This creates a set of ordinal data with 1,2,3,4 and 5 as the categories used.

It should be noted that, in contrast to the current study, in other studies using Likert rating scales, '1' is generally used to mean 'strongly disagree' while '5' means 'strongly agree'. However, in the Middle East people generally understand number one to represent the 'best' (according to local Emirati people). For example, at a press conference, the ruler of Dubai Emirate, Shaikh Mohammad, explained why he always only looks to be number one. "All our achievements have been possible because we are

looking to be number one. There is no alternative to number one. I, UAE leaders and citizens should continue to seek to be number one because nothing remains after number one".

While pilot-testing the questionnaire on a few local and expatriate respondents, it became clear that the more usual scale with '1' for 'strongly disagree' was not very well accepted by respondents and the researcher had to explain the reason for using this kind of scale. It could be that the lack of a research culture in the Middle East and GCC countries means that people are not well- educated about such scaling systems.

As Robertson et al. (2011) and Balakrishnan (2013) report, research in the Middle East and North African region accounts for less than 1 percent of globally published research in business, management and accounting. Therefore, to reduce the confusion for the respondents, the scale was made clearer by reversing the numbering of the Likert scales.

3.10. Reliability of the Content:

A scale is internally consistent when the items making it up are highly inter-correlated (DeVellis, 2012:34). High inter-correlations between the items means that they are measuring the same construct (DeVellis, 2012:34). This content reliability can be tested using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, which is a measure of internal consistency for assessing the quality of the instrument. The closer to 1 the scale is, the more reliable it can be considered. Churchill (1979) suggests that for research studies reliabilities of 0.80 or beyond are highly acceptable.

In the present PhD study, the internal consistency method was used to assess the reliability of the measuring instrument. Once the final questionnaire was ready having made the required changes, SPSS (Software Programming for Social Sciences) was utilised to assess the reliability of the content of the questionnaire, which yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.95, indicating that all the items in the questionnaire measured the same construct.

3.11. Administering the Questionnaire

An important criterion of a successful questionnaire is that it allows the response rate to be maximized. Non-response bias or non-response error occurs when information is not collected from elements of the population that were selected for the sample. Researchers must therefore take great care to increase the response rate by using appropriate methods of questionnaire administration. Kendall (2008) suggests several ways to distribute the questionnaire:

1. Convening all the respondents together at one time;
2. Personally administering the questionnaire;
3. Allowing respondents to self-administer the questionnaire;
4. Mailing questionnaires;
5. Administering the questionnaire over the web or via email.

Personal administration of the questionnaire was considered the most appropriate method for reducing non-response bias in this study. As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire was administered at the Dubai International Airport Terminal 2, this is a

dedicated terminal for LCCs. This Terminal has basic ambience and is fairly smaller than other Terminals in Dubai. The researcher originally received permission to conduct the survey for two weeks with the promise of several assistants. Unfortunately, however, the time period was later reduced to only five days and no assistants were provided due to on-going airport restructuring. Despite these restrictions, the location was ideal for conducting the field work.

The passengers in the waiting area generally had more than one hour to spend while waiting to board the airline, so they were willing to participate in the survey by completing the questionnaire. Waiting time is the perfect time to administer the questionnaire for such kind of study as the passengers would have completed all the formalities and are just doing nothing but waiting.

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire, which gave the advantage of allowing participants to ask questions and clarify anything they wished for. The researcher helped some less educated respondents to complete the questionnaire. To increase the representativeness of the sample, the researcher targeted different sitting areas of the terminal as passengers were scattered near their respective boarding gates as well as restaurants. In addition, a variety of nationalities and age groups were targeted.

Interestingly, many participants encouraged the researcher and congratulated her for conducting this study as they hoped for improvements in the service quality of LCCs following this study. In order to guarantee the security of the questionnaires and because of a lack of research assistants, the researcher spent nine to ten hours each day

to administer the questionnaire. It was also not possible to use any personal networks to assist in administering the questionnaire.

Most potential participants responded positively and willingly participated in the survey even though if they found the questionnaire too lengthy, while some labourers/passengers were unwilling out of concern that participation could place their job at risk. Since the language of the questionnaire was simple, the researcher found it easy to assist those participants who could not read or understand much English. Whenever there was a language problem, the researcher translated to help the participants complete the questionnaire.

The specific procedure adopted was very simple: the researcher approached one of the passengers waiting in the area and would then ask other passengers sitting close-by the new participant to also participate in the survey. The researcher had arranged for pens as the passengers did not want to open their bags to find their own and in case they did not have pens. Many participants were also happy to participate in the survey since the researcher lets them keep the pen after they had completed the survey.

3.12. Interview Techniques

In qualitative research, researchers engage in naturalistic inquiry of naturally occurring activities and processes. These activities are 'natural' in the sense that they are not planned or manipulated by the researcher as would be the case in an experiment (Patton, 1987). Through the use of interviews, the researcher enters another person's world, to understand their perspective.

Hence, according to Patton (2002), "The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter the other person's perspective." Interviews are a widely-used tool to access people's experiences and their inner perceptions, attitudes and feelings about reality. The interview is one of the key tools for the qualitative researcher, and indeed a large proportion of social science investigations rely on interview data (Roulston et al. 2003).

For qualitative data collection, the in-depth interview is the best way to capture the feelings, attitudes and body language of the respondents. It provides clear information about the respondents' perceptions and experiences during their encounter with a product or service. Another advantage of conducting in-depth interviews is that the researcher can obtain first-hand information about the respondent's experience (Patton, 2002).

Interviews can be designed in several ways. First, in structured interviews, the set of questions is pre-defined and asked with the same wording and in the same order to all respondents. Semi-structured interviews are more flexible and less formal than structured interviews, giving the researcher some flexibility to ask both closed and open-ended questions and to change the question order in some cases. Finally, an unstructured interview takes the form of an informal conversation with the respondent where there is no pre-defined structure and questions can be asked in any order about the specific subject.

The PhD research employed unstructured interviews as a qualitative research method for data collection as the best way to clearly understand in depth the perspectives of

LCC passengers, since Punch (2005) described it as ‘a way to understand the complex behaviour of people without imposing any a priori classification, which might limit the field of inquiry’. It was essential to investigate their expectations and perceptions about the service quality of LCCs, as well as the perspectives of LCC management representatives.

In an ideal unstructured interview, the interviewer flows with the interviewees’ narration and generates questions instinctively based on his/her reflections on that description. Briggs (2000); McCann and Clark (2005) agree that the structure of the interview can be loosely guided by a list of questions, called an *aide memoire* or agenda. Burgess (1984) defined this as ‘a broad guide to topic issues that might be covered in the interview, rather than the actual questions to be asked’.

The researcher of this study prepared an aide memoire as suggested by Burgess (1984), drawing on the literature review and the SERVQUAL model to focus the conversations on relevant topics. While the researcher exercised minimum control over the interview, probing was used when necessary to attain richer in-depth information about each interviewee’s perspective. As outlined earlier, the interviews were conducted both with regional LCC passengers and LCC senior-level executives.

3.12.1. Passenger Interviews:

It was decided to interview those passengers who regularly travel with LCCs to get a better perspective to understand the direction of the study. As a regular traveller with LCCs, the researcher had personally encountered several gaps in the service quality

process, but it was necessary to question other people about their experiences with LCCs.

Different interview locations were chosen for the convenience of the participants as some preferred a quiet coffee shop or their own home, while others were interviewed during LCC flights after seeking their permission. While distinct, all these locations were ideal for in-depth interviews as the participants were relaxed. Nevertheless, two participants were sceptical about sharing their thoughts as they feared confidentiality issues that could put their jobs at risk.

Before being interviewed, all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study as and re-assured about the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. As suggested by Fife (2005) each interviewee was asked a range of open-ended questions based on the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. Specific key points naturally evolved during the conversation in most cases, although probing was used where necessary to clarify or seek more details about their experiences and expectations.

3.12.2. Senior Executive Interviews:

The objective of interviews with LCC managers was to investigate their perceptions about the service their companies provide to the customers since, according to the gap model (Parasuraman et al. 1985), out of the five gaps, four lie within the organisation. The first gap is among consumers and the management, i.e. regarding the management's perceptions of customer expectations, while the second gap concerns the specification level, in that, if the management has inaccurate perceptions about

customer expectations regarding a specific service delivery, they will give incorrect directions to the company's staff causing the gap to widen, unless management works to correct it.

The third gap occurs when staff follows management directions and provide wrong information or inappropriate service delivery to the end consumer. The fourth gap concerns communication of company objectives, social responsibility, brand image and identity, through websites or other communication methods. These first four gaps lead to the fifth gap between perceived and expected service.

It was imperative to interview a sample of LCC management to understand their opinions about the service they provide. To find participants, all Middle East LCC managers were contacted by email. Although reminders were sent, due to their busy schedules, some did not respond while some who did were not interested in participating. The lack of positive responses made this part of the interview process very challenging since staff were also unwilling to participate in the survey. Fortunately, the researcher then received invitations to attend two business conferences to be held in Singapore and Dubai. The conference titled 'The 9th Annual Low Cost Airlines World Asia Pacific' was held in Singapore and all the senior level executives such as CEO of Spring airlines, marketing head AirAsia from different parts of the world were attending it.

The second business conference attended by the researcher was '5th Annual Aviation Outlook MENA, Dubai, UAE'. It was noticed through the conference brochures that some of Middle East LCC officials would be attending both the conferences to address

the gathering, promote their businesses and join panel discussions, which offered a good opportunity to interview some LCC management officials. Since most top-level executives regularly attend such conferences when they are also available for longer periods of time, it was much easier for the researcher to contact them at the conferences and request permission to interview them.

Most of the executives contacted were willing to be interviewed since they were waiting to deliver their presentation or join a panel discussion. The executives interviewed were from RAK Airways, Jazeera Airways, Air Arabia and Bahrain Air from the Middle East [there were other airlines from the Middle East however, they did not want their names to be disclosed] also an airline expert from Qatar airways was interviewed. Other senior executives interviewed were from Asia, they were Air Asia, Spring Airlines, Cebu Pacific and Peach Airlines.

The interview questions focused on their perceptions of the service provided by their company and the service delivery process, staff training and communication with their passengers. The questions were not asked in any predetermined order, and in most cases the interview was a natural conversation between the researcher and respondent with very little probing.

3.12.3. Focus Group Interview:

A focus-group interview is defined as a session containing group discussion which is organised and planned carefully (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996; Jennings, 2010). Participants in this type of research are, therefore, selected on the criteria that they would have something to contribute to the topic, are within the age-range, have similar

socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other (Churchill, 1991; Richardson & Rabiee, 2001).

A study following the interpretive approach tends to use research tools such as in-depth interviews and focus groups to collect data (Michael, 2013). As in the case of this PhD study, the researcher utilised both in-depth interviews as well as focus group interviews, this allowed the researcher to investigate the experience of the passenger's from the insider's perspective, especially in the case of Arab passengers. The advantage of using in-depth interviews and focus group was to collect data in the real world or natural setting (Jennings, 2001; Michael, 2013).

According to Gale and Beeftink (2005), the methodology assists the interpretivist approach as it involves interaction and cooperation between the researcher and the participant, where the interpretive researcher watches, listens, feels, asks, records and examines the information. In relation to this study, the interpretative approach allowed the researcher to inductively analyse the empirical materials obtained through data collection to build on and generate new theory concerning LCC service quality based on passengers' perception especially the Arab passenger's perception.

A focus group of seven Emirati [Arab] women passenger's was conducted especially since they were all Emirati locals [based in UAE] as well as it was the first time they had travelled by LCC. It was very important to learn about their expectations and perceptions/experiences. In both the passenger and senior executive interviews, great flexibility and spontaneity were needed so unstructured interview techniques were the most appropriate.

3.13. Transcribing the Qualitative Data:

From the beginning of the 20th century, the collection of empirical data on social behaviour became increasingly popular (Dicks et al. 2006). Before this time, it was mostly travellers and missionaries who gathered such empirical material. However, their data collection was neither very systematic nor scientifically underpinned. Stocking (2001) notes that anthropological data were, and are still gathering mainly by taking notes 'in the field', commonly known as 'field notes', sometimes accompanied by drawings and collections of material objects (artefacts) from the culture under study.

According to Evers (2011), in the last fifty years, recording devices have taken on a critical role in the empirical social sciences during data collection (tape and voice recorders, photo and video cameras). It seems obvious to (Ross, 2010; Ashmore and Reed, 2000) that, wherever possible, data gathered should be digitally recorded because it ensures significantly higher quality which improves the quality of the transcript. The researcher can also edit digital files very easily using digital software such as NVivo 10. Due to the latest digital technology, qualitative research can be safely archived and shared with other researchers, which gives a chance for secondary analysis (Corti et al. 2005).

All the interviews, including the focus group in this study were digitally recorded on a voice recorder to help the researcher recall both information and the tone of the respondents at the time of transcription and go back and forth over the information at any given later stage of the research as stated by Ashmore and Reed (2000). Once all

the interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word and analysed using NVivo (to be discussed in the later sections).

Verbatim transcription refers to the word-for-word reproduction of verbal data, where the written words are an exact replication of the audio-recorded words (Poland, 1995, cited in Halcomb and Davidson, 2006). The way in which interview content is both heard and perceived by a transcriber plays an important role in the accuracy of transcription (MacLean et al. 2004). Wellard and McKenna (2001) assert that transcription, forms a part of the data analysis process and should be clearly disclosed in the methodology of a project.

3.13.1. Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA)

According to Patton (2002:432), 'Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe. Direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when—and if—arrived at'. The most important feature of qualitative analysis is that the main focus in qualitative data analysis (QDA) is on 'text' rather than on 'numbers'. The 'text' that qualitative researchers analyse is commonly transcripts of interviews or notes from participant observation sessions, but text can also be referred to pictures or other images that the researcher examines. Qualitative content analysis is primarily used within the interpretive social science paradigm (Jennings, 2010).

Since qualitative data are text-based, the cornerstone for analysing these data is the coding process. Codes, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), are 'tags or labels

for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study'. These codes often adhere to chunks of words, phrases, sentences or entire paragraphs. The process of coding involves tracing related words or phrases mentioned by interviewees or found in documents, which can then be combined in order to reveal possible connections between them.

3.13.1.1. Content Analysis:

The term 'content analysis' was coined about 60 years ago, and included in Webster's dictionary, 1961 edition, where it was defined as 'analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect'. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective. Content analysis can be applied to both qualitative and quantitative data, and either inductively and deductively (Elo and Kyngas, 2008).

Krippendorff, (2004) adds that it allows the researcher to make replicable and valid inferences from data to context in order to provide knowledge, new insights, represent facts and offer a practical guide to action. Elo and Kyngas (2008) agree that, by following the process suggested by Krippendorff (2004), the researcher can identify the concepts or categories that describe the phenomenon under investigation. The purpose of identifying such concepts or categories is to build a model, conceptual map, conceptual system or categories.

According to Dey (1993, cited in Jennings, 2010:85), content analysis involves 'the process of finding a focus for the analysis, and reading and annotating the data, [which] leads on naturally to the creation of categories … [I]deas must be sifted, their import assessed, their relevance evaluated. Some may be discarded. Others may suggest key concepts through which to understand that data'.

Qualitative content analysis is predicated on four concepts (Sarantakos, 2005:306):

- Openness
- Communicability
- Naturalism
- Interpretively

Each relates to one of the ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological aspects of the theoretical paradigm informing the research. According Jennings (2010:212), in qualitative content analysis:

- Researchers are free to investigate the texts without any 'a priori' theory or concepts to direct them. This allows them to discover the textual units revealed by the study. The empirical materials are not forced in any way by an 'a priori' theory, as in the case of quantitative content analysis.
- Researchers are responsible for interpreting the contents of the 'communication' texts and explaining their meanings based on the social setting or context from which they were drawn.

- Researchers should interpret the content holistically, in context to enable the empirical materials to reflect real-world settings, events and texts rather than abstractions from the real-world setting.
- Researchers should embed their interpretation in the real world and explain the material within the context of the real world. This means that the meaning of the text is explained based on the setting from which it is drawn rather than some other objectively-derived analysis.

3.13.1.2. Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA)

Until the dawn of powerful computers and software programming, most data were interpreted and analysed manually. However, subsequent developments in information technology have given rise to various software tools that can be utilised for generating final outcomes. Most researchers now make use of readily-available computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) in order to produce better and more accurate results.

Previously, coding was done manually by colour coding the data, before cutting and categorising it into a meaningful analysis. Some researchers used to photocopy each transcript on different coloured paper before cutting out phrases that were important to the study and arranging them in categories (Jennings, 2010). More recently, researchers have been able to use word-processor functions to highlight the transcript in different colours for each interviewee before storing them together electronically. However, all these processes were cumbersome, uncertain and time-consuming. Therefore, given the volume of data, and after exploring possible options through secondary research, it

was decided to use the NVivo QDA software package for the analysis of qualitative data in this study.

3.13.1.2.1. NVivo: A Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

One of the leading packages in the market is NUD*IST, which has quickly achieved popularity and recognition among researchers (Ozkan, 2004). NVivo, produced by QSR International, is an updated, improved, comprehensive version of NUD*IST, which has provided many new data analysis functions for researchers. The software can be used to organise and analyse interviews, field notes, textual sources or other types of qualitative data, including images, and audio or video files. The software assists researchers in conducting word and text searches, or designing word trees, while supporting different document types like PDF, Word, image, audio or social media formats like chats and tweets with the help of a new feature called NCapture (D'Silva et al. 2014).

NVivo has many advantages that may significantly improve the quality of research (Hilal and Alabri, 2013). It is relatively simple to use because documents can be imported directly from word processing packages or other sources and coded easily on screen. Coding stripes can be made visible in document margins so that the researcher can see, at a glance, which codes have been used where. In addition, it is possible to write memos about particular aspects of documents and link these to relevant pieces of text in different documents (Welsh, 2002). From her assessment of the ways in which NVivo can be used for data analysis compared to paper and pencil methods.

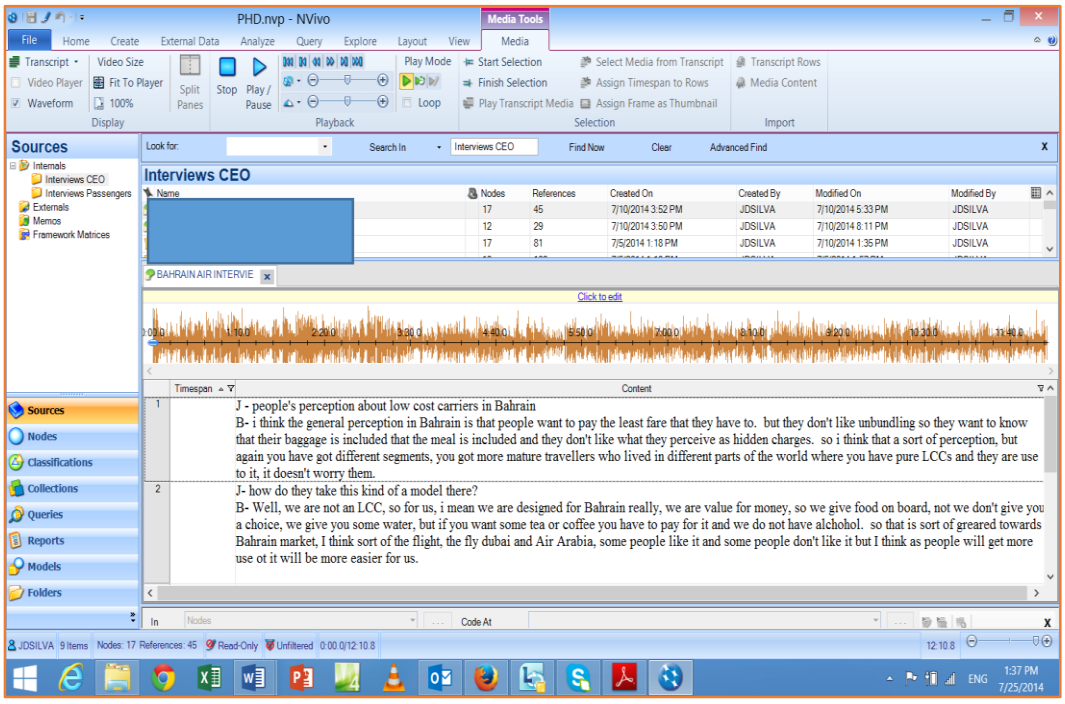
Welsh (2002) also concluded that qualitative data analysis software assists researchers in the labour-intensive process of qualitative data analysis. However, she also warns that to achieve the best results it is important that researchers do not reify either electronic or manual methods; instead, she recommends combining the best features of both. Many researchers have used NVivo for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, such as Asensio (2000) in student learning, Di Gregorio (2000) for literature review, and Rich and Patashnick (2002) to investigate health conditions.

3.13.1.2.2. NVivo Application in this Research:

In this PhD study, both content analysis and CAQDA were used to extract the key information from the interview and the focus group data. After downloading NVivo, a one-day tutorial was completed using in-house content and webinars to understand how to use the software in the research process. A master folder was created to store Word documents of all the transcribed interviews along with several audio-recordings. As described in the previous section, all the interviews were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft word and NVivo.

One of the advantages of using NVivo 10 for CAQDA is that it allows the researchers to store audio-recordings in a folder, which assists in transcribing the interview with the help of its features. Specifically, the playback speed can be slowed in order to help the transcriber enter information on the same page within NVivo, whereas, transcribing through Microsoft Word the researcher has to shuffle between different applications to listen and write. Figure 12 shows this feature of NVivo:

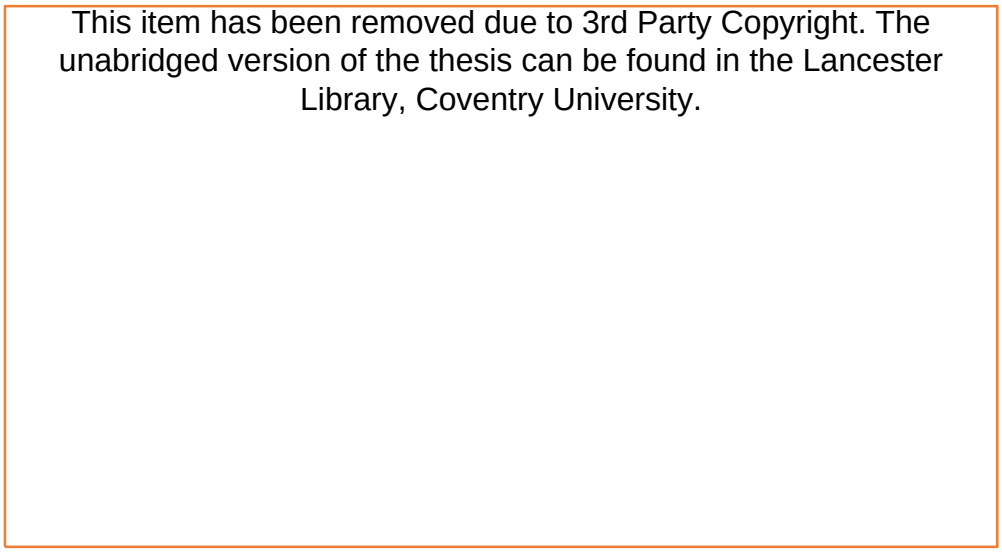
Figure 12: Transcribing Interviews with the help of NVivo 10



Source: NVivo Software

Miles and Huberman (1994) view data analysis as three interconnected sub-processes of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. They describe data reduction in terms of data selection and condensation. Within this stage, data are reduced in anticipatory ways as conceptual frameworks are chosen and as instruments, cases and questions are refined. Huberman and Miles's analytical approach was utilised in this study, as illustrated in Figure 13:

Figure 13: Miles and Huberman's QDA Framework



Source: Miles and Huberman 1994

3.13.1.2.3. Coding and Data reduction Phase using NVivo:

In a qualitative study, the accumulated mass of data has to be organised and somehow meaningfully reduced or reconfigured in the key phase of coding. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe this first step of their three elements of qualitative data analysis as data reduction. 'Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in writing up field notes or transcriptions'. Not only do the data need to be condensed for the sake of manageability, they also have to be transformed so they can be made intelligible in terms of the issues being addressed.

The researcher has to be cautious of the method used to identify the codes. According to Saldana (2008), a code 'is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of

language-based or visual data'. Codes can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one like a metaphor. By coding the data in this way they can be analysed so that themes can emerge.

3.13.1.2.4. Data Display Phase:

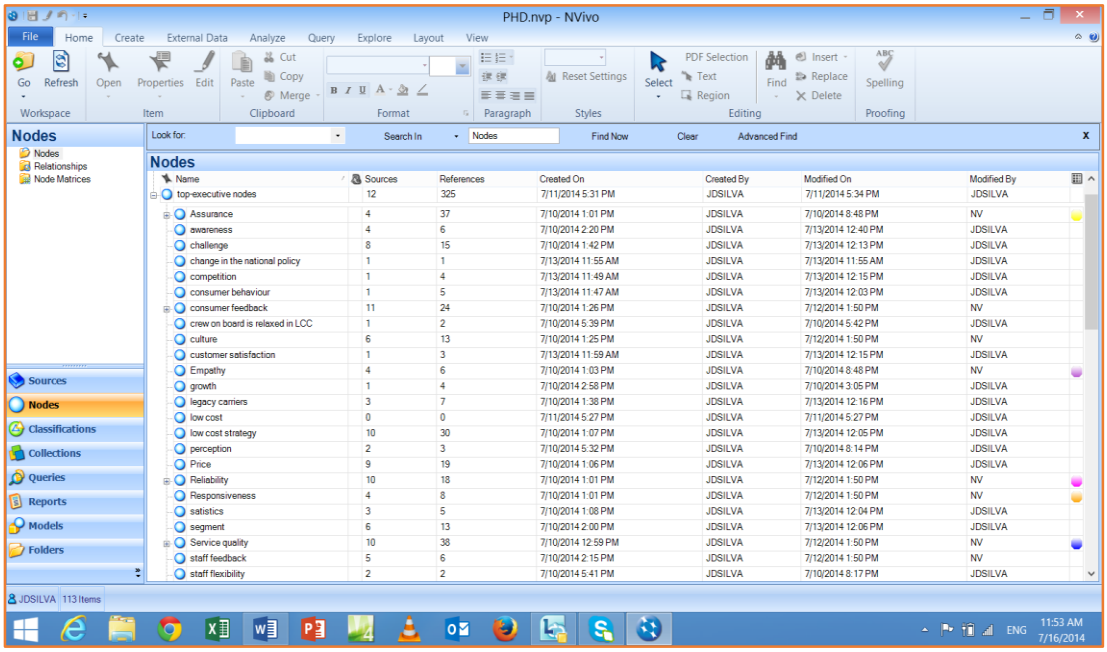
Once the data reduction phase had been completed, the reduced data were displayed and classified into different themes. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data display should be viewed as an 'organised', compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and/or action taking. As mentioned in the previous section, the reduced data were then displayed in the form of main and sub themes.

With the help of NVivo nodes features, key words, specifically the dimensions of the LCCSQUAL model, can be defined as the starting coding list. Each dimension was accordingly created as a parent node so that, whenever themes emerged within each dimension from reading the transcripts then child nodes under the specific parent node could be created. For example, the phrase 'clean toilets' became a child node under the parent node 'Tangibility'.

Other valuable features of NVivo version 10 are that nodes can be created by highlighting the relevant term in the interview transcript and selecting it as a new node, highlighted phrases or paragraphs can be placed in the existing nodes, while the several parent and child nodes can be created. Auto-coding is also another important feature, which allows the researcher to automatically code certain words using search or text

search results. In This study, using these tools, a large number of nodes were created, as illustrated in Figure 14 below:

Figure 14: Nodes from the Transcribed Interviews

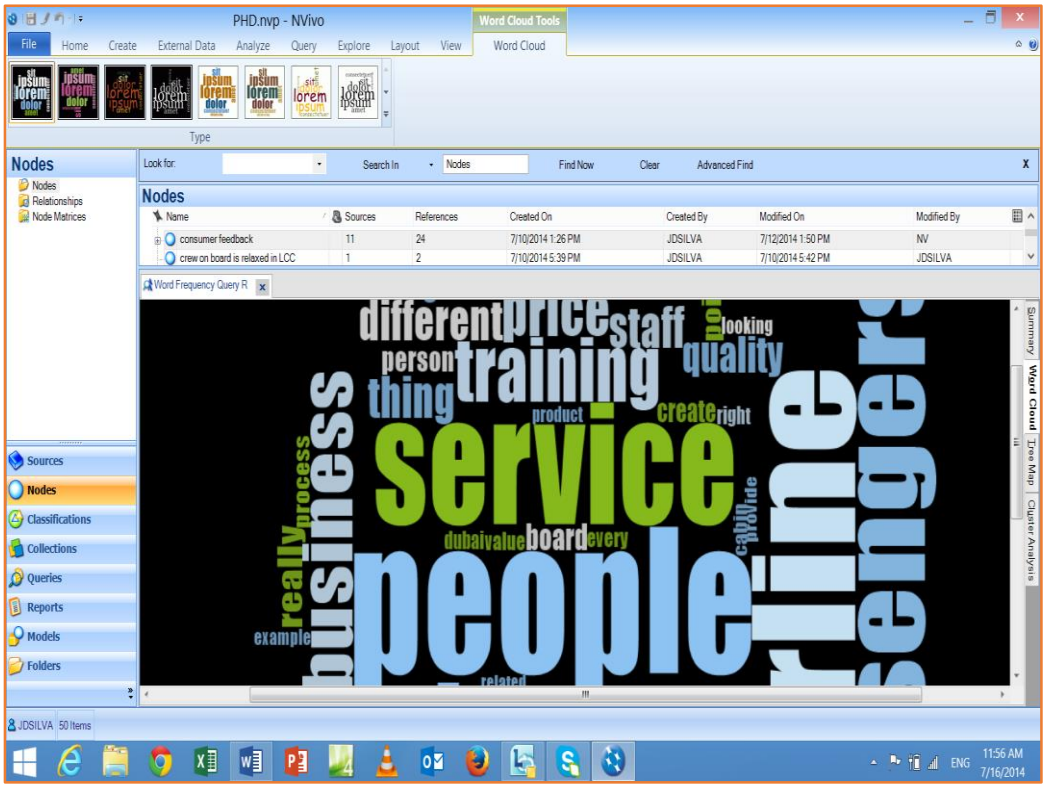


Source: NVivo Software

It is important to note that this process requires the researcher to maintain a clear understanding of what type of data should be assigned to each code. Throughout this stage, the researcher has to adopt an inductive approach of revising or removing codes with additional codes and sub-codes being created as new themes emerge from the data. In the present study, as the codes were revised, each transcript was re-read and re-coded. This phase of coding and sub-coding is also known as the data reduction phase (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data reduction often forces choices about which aspects of the assembled data should be emphasised, minimised, or set aside completely for the purposes of the project at hand.

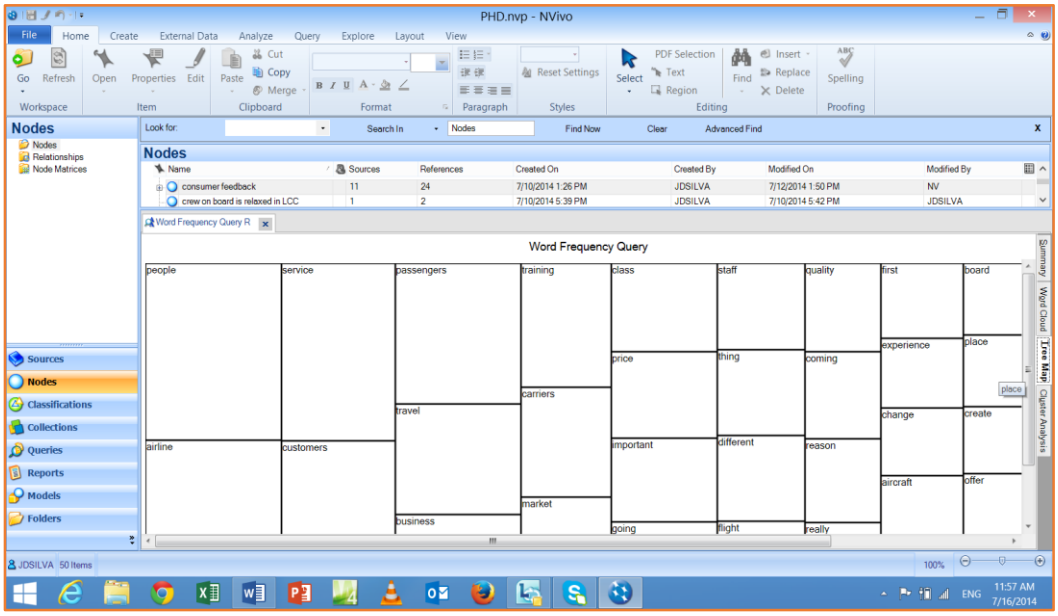
To identify any important key terms that might have been left undetected, the 'word search' and 'text search' features of NVivo 10 were used. This feature assists the researcher in examining the data more closely so that, in some cases, relationships between different terms can be identified with the help of the 'tree map' feature. Figure 15 below illustrates how the word-search and figure 16 illustrates the tree map features **are used to identify further key codes.**

Figure 15: Word Cloud from Word Search option in NVivo 10



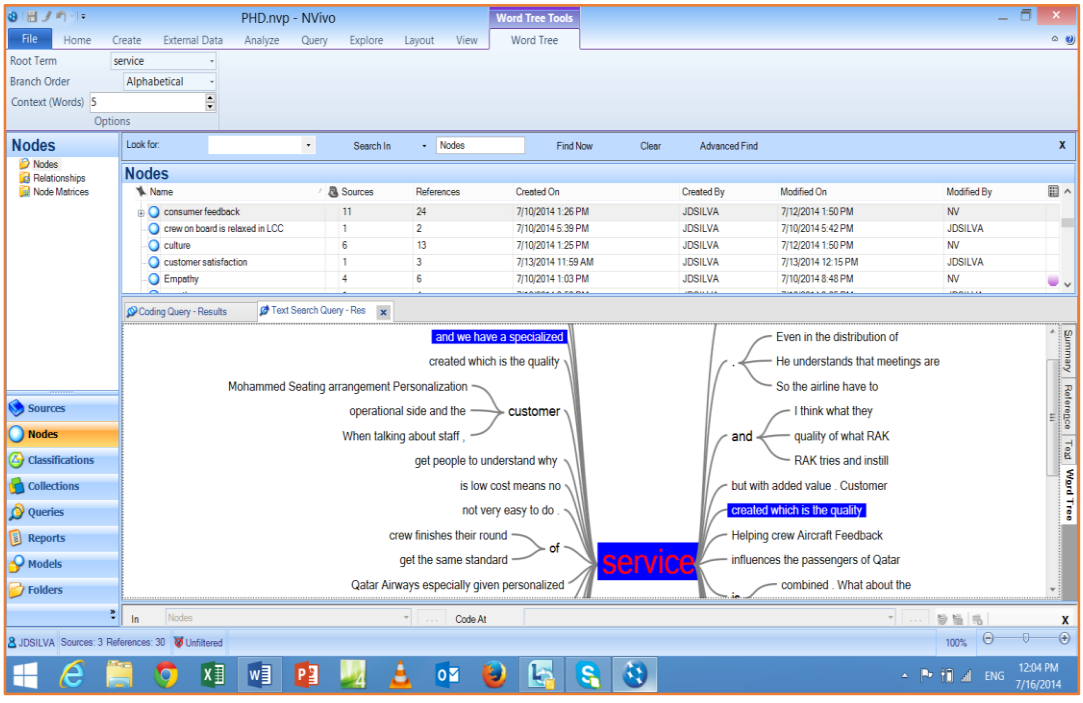
Source: NVivo Software

Figure 16: Tree Map in NVivo 10



Source: NVivo Software

Figure 17: Relationships created from the text search option in NVivo10



Source: NVivo Software

3.13.1.2.5. Conclusion drawing and verification phase:

The final phase of Miles and Huberman's (1994) analytical sub-process allows the researcher to draw conclusions and verify the themes by returning to the existing literature. This is the stage where the displayed data are interpreted and meaning is drawn. The authors suggest that this can be done through various different tactics, for example by looking for comparative and contrasting cases, noting and exploring themes, patterns, and regularities, and by using metaphors. Through this approach, researchers can attach meanings and determine the importance of their analysis, explaining descriptive patterns and looking for relationships and linkages among the descriptive dimensions.

The themes and their interrelationships were then sorted, as will be discussed in detail in the data analysis chapter. As a result of following this analytical process, the theoretical implications to be suggested in this study were firmly grounded in the qualitative data obtained from the in-depth interviews. All the three stages suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were implemented in this research study with the help of computer application programme called NVivo 10.

As a powerful example of CAQDAS software, NVivo helped the researcher hugely to store, manage and interrogate the data. However, it is important to note that the package could not itself interpret or write up the findings; the researcher has to do the thinking and writing, which is at times tedious and time-consuming. However, the NVivo website provides a lot of support for both new and experienced users through tutorials and webinars.

3.13.2. Quantitative Data Analysis:

Once quantitative data have been collected from a representative sample of the population, the next step is to analyse them to investigate, research questions, objectives or hypotheses (Sekaran, 2010). However, before being ready for analysis, data has to pass through several processes. Firstly, the data needs to be edited; specifically, each questionnaire has to be carefully checked to eliminate questionnaires with blank responses or missing data.

Scheffer (2002) argues that missing data is a problem in almost all surveys and quite a number of designed experiments, however much the researcher has carefully tried to ensure that all questions are answered or however well-designed an experiment is. The problem then is how to deal with missing data when it is impossible to recover the actual missing values. The traditional approaches include case deletion to minimize the impact on data analysis Scheffer (2002). The most common method, and the easiest to apply according to Hedges and Pigott (2004), is to use only those cases with complete information.

For statistical analysis, researchers omit questionnaires that lack complete data for the variables of interest. However, instead of complete-case analysis, researchers may also add a plausible value for missing observations, for example by using the mean of the observed cases for that variable. In some cases, where the respondent has left several questions unanswered, the researcher may go back to the respondent to see if the respondent can provide the data so that the questionnaire can be included Scheffer

(2002). However, random sampling usually means that the researcher will not have obtained any of the respondents' contact details unless it was a requirement in the questionnaire.

In the present study, once the survey data had been collected, the fully-answered questionnaires were identified. Of 540 questionnaires received from respondents, only 516 could be used for further analysis since the remaining questionnaires had major sections unanswered, one reason could be that those respondents had been waiting for their flights so that as soon as the boarding gates opened they had left without completing the questionnaire. Fortunately, most respondents were able to complete the questionnaire.

In most cases, the researcher checked each questionnaire while collecting it from the respondent so that, wherever there was a missing value, the respondent was asked immediately to see if they could complete it. However, this was not always possible since the researcher was alone and had to help some respondents fill out their questionnaires as they were willing to participate but could not understand much English.

3.13.3. Coding Questionnaire Data:

Coding is important in quantitative studies. If data are entered into a computer for subsequent processing and analysis, it is essential to develop a coding system. According to Sekaran and Bougie, (2010), the process whereby raw data is transformed

into a standardized form suitable for machine processing and analysis in known as coding.

In the present study, once the data collection stage was completed, the next task was thus to decide how to code each item to determine the values to enter into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). This was necessary because numerical values were needed to represent the data to allow the software to generate an appropriate analysis. The data were first coded on a master questionnaire and then entered into an excel sheet with the help of a data dictionary created to transfer in SPSS files (Cunningham and Aldrich, 2012).

This coding process made the entry process much clearer, thereby reducing errors. Another benefit of coding the data was that it removes the need to remember the original data and also provides a permanent record of the dataset (Cunningham and Aldrich, 2012). Questions in section 1 of the questionnaire were coded as 'E' for expected variables, while section 2 questions were coded 'P' for perceived variables. Each question was then coded individually using an alpha-numerical code, for example, for the first question in section the code given was E1 while in section 2 the code for the first question was P1.

The entered data were then checked in detail and filtered to identify any data entry errors this allowed the researcher to remove a few data entry errors from the raw data sheet, which was then converted into tabular form to assist in further analysis using SPSS software. The complete coding scheme for sections 1 and 2 is presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Coding of expectation and perception questions

FACTORS	Expected	Perceived
Low Cost Airlines/Carriers (LCC) should have reliable aircrafts which are safe to travel.	E1 TAN	P1 TAN
The physical facilities of the aircraft should be of good standard compared to other airlines.	E2 TAN	P2 TAN
Leg Space	E2.1 TAN	P2.1 TAN
Noise Level in the aircraft	E2.2 TAN	P2.2 TAN
Clean Toilets	E2.3 TAN	P2.3 TAN
Comfortable Seats	E2.4 TAN	P2.4 TAN
Food (on board or on sale)	E2.5 TAN	P2.5 TAN
Entertainment (Magazine, TV and/or Music)	E2.6 TAN	P2.6 TAN
LCC should give clear information to its passengers regarding policies, timings, offers and any changes made.	E3 TAN	P3 TAN
LCC should pay careful attention to the safety and security equipment in the aircraft.	E4 TAN	P4 TAN
LCC should maintain a required level of hygiene (cleanliness) in the aircraft during its flights.	E5 TAN	P5 TAN
Employees (Pilots, Cabin Crew and Ground Staff) should all appear professionally dressed.	E6 TAN	P6 TAN
When a LCC promises, they should keep up to their promise.	E7 REL	P7 REL
The passengers should feel safe and secure when dealing with the airline and its staff.	E8 REL	P8 REL
To be a reliable airline it should give priority to on-time performance.	E9 REL	P9 REL
The staff of the airline should perform their tasks correctly.	E10 REL	P10 REL
The website of the airline should provide easy access and the right information regarding flight timings and other information.	E11 REL	P11 REL
The luggage should be received on time without any problems.	E12 REL	P12 REL
Employees in an airline should be friendly and accessible to assist the customers.	E13 ASR	P13 ASR
The employees of the airline should inspire confidence in the customers.	E14 ASR	P14 ASR
The employees should be polite and courteous at all times.	E15 ASR	P15 ASR
LCC should frequently communicate with passengers in case of any problems or delays.	E16 EMP	P16 EMP
The employees of the airline should develop trust in their passengers.	E17 EMP	P17 EMP
The staff of LCC should have a positive attitude towards its customers.	E18 EMP	P18 EMP
The employees of the LCC should give personal attention to each of their passengers.	E19 EMP	P19 EMP
It is important for employees to know what the needs of their individual customers are.	E20 EMP	P20 EMP
When a customer has a problem or complaint, LCC should show a sincere effort in solving them.	E21 RES	P21 RES
LCC employees should have the required skill and knowledge to answer questions of customers.	E22 RES	P22 RES
LCC should give special preference to special needs passengers like Elderly, Disabled or Family with Infants.	E23 RES	P23 RES
The Crew on board should have more time and less stressed since they have a less complicated service to handle compared to Full Fare Airlines.	E24 RES	P24 RES
LCCs should be of value for money (VFM) compared to Full Fare Airlines.	E25 RES	P25 RES

3.13.4. Data Entry:

A coding spreadsheet was created in Microsoft Excel and raw data were entered into the spreadsheet. This was the longest process in the study as there were many values to enter while the researcher had to be cautious about entering the right values in each cell. After each entry, the spreadsheet was reviewed to check that the correct values had been entered.

Each questionnaire was numbered according to the observation number given in the spreadsheet to reduce errors and to allow reference to a specific questionnaire in case of any doubt in the analysis process. Two missing values were eventually found in the data sheet while transferring the data into the SPSS file. However, because the questionnaire observation number had been recorded, the error could be corrected (Sekaran, 2010:305).

3.13.5. Tools Used for Quantitative Analysis:

The selection of an appropriate statistical tool as a decision making tool is often a difficult task without a proper understanding of the theoretical concepts and meaningful interpretation, computers greatly assist in the analysis of quantitative data. According to Babbie (2004:400), more quantitative data nowadays are in a 'machine-readable form, so that computers can read and manipulate the data'. Statistical analysis can be conducted using two main methods. One is simply to use a general spreadsheet or data management program, such as MS Excel; the other is using a specialized statistical package such as SPSS (Software Package for the Social Science), as was the case in this study.

SPSS is a Windows-based program for data entry, analysis and to create tables and graphs (Fields, 2009). It is the most frequently-used software packages for quantitative data analysis (Jennings, 2010). SPSS is capable of handling large amounts of data and can perform all of the analyses. SPSS, which is regularly updated, is commonly used in both the social sciences and the business world (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010).

SPSS is also designed to ensure that the output is kept separate from the data itself by storing all analytical results separately from the data (Cunningham and Aldrich, 2012). In programs like Excel, by contrast, the results of the analysis are placed within the same data worksheet, which increases the chance of overwriting other information by accident. For these reasons, SPSS software was the best tool for interpreting and analysing data in this study.

Experts on SPSS were consulted as well as secondary research was read and analysed to support the researcher in utilising the statistical software SPSS. Several statistical methods were used to interpret the data for the final analysis. More specifically, means and standard deviations were used as descriptive analysis and chi-square tests were employed to identify the relationship of customer perceptions with their expectations. Spearman's Rank Correlations were calculated to determine how variables were related to each other. Cross-tabulations were also conducted on the demographic data and variables to generate further findings.

3.13.5.1. Statistical Analysis:

A total of 540 questionnaires was distributed to the LCC passengers, however, 6 questionnaires were left blank, and of a total 540 questionnaire received 18 questionnaires were incomplete, leaving a total of 516 usable questionnaires. According to Willimack et al. (2002) a response rate of 50 to 65% for paper-based questionnaires are acceptable. The dataset of 516 different subjects/customers were put in rows with demographic details and questionnaire item responses recorded in columns.

The data were grouped into customer demographic data, expected and perceived variables. The questionnaire item variables recorded the responses according to the Likert scale used in the questionnaire, where 1 was for Strongly Agree, 2 for Agree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Disagree and 5 for Strongly Disagree. The aim of this stage of data analysis was to evaluate the correlation between the expected and perceived responses. For categorical or ordinal data, as is the case for the Likert scale responses in this study, it is better to use Spearman's rank correlation method.

3.13.5.1.1. Spearman's rank correlation method

Spearman's correlation coefficient, (ρ, also signified by $r_{s)}$ measures the strength of association between two ranked variables. It is a nonparametric (distribution-free) rank statistic that measures the strength of the association between two variables (Lehmann and D'Abrera, 2006). That is, the test is performed to determine the alignment of levels

between two categorical variables. If the levels are aligned, then it indicates a positive correlation coefficient; otherwise the value is negative.

Ordinal data consist of values defined by the position of the data in an ordered list (a rank), and may be applied to situations where no numerical measurement can be made, but where best and worst or most favoured and least favoured can be identified (Curwin and Slater, 2007:371). However, in situations where the best and the worst have to be identified, but it is impossible to identify how much better the first is than second, it is necessary to exercise caution in interpreting a rank correlation coefficient. Hence, after consulting some experts in statistics and reading online material on SPSS, it was decided to perform Spearman's rank correlation test to determine the correlation between the variables.

Another method to investigate the gap between expectations and perceptions would be to use the straight difference. However, this is considered inadvisable because it is inappropriate when dealing with ordinal data. Therefore, Spearman's Correlation was the statistical test to use for the data in this study where the ranks of the data were derived and then the gaps were calculated.

In using Spearman's correlation method, part of the process involves examination to make sure that the data to be examined can actually be analysed using this test. This is necessary since it is only appropriate to use the method if the data can meet two assumptions that are required for Spearman's correlation to give a valid result. The first assumption is that the two variables should be measured on an **ordinal**, **interval** or **ratio scale**.

The data in this study satisfies this assumption since it was collected using an ordinal Likert scale. The second assumption is that there is a **monotonic relationship** between the two variables. A monotonic relationship exists when the variables increase in value together or else one variable value's increases as the other variable's value decreases. There are a number of ways to check whether the relationship between two variables is monotonic such as similarity and dissimilarity test which will be discussed in the next section.

3.13.5.1.2. Similarity and Dissimilarity Test:

For expected (E series variables) and observed (P series variables), both similarity and dissimilarity measures were calculated. 'Similarity' can be measured using either the Chi Square test or the rank correlation. Similarity test is a measure of the proximity between two or more objects or variables, while dissimilarity is a measure of difference (distance) between objects or variables. Both measures are conventionally normalised to take the value from intervals (0, 1) or (1, -1). Dissimilarity can be measured by a function called distance or metric (Mazurek et al. 2003).

The first test conducted under Spearman's rank correlation method was to identify similarity associations between the LCC passengers' expectations and perceptions. This test aimed to assess the validity of the questions and the alignment between expectation and perception responses by determining the alignment of levels between two categorical variables. Generally, a 'p' value of less than 0.05 indicates that there

is a strong association between the variables, while a p value of less than 0.01 indicates that the association is very strong.

Table 6 below presents the results of this analysis. It indicates that there is a strong association between E3 and P3 in the tangibility dimension ('An *LCC should give clear information to its passengers regarding policies, timings, offers and any changes made*' and '*This LCC gives clear information to its passengers regarding policies, timings, offers and any changes made*'). The p value of the association between E3 and P3 is 0.071, which is less than 0.05. That is, the two variables have a statistically significant association. In the reliability dimension, E7 and P7, and E9 and P9, have very strong associations. At -0.01, a negative association, the rank correlation between E9 and P9 was the highest association. However, as they have higher p-values, which means that there is a larger gap between expectations and perceptions for this variable than the other variables.

Table 6: Similarity Associations of Spearman's Rank Correlation

Type	Expected	Observed	Rank Correlation	p Value for Rank Correlation	Chi Square	p Value Chi Square test of Independence
Tangibility	E1 TAN	P1 TAN	0.15	0.00	35.64	0.00
	E2.1 TAN	P2.1 TAN	0.25	0.00	111.11	0.00
	E2.2 TAN	P2.2 TAN	0.21	0.00	47.07	0.00
	E2.3 TAN	P2.3 TAN	0.16	0.00	61.99	0.00
	E2.4 TAN	P2.4 TAN	0.19	0.00	55.82	0.00
	E2.5 TAN	P2.5 TAN	0.18	0.00	68.40	0.00
	E2.6 TAN	P2.6 TAN	0.23	0.00	82.22	0.00
	E3 TAN	P3 TAN	0.08	0.07	43.19	0.00
	E4 TAN	P4 TAN	0.15	0.00	46.34	0.00
	E5 TAN	P5 TAN	0.11	0.01	49.11	0.00
	E6 TAN	P6 TAN	0.13	0.00	39.36	0.00
Reliability	E7 REL	P7 REL	0.07	0.14	68.01	0.00
	E8 REL	P8 REL	0.11	0.01	44.07	0.00
	E9 REL	P9 REL	-0.01	0.82	48.05	0.00
	E10 REL	P10 REL	0.20	0.00	85.05	0.00
	E11 REL	P11 REL	0.17	0.00	55.59	0.00
	E12 REL	P12 REL	0.15	0.00	52.81	0.00
Assurance	E13 ASR	P13 ASR	0.16	0.00	49.01	0.00
	E14 ASR	P14 ASR	0.24	0.00	63.93	0.00
	E15 ASR	P15 ASR	0.21	0.00	50.20	0.00
Empathy	E16 EMP	P16 EMP	0.15	0.00	51.79	0.00
	E17 EMP	P17 EMP	0.26	0.00	94.38	0.00
	E18 EMP	P18 EMP	0.16	0.00	49.34	0.00
	E19 EMP	P19 EMP	0.20	0.00	67.87	0.00
	E20 EMP	P20 EMP	0.25	0.00	100.35	0.00
Responsiveness	E21 RES	P21 RES	0.17	0.00	30.56	0.02
	E22 RES	P22 RES	0.19	0.00	77.46	0.00
	E23 RES	P23 RES	0.16	0.00	32.43	0.01
	E24 RES	P24 RES	0.21	0.00	108.79	0.00
	E25 RES	P25 RES	0.19	0.00	90.51	0.00

The purpose of this stage of the analysis was to develop an understanding of the gap between customer expectations and perceptions. It was identified that there was a gap between expected and perceived responses. In particular, the p-values for E3-P3, E7-P7 and E9-P9 were all less than 0.05, which implies that the alignments between these pairs are significant. The pair E9-P9 were negatively correlated, there was a significant gap between expected on-time performance and perceived on-time performance.

The significant p-value for the E3-P3 gap indicates that passengers were not very impressed with the actual information they were provided regarding timings or the offers and other conditions. E7-P7 was related to the promises LCCs make to the passengers regarding services, such as flying on time and other services. The analysis showed that here too there was a gap between what was promised and what was actually experienced by the passengers while travelling. E9-P9 related to the passengers' priority for on-time performance. The negative rank correlation value indicates that there was a significant gap, larger than those for the other two variables.

The second test conducted, the dissimilarity test, aimed to confirm the result of the similarity test more precisely. First, SPSS software was used to calculate the distance or gap between the expected and perceived responses. Then the distances between each expected and perceived variable was calculated. The higher the value of the variable is, the wider the gap. Table 7 below presents the dissimilarity scores for each pair of variables. A large dissimilarity score indicates that the LCCs failed to satisfy passenger expectations.

Table 7: Spearman's Rank Correlation dissimilarity results

Type	Expected	Observed	Dissimilarity
Tangibility	E1 TAN	P1 TAN	10.43
	E2.1 TAN	P2.1 TAN	11.74
	E2.2 TAN	P2.2 TAN	11.74
	E2.3 TAN	P2.3 TAN	11.77
	E2.4 TAN	P2.4 TAN	12.64
	E2.5 TAN	P2.5 TAN	13.92
	E2.6 TAN	P2.6 TAN	13.92
	E3 TAN	P3 TAN	12.91
	E4 TAN	P4 TAN	11.03
	E5 TAN	P5 TAN	11.60
	E6 TAN	P6 TAN	11.96
Reliability	E7 REL	P7 REL	11.89
	E8 REL	P8 REL	11.06
	E9 REL	P9 REL	12.77
	E10 REL	P10 REL	9.58
	E11 REL	P11 REL	11.03
	E12 REL	P12 REL	10.95
Assurance	E13 ASR	P13 ASR	10.74
	E14 ASR	P14 ASR	10.64
	E15 ASR	P15 ASR	10.72
Empathy	E16 EMP	P16 EMP	11.39
	E17 EMP	P17 EMP	10.94
	E18 EMP	P18 EMP	10.83
	E19 EMP	P19 EMP	11.81
	E20 EMP	P20 EMP	11.64
Responsiveness	E21 RES	P21 RES	11.26
	E22 RES	P22 RES	10.79
	E23 RES	P23 RES	11.25
	E24 RES	P24 RES	12.59
	E25 RES	P25 RES	11.72

The results indicate that there are gaps in three of the dimensions. First, in the tangibility dimension, the largest gaps reported was for E2.4-P2.4 'comfortable seats', E2.5-P2.5 'food' and E2.6-P2.6 'entertainment' and E3-P3 'information provided to the passengers'.

In the reliability dimension, a gap was reported in the 'flight timings' for E9-P9 that is, passengers expected LCCs to provide on-time performance, but actual delays in

landings or take-offs caused long waits that were unacceptable to some passengers. Passengers travelling with LCCs included business owners, managerial and non-managerial workers, students and families with children. Of these, business passengers generally travel short distances to conduct meetings, conferences or other business-related tasks. Such passengers expect on-time performance to avoid missing important engagements. Flight delays can thus lead to passengers missing important work-related opportunities, connecting flights or even more serious problems. Thus, it is important for LCCs to work on this variable to reduce delays in arrivals and departure to satisfy the passengers.

In the responsiveness dimension, the gap was identified between the expected and experienced level of crew relaxation of 12.59 that is, actual experience did not fulfil LCC passengers' expectations that the crew would be more relaxed than FSC since they have fewer in-flight tasks to perform in an LCC operation. In reality, passengers found that the crew were as busy as they would be on any full-fare airline. One reason for this could be that there are less crew on board an LCC flight than on a full-fare airline, which increases each crew member's workload. Secondly, LCC flights are less than 4 hours long, so the crew has to complete on-flight services quickly, making the crew less relaxed.

To sum up, the highest gaps were found in the Tangibility dimension, where four items had high dissimilarity scores. For the reliability and responsiveness dimensions only one variable had a high dissimilarity score, the assurance and empathy dimensions had the lowest dissimilarity scores.

3.13.5.1.3. Pearson Chi Square Test:

The chi-square test for independence, also called Pearson's chi-square test or the chi-square test of association, is used to discover if there is a relationship between two categorical variables. It is intended to test how likely it is that an observed distribution is due to chance. It is also called a **"goodness of fit"** statistic, because it measures how well the observed distribution of data fits with the distribution that is expected if the variables are independent. If a significant impact is produced then the two variables are considered to be statistically significantly associated.

For example; to determine the significance of the relation between respondents' ages and their expectations about aircraft (E1), the researcher used the Chi Square Test for Independence to generate a 'p-value'. To check the relationship between the variables, the Pearson Chi Square test for independence was performed. The association between expected and perceived responses was tested, it highlighted that all responses were statistically significantly associated with each other.

Another example would be, the association between E1 and Annual Income ($p<0.01$) (Appendix), with a highly significant p value of 0.002, indicates that there is a very strong association between annual income and expectations about the aircraft. The shortcoming of this test is that it cannot determine the precise nature of the association, such as exactly which income groups agreed or disagreed about expectations about the aircraft.

3.13.5.1.4. Cross Tabulation:

Cross-tabulation involves presenting the results of one variable against the other variable to provide a basic understanding of how two variables inter-relate. It also helps

in the search for patterns of interaction, that is, if certain cells in a cross-tabulation table contain noticeably large (or small) numbers of cases, it might indicate a pattern of interaction. For the purpose of this research, cross tabulation was performed on the expected and perceived variables as well as the demographic variables. Table 8 presents an example of the cross tabulation conducted on gender and comfortable seats.

Table 8: Cross Tabulation for comfortable seats

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender * E2.4 TAN : Comfortable Seats	516	100.0%	0	0.0%	516	100.0%

	E2.4 TAN : Comfortable Seats					
Gender	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Total
F	53.25%	35.06%	8.44%	1.95%	1.30%	100.00%
M	40.88%	41.16%	11.33%	5.25%	1.38%	100.00%
Total	44.57%	39.34%	10.47%	4.26%	1.36%	100.00%

The table 8 highlights the results of cross-tabulation analysis conducted on 'Comfortable Seats' and 'Gender'. The results indicated that, while about 53% of female passengers expect comfortable seats, only 41% of male passengers agreed that they expect comfortable seats during their travel with LCC. This directs that female passengers' expectations are higher than male passengers' for this service variable.

3.13.5.1.5. Factor Analysis:

Factor Analysis is used in the study to identify the prominent attributes that have impact on consumers' perception of LCC service providers. Since, Factor Analysis is an

analytical process of transforming data (as measurements) into linear combinations of the original variables, it is a meaningful statistical method used for combining a large amount of correlated data into a considerably smaller number of uncorrelated factors with hopefully a minimum loss of information (Hair, et al., 2010). Measures that are highly correlated, either positively or negatively are likely influenced by the same factors, while those that are relatively uncorrelated are likely influenced by different factors (Yong and Pearce, 2013)

Factor Analysis has two basic forms; Exploratory Factor Analysis which tries to find the nature of the constructs influencing a set of responses and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) which tests whether a specified set of constructs influences responses in a predicted way (DeCoster, 1998) and (Yong and Pearce 2013). The current study employed Confirmatory Factor Analysis for two main objectives: first, to test the validity of the measurement through convergent and discriminant validity and second, to assess the structure of the entire scale (Byrne, 2010). CFA was also used in the study since the SERVQUAL is a well-established model and this study has adapted the original five dimensions and modified them to suit the Low Cost Carrier (LCC) service quality.

3.14. Chapter Summary

Research methodology forms the backbone of any research study (Buckley et al. 1975). Accordingly, several key topics were discussed in this chapter. First, it considered the theoretical framework of the study, including the adoption of both positivist and social interpretivist paradigms. This was followed by a brief discussion of quantitative and

qualitative methodology in order to justify the decision to use triangulation, i.e. a multi methodology, in investigating the research questions. Having established the study's methodology, the specific methods were presented next, namely the questionnaire design and in-depth interview techniques.

In addition, scale development was described in terms of Rossiter's (2002) C-OAR-SE model, which has been employed to support the development of scales in recent marketing research. In the final sections, the use of software such as NVivo for computer-assisted qualitative analysis and SPSS for quantitative analysis was explained and justified. The data analysis and the statistical tests conducted on the data was discussed in detail.

It justified the use of Spearman's rank correlation as the appropriate test for this study's nominal data set. Given that the aim of the study was to measure and evaluate the gap between LCC passenger expectations and perceptions, rank correlation supports the test of similarity and dis-similarity to identify the gap following the rank method. Chi-square tests were conducted on the non-numerical data while cross tabulation was used to identify which variables interacted in terms of the patterns of questionnaire responses for different demographic categories of respondents. Finally, Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that a relationship between expected variables and perceived variables exists.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Research Findings

4.1. Introduction:

This chapter concentrates on presenting empirical findings of the interviews with individual passengers, LCC senior-executives and focus groups as well as the self-administered survey. The objective of the empirical research is to develop an industry specific service quality model and investigate the LCC service quality based on the passengers' perception in a new cultural setting. This study investigated five dimensions of LCC service quality, which were further divided into several new variables under each dimension discussed in chapter six, research methodology.

This study also aimed to find if passengers in different age groups behaved differently when making decisions, based on differing expectations and perceptions. In the following section, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the questionnaire and interviews is discussed under the five dimensions, namely; tangibility, reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness.

A total of 540 passengers participated in the survey at Dubai International Airport Terminal 2, a Low Cost Terminal from 08.00 a.m. to 07.00 p.m. and the survey was administered over a week. Terminal 2 is a dedicated Terminal for all the low cost airlines arriving and departing from UAE except for Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah, which has its own airport being used by Air Arabia (the only LCC based in Sharjah and now also in Ras Al Khaimah).

The researcher had the opportunity to survey passengers who were waiting in the lounge near the gates to board their flights, at the restaurant areas and who had a minimum of 1 hour waiting time. It was the perfect time to ask such passengers to participate in the survey. Since the passengers were in a relaxed disposition as they had completed the immigration formalities, most of the passengers agreed to complete the survey as they had nothing much to do but wait for their flight. This resulted in fewer response errors and very few incomplete questionnaires.

If the passengers looked very young then their age was enquired and only passengers older than 15 years were approached, with careful consideration being given to not involve passengers below 15 years, since they were considered as less capable of appropriately comparing items about expectations and actual experiences in the questionnaire.

4.2. Integrating the results by Triangulation Method:

In recent years, the advantages of multi methods research have been increasingly recognised. For example, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2004) argue that combining quantitative and qualitative research enables researchers to be more flexible in evaluation as well as more holistic in their investigative techniques, as they endeavour to address a range of complex research questions that arise.

Multi methods optimally involve combining of methods that have complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses, which is known as the fundamental principle of multi methods research (Johnson and Turner, 2003). However, the central issue discussed by Bryman (2007) is the degree to which multi methods researchers genuinely

integrate their findings. As Greene et al. (1989, cited in Bryman 2007) found that, 44% of the 57 articles examined did not integrate the quantitative and qualitative data, with only 5 articles integrating quantitative and qualitative data during analysis. Niglas (2004) concluded that, 'substantial integration of qualitative and quantitative data during the analysis was exercised very rarely'. According to Bryman (2007), integrating quantitative and qualitative findings have the potential to offer insights that could not otherwise be assembled.

The research undertaken for this PhD study followed a multi methodology (triangulation) in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The researcher gave careful consideration to integrate both, the interviews conducted with individual passengers, senior-executives, focus group as well as the self-administered questionnaire survey. The findings of the data collected through each method were integrated in line with the aim of triangulation, which is to arrive at the same findings but using different methodologies.

4.3. Demographic Analysis

One of the objectives of the research was "to examine the impact of changes in the passenger demographic factors on the growth of LCCs". Therefore, it is important to highlight some of the demographic results collected from the survey, to explain the demographic changes developing in the Middle East region which has benefited the development of LCC market.

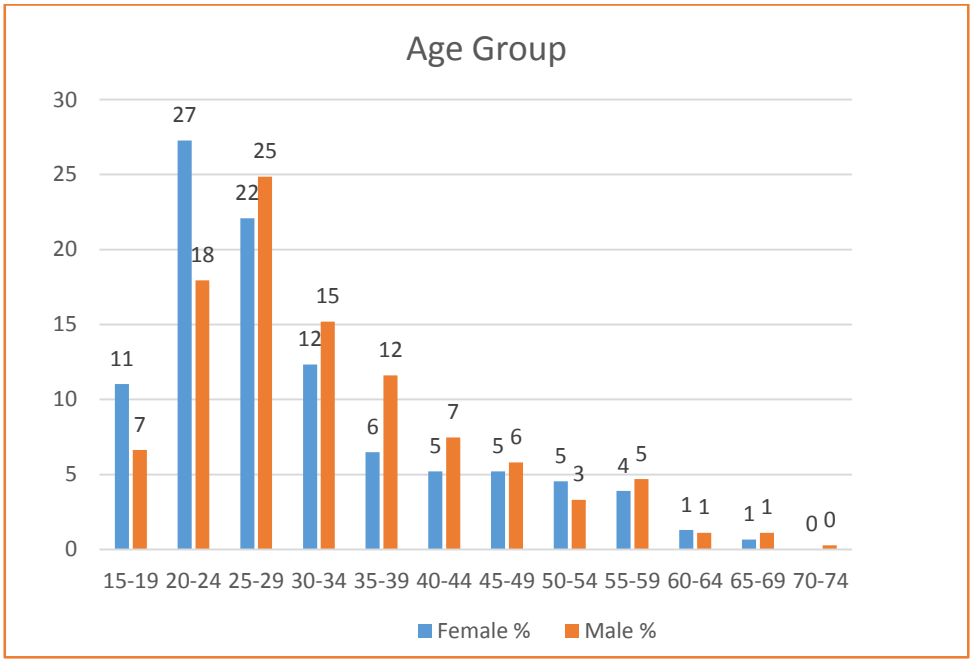
A total of 516 questionnaires were fully filled, of which, 362 (70%) were by male passengers and 154 (30%) were by female passengers, which corresponded to the general

ratio of male to female passengers observed at the airport. From discussions with some of the airport staff, it was suggested that mostly male members of expatriate families come to the gulf region in search of work, leaving their families back home.

According to the Dubai Statistics Centre, 76 % of Dubai's estimated population of 2.2 million are males and 24% are females. The centre described this population as distribution as "unnatural" in its report, attributing the unbalanced structure to the large proportion of foreign workers living in Dubai, most of whom are working-aged males unaccompanied by their family members (Gulf News, September 3 2014).

4.3.1. Age Group:

Figure 18: Results of demographic information section III: Age group Analysis



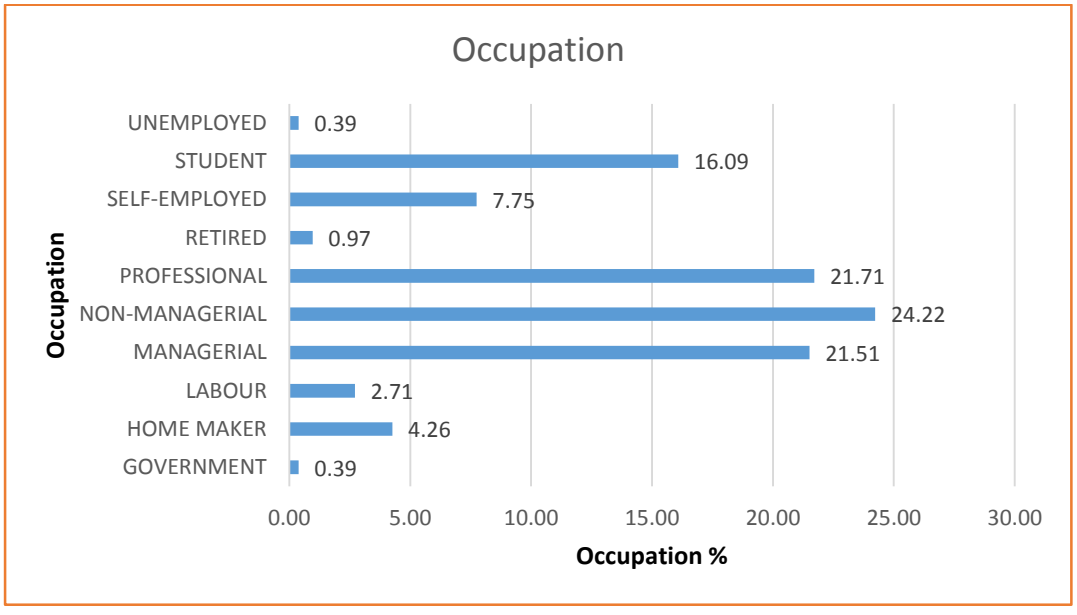
During the self-administered survey, passengers from different age groups were approached. The age groups were decided according to statistical data from the UAE government's website, with passengers older than 15 years considered appropriate to be

included in the survey. The largest age group travelling regularly with LCCs has been between 20 to 39 years, perhaps because they were travelling for work, business or visiting family and relatives (VFR).

The largest age group, 24% travelling with LCCs was the age group 25-29 years, of whom 73% were male passengers. Two-thirds of the population were between 20-39 years old. In 2013, the total number of men in that age group was almost 60 per cent more than females, according to the Dubai Statistics Centre website.

4.3.2. Occupation:

Figure 19: Results of demographic information section III: Occupation Analysis



The demographic results highlighted that the most frequent occupational category of the LCC passengers was non-managerial 24%, followed by professionals 22% and managerial 22%. Only 8% of passengers were self-employed, while 16% were students, presumably

because travelling with an LCC might be much cheaper option for them as they had low incomes.

These demographic results were important to indicate that the trends in travelling are changing. In the past, managerial-level passengers or above would have preferred to travel with legacy carriers since it was a status issue for them to travel in anything cheaper. However, as Dresner (2006) notes, during recessions, when corporate travel departments' 'budgets contract, business passengers' became more price sensitive, leading them to more closely resemble leisure passengers in their purchasing decisions. After the economic downturn and the introduction of LCCs, companies now expect their managers to travel with LCCs to reduce costs.

While interviewing an expert on Middle East aviation industry, he discussed that the travelling pattern of people have changed in the Middle East, he commented that, "*five years back there were different types of passengers, those passengers are earning income exceeding 15000 Dirhams [per month] the expatriates were travelling back to their home countries once or twice in the year but now they are trying different parts of the world. The passengers have invented different offers in different destinations like they could travel to a different destination with cheap fares or offers"*.

4.3.3. Annual Income:

The next demographic results necessary to prove the objective, "to examine the impact of demographic factors on LCC passengers", was annual income, this information contributed towards understanding passengers' spending capacity, and whether only low-

income and middle- income passengers travelled with LCCs. The annual income category was matched to the census survey categories, followed by the UAE statistics department; its categories were ranging from AED 10,000 to 45,000 and above annually. However, during coding and interpretation the data it was realised that, there was an additional group which was not included in the annual income category of the survey and it was 'no income', for example students and homemakers. These respondents did not tick any of the available options in the annual income category therefore, they were categorised under the 'no-income' category, as they had ticked in either homemaker or student category in the occupation section.

The results for annual income highlighted that, there has been a shift in the travellers' preferences. For example the results surprised the researcher that, the highest number of passengers travelling with LCCs was high income passengers 30%, with an annual income of AED 45,000 or above. This highlighted that, high-income passengers now preferred travelling with LCCs, thus this could be because they found it more convenient to travel with an LCC, being not concerned about getting all the services of a full service carrier, as long as they reached their destination. They might also be the largest group of travellers since they have dispensable income to spend on themselves and were trying to save on travel in order to spend more on their holidays. This could be an interesting area to further investigate, if high income passengers travel to save for their destination spending or if there is another reason.

The next majority category was 17% of the respondents who had an annual income of AED10, 000 – 15,000 annually, while 15% were from the no-income category (students and homemakers). The results were quite extreme with two largest groups; one was the

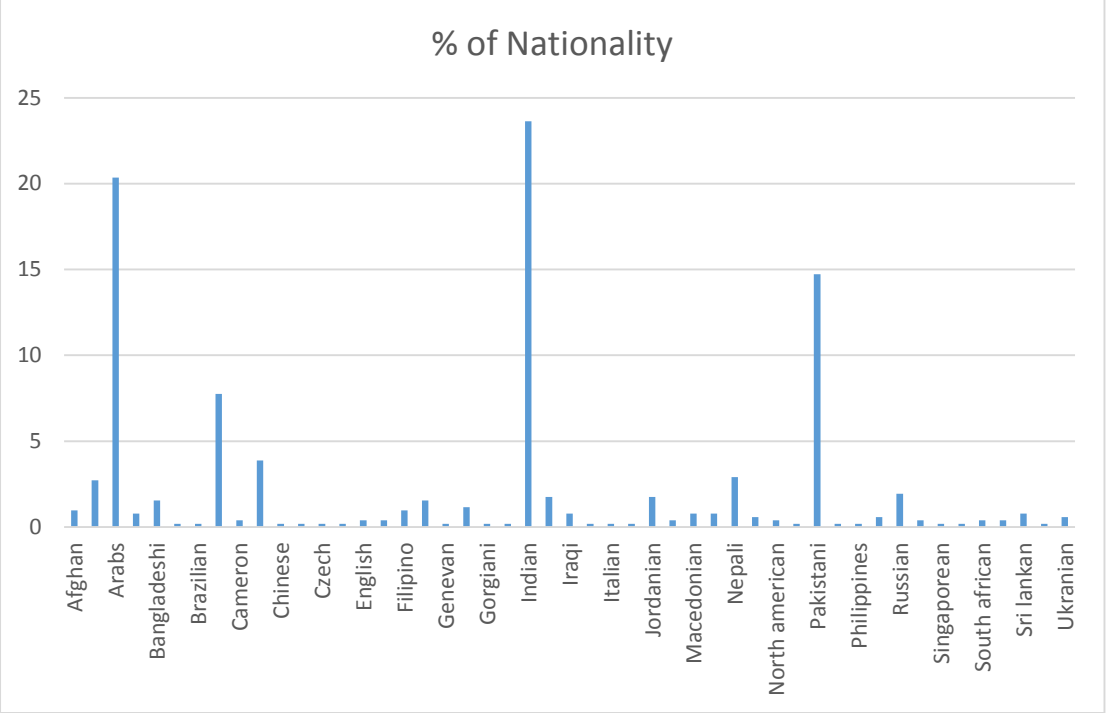
high income group and the other very low income group. The low income group, presumably had no other choice but to travel by LCCs since their low income meant they had no disposable income to travel with a full service carrier.

This is an important market to tap into for Middle East LCCs since 40% of GCC workers are low-income according to the IMF report on GCC market (2014) therefore, if LCCs can offer competitive low prices and services, such travellers will prefer to travel with LCCs. During the senior-executive interviews the CEO of RAK Airways commented that, "*we are trying to build up in the business of the labour movement, with the recovery of post financial crisis 2007-10 the recovery".*

4.3.4. Nationality

It was important to find about the different nationalities that travelled with LCCs, since the Middle East has more expatriates than nationals. Therefore, it is imperative to know which nationalities travelled more often with LCCs. The nationality category was left open-ended since many nationalities are live and worked in the Middle East. A total of 70 nationalities was involved in the survey, which gave an understanding of the wide spectrum of people travelling in and out of the GCC countries in the recent times.

Figure 20: Results of demographic information section III: Nationality Analysis



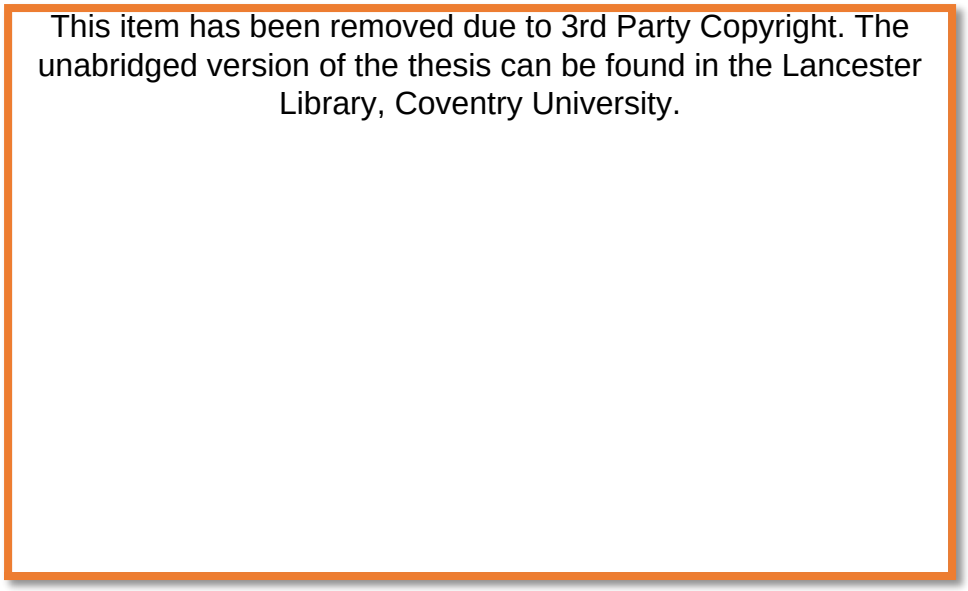
The greatest proportions were Indians (24%), followed by Pakistanis (17%), Emiratis and other Arab nationals (20%), British (9%), Canadians (4%) and Russians (4%). Other nationalities that were surveyed were less than 4%, and therefore, have not been discussed in the analysis. It is important to note here that a high percentage of passengers travelling with LCCs are Asian's as they travel to Middle East countries for work and business purpose. It is important for LCCs to identify different nationalities coming from different cultures have different expectations and perceptions of the airline, therefore, LCCs should analyse the passenger's culture and improve their service quality accordingly.

4.4. Summary of Demographic Results

To conclude the demographic section the figure 21, below, highlights that, travellers have been travelling more in the recent years, especially a large influx of travellers of different

nationalities into the Middle East countries can be seen. The figure 21 indicates the growth in airline passenger traffic between the years 2007 – 2014.

Figure 21: International Passenger Traffic



Source: International Air Transport Association (IATA)

In this section four demographic results were discussed to prove that one of the objectives, "to examine the impact of changes in the passenger demographic factors on the growth of LCCs" have been fulfilled. The demographic results discussed were the age group, occupation, annual income and nationality of the passengers travelled. The results of all the demographic sections have highlighted that there has been a significant change in the travelling pattern and the type of passengers travelling with LCCs in the Middle East region.

4.5. Integrating the results of passenger expectations and perceptions

Both sections of the questionnaire contained 25 questions for the respondents based on their expectations and perceptions of LCCs. Using a Likert scale of 1 equals strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree, the respondents were asked to circle the most appropriate number according to their understanding. They were clearly informed that there were no right or wrong answers. The next sections in this chapter will focus on analysing each dimension and newly identified variables to suit the industry specific variables to measure the LCC service quality in the Middle East region.

4.5.1. TANGIBILITY DIMENSION:

This was the first dimension tested in the LCC service quality survey questionnaire and the variables included in this dimension were reliable aircrafts, physical facilities [further divided into sub-variables], clear information, safety and security of the equipment's, aircraft cleanliness and Professionally dressed staff. The detailed discussions will be explained below:

4.5.1.1. TANGIBILITY DIMENSION: Reliable aircrafts

Modern looking and reliable aircrafts are an important variable under tangibility dimension as well as an important service for LCC passengers since, reliable aircrafts means increased safety while travelling. The majority of respondents that is over 95% of passengers expected that the LCC aircraft should be reliable and safe for travelling short distances at least. Further analysis on the bases of the gender showed that both male, 65% and female, 65% strongly agreed that the aircraft used by LCCs should be safe and reliable. Comparing expected and perceived responses for aircraft reliability, we see that

84% of respondents found the actual aircraft to be safe and reliable compared to expected results of 95%, which means a gap of 11% in the results.

> When the senior executive of AL Jazeera was interviewed, he mentioned, "*While we have the new aircraft, our average fleet type **is** 3.1 years. Of course, we try to keep the cabin appearance good and well monitored, cabin appearance on each aircraft every month. And wherever we have seen aircraft in terms of cabin appearance is going down, we do regular maintenance and so changes happen very quickly, within a day*".

The in-depth interview replies from the passengers about reliable aircrafts indicated that they expected new and reliable aircrafts and it also highlighted that they were quite satisfied with the aircrafts used by LCCs in the Middle East.

> Respondent one said, "*I expect satisfactory aircraft*"
>
> Respondent five replied, "*With the aircraft I think that the low cost carriers always use the old aircraft but I am not sure because the same happens in my country (Turkey). I feel that the aircraft with low cost carriers are less modern than the full fare airlines"*.
>
> Respondent six, "*new airlines so I guess that their aircrafts are new and that's absolutely brilliant*".

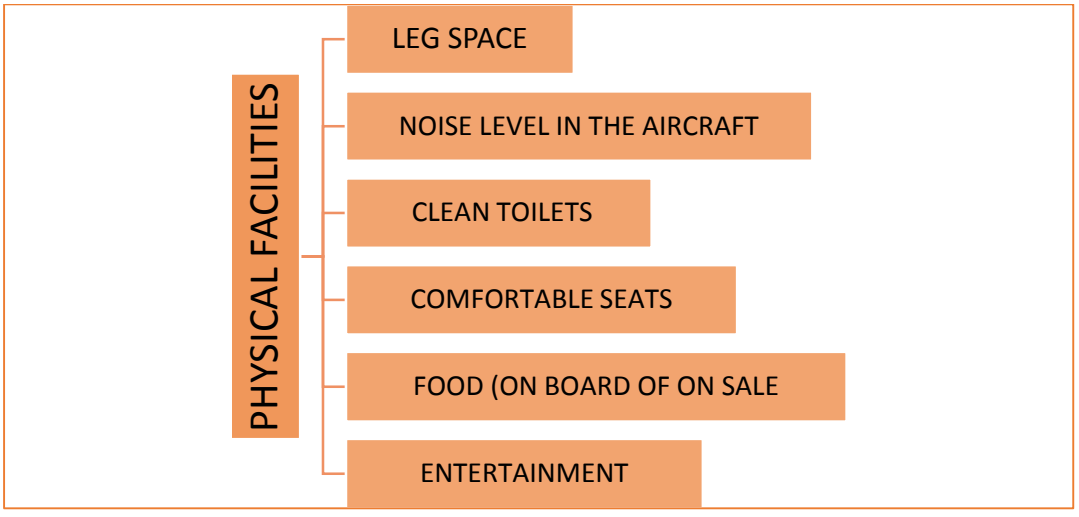
It indicates that the expectations of the passengers are naturally governed by the experiences they have had in the past in their country of residence. Most of the interviewees believed that they are impressed with the aircrafts in the Middle East, for example, respondent four mentioned, "*Air Arabia is good in terms of new aircraft and good flight experience.* Respondent five discussed that*, "The aircraft of Air India Express*

very spacious and everything was very good. With Air Arabia, I felt everything was fine, I was in fact very happy". Respondent seven replied, *"They all are very well maintained they are quite clean*". The CEO of Air Arabia was interviewed and his perception about Air Arabia was "*Good airplanes, Good service and comfortable seat pitches so it is, you know, good".* At many instances passenger interviewees did mention that they were very much satisfied with Air Arabia.

The results from both the interviews and survey questionnaire indicated that the passengers travelling on LCCs had high expectations of aircraft reliability and were generally satisfied with aircraft maintenance, as well as finding that LCC companies in the Middle East region provided great care to the modern look and reliability of the aircraft. Well-maintained aircraft reduce accidents and made passengers feel safe to travel on them. In the last 10-12 years, there have been no accidents reported involving any Middle East LCCs.

4.5.1.2. TANGIBILITY DIMENSION: Physical Facilities

Figure 22: Tangibility: Physical Facilities



Source: Author, 2015

As shown in the diagrammatic representation above in Figure 22, this variable was further divided into specific facilities identified by the interviewees during the interview or group discussion, such as leg space, noise level in the aircraft, clean toilets, comfortable seats, food (on-board or on sale) and entertainment (magazines, TV and/or music) to gauge passenger expectations and actual perceptions.

The options were separated to give a clear analysis of each variable since every variable is important in analysing the tangibility dimension. The first feature under physical facilities was **leg space**, while 83% of respondents expected to have comfortable leg space, only 65% experienced comfortable leg space, which reveals a significant gap between passenger expectations and perceptions. Confirming this, during the survey, the researcher informally discussed LCC service in general with passengers travelling to Nepal to visit their family and relatives. As one of the respondents mentioned, "*It is uncomfortable to travel with an airline with limited leg space, especially when the timings of the flights are odd"*.

During the interview some of the respondents also discussed some issues with leg space and other problems such as, respondent one discussed that, "*I had issues like cleanliness, leg space and high noise level of the aircraft. I think it's better to have good leg spacing in the aircraft, comfortability especially seats should be a little softer than they are".* Respondent two also shared similar kind of feelings*, "My expectations are that there should be a certain level of comfortability in the seating arrangement; seats should be comfortable, I do not mean too much leg space or a bigger seat but definitely appropriate spacing between the seats to rest and eat meals*.

Respondent five was particular about the physical facilities of the aircraft as she replied, "*I do not feel very comfortable flying with fly Dubai, I would think it is just 4 hours so it does not matter but with the age you want things should be made more comfortable. 'space between the seats', It depends on the seat especially in certain places like the seat near fire exit is not very comfortable since I could not lean back on the back rest. I travel with my daughter, I have a lot of stuff with me and I find the space provided to us is not enough, the space allocated to me feels like I am stuffed in a cabinet.*

The aircraft in Air India Express was very spacious, I was not particularly happy with Fly Dubai due to the comfortability of seating arrangements and the leg space and the spacing". Respondent seven was a tall person and was particularly affected by the leg space due to her long legs, this what she replied, "*In terms of comfort, long legs as I have long legs it is very comfortable to travel in Air Arabia even compared to big carriers because of the leg space, they are great".*

Leg space is important for passengers since they need sufficient space to sit comfortably without being cross-legged or cramped in the seat. However, LCCs need to fit more seats in their aircraft to increase revenue and keep costs low. Nevertheless, LCCs should give due consideration to the seat comfort and leg space. While 65% of passengers were satisfied with actual leg space, this still represents a gap of 18% from perceptions. Although this may not be considered an important gap, it might still be advisable for LCCs to consider leg space as one of the factors of service quality which influences the expectations and perceptions of the LCC passengers and also the impact on customer satisfaction and their future behavioural intention.

When the Focus group interviewees [Arab passengers] were asked about the leg space and the space between the seats or even the pathway, following were their comments;

> "Focus Group Member *1, 3, 5, and 6: Yeah! It was good we didn't have any problem with it*
>
> Focus Group Member *2: the seats were comfortable, we didn't have any problem in that*
>
> Focus Group Member *1: even more comfortable than Emirates maybe*
>
> Focus Group Member *3: the space in between the row (walking space) was good I can walk with my bag comfortably without hitting anyone".*

It was clear that the Arab passengers appreciate if more leg space is provided since they carry big and expensive brand bags (as mentioned by one of the focus group member) they do not like it to be damaged by cramping in a smaller space. Also, it is important to know that, women in the Arab culture are not allowed to be touched or share a seat next to a male passenger, therefore, they always like to travel on airlines which have a good distance between the seats as well as at the aisles.

The next variable in the tangibility dimension was **the noise level in the aircraft**, which is generally divided into two factors: machine and human noise (Civil Aviation Authority, 2014). It is an important physical factor for some passengers who are travelling at night after a busy working day or who might want some relaxation before getting busy after the travel. A gap between expectations and perceptions in the noise level 18% was as similar to the leg space variable analysis. The interview respondents also voiced a similar kind

of concern regarding the noise level in the aircraft, they referred to both kinds of noise; human and engine noise.

> Respondent one replied, "*High noise level of the aircraft. Noise level in the aircraft should be less'.* Respondent five had some major issue with the airline she travelled with as she had to experience both engine and human noise, which was annoying for her, this is what she stated, "*when the flights take off and land and if they make any noise which is what out of my understanding I think is it because they are old aircrafts or is there anything happening so the passengers might be in a state of panic when such noise come from the aircraft. With Air Arabia I felt everything was fine, I was in fact very happy'. But I was not particularly happy with the other passengers travelling on the flight with fly dubai".*

She narrated another incident with another LCC in the Middle East during her travel, "*There was a family of 6 or 7 children and the mum was very busy with the infant in the arms but meanwhile the other children were making noise and lying on the floor, and the kids were at the age of 2 or 3 nobody was paying attention to them. They were disturbing other passengers and the crew could not manage to explain the mother that at the age of 2 or 3 the kids need to be accompanying with an adult and cannot be seated on their own and the crew had to tell the mother 2 to 3 times to make an adult sit with them since they were really disturbing other passengers".* Because of this the respondent was disturbed, but she remarked that "*in this case there is nothing much the staff could do to handle in this situation*'.

Respondent seven who were a couple, and they were ready to accommodate with the human noise in the aircraft as they were aware about the LCC passengers, "*At times may there is a group of people travelling and they are having a go time (fun time) haven't they? But they were loud, happy, but it was really fine, it didn't really bother us"*.

Sometimes LCC aircrafts are old with greater engine noise, which can be unbearable at times, as suggested by the interview responses as well as discussed in the Civil Aviation Authority report, 2014, fellow passenger noise such as snoring or talking in loud voice can also become unbearable, especially if there are families with infants or small children, adding to the difficulty for a passenger who wants to sleep before going to an important meeting or presentation. Thus LCCs should adopt some strategies whereby provision can be made for passengers to have the option of selecting seats at additional cost that can ensure a quiet space in the flight. This was also expressed by senior executive from RAK airways during his interview as one of the company's future strategies since the majority of the passengers were working class, who tended to be noisier than other passengers.

> This was commented by the *RAK airways CEO, "For example traveling to Doha in a group in some respect you would like to associate with somebody else you are traveling with and it very discriminatory quite unfortunately but that's the nature of life and it is particularly so in the economy where people are more densely seated and so the impact of the passengers next row or next door is far more significant to you than it is if you are traveling in a business class or the first for this degree of separation you had paid for. So the economy product or economy cabin is first of all the most difficult and challenging market but it is where one can make the most impact. And using technology for example the idea is to be able*

to pay a small fee to guarantee that there is an empty seat in the aircraft is going be the one next to you".

He further commented about single female travellers*, "It is very important I mean one of the other things which becomes sadly more important which as we go forward in life we see female travellers traveling alone need to be treated with some sensitivity bearing in mind who else is traveling in the aircraft. Secondly if you are flying somewhere and you had an exhaustive day and want to rest and next to you is a very hyper person wanting to talk how would you then ask the people next to you to not talk, but you need to use the right words or then call the crew to ask him to stop talking so then the co-passenger poor thing feels very bad about everything which is a concern for the airlines, if we can use technology and get the system to work and couple that with good quality people to understand the sensitivity".*

"Another good example to the routes which RAK does fly to Colombo, Sri Lanka which is a very very good quality leisure destination and lot of people in the Middle East like to go to Colombo for thousand and one reason but Sri Lanka is also a labour market and if someone is employed for 1 year on a building site and has worked extremely hard for the last couple of years and salaries are not brilliant and people have huge obligation back home and so they live a very frugal life and they then send as much as they can back home. Well to mix those two kinds of people, families on leisure and labour travellers is not a good mix in the context of this market. Not every Emirati family (Arab family) can afford business class or

first class since there is going to be large portion of them traveling economy so it is important to maintain levels".

The findings highlighted that both the passengers and the LCC management expectations matched about the noise level variable, especially the human noise level in the aircraft. It has been also highlighted in the Civil Aviation Authority report 2014 that, high noise levels can impact the passengers and the crew in the long term and the airline management has to identify solutions such as well-maintained aircrafts using technology to reduce engine levels as well as other strategies.

Clean toilets were the next important physical facility under the tangibility dimension, 56% of respondents, strongly agreed and 33% agreed that LCC aircraft should have clean toilets. Whereas, under the perceptions section, only 22% of respondents strongly agreed and 51% agreed that the toilets were clean on LCC aircraft they travelled in the Middle East which means that, 73% respondents were satisfied with this variable. It is significant to note that a gap of 16% was identified between the expectations and perceptions of the LCC passengers.

One passenger travelling by LCC to Pune, India, at the time of the survey was generally enquired about the basic facilities of the LCCs. He replied, "*I have been travelling with the same airline for past few years and I find that the basic facilities are up to the mark*' and had no complaints regarding the basic facilities, however, he added, '*I am generally disheartened with the way the staff behaves with passengers especially the impolite behaviour really disturbed me".*

The passenger interviewees also highlighted the importance of cleanliness in the aircraft and clean toilets, Respondent one replied that, *'I had issues like cleanliness. Cleanliness should be given more importance, especially the toilets are found to be dirty during the flights'*. Respondent four commented that, "*The aircraft should be clean, especially the toilet should be well maintained because, if anybody gets a back seat, it is difficult to sit, since the toilet stinks. The crew should spray some freshener in order to keep away from the bad smell. I feel that since the low cost should maintain certain standards of service*". The results indicate LCC passengers give importance to clean toilets during their travel even though they are travelling with LCCs. The general impression from the survey and interviews was that the passengers care about services such as clean toilets, even though low fares are also a priority for them.

Another tangible feature of an aircraft that is important for passengers is the **seating comfort**. Passengers were therefore asked if they expected comfortable seats while travelling in LCCs. In total, 84% respondents expected to have comfortable seats, but only 61% respondents agreed to that the seats were comfortable on the aircrafts they travelled with the LCCs in the Middle East. This highlights a 23% gap in the results which could be considered important for LCCs to be looked at. This idea of acceptance was exemplified by one of the passengers who did not want to complete the survey discussed the issue of uncomfortable seats: *'I am not in a mood to talk because I am tired because the flight seat I was sitting was not at all comfortable and it has given me back pain*', and also added with great discomfort that, '*again I have to travel with the same airline'*.

When considering the comfort level of aircraft seats, passengers expect the seats to be comfortable enough for a flight of at least three to four hours. On full service carriers

(FSC), even in the economy class, seating is much more comfortable than on LCCs. In addition, LCC flight timings are generally inconvenient, i.e. late night or early morning, so passengers may want to rest even though the flight is probably less than four hours. Nevertheless, with uncomfortable seats, it becomes difficult to travel and difficult to utilise the following day since the passenger was unable to loosen up or sleep comfortably during the flight.

The next physical facility investigated was **food (on board or on sale)**, the study found that, 35% of respondents strongly agreed that there should be some food provided on board either free or for sale, while 36% agreed and 20% respondents were neutral. In the perceptions section, a much lower percentage 16% of passengers strongly agreed and 29% agreed that food was provided and that they were satisfied, although it was not clear whether the food was served for free or on sale. It was important to note that, 28% of passengers neither agreed nor disagreed.

The reason for such a result could be that, the food available on board was not very good or, if it was on sale, it was too expensive especially for low-income passengers. Further, the results also found that 20% of passengers disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed that food provision was of a good standard. Comparing perceptions to expectations signifies a gap of 26% between them for in-flight food provision.

While conducting the survey, the researcher spoke to a group of passengers who had travelled for Umrah, the religious pilgrimage that Muslims make to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and they were travelling to Pakistan. They were extremely unhappy that they were not even served water during the flight and ignored by the flight attendants when they

asked for some help. As one of the passengers in the group said, "*I had discussed this matter with the airline operators in our country [Pakistan], however, no attention was paid to that issue till date, the long waiting time at the airport for the next flight and also we had travelled long from Saudi and needed at least water during the whole flight".*

Similar kind of discontent was discussed by some of the passengers while they were interviewed, Respondent one replied, "*I am not very happy about the food provided in the flight, it isn't very good since there is no variety, I suggest to provide just a kind of sandwich since it's a short flight or something which is easy to handle. Food should be of good quality like sandwiches or variety in the regular meal".*

Respondent two commented that, "*the meals provided on the flights are same every time we travel which is kind of boring for me, I expect a little bit of variety in the menu served to the passengers daily".* Respondent four had a bitter experience with the food served on board as he mentioned*, "While travelling With Air India Express I was travelling with my children and found that the food provided was spoilt and was smelling*".

The other four respondents were satisfied that the food on sale was great, service while travelling with LCC and that it was cheap, in case they needed to buy for themselves and their children. Respondent three complimented that, "I was glad that food was provided in the Air India Express". Respondent five replied, "*For the service as long I have access to food and beverages I am fine with it*". Respondent six mentioned that, "*There should be some food service provided for a certain fee. I was pleasantly surprised with fly dubai that price of food or entertainment channels that you can get on their flights is basically not so expensive at all".*

Respondent seven [the couple] was more particular of buying their sandwiches, they mentioned, "*I would prefer the choice like buying my own sandwiches or food, I like to have the choice instead of given a lukewarm biryani especially when we do not even eat during the short flight so there is so much of wastage*". They also mentioned that, "*Sharjah Airport has a food court so we eat before we get into the flight and then timings are such that they are very late at night so we don't really need the food*".

Another factor is that some LCC passengers take connecting flights, and there is sometimes very little time available for transfer passengers to eat at the airport. It may be that transit passengers are not interested in food during the first flight since it was a short flight or because they made their own arrangements like buying a snack before boarding the aircraft. Thus, a unique selling proposition for some Middle East LCCs could be by serving passengers with free meals or for sale on minimum charges. Some of the LCCs in the Middle East are already providing free food or on sale. Some passengers might prefer to travel with an airline which serves meals rather than one that does not serve any free food.

The focus group interviewees [Arab passengers] were particularly discussing about the food on-board service they experienced with fly dubai,

> *"Focus Group Member 2: there is a menu in the pocket of the seat and we saw sandwiches and other food and we were very hungry because we were at the airport for so long we didn't eat anything because we were so scared (scared about what?)*

Focus Group Member 1: scared about losing the flight because there was no announcement nothing, we are waiting at the front of the door, there is no staff, so we were so scared to go away and therefore we didn't go anywhere.

Focus Group Member 4: (about sandwiches) when they took off after 5 minutes to sell food, they took around one hour to reach us

Focus Group Member 1: to reach the half of the plane

Focus Group Member 6: when they reached us I said we want a sandwich, and they said that it is not available

Focus Group Member 1: they said that we have several prices and it is not available and they said if you want we have chips and chocolates, which annoyed us more because we were hungry for 4 hours

Focus Group Member 3: suddenly she said we don't have food and we were hungry so we got mad at her

Focus Group Member 6: for long-time I was looking at the menu and she didn't come and when she come she said no food

Focus Group Member 4: what a disappointment

Focus Group Member 2: the menu pictures were very nice and it made us hungry more but sad you miss one of our friend was opening the menu and putting at the table and looking at it and when she came to us there was no food only chips, chocolate and coffee.

Focus Group Member 1: she ordered the coffee and she couldn't drink it [why]

Focus Group Member 7: no, I ordered a hot chocolate, it was only water, so I can't drink it, I don't mean there was only water but the amount of water was more than the chocolate

So did you not talk to the cabin crew about the coffee?

Focus Group Member 1 and 7: yes we did, the crew said we have to buy another one, she said we can't do anything this what we have

Focus Group Member 1: so at the end we did not take any chips no chocolates, we were just waiting to leaving for wait for our holiday plan".

The passengers in the case of LCCs in the Middle East expect that they are provided food either free or for sale since they do not mind buying food if it is available and at a reasonable price. The transit passengers, especially may have decided to have a meal on board before taking their next flight or in the case of the focus group Arab passengers who were also first time travellers with LCC who decided to take their meal on board since they could not manage to take before their flight as they were afraid that they would miss their flight.

If the passengers are not given either of the options [free food or on sale] then such treatment will leave the passengers dissatisfied and will impact on their behavioural intention for their next purchase as mentioned by the focus group passengers, "*while coming back we came back by fly dubai and it was the worst experience but while going we went by Emirates airlines, that's why we are telling you that we swear that we won't travel with fly dubai. If there is no flight is ok, we won't travel, but fly dubai never*".

The last physical facility analysed under tangibility was **entertainment**, in the form of any reading material like a magazine or newspaper, or music or TV. The results in the expectations section highlighted that, 33% respondents strongly agreed that there should be some form of entertainment, whereas only 14% passengers strongly agreed that LCCs actually provided a good standard of in-flight entertainment. In the expected section, 33%

respondents agreed that at least some simple form of entertainment should be provided, but only 28% agreed that it was provided in the LCCs they travelled, this variable identified a gap of 24% in total between the expectation and perception section.

A total 22% respondents neither agree nor disagree that entertainment should be provided by the LCCs, these passengers seem to be aware that, if there were in-flight entertainment, the airline could charge them more for that service, therefore, many LCC passengers may be unwilling to pay extra for the getting entertained on LCC.

In the perceptions section, 18% respondents disagreed that there was sufficient on-board entertainment while 12% strongly disagreed, perhaps because they were expecting some entertainment but were disappointed by the reality. This variable holds a higher gap between the expectation and perception of the passengers compared to other physical facilities provided by the LCC in the Middle East. It could be another opportunity for the LCCs to gain competitive advantage in the LCC market in the Middle East by providing some kind of entertainment to the passengers on board.

Analysing the responses from the passenger interviews it indicates that, the passengers were aware that if they were provided with entertainment in the LCC they travelled, they will be charged high therefore, they preferred little or no entertainment. The responses were mixed depending on the interviewee's habit while travelling, such as Respondent one replied, "[I expect] s*atisfactory aircraft with minimum food and entertainment", however, when we [the respondent with her family] travelled on July 16th, 2012 [in one of the LCC in the Middle East, name not mentioned] there was no entertainment on the flight, which we found it strange*".

Respondent two and four were neutral to the idea of entertainment on LCC flights, Respondent two "*I am ok with no entertainment or games on the flight, but is ok with pay-and-use entertainment if provided to the passengers*". Respondent four, "*regarding entertainment, I am not so keen on it since again, I understand that the cost of the ticket will be higher if entertainment provided. Also, I feel that if flying to short-haul destinations reaching the destination is important and not entertainment definitely but if available, for any and use will depend on the mood".*

Respondent three expected some form of entertainment in the flight even though she was travelling on LCC, "*Since we were travelling [she and her daughter] for 3 and half hours there was no entertainment provided I expected at least a magazine to whizz through would be good because there was no chance to kill the time for those who neither wanted to sleep nor sit".* Respondent five also expected that some form of entertainment should be provided*, "I love to spend some time and read the magazine and at times carry them home but the worst part of low-cost flights is that they do not have any magazine to read but in Air Arabia they always have the magazine provided which makes me feel nice about it*".

Respondent six commentated that, "*I was pleasantly surprised with that price of food or entertainment channels that you can get on their flights is basically not so expensive at all so throughout the flight you can have games and TV programmes for 30 Dirhams which is something everyone can afford especially on the price of the ticket especially with children, it really helps*".

Respondent seven couple mentioned that, "*I think most people would argue that they do not have a T.V. screen in front of them [while travelling on LCC] but we are readers. Therefore, we might not bother about it. And if it is a night flight people would prefer sleeping rather than watching T.V. and in any way people nowadays have their arrangement like an iPod or a tablet so it does not matter much. I suppose they can bring their own entertainment with kind today. Keeping in mind it is a low-cost carrier, and again show me a child today who does not have their own entertainment".*

These passenger interviews suggest that, since LCCs cannot afford to beat the quality of entertainment provided by FSCs, LCC passengers can accept even a basic level of entertainment, such as a newspaper or a magazine, to limit flight boredom. According to the 'The Future is Personal' report by SITA (Société Internationale de Télécommunications Aéronautiques) in February 2015 highlighted that, 97% of air travellers now carry a personal device when travelling, with 81% carrying a smartphone loaded with many apps to keep them engaged. The passengers may not need entertainment provided by the airline in the near future. However, according to the survey and interview responses, when there was no in-flight entertainment available, families found it difficult to control their children.

Many of the LCC passengers investigated in this study expected that there should be some kind of entertainment on the flight, which indicates that LCC passengers in the Middle East are more demanding than in other regions. This also highlights that passengers in the Middle East do not much differentiate between full service and low cost carriers. It is therefore necessary for LCC marketing departments to create more awareness about LCC

features and to differentiate their services compared to full service carriers as well as other carriers.

4.5.1.3. TANGIBILITY DIMENSION: Clear Information

The next question investigated was about passenger expectations in relation to clear information received when dealing with LCC. Unsurprisingly, passengers expected LCCs to provide clear inform to them regarding flight timings, baggage handling or any other policy. Passengers do not like surprises, whether at the time of departure or at arrival. The outcomes in the expectation section indicated that, 91% survey participants strongly agreed or agreed that LCCs should provide them clear and information regarding flights, timings, baggage or other relevant insurances.

In the perception section, only 24% strongly agreed and 45% agreed that they actually received clear information from the LCCs they travelled within the Middle East, therefore, there was a gap of 20% between expectations and actual experiences of the passengers travelling in LCCs in the Middle East. 31% of respondents selected the last three options, which indicates that a large proportion of passengers were not satisfied with the amount of information they had actually received from the LCC they travelled. Thus, the gap between expectations and perceptions for this variable is particularly wide in the tangible dimension.

The importance of providing clear information was also recognised by Mr. Greg Fordham, Managing Director of Airbiz, during his conference presentation at the Future Travel Experience Asia Conference and Exhibition, 2013: '*Soon, texts telling you when to board*

will soon become the norm. The key, of course, is for airlines to learn just what information passengers want, and, crucially, what they don't'. He mentioned how Airbiz's investigative scheme team discovered that, one of the most prominent priorities for passengers is information: '*98% want to receive personalised notifications of any disruption to their flight, with 68% of these wanting it to be in the form of an SMS from the airline, 14% wanting it by email and 9% via a push message from the airline's app. The last figure is expected to increase in the near future. Overall, what these figures make clear is that the great majority of passengers want to receive information automatically without actively having to do anything themselves*'.

The respondents interviewed also stated similar kind of responses in line with Airbiz CEO that, they expect clear information, however, they were not particularly satisfied with the kind of information they received from the LCC staff about their queries. Respondent one mentioned, "*When we travelled on July 16th, 2012 there was no entertainment on the flight, which we found it strange since there was no information given about it*".

Respondent two discussed that, "*when the baggage was on the belt an announcement was made later that some baggage has not arrived and it is coming with the second flight and they announced it so late. I think that was not the right thing for them to do. They should have informed earlier itself and then we had to wait for the flight to come which was coming the next day, so we had to come to the airport the next day. The flight was delayed, the timing was changed but the problem is that they never informed about that. They had our contact details and they could inform us but they did not. We had to wait for a long time*".

Respondent four replied, "*When I requested for a complaint form, I was surprised understanding that the airline does not maintain complaint forms on board and that I was given a used paper to write the complaint on. I know about IATA standards of having complaint forms on board. I felt even though they are budget carriers they should carry complaint and suggestion forms on board. I have faced issues with time management and lack of information with the LCC in the past while traveling, wrong information being given to me at the counter related flight timings*".

Respondent six, "*I had problem with is, not all terms and conditions are very clear and not that the most important once are highlighted but it is a very very long list of paragraphs of terms and conditions and then you really get shocked and annoyed when you want to re-book your ticket and realise that you have to pay the fare, then you feel robbed rather than served as customers*".

According to respondent seven they were not very clear with the policies mentioned on the back of the ticket, "*We do not generally look at the back of the ticket but only things like if we have to re-book the ticket, will we lose money, that sort of things we do look at. But I don't think people are interested in reading terms and conditions especially when there are so many. I think the terms and conditions should be at the side as you book the tickets*".

The focus group Focus Group Members were really upset with not receiving information about their flight and the gate they were traveling from, this is what they commented:

> *"Focus Group Member 2 – even there wasn't a way there was no announcement, no information system, only the people were shouting*

Focus Group Member 3: a man came from the airport, we heard him talk and looking that people moving from one gate to the other we started moving as well. We could not hear any announcement, it wasn't very clear.

Focus Group Member 1: they didn't say anything ("aslan" an Arabic word for 'in real'), suddenly we saw people going that way so we followed them and then we stayed in the waiting room and then we entered the air plane. So we already had a bad experience finish from there itself we took our decision that we will never travel by this airline or any LCC (name not mentioned) anymore".

It is a natural tendency for every customer to expect clear information about every product or service they purchase because they expect that any dealings they have with an organisation has to be transparent. Given that there was a wide gap between expectations and perceptions for clear information, LCCs should give this issue more consideration. Their passengers report facing difficulties because the airlines they were travelling with gave them limited or no information about timings, baggage handling and other essential information.

Passengers could thus have a negative experience with the airline, which might affect future transactions since dissatisfaction will eventually lead to reduced repurchase behaviour. One such example highlighted was about Ryanair, an LCC from Europe, which charges its passengers without informing them (airlinequality.com).

4.5.1.4. TANGIBILITY DIMENSION: Safety and Security equipment's in the aircraft.

The next variable in the questionnaire was the careful attention given by the airline to the safety and security equipment's in the aircraft. The RAK Airways CEO highlighted that, "safety and security which is not compromised [in RAK Airways]". The survey results highlighted that 70% of respondents strongly agreed and 22% agreed that LCCs should pay careful attention to safety and security with their equipment in the aircraft.

Altogether 93% expected that LCCs should give the utmost importance to the safety and security of the passengers travelling with them. Comparing these expectations to perceptions, 82% of respondents in total agreed that Middle East LCCs actually paid careful attention to safety and security. Only 18% selected the remaining 3 options, which suggests that LCCs pay attention to safety equipment, although improvements can still be made to further increase the positive experiences of passengers.

The interview respondents gave a mixed response about the safety and security equipment's since Respondent one felt that, "*the airline is quite reliable since I have never faced problems like accidents, etc. apart from turbulences which are quite natural*". Respondent two was pleased that she was involved in the process of using the safety equipment on board the aircraft, "*I think the flights should be safe. I experienced while flying from Dubai to Mangalore that I was at the exit seat and was asked if I am confident enough to sit near exit and after receiving my assurance the flight attendant explained me the complete procedure of how to open the aircraft door, for what instruction from the pilot to wait and how to go down and everything.*

I found it very interesting that I was given clear information during the emergency which I haven't received in the past". Respondent three replied, "*I have had pleasant experiences from them all" [including the safety of the airline]*. Respondent five was a bit sceptical about the safety and security as she had her pre-assumptions about LCCs, "*with the aircraft I assume that the low cost carriers always use the old aircraft [less safety] but I am not sure because the same happens in my country*".

Respondent six replied, "*Safety and security is as important as any other airline. I don't think there should be any exceptions. It was excellent from my point of view, but I used to be cabin crew so I look at each and every detail. Yes, they [crew of fly dubai] did the demonstration, pre-flight demonstrations both on screens, and in person, which I never used to do when I was flying other commercial airline, but otherwise all equipment's were in place but I don't know how did they do their pre-flight checks.*

Respondent seven discussed that, "*I am wondering how relevant that safety demonstration is. I think when it comes down to panic, it will be too hard to remember all that. I don't think people take notice of that demonstration or maybe they do for a second or so and that's it. I think if you're flying frequently then you don't take notice of that. So really in that demonstration that they show a diagram pointing that a picture is there, then that will make me feel more safer. Especially at the time of panic, if I know where exactly it is and how to get it then it is better but it is not only with a low-cost, it is the same with a full-fare as well.*

Clearly, having a safe and secure aircraft with proper safety equipment and procedures is a major passenger concern. Aviation authorities have put in place certain guidelines for

every airline, which cannot operate without the right procedures for passenger safety and security. Passengers also expect airlines to invest in aircrafts which are well maintained and are safe to travel. A general perception of people who have never travelled with LCCs is that they use old, unsafe aircraft. However, with the increase in operations in the Middle East, LCCs is giving greater importance to using highly safe, modern aircraft.

Clearly, the reliability of aircrafts and its equipment's are extremely important for the majority of the passengers, who expect LCCs to give utmost importance to on-board safety equipment and to fly passengers safely to their destination. Even though they are considered LCCs, passengers still expect them to take care of their safety. The results of this study indicate that LCCs need to create more awareness about the safety standards maintained in their aircraft.

4.5.1.5. TANGIBILITY DIMENSION: On-board Cleanliness

Almost all respondents i.e. 92% of respondents expected a high level of on-board cleanliness even though they were travelling on an LCC flight, this was next variable tested in the questionnaire. Only a very small proportion, 8% of respondents were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed. Regarding perceptions, 81% respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their LCC flight had been sufficiently clean.

A total of 14% neither agreed nor disagreed, possibly because they were not particularly worried about the hygiene level of the aircraft or because they had decided to ignore it. The remaining 5% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the hygiene level of their LCC flight, they had travelled in the Middle East had been satisfactory. Respondent one replied, "*I had issues like cleanliness. Cleanliness should be given more*

importance; especially the toilets are found to be dirty during the flights". Respondent four was more pleased with this service, "*The aircraft should be clean, and especially the toilet should be well maintained because if anybody gets a back seat it is difficult to sit since the toilet stinks. But I found Air Arabia had better ambience than Al Jazeera and Air India Express*".

Respondent five discussed that, "*I think this [hygiene] is very important … that the tiny papers at the seats stuck at the head rest should be changed for every flight, which I think it does not take longer than any full-cost flight and also spends in doing this. I also felt the different standards in the hygiene in the toilets, which were not as clean and hygienic as compared to a full-cost carrier. But with the seating, when I touched some parts of it, I always had it in the back of mind whether do they clean it? Since I did feel less hygienic seats like: Do they pay attention? All this kind of things being a low-cost".*

Respondent six mentioned that, "*their aircraft was immaculate in terms of hygiene, which is extremely important, they all are very well-maintained; they are quite clean because if you are going on a long haul more people are using the toilets, more people are walking up and down, more people are throwing chewing gum wrappers around, but with a low-cost it's a short flight so really everything is fine*".

This question was asked to confirm the passengers' level of interest concerning in-flight cleanliness with LCCs. Their responses indicate that in-flight cleanliness is a very important service. While passengers may not expect perfectly perfumed aircraft with highly cleaned seats and surroundings, they do expect that, even with an LCC, aircraft should be decently cleaned for travelling. Possible sources of dissatisfaction regarding

general cleanliness could be that aircraft were not cleaned before new passengers boarded or that some passengers had bad experiences due to co-passengers ignoring in-flight cleanliness instructions.

4.5.1.6. TANGIBILITY DIMENSION: Professional Dress of the Cabin Crew

The last question under tangibility was about professional dress of the cabin crew, when questioned by the researcher the RAK airways CEO discussed that, "How they [staff] look alike in the uniform, the image of the company is rather substantial. *What we are looking for is a broad variety of ethnic people*". At the same time the survey results highlighted that, 51% of respondents strongly agreed and 34% agreed that LCC staff should be professionally dressed.

This is an important element which represents the company as well as dressing modestly is a part of Arab culture in the Middle East. Remaining 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, which could mean that they did not much worry about this issue as long as they could travel safely to their destination, while the remaining 3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, showing that professional dress did not matter to them. Perhaps, they had travelled in other countries, such as Malaysia (with the LCC Air Asia), where professional dress is not found to make a big difference to passengers.

The results highlighted that passengers were mostly satisfied that LCCs give due importance to the staff's professional dress, both for ground staff and flight crew members. Most respondents, 83%, of which 34% strongly agreed and 49% agreed, were satisfied with the professional dress of LCC employees. Approximately 13% respondents neither

agreed nor disagreed, which could mean that some passengers were not concerned about this factor as long as they are given the required attention and reached their destination safely.

Almost 80% of the respondents surveyed were expatriates who may have travelled to other countries with LCCs where professional dress is not given as much importance as it is with luxury airlines. Only 4% disagreed that LCC staff were professionally dressed. This could be because they may have wanted staff members, especially females, to be more or less completely covered, as is the norm in many Islamic countries. Respondent six replied that, "*Yes, uniforms were a bit more basic than the ones on the other commercial airline but yeah really this is it".*

It was necessary to understand whether LCC passengers would expect the employees to be professionally dressed, especially in the Middle East. The researcher hypothesised that professional dress did not matter to LCC passengers. However, the results indicated that they expected staff and crew to be professionally dressed, even for an LCC. As already mentioned, one possible passenger expectation regarding the professional dress of LCC employees could be that the general cultural expectation in an Arab country is to be dressed modestly according to Islamic norms. Therefore, the respondents' expectations were not unusual in expecting employees to be dressed modestly, hence professionally.

4.5.1.7. TANGIBILITY: Summary

Tangibility is an important dimension for both the airline and the passengers, with certain variables being particularly significant, namely comfortable seats, safety and security, aircraft cleanliness and information regarding policies, changes and any promotions. This

contrasts with Park, Robertson, and Wu (2006), who found that Australian passengers do not place high expectations on tangibles because they know that financial constraints do not allow for extravagant tangibles. However, demands appear to be different in the Middle East market where passengers have higher expectations despite travelling with LCCs. The results indicate that the management of all the LCCs interviewed were concerned about the safety and security of the passengers and therefore maintains new aircraft and train their staff about safety requirements on a regular basis.

4.5.2. RELIABILITY DIMENSION

The reliability dimension analysed variables such as keeping promises, feeling safe while dealing with LCC, on-time performance, staff performing the task correctly, friendly website, receiving luggage on-time without any problems. These variables are important for LCC passengers since negative experiences in one or more variables in this dimension may lead to dissatisfaction.

4.5.2.1. RELIABILITY: LCCs should keep their promise

This question analysed the variable whether LCCs keep the promises they make to their passengers about booking seats, departures, in-flight expectations and arrivals. It was clear that a majority of passengers expects high reliability, with 63% strongly agreeing and 29% agreeing that LCCs should keep its promises. Only 8% selected the remaining three options. Comparing the results for expectations and perceptions revealed a large gap of 30%. Only 63% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that LCCs actually keep their promises, confirming that the LCC they travelled with had kept the promises.

A total of 37% selected the remaining three options, which could mean that they had mixed feelings about promises made and fulfilled by LCCs. This suggests that LCCs should give priority to providing the promised service at all times. For example, if the LCC has promised a specific promotion then they should be very clear in giving information about it and offer the same fare price as promised without including hidden terms and conditions.

> Respondent two discussed "*The next day we went and they had given us a time we had to go at a particular time, but when we went there was no response like the custom officers were not there*". Respondent seven said that, "*I think at Air Arabia when you cancel the ticket, there is a little charge, but the money is backed for you for one year; you can buy another ticket. They keep the money for you and then after a year it is forfeited, and so that's really good. We cancelled once and then we used one for India later*".

Airlines should keep their promises, whether tangible or intangible, of providing the correct service to passengers. A large majority of passengers agreed that LCCs should keep their promises. Some passengers may have been not much concerned about LCC promises since they were too busy to think about the issue or rather expected that this kind of behaviour is acceptable as they were flying with an LCC. Another possibility could be that some passengers had not dealt with the airline directly so they are not much worried about any promises made by the LCC. Overall, however, LCCs should consider breaking promises as a major issue. They should focus on improving their ability to provide the promised service to passengers if they want to increase their market share.

4.5.2.2. RELIABILITY: Passengers should feel safe and secure when dealing with the airline and its staff.

The vast majority 94% of respondents indicated that they expected to feel safe and secure when dealing with LCC staff, whether booking a ticket, travelling or reclaiming luggage. Only 6% respondents selected the remaining three options. In the perceptions section, however, only 29% strongly agreed and 50% agreed that they felt safe and secure while dealing with the LCC they were travelling. Thus, there was a clear gap of 15% between LCCs' expected and perceived service quality for this variable.

Altogether 17% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting this did not matter much to them. Perhaps, some passengers had already travelled with the same LCC several times and were therefore confident about the safety and security of the airline. Only 4% selected the last two options of disagree and strongly disagree.

During the interview, Respondent four replied that, "*Related to credit card security, I was concerned about the safety of information related to credit card and I suggest of will some password or a card provide by the banks which are safe to use on the web*". However, Respondent six replied, "*it was excellent in terms of security in the use of credit card".*

4.5.2.3. RELIABILITY: On-time Performance

This is an important element for a successful LCC as well as a significant variable in the reliability dimension. LCC passengers clearly expected timely arrivals and departures, with 64% of respondents strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing, thus, a total of 94%

expected LCCs to give importance to on-time performance. Only a minority 6% selected the other 3 options, perhaps these passengers did not much worry about on-time performance of the airline because they could accept short delays in reaching their destinations as their reasons for travelling could be relatively less important, such as visiting friends.

Comparing expectations and perceptions revealed a large gap of 30% between what passengers expected and what they experienced. Only 23% strongly agreed and 40% agreed that the LCC they travelled in the Middle East achieved on-time performance, clearly indicating that passengers were not very satisfied with the on-time performance of LCCs in this region. That is, their expectations were much higher than what they experienced. A total of 37% respondents selected the last three options in the perception section, which indicates that these passengers were dissatisfied regarding timely arrivals and departures.

The interviewee had also discussed similar kind of discomfort while discussing about the on-time performance of the LCC they travelled in the Middle East. Respondent two replied, "*When I inquired about it [about the luggage], I was told that the flight bringing the luggage has been delayed and therefore I had to wait for it*". Respondent five said, "*Twice I had to travel with Fly Dubai, and for both the flight we had to wait in the plane for more than an hour for a local family to arrive, which I do not know if it was a coincidence but we had to wait. In fact, in one incident, we had to wait from both sides while travelling from Dubai and then while coming back from Istanbul, and in all the cases it was the local family, which delayed the flight, and the flight waited for them for a long time*".

The focus group interviewee also in line with Respondent five, had a hard time due to the delay in the flight, and she commented that:

> *Focus Group Member 1: "before we entered the aircraft they told us that the flight will be at gate 1, we stayed there for like 4 hours because we have to be at the airport before 3 hours before the flight time and then we waited, there was a delay of an hour and a half, then then changed the gate number, so it was really like a chaos, people went from gate 1 to gate 3, it was very crowded and was not very good not very convenient".*

The other five respondents interviewed have not faced such issues with the airlines they have travelled, which is a good sign. This highlights that some LCCs in the Middle East give more importance to on-time performance since, it is the core objective of their business strategy. Respondent one discussed, "*I have flown [travelled] with the airline; the flight was always on-time while at arrival or departure*". Respondent four was pleased with some of the LCCs in the Middle East, "*Al Jazeera and Air Arabia the flight has always been on time, which is very important for me since I travel frequently for short visits. I feel irrespective of full-cost or low-cost, the airline should have good time management*".

Respondent seven [couple] did not find it hard to accept if they were delayed as they were travelling for holiday as they mentioned, "*about time, we have always reached on time. May be just once or twice we were delayed, but otherwise we have always reached on time. In fact, I travelled with Emirates and have delayed many times compared to LCC*". Al Jazeera senior executive was very confident about their on-time performance, "*There*

is high on time performance and all of the airlines in the Middle East. We are the market leader in on-time performance".

The CEO of Air Arabia expressed that "*Air Arabia is known in the public's mind or customer's mind that Air Arabia is a good business so we run the airline as a business. In terms of airline customers, we certainly being known for being a punctual airline, to being airline which is reliable*". This has been observed by the researcher as well since in most cases when she and her family travelled with Air Arabia it was always on-time at both arrival and departure times.

4.5.2.4. RELIABILITY: Staff to perform their task correctly

Passengers clearly expect that LCC staff should perform their tasks correctly, with 51% strongly agreeing and 46% agreeing for a total of 97% and the remaining 3% of respondents selected the last 3 options. This result indicates that LCCs should train their staff to carry out their tasks correctly to satisfy the passengers because they have high expectations of LCC staff regarding doing their job correctly. This was also discussed by most of the interview respondents that the staff should be trained to give optimum service and complete their task correctly. Respondent two stressed that, "*Training should be mandatory, the airport staff and crew when compared to full cost airlines I feel that they should have appropriate customer service".*

In the perceptions section, 25% strongly agreed and 59% agreed, altogether 84% of respondents agreed that LCC staff actually performed their tasks correctly while 16% of respondents selected the remaining three options. Thus, there is a gap of 12%, which

indicates that LCC passengers have high expectations of the staff, but that it is also clear that LCC staff need better training to provide the expected level of customer service. The importance of staff training was also highlighted by two passengers who were responding to the questionnaire, "*training can improve the quality of service provided by the crew on board"*.

A good training will definitely improve the performance of the LCC staff, which will in turn create a good impression when they provide quality service to their passengers. However, Respondent six believes that, "*I think it is about two things; it's about training and personality, I don't think everyone can be trained to be in customer service that's obvious and when they are provided with good training and I think it is also important that they are not under huge pressure and that reflects in service".*

Respondent seven mentioned that they believe training can add to the competitive advantage of the company, *"it all goes back to training. I think that is the basic thing in fact at the most difficult times like today companies cut down on training that is what you really need to concentrate on and give yourself a competitive advantage over other airlines so maybe you want to look at that".*

The response from the Focus group interview, Focus Group Member 1 commented*: "They were actually so busy they didn't care about the passengers, [we] had to put our luggage by ourselves. The staff at the ticket counter was good, but was very slow. There were many passengers, but there less [were] staff to help the passengers".*

The Arab passengers expected that they should be provided with assistance since a general observation in the Middle East is that the local families have helpers or maids to do their job and therefore, they do not engage in doing tasks such as carrying and putting luggage on the belt. This could be an important observation for those LCCs who are planning to attract more Arab passengers to the airline.

4.5.2.5. RELIABILITY: Website of the airline

This variable was important to investigate the pattern of air-ticket bookings made by the passengers and if they were comfortable booking their tickets online, as opposed to booking through travel agents. 59% of respondents strongly agreed and 35% agreed that the website of an LCC should provide easy access, with accurate and up-to-date information. In the perceptions section, 24% strongly agreed and 50% agreed that the website of the LCC they travelled with provided easy access, correct and updated information about flight timings, promotions and baggage-related information.

An additional 18% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, 9% disagreed and strongly disagreed that the website was easily accessible and gave clear information. This indicates that there is a gap of 20% between expectations and perceptions while dealing with the LCC's website.

Most of the interviewed respondents were satisfied with their experience of the website of the airline, Respondent one, "*I find the website to be appropriate and it gives good information about the flight and I find it authentic".* Most of the passengers now a days book their tickets through the airline's website and that helps to save a lot of time for the

passenger. The passengers make use of the booking app or booking site of the airlines website in most cases, such as Respondent two, "*I have visited the website only while booking the seats but I find it a good source of information about flight timings availability and fares. I feel the transaction has been safe, but few problems like could not copy the ticket details and print later".* Respondent four replied, "*I found the website of the airline very informative related to flight timings, availability and other information as well*".

Some passengers might find the website a bit complicated as some of the information is not clear and therefore, they find it hard to rely on the website information of the airline such as Respondent six, "*The website is well organised and it's easy to understand I believe to book tickets. Its time-tables, everything is straightforward. One thing that can certainly improve and I had a problem with is not all terms and conditions are very clear and not that the most important ones are highlighted, but it is a very, very long list of paragraphs of terms and conditions and then you really get shocked and annoyed.*

When you want to re-book your ticket and realise that you have to pay the fare, then you feel robbed rather than served as customers. I think these are aspects that they need working on, but again, it is in my opinion and this is exactly I had problem with, and I had to rebook twice and ended up paying more money than full-fare, so low-cost, costed me more than full-cost". Similarly Respondent seven had a problem with the company website while booking their ticket since they paid double the amount for the ticket due to a technical glitch on the airline's website, "*we clicked twice and the payment went twice".*

In the Middle East, technology is given high importance by the passengers since it has a highest usage rate of smart phones. Many government services are now available on the

smart phones in the form of apps and therefore, airlines should focus on their mobile friendly or technology friendly services to attract more customers as well as the website should provide clear instructions regarding policies and procedures.

4.5.2.6. RELIABILITY: Luggage on Time and without problems

This variable was included in the LCC service quality model after conducting pre-interviews where some of the passengers explained that it caused them problems due to delays collecting their luggage. The survey results identified that, 62% of respondents strongly agreed and 32% agreed that luggage should be received on time without any problems. Altogether, 94% passengers expected that they should receive their luggage on time without any problems, this result is definitely important for LCCs since it indicates that this is a service which significantly affects passenger satisfaction levels.

In the perception section, 76% respondents selected the first two options that they received their luggage on time without any problems, 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, 6% disagreed and strongly disagreed. It indicates 19% gap between the expectation and perceptions of the passengers travelling in the Middle East LCC.

Clearly, efficient baggage handling is a basic service expectation of any airline passenger. Especially while travelling with an LCC, passenger expectations increase since they may have to take another flight or be waiting to meet their families after a long time away from home. Therefore, delay in receiving baggage can create a lot of anxiety for passengers, especially mishandling of the luggage, missing baggage or the possibility that the airline sent the luggage with another flight due to overcrowding. Thus, LCCs have to give due

consideration to luggage handling since that may create dissatisfaction towards the airline in case of not handling this variable efficiently.

Respondent two faced a problem with baggage service of the LCC, she travelled, "*It was with my luggage when we came to Mangalore from Dubai: the luggage had not come on time. It did not come with the same flight like it did not come in the same cargo of same flight; it came with the second flight. I found it difficult since my children were in the hospital and could not manage to reach on time to the hospital because of this issue. I waited for my luggage for a long time and the announcement was made later that some of the luggage is coming by another flight. It was very inconvenient for us since I was waiting to see my children who were in the hospital in India; I arrived in India but could not go to them immediately since I was stuck for my baggage.*

The same scenario, what had happened with me happened with other passengers so it was a problem for others as well. But I still feel that there should be baggage safety since at times people do carry perishable items and if the baggage's do not reach on time things might be spoiled or damaged".

The other six respondents interviewed as well as the focus group interviewees did not face many problems with their baggage, however, the interviewees did not discuss how long it took for them to receive their luggage.

4.5.2.7. RELIABILITY: Summary

In conclusion, for the reliability dimension, the passengers had very high expectations about this dimension since it evaluated the promise keeping attitude of the airline, safe and security of the equipment's, on-time performance, staff performing their task correctly, website performance and receiving luggage without any problems. According to the results of the survey high gap was identified in two areas, namely, keeping the promise and on-time performance, between the expectation and perception of the passengers travelling on LCCs in the Middle East.

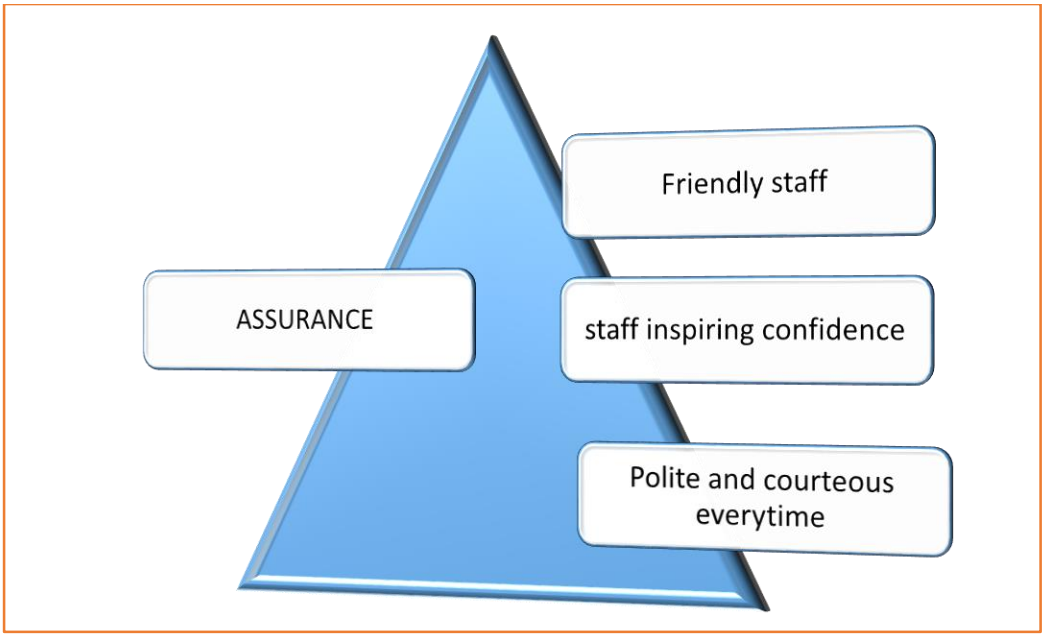
The passengers expected high on receiving their luggage on time as well the staff performing their task correctly. The passengers were relatively satisfied with the website performance of the LCC. Airlines like Jazeera and Air Arabia give utmost importance to on-time performance, which is the major concern to the passengers, as discussed in the results of on-time performance variable. Therefore, passengers would prefer to travel with LCCs who give importance to on-time performance, hassle-free baggage and good customer service.

4.5.3. ASSURANCE DIMENSION

This dimension concerns the behaviour of LCC staff [on ground and crew on board] towards their passengers. Three variables were tested in the model to investigate how airline ground and in-flight staff behaved with passengers. In general passengers expect that they should always be well treated and provided with support whenever there is a concern or an issue. The variables included were; whether staff are friendly; whether they

instil confidence in passengers; and whether they deal with the passengers in a polite and courteous manner (see figure 23).

Figure 23: Assurance Dimension



Source: Author, 2015

4.5.3.1. ASSURANCE: Friendly Staff

All passengers expect irrespective of whether they travelled with FSC or LCC that they must be well treated and would expect that staff should be friendly and accessible whenever the passenger needs assistance. Accordingly, 93% passengers selected strongly agreed and agreed options, confirming that they expect staff to be friendly and courteous whereas 7% respondents selected the last three options.

Most of the interviews conducted with LCC senior executives indicated that they conducted staff training before their staff entered the workforce. One of the Middle East LCC senior executive respondents [not to be named], "*I mean it is natural like in any*

business, you have to develop your people, to manage the business as well as to develop their own skills, so you all sorts of training goes on like customer service training, management skill training, and so on". The senior executive from Jazeera airways replied, "*in terms of the operational side our training is very good".*

An LCC senior executive in the Middle East*, "Our objective is really to hire people who are good at and are customer oriented and they are basically they like to deliver safe and they enjoy what they are doing and we have some sort of a challenge to get the right people you know we are not that well developed you know have no much training academy*". However, the LCC management perceptions did not much reflect the passengers' perception of LCCs in the Middle East on this variable. Only 79% respondents agreed that the staff of the airline they travelled with being friendly and accessible whenever needed assistance, which indicates a gap of 14%.

LCCs should work on reducing the gap by providing more training or recruiting the right staff as also discussed in the reliability dimension. It is also worth noticing that 21% of respondents selected the remaining three options, meaning they may have had different experiences at different times while travelling with LCCs in the Middle East. One of the passengers travelling on Middle East based LCC discussed that, he was particularly disheartened with the 'staff of the airline' as on several occasions he was not treated very well.

The passengers interviewed during the in-depth session discussed that they were pleased with the friendliness of the staff, therefore, it is difficult to gauge level of dissatisfaction of the passengers, however as observed by the researchers different nationalities evaluated

staff approachability and friendliness in different ways. Respondent one replied, "*Good staff and crew members. I have always been given good treatment of all the employees of Air India Express. I feel the staff is quite helpful and friendly with the passengers*".

Even Respondent three was happy with the staff attention, "*I was treated by the staff of the airline and I have had pleasant experiences from them all the staff members".* Respondent five also experienced similar treatment from the crew, "*I and my family never had any bad experience with the staff since they were very very helpful and sweet. Especially when the staff sees that you are carrying children they are particularly nice to them".*

Respondent six compared her experience with other LCCs around the world and found that she was treated much better by the LCC crew in the Middle East than the crew in some European LCCs, "*I can't believe that there were 3 or 4 crew from all I have seen and their customer service was nice; little more basic they were, but they can't provide you with a personalised service, but they were extremely friendly and very professional. But they were also very flexible and friendly and used common sense, I had experience with Easy Jet when I was back in Europe and that's also a big difference in comparison to Fly Dubai, like there was not so much flexibility with staff and not such friendly approach, less smiles on Easy Jet than Fly Dubai. Fly Dubai was much more friendlier than them".*

4.5.3.2. ASSURANCE: Staff inspiring Confidence

This variable evaluated whether passengers expected staff of LCC to inspire confidence regarding safety issues, answering the passenger questions and the service delivered. Generally, LCC staff is trained to provide basic services and solve simple problems. However, due to, training costs, LCCs mostly outsource their staffing requirements so staff may not have benefitted from the advanced training needed to solve major problems or inspire a high level of confidence in their passengers.

There was a mixed reaction to this variable since expectations were high regarding inspiring confidence. The perceptions of respondents highlighted that they were generally satisfied with this variable of LCC service, 23% of respondents strongly agreed and 49% agreed that the LCC employees actually inspired confidence in the passengers regarding all the services provided. It was interesting to note that 23% of respondents were neutral while the remaining 5% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This could mean that, 27% were less satisfied or completely dissatisfied with the staff of the LCC they travelled with, suggesting that the staff of these airlines may not have instilled confidence in the passengers.

Passengers travelling with such LCCs may have found it difficult to approach staff or had low trust in them. Thus, comparing expectations and perceptions, 90% respondents expected that the staff of the airline should inspire confidence in the passengers, but only 73% experienced that the staff actually instilled confidence, indicating a gap of 17% for this variable.

The passengers are more tolerant towards LCC crew as they are aware that they are less in number compared to FSC and managing many passengers, therefore, some passengers are ready to wait and do not feel that they should be given personal attention or inspire much confidence. Respondent four mentioned that, "*the staff takes more time to provide service which is ok with me as long as the staff is ready with an answer to the question; a solution to the problem*".

Respondent five did not have any problems with the crew, but was concerned with the pilots of the LCC aircrafts, "*Years back with Air Arabia, there were some problems. However, Air Arabia has improved a lot in past 5 years.*

There is always a feeling in [my] mind when we are travelling with a low-cost, not because of less experience of low-cost, but still I feel not the flight attendant, but mostly the pilots; that they are experienced, but they are quite old pilots close to their retiring age. I just have that feeling but not very sure that the pilots are not new, but has more experience, but maybe because of their age, I am a bit sceptical about them flying the planes". Respondent six was pleased with*, "Fly Dubai was excellent in that sense: push chair come right to the aircraft; they help you fold it*".

4.5.3.3. ASSURANCE: Polite and Courteous Staff

Serving passengers in a polite and courteous manner is a basic requirement of any airline, so it was important to determine passenger expectations about this variable. The results highlighted that 57% of respondents strongly agreed and 35% agreed that employees should be polite and courteous at all times while serving passengers. Altogether 92% of

respondents expected the LCC staff to be polite and courteous while dealing with the passengers. Only a minority of 8% selected the last three options. This was a clear indication that most of the passengers expect LCC staff to be polite and courteous at all the times while dealing with passengers.

In the perceptions section, only 26% strongly agreed and 54% agreed that the staff of the LCC they travelled with were actually polite and courteous in serving passengers, 14% neither agreed nor disagreed, possibly because they had both good and bad experiences with staff attitudes, or because for some of them it did not much matter since they did not much interact with staff. Also, 6% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the staff were actually being polite and courteous at all times with them.

During the data collection phase of the airport, when the researcher interacted with the sample of passengers who were completing the survey, some expressed their dissatisfaction about the poor treatment they received from the staff of the LCC they were travelling with. This information could be crucial for LCC management in improving staff performance, and also used for reward management. That is, management could identify staff with good or bad attitudes towards passengers and reward those with good attitude, while penalising those with bad service or attitude with the passengers.

Al Jazeera senior executive highlighted that they give good training to their staff and crew, "*It's the customer service, it depends. Look, for example, in call centres, if you train people, they receive sales training and we do that every year. And we also have training for our ground staff and training for cabin crew, and they receive this customer service*

training in order to intact with the customers. And we have this in yearly continuous basis".

4.5.3.4. ASSURANCE: Summary

This dimension evaluated the staff behaviour towards the passengers. It had three variables; friendliness towards passengers, staff inspiring confidence in the passengers and courteous staff/ crew members. The survey respondents highlighted that they were not very satisfied with the staff behaviour and attitude towards the passengers, however, most of the interview passengers experienced good treatment from the staff and crew members of the LCC airline they travelled. Therefore, it is important for the LCC management to evaluate staff/crew behaviour on a regular basis and give them regular training on customer service.

4.5.4. EMPATHY DIMENSION:

This dimension focused on how empathetic the airline and its staff should be towards the passengers. Empathy towards passengers can be expressed by four variables; communicating with them regularly regarding flight timings, and by developing trust and positive attitudes.

4.5.4.1. EMPATHY: Frequent Communication with Passengers

In total, 93% respondents expected regular communication from the LCC in the event of a problem or any delay. The results of this variable in the expected section highlighted

that the passengers gave high importance to communication with passengers in times of delay or any problems. According to the perception section results, only 18% of respondents strongly agreed while 45% agreed that there was frequent communication when flights were delayed or there were any other problems. A significant proportion, 38% selected the remaining three options. Thus, there is a 30% gap between what passengers expected and what they experienced regarding communication in times of delay.

This suggests that LCCs are not very empathetic towards passengers regarding communicating with them, which could lead to further dissatisfaction of the passengers and reduced profit or market share for the airlines if they did not give importance to updating passengers regarding crucial flight information. Similarly, Respondent two also faced a problem with lack of information, "*we were not informed about it [the lost baggage] earlier, which I think was not good. The timing is changed, but the problem is that they never informed about that. They had our contact details and they could inform us, but they did not"*.

The focus group interviewees discussed similar concern about the LCC they travelled with, they commented that,

"*Focus Group Member 2 – even there wasn't a way there was no announcement, no information system, only the people were shouting*

Focus Group Member 3: a man came from the airport, we heard him talk and looking that people moving from one gate to the other we started moving as well. We could not hear any announcement, it wasn't very clear.

Focus Group Member 1: they didn't say anything, aslan (an Arabic word for in real), suddenly we saw people going that way so we followed them and then we stayed in the waiting room and then we entered the air plane. So we already had a bad experience finish from there itself, we took our decision that we will never travel by fly dubai anymore".

4.5.4.2. EMPATHY: Developing Trust in their Passengers

The results disclosed that 85% passengers expected LCC staff to develop trust while dealing with passengers throughout the process. A total of 15% of respondents were not very much concerned about this aspect of staff service. This may be because the passengers in an LCC flight have fewer opportunities to interact with the LCC staff due to limited service and time on board.

The perception section results displayed that, there were differences of opinion on expectation and perception regarding the staff of the LCC developing trust while dealing with the passengers. It is important to note that only 62% respondents in total agreed that LCC staff actually developed trust in them while flying, thus, a gap of 23% was identified between expectations and perceptions.

It is also noteworthy that 38% selected the remaining three options, which could be because these passengers were unable to develop necessary trust in the LCC staff. In confirmation of this, while completing the survey, one of the passengers travelling with an LCC mentioned that staff responses and attitudes did not create any positive feeling in him, therefore, he could not develop trust in the staff.

Respondent four experienced that, "*When complaint to the crew, they were ignorant as well as less responsive. Again, after a few minutes, I had the same response and received the same answer. However, the third time when asked, the crew said that the blankets were given away and nothing in remaining in the stock. When I asked about 'You should have informed me earlier', the crew acted completely ignorant*".

4.5.4.3. EMPATHY: Developing Trust in their Passengers

This variable tested the attitude of LCC staff towards its passengers, it was included in this dimension to confirm if there was any contradiction with the response to the previous item. Passengers always have high expectations that staff attitudes should be positive since they are the customers and want to be treated in a positive manner (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). This was confirmed by the results, 52 % of respondents strongly agreed, 41% selected agreed, with both responses adding up to 93%. This indicated that almost all passengers expected the best attitude of the staff towards the passengers.

Thus, it was very clear that passengers have high expectations about positive staff attitude, although they are travelling on LCC, making this an attribute that can differentiate a good LCC from the others. LCC management should, therefore, give priority to training and developing soft skills of the staff.

4.5.4.4. EMPATHY: Positive Attitude towards Passengers

The results for passenger perceptions on this variable indicate that there is room for improvement in LCC staff regarding their attitude towards passengers. The senior executive of one of the Middle East LCC airlines [not to be named] discussed that, "Our

objective is really to hire people who are good at and are customer oriented, and they are basically, they like to deliver safe and they enjoy what they are doing". However, the survey results highlight that only 22% of respondents strongly agreed that they experienced a positive attitude towards them during their flight, while 48% agreed that the staff had a positive attitude, meaning that a total of 70% passengers were satisfied with staff's positive attitude.

Comparing these results to expectations indicates that there is a significant gap of 23%. It is also important to note that 30% of respondents selected the remaining three options in the perception section. This could be because they experienced different attitudes at different times in their past experiences with LCCs.

The focus group interviewees commented about the crew attitude,

"Focus Group Member 4: (about sandwiches) when they took off after 5 minutes to sell food, they took around one hour to reach us

Focus Group Member 1: to reach the half of the plane

Focus Group Member 6: when they reached us I said we want a sandwich, and they said that it is not available

Focus Group Member 1: they said that we have several prices and it is not available and they said if you want we have chips and chocolates, which annoyed us more because we were hungry for 4 hours

Focus Group Member 3: suddenly she said we don't have food and we were hungry, so we got mad at her

Focus Group Member 6: for a long time I was looking at the menu and she didn't come and when she come she said no food

Focus Group Member 4: what a disappointment".

Positive staff attitude can be a significant service factor, which airline management could use to reduce passenger turnover to their competitors such as another LCC or to a full service airline. The Air Arabia CEO mentioned that, "*One thing that we do is the staff in any company, any human being, has got a lot of power in their brain if you allow them to use them. So we allow them to use their brain and use their power of common sense needs to be done within the parameter of the business requirement. Once you allow them to use their brain that means that they have to make decisions. We are in people's business and every customer is a customer. We are very strict when it comes to the safety and security of the business and when it comes to dealing with the customers. They have all the flexibility they can use***".**

4.5.4.5. EMPATHY: Personal Attention to the Passengers

During the in-depth interviews the respondents were asked about should they be given personal attention even though they are travelling with LCC, the researcher received a mixed response, therefore, this variable was added in the questionnaire to investigate what the other passengers feel about this service. Respondent four replied, "*I expect the staff to be responsive towards the passengers with service. I do not feel even if I have paid less I am ready to wait for the service"***.**

The main reason to add this variable in the LCC service quality model was to investigate if LCC passengers in the Middle East expected personal attention like attending to them

immediately. In legacy airlines, staff are expected to attend to passengers as soon as they require them. It was surprising to note that LCC passengers also had high expectations to get personal attention from the staff. Thus, it may be that passengers still do not differentiate much between the legacy carriers and LCCs in the Middle East region.

A total of 79% of respondents expected that LCC employees should give personal attention to each of their passengers. The remaining three options were selected by 21% of respondents, which indicates that there are passengers who are aware that they cannot get personal attention while travelling with LCC. This could be another area for LCC management in the Middle East to work on in their marketing strategies to create more awareness about how LCC airlines differ from legacy carriers.

There were some positive results in perceptions about receiving personal attention, with 63% of respondents excepting that staff actually provided them with personal attention, such as attending to them as quickly as possible, even though it was an LCC, while 28% neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting that it did not much matter to them about receiving personal attention. This may be because they were aware that it was an LCC so they would not get the same personal attention as with a legacy carrier and that they were willing to wait to be served.

The remaining 9% of respondents selected the last two options, which directs that they were dissatisfied due not receiving the personal attention that they had expected, therefore, it is worth investigating, why did the passengers experienced this feeling? One of the reasons could be that these passengers have always received special attention for example, Arab passengers.

Respondent five mentioned that, she would expect personal attention for special needs people, "*If it is the priority for special needs people, but if it is for me personally, then I understand and I can wait because I know the fact that it is a low-cost".*

She also commented that*, "I think it depends on the occasion like if it is for the kids, they are small so they cannot wait for a glass of water, or if they have to be accompanied to the bathroom. In this case, yes, I expect quick service. I feel it also depends on the profile of the passengers like some passengers might be more demanding than others and in that case the crew/staff has to spend more time with some passengers than others*". However, respondent six is aware that, "*they can't provide you with a personalised service*".

4.5.4.6. EMPATHY: Needs of the Individual Passengers.

The aim of adding this variable in the empathy dimension was to identify, if passengers expected LCC staff to know about the individual needs of passengers, such as the passenger's name, personal preferences, food habits and dietary requirements. Surprisingly, 77% of respondents expected that it is important to them that LCC employees know what their individual needs are, 17% were neutral, and 6% selected the last two options.

The survey results were quite surprising for the researcher, since these are the kinds of expectation from the staff of a full-fare airline. Especially, first-class and business-class passengers would have such expectations as they pay for a high level of service. This suggests that more of high class passengers have started travelling with LCC and also that

they have been pampered by legacy carriers and they expect the same treatment from LCC staff as well. The managerial implication here is a need to create awareness about the level of service LCCs can actually provide.

Perception results were positive for LCC management since they exhibited that 59% passengers experienced that LCC staff gave careful attention to the individual needs of the passengers, which is a good sign for LCCs in the region as they are still in the growth stage. A total of 29% neither agreed nor disagreed, perhaps because they did not expect such service from LCC staff, 9% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. It was interesting to note that the executives of all the LCCs interviewed considered that staff training could improve the assurance and empathy of the staff members towards their passengers. Some LCCs also allow the staff members to make operational decisions, which empowers their staff to be naturally more passenger friendly than those working for other airlines.

4.5.4.7. EMPATHY: Summary

In this dimension the variables included were; communication with the passengers in terms of delay, developing trust, positive attitude, personal attention, identifying needs of the individual passengers. There were high expectations for communicating with the passengers, especially during the time of delay, although, the perception results highlighted that the LCC management needed improvement in this area of LCC service. Most of the passengers expected personal attention and had some expectation about identifying the individual needs of the passengers.

These results were similar to Suharanto and Noor (2012) as found in their study conducted on both low cost and full service airlines that, in both types of airlines even though their

target markets are different, passengers gave importance to staff attitude. The LCC management should give great attention to communicating with the passengers in terms of delays, new policies and other information. Also staff attitude and behaviour should be developed through training and regular monitoring as discussed in the assurance dimension.

4.5.5. RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION

This dimension concerns the responsiveness of LCCs in terms of problem solving, having the right knowledge to answer passengers' questions, handling special needs passengers with utmost care and giving value-for-money service. Five variables were tested under this dimension to identify if there were any gaps in the responsiveness of LCCs and their staff. One additional question was added to the original questionnaire after conducting the interviews and that was about stress free and relaxed cabin crew members.

4.5.5.1. REPONSIVENESS: Solving Passenger Complaints

It is important for any airline to understand passenger problems and solve them. These problems could range from missed flights, lost baggage to general lack of information about LCC services. To this question, 56% respondents strongly agreed that when a customer has a problem an LCC should make a sincere effort to solve it, while 37% agreed, making a total of 94% with high expectations regarding LCC problem-solving responsibilities. Only 6% of respondents selected the last three options, indicating that most passengers had very high expectations about an LCC's need to be responsive by sincerely addressing passenger problems.

The results in the perceptions section, however, indicated that the respondents were not very satisfied by the effort made by LCCs in solving passenger complaints. Only 54% of respondents experienced compared to the 94% expected results that, the LCCs they travelled sincerely attempted to resolve their complaint. It is vital to note that almost half, 46% of respondents selected the remaining three options, which indicates that they had varying experiences with LCCs.

The variable was found to be very important for the passengers to influence their behavioural intention for future purchase. According to the CEO of RAK Airways, "*RAK is reasonably strict about passenger complaints and report, especially the negative ones are taken quite seriously and they are generous in praise when they get positive comments"*.

LCC managements need to give due consideration to this variable since it is very important to listen to customer complaints and provide them with suitable solutions, i.e. service recovery (Chang and Chang, 2010). If management fails to listen and solve the complaints then passengers will be unsatisfied. This might result in losing passengers' confidence in the airline and eventually passing them to other airlines and reduced revenue and lower repurchases.

Respondent two also voiced a similar concern, "*No response, like the custom officers were not there, the airport staff and crew when compared to full-cost airlines, I feel that they should have appropriate customer service"*. Respondent four replied, "*When complaint to the crew, they were found ignorant as well as less responsive*".

When the staff cannot manage the complaints or solve problems for the passengers it highlights the inefficiency of the management in training them in this area. Another issue could be that the staff recruited may not be appropriate to do that job. Respondent three experienced that, "*I had a bad experience while travelling through xyz airline since there was a passenger who was completely panicky and was not handled by the staff. This thing disturbed all the passengers and it was kind of a rumour he was shouting out and the crew could not do anything about it*".

Respondent four replied that, "*The crew could not manage to explain the mother that at the age of 2 or 3 the kids need to be accompanying with an adult*". Respondent seven had a different experience than the rest of the respondents, "*we had to follow up with the person [regarding our money, which was charged twice due to technical glitch] but the person was polite*".

Al Jazeera senior executive discussed that they handle all the necessary complaints, "*Well, we have just introduced an online customer feedback, which means everybody who travels Jazeera gets an online questionnaire after he has travelled, so we get feedback on the continuous basis*".

According to the Air Arabia CEO, "*In any business without customer it is impossible. It is extremely important because without it you end up not knowing which direction to develop your business. Given that our online penetration is high overall so we have got this fantastic facility to communicate and engage with customers as so online make. Today's technology allows you to engage quite a lot and that's the main key. Always all*

the other sorts of things happen. I think technology is the one that we continue to develop". He discussed how Air Arabia is using technology not only to promote their products, but also to solve their passenger complaints if any.

4.5.5.2. RESPONSIVENESS: Employees Skill and Knowledge

This question was asked to evaluate whether the staff of LCCs is given enough training to be able to understand and answer all passenger questions to reduce contradictions or mistakes in the information they generally receive before or during their flight. A total of 91% respondents agreed that LCC staff should have enough skills and knowledge to answer passenger queries of the passengers. These results show that passengers have high expectations regarding the skills and knowledge of LCC staff.

Perceptions for this variable were different to the respondents' expectations. Merely, 17% of respondents strongly agreed that the staff of LCCs they travelled within the Middle East were skilled and knowledgeable, while 45% agreed. Quite a large proportion i.e. 38% selected the remaining three options, which shows that the passengers were not very satisfied about the LCC performance of this variable.

4.5.5.3. RESPONSIVENESS: Special Preference to Special Needs Passengers

This question was added to the original questionnaire based on information collected during the in-depth interviews. Some of the interviewees mentioned the need to give special preference to elderly or disabled passengers and to families with infants.

Therefore, this variable was included in the responsiveness dimension. The results, 58% strongly agreed and 32% agreed confirmed that most respondents expected LCCs and their staff to give special treatment to all the special needs passengers. The responses, 8% were neutral as they may not be sure regarding this service of the airline. This result clearly indicates that special preference should be given to passengers who are elderly or disabled and to parents with infants, not only by full-fare airlines but also by LCCs.

In the perceptions section, 69% of respondents experienced that, the LCC they travelled within the Middle East dealt with this variable satisfactorily, with 26% strongly agreeing and 43% agreeing that the elderly and disabled, or parents with infants were given good instructions and care during the flight. Also, 27% neither agreed nor disagreed, which could be because they had not much observed such passengers or were not much affected by this factor. Only 4% selected the last two options, which could be because they themselves had faced some problems or had seen other passengers facing problems with services for special needs passengers.

One group of passengers mentioned that an in-flight crew needs to be more courteous towards elderly people. One survey respondent explained how they had been travelling after performing the Hajj (visiting the Muslim holy places in Saudi Arabia) and her mother was sick. She, therefore, requested 'if she could sit with her [mother] since her seat was somewhere else'. However, the crew was not at all helpful and when her mother asked for some assistance, she was ignored. Her mother and other elderly passengers in their group were not treated very well.

This variable seemed quite important to those passengers travelling with elderly passengers or other special needs passengers, so LCCs must give importance to this basic passenger service. While the results indicate that most passengers find that LCCs in the GCC region are doing a good job on this service factor already, staff still need to improve their attitudes towards such passengers and handle them with utmost care. Respondent six discussed that, "*when you travel with two small children, it is really important to have the push chairs. It is good for mums like me*". Respondent five discussed that, "*when you age or become older it does matter*". Therefore, it is necessary that the LCC staff gives special attention to the passengers who have special needs such family with infants, old aged people and people with disability.

4.5.5.4. RESPONSIVENESS: Relaxed and Stress free Crew

This variable was included in the survey as a result of a passenger interview with the interviewee who was herself a crew in a legacy carrier. Her observation was that, 'LCC crew is much relaxed and stress-free since their service is less complicated than FSC'. It was quite interesting to check whether other passengers also observed the same.

Bahrain Air CEO discussed that, "*actually, I feel crew on a LCC is much busy than otherwise because they are trying to sell duty free, they are trying to sell tea and coffee, they are trying to sell things. It is a part of their revenue an airline gets. So, it is not necessarily true with the crew, and then there are typically more seats in the aircraft. But what you will find is the service operating is simpler so there is less room for confusion, and I think that's where it make things easier*".

The results indicate that LCC passengers expect the in-flight crew to be less stressed since they have less complicated services to perform on board. Altogether 70% of respondents agreed that they expected LCC staff much relaxed than FSC staff, 30% of respondents selected the remaining three options indicating that this factor did not matter much to them since it did not affect their travel. The RAK Airways CEO replied that, "*If there is no alternative, the passengers sit and relax and are self-sufficient once the crew finishes their round of service. They certainly do not sleep, but they do not interfere with the passengers until their service routine requires them to do another round of selling to see if people want to buy*".

The results indicated differences between expectations and perceptions, with less respondents experiencing LCC crew members relaxed and less stressed. The total response 15% strongly agreed and 40% agreed directs that the crew were relaxed and less stressed than on a full fare airline, proves that the 55% passengers believe that the LCC crew were relaxed and less stress compared to FSCs. The remaining 35% selected the remaining three options, possibly because they did not notice any such difference or were not interested in it and therefore decided to remain neutral. Approximately 10% of respondents selected disagree indicating that they did not find the cabin crew much relaxed and stress free. It could be useful to investigate this variable further in another comparative study that involves both full-fare airline passengers and LCC passengers.

When this question was asked to other in-depth interview respondents, Respondent four commented that, "*I have generally found that since there are less staff on board due to reduce cost, the staff takes more time"* indicating that they are not as relaxed as it seems since they have to provide service to all the passengers. Respondent six, "*I can't help to*

think because they don't have such complicated service, then they can pay attention to the customers who really need them there on the aircraft, rather than trying to provide very long let say lunch service for 2 or 3 hours for 200 hundred to 300 hundred passengers.

I think it is also important that they are not under huge pressure and that reflects in service. Often, in other carriers, there is so much pressure on providing very long let say meal service. I found them less stressed, more relaxed, friendly. There was more freedom for them to chat with passengers, more time for all of that.

The crew is more relaxed and has more time to actually help people who need help. That makes an amazing difference. Respondent seven agreed with respondent six that, "I think she is absolutely right because that is one of the things that I do enjoy about a low-cost is that there is serenity on the plane. You find staff totally relaxed. In a full–cost, you have many things to contend with [such as] stressed crew".

The same question was asked to the focus group interviewees, however, they did not agree with this point, this is what they commented:

"Focus Group Member 4: Ya, they were stressed

Focus Group Member 1: Yes, because they had no time to sit, maybe they had almost 300 like that passengers

Focus Group Member 3 and 5: two only serving the passengers and one crew, we don't know she was so it was bad

Focus Group Member 3: the service miss is not very fast

Focus Group Member 5: like miss, for example, she only reached half of the plane and she said only 20 minutes left for the landing

Focus Group Member 2: the other people didn't get anything

Focus Group Member 1: she did not manage to come to our place

Focus Group Member 4: there was one crew at the starting of the plane and one from the middle of the plane selling food, but we were at the end of the first half

Focus Group Member 6: they took 40 minutes to reach us".

This variable had a mixed response, therefore, it could not be proved that the cabin crew is completely relaxed in LCCs compared to FSCs since there are less crew members on the LCCs than FSCs.

4.5.5.5. RESPONSIVENESS: Value for Money (VFM) compared to Full Fare Airlines.

This was the final question in the Responsiveness dimension. The reason behind asking this question was to evaluate if LCCs really were responsive enough to keep their service value-for-money for passengers compared to full-fare airlines. It has been an important question since the major reason why passengers select LCCs over full-fare airlines are value for money. Thus, if passengers experience a gap in this variable, then there is a major room for improvement for LCCs.

In the expected section, 90% selected the first two options, agreeing that LCCs should offer value for money services than full fare airline, since that was the main reason why most passengers travelled with LCCs. 8% were neutral, suggesting that they were not very clear about whether LCCs should offer value for money compared to full-fare airlines. This could also be because their tickets are generally booked by their companies.

The remaining 3% of respondents selected the last two options, so it would be interesting to know more about why they disagreed that LCCs should offer value for money.

A total of 74% respondents agreed that the LCC they used offered value for money, a further 16% neither agreed nor disagreed. The remaining 10% selected the last two options, disagreeing that the LCC they travelled with offered value for money compared to FSCs. Thus, altogether 26% of respondents did not find LCCs they travelled with offered better value for money than a full fare airlines. During the in-depth interview respondent four discussed that, "*the expectation is that to have a low fare, but I feel that the fare has been drastically increased with the frequently flown airline. I expect the fare should be reasonable and stagnant*".

These results could be alarming for LCCs since their unique selling preposition is based on being value for money service compared to FSCs. If passengers start believing that there is only a small or no difference between LCCs and full-fare airlines then passengers may prefer to travel with full-fare airlines to take advantage of their better services. By selecting an LCC, passengers decide to give up many of the services provided by full-fare airlines. LCCs in the Middle East should therefore identify areas of improvement to make themselves the most preferred and best value for money choices for LCC passengers.

The in depth interview response also expected that LCCs should value for money as Respondent one said, "*It's very convenient for low salaried people. I am aware that since we are paying less, I do not have to expect too many things from a low-cost carrier".* Respondent two also mentioned that*, "Yes, they should be economically good, well served*

like, well treated". Respondent five replied, "*We are 4 in the family. The low cost really makes a difference in the cost*".

4.5.5.6. RESPONSIVENESS: Summary

The responsiveness dimension is important for both the passengers and the LCC management, therefore, LCCs must focus on staff/crew, customer service training as well as recruiting the right staff. The management in some of the airlines involves themselves in the training sessions for the crew, which means that they involve themselves personally in regular operational activities. Most of the executives mentioned that they receive complaints or suggestions through several different social media since they cannot afford to have a customer compliance department. They also try their best to solve issues related to staff attitudes and other problems.

Taking both sections of the questionnaire together, it is clear that LCC passengers give great importance to most of the service quality dimensions. In particular, however, they give more preference to tangibility, reliability and responsiveness than empathy and assurance. Therefore, LCCs should focus on improving tangibility, reliability and responsiveness attract more passengers to increase their market share and achieve higher revenue.

4.5.6. Additional Comments by Passengers:

Passengers were also given the opportunity to add any further comments at the end of section 2. Altogether 20 passengers gave additional comments, which will be discussed below:

Table 9: Additional Comments by survey respondents

Respondent 113	If entertainment is available, more people will fly.
Respondent 115	Food and entertainment should be provided and entertainment should be according to the level.
Respondent 136	Fly Dubai are often late leaving Kabul. They need to address this.
Respondent 157	More products needs to be introduced; should add more flexibility.
Respondent 163	For transit passengers, some food and water should be provided. Sometimes language problem.
Respondent 192	LCC cannot compromise on safety aspect.
Respondent 200	Not enough food provided. Too much noise of the engine.
Respondent 204	Only for name's sake: low cost but more expensive.
Respondent 207	The LCC fare should be more cheaper for the people who can't afford.
Respondent 250	The staff was very rude.
Respondent 261	LCC carriers charge for beverages.
Respondent 286	Language, staff is problem. They should change their image.
Respondent 294	Had problem with the food.
Respondent 493	Timing is very long for transit passengers: too much waiting time. Food not provided for transit passengers. At least some water should be provided.
Respondent 494	Timing is very long for transit passengers. We have to wait for long time. Too much money charged for changing timings or other requirements.
Respondent 501	They did not help my old mother in changing the seat next to me and she was sick. They did not even give water to drink.
Respondent 504	Very expensive food.
Respondent 509	It is sometime since I travelled Fly Dubai. Over 18 months, my memory was that they were overall much better than local Afghan competition. However, KAMAIR, at the time of my departure, had shown considerable improvements. A key element I dislike about LCC, and particularly Easy Jet, are all the hidden cost, which quickly make them less competitive. I have taken them and will only use Easy Jet when convenience dictates. Particularly irritating is additional baggage cost and policy of only 20kg per passenger regardless of how many bags you pay for!! Fortunately, my experience is limited to UK carrier's Easy Jet, Ryan air, etc. I will pay slightly more to avoid these airlines when possible. In summary, I expect the same levels of service, safety and comfort but I am willing to sacrifice some elements, such as paid food, etc. Also, in my experience, large airlines on long haul are competitive with LCC on short haul (i.e.) short trip.
Respondent 510	Timing not OK; not even providing water and breakfast. The company should provide water and at least biscuit.
Respondent 511	No food, too much noise, not very helpful, very expensive food.

At the end of section II an open ended question was added to seek the respondent's opinion about any additional comment. Some passengers decided to leave it blank and others have some comments which are recorded in Table 9. The highest comment i.e. ten respondents mentioned that food was not provided or it was very expensive and two respondents also discussed about lack of entertainment on board. Atleast four respondents were upset due to staff attitude and how they did not help the sick or old-aged passengers on board. Some of the respondents discussed that the fare prices of LCC were on the higher range. Some other issues discussed were longing waiting time as well as higher noise level during the journey.

4.6. Passengers and Management perception

This segment compares some of the responses of the top management and passengers.

"The definition of a service because the days of service means food on the aircraft is gone; it is behind us and therefore service for me is punctuality, good clean airplane, treating the customers as human being and, most importantly, making sure that the customer has the choice" CEO of Air Arabia.

"The general perception in Bahrain is that people want to pay the least fare that they have to. But they don't like unbundling so they want to know that their baggage is included, that the meal is included, and they don't like what they perceive as hidden charges" Bahrain Air.

"We put a lot of time in terms of service and we express it in a number of different ways and i.e. we just say we will smile a lot. The way the marketing guys were talking about it

is, it will be a fun experience, and so we do invest a lot in customer service training and it's about fun. I mean CEBU Pacific in particular is known to be a fun airline." Cebu Pacific

"We want to reinvent ourselves as quality and values carrier rather than always having the lowest price." RAK Airways

"We actually give value for proper experience." Air Asia

"We have to make money, so we try to keep the lowest cost and we try to make money whenever we can. Of course, for example, we offer food service products. All-inclusive meals and whatever high baggage allowance, whatever you can, we do the same product. Like other legacy airlines. But we still have low cost," Jazeera Airways

"The general notion is a low cost means no service; the price is the most important factor not service quality." Unnamed airline

These quotes are from the interviews conducted with senior-level executives of LCCs in the Middle East and Asia. Passengers also shared their experiences while travelling with LCCs in the Middle East.

"It has been more economical for us and mostly I have been happy with the experience I had with the low cost I have flown with." Respondent no. five

"I have also flown to the UK with Easy Jet and my experience with Easy Jet was much better than any other Middle East low cost. I think maybe because they have been doing this for years together. The least satisfying one was Fly Dubai." Respondent no. five

"I have good experience with Fly Dubai so I can only compare what I have experienced and that for me is excellent. It is good for mums." Respondent no. six

"I felt that, even though it's a low cost, I have been treated well throughout the travel." Respondent no. three

"I have had good experiences with Air Arabia in terms of new aircraft and good flight experience, whereas with Al Jazeera the flight has always been on time." Respondent no. four

"I have been travelling on Air India Express for more than 5 years now; my experience has always been pleasant with this airline." Respondent no. one.

4.7. Further Findings from Senior Executive Interviews: Challenges Faced by the LCCs

There were other issues discussed by the executives which have relevance to the topic of this research and may be worth exploring in the future. One of the key issues is the challenges faced by LCCs to be price sensitive while providing quality service. During the interviews with the LCC management/top executives several challenges of managing and maintaining the LCC day to day operations were discussed.

4.7.1. Cost Leadership:

Some of the airlines in the Middle East are trying to improve their brand image from just a Low Cost airline to value airline, which means that they would possibly have an economy and business class as well as provide some services at an extra cost but will be still cheaper than the full service airline.

"Challenge for RAK is in the sense create a new market and target shouldn't be the low cost and trying to persuade people you are looking to pay the lowest price to pay more because that's probably an impossible task; but maybe targeting the legacy and luxury passengers and saying that if we take out the little bit of the luxury, particularly those things that are not necessarily relevant, you can actually get better value for money and still get the same standard of service and quality of what RAK deliver; maybe less, but they will deliver the same quality is.

I think the dilemma is that if you are not the lowest price on many routes at the moment a significant change to your customer numbers; and of course there is no way to go when you are in the low cost scenario: you can only go lower to match your competitors.

Difficulty is the, with some of the types of movement that we have in the Middle East, principally labour movement, and then they are very price conscious".

4.7.2. Customer Perception:

Some of the Middle East LCCs are still battling with the understanding of the passengers about the Low Cost concept. The passengers in the Middle East have long been treated

royally by the luxury airlines and therefore, the passengers still expect a similar kind of service delivery from LCCs.

"*There is a misunderstanding in particularly in this part of the world, and it will be normal that, because the business, the low cost business model, is not long been around, unlike in the western world, where it has been 20-30 years, people much more mature about it. I suspect every similar airline, whether it is low cost or not, they are trying to manage their costs, to make it as low as possible. Therefore, the public perception depends on what is the definition of a service because the days of service means food on the aircraft is gone; it is behind us, and therefore service for me, punctuality is good clean airplane, treating the customers as human being and, most importantly, making sure that the customer has the choice. I think you will find in a low cost business in a much better position and offers than any conventional airline you can think of*".

4.7.3. Open Skies Policy:

In many of the Middle East countries open skies are still a challenge to many of the airlines. Some of the neighbouring countries have an open skies policy, however, there are many restrictions as well as other problems which does not allow a specific airline to enter into that specific sky.

"*The difficulty within the Middle East is that the bilateral in most places which are not entirely open skies are quite exhaustive and some parts are very difficult because there isn't a reciprocity because they may not have a strong national carrier or they*

may have only one airline; and yet they're having to respond to the demands for 3, 4, 5 carriers to fly so bilateral are a challenge".

4.7.4. Staff Recruitment:

This is another challenge LCCs face, according to some of the senior executives; recruiting the right staff/crew. In many cases the crew are given better incentive in luxury airlines compared to LCCs. Staff training is not a big issue for luxury airlines as they have their own academy or training institution and staff/crew are given regular training however it is a challenge for most of the LCCs. Basic training is provided by LCCs however, continuous training, professional development and career advancement may not be possible as mentioned by some of the senior executives since their budget is very limited in this area.

"We have some sort of a challenge to get the right people. You know we are not that well developed; you know have no much training academy; we have to create our own syllabus where; when we hire our staff and in a function; we have to go board into technology so that they can broaden their knowledge. It is regardless of any staff, maybe ground staff or cabin crew, they have to know their product well, and at the end of the day they should remember that they work for this airline" Senior-Executive of LCC in the Middle East [not to be named]

"*Anybody in the service industry have service related challenges. What you are trying to do is make sure that everything that is happening is happening day after day after day; that all the procedures work, which seems people know what to expect and*

deliver, but at the same time have the flexibility to sort of adjust the situations; and that's a sort of, it is not always straight forward, which is sad. But I think the key thing to passengers is that if you have standard procedures and everybody understands, including the passengers, and they work, that gets you certain part of the way; and if you have people recruited who have the right attitude then some of them it is the person himself who is recruited. Some of it is the culture of the organization; of being a family.

If you have people providing service, you conceive want to help, as even if they can't help it makes you feel valued, so attitude is very important. So it goes back to how people are recruited, the way people are managed; and again there is no airline that gets it all right, but we don't do too bad in that area". CEO, Bahrain Air

"*I think we all try focusing consistency. Consistency is very important. We don't want to have somebody one day do something super and the next day stop performing or even under–performing. That's what I mean: consistency*". CEO Jazeera Airways

This analysis makes clear that LCCs face challenges related to day-to-day operations, recruiting the right staff, and managing the perceptions of people, especially in the Middle East, since they have only recently experienced LCCs. One executive also discussed the challenge of not having sufficient open skies in the Middle East. Regarding Asian LCCs, their challenge is again the perceptions of people like the Japanese, who have not experienced LCC products until recently.

4.8. Further Findings from Senior-executive Interviews: Opportunity for LCCs:

During the interview with the LCC senior executives, they discussed about opportunity of operating in the Middle East. Technology was discussed by most of the senior executives, expatriate population was another opportunity discussed by the executives. Some also discussed about the development of many countries as tourism hub.

4.8.1. Technology used in LCCs

Because the main target of LCCs is to cut costs as much as possible, they have made the best use of technology to attract passengers and receive feedback and update them. LCCs also utilise web booking systems efficiently to remove travel agents costs. As one of the interviewed experts mentioned, LCCs are the trend setters in adapting to technology, which has benefitted legacy carriers as well.

According to one airline expert, Mr. Mohammed, regarding embracing technology:

> *"The legacy carriers have contributed high time in the market and once the LCC's have hit the market it has changed the trend of the market. They have created a great amount of awareness among the passengers regarding the online booking and it has benefited legacy carriers as well because it has benefitted in terms of revenue percentage big time in 2009 and the revenue is definitely higher than 2007."*

CEO of CEBU PACIFIC, "*We introduced a bit more fun to some our flights. We noticed as most airlines do that customers don't take a lot of notice to the safety instructions at the beginning of the flight so we had a cabin crew choreographed the safety demonstration. It's all over YouTube; it went viral: 10 million viewers saw the Cebu Pacific dancing cabin crew up as a part of what we do.*

We leverage social media a lot. Filipinos are the largest users of Facebook in the world per capita based. We have over 500,000 fans on our Facebook page and that's interactive: we have people responding constantly, and we have got people posting information; and that is a huge feedback mechanism for us. I think we have something like 200,000 followers on Twitter; that is something another way of connecting with customers and understanding what they like or what they don't like. So I think if you leverage new technology, leverage the new way of communicating with people, which is really by social networking, then you can get that feedback mechanism to make adjustments to the service offerings".

Air Arabia CEO, "*It is extremely important because, without it, you end up not knowing which direction to develop your business. Given that our online penetration is high overall so we have got this fantastic facility to communicate and engagement with customers as so online make. Today's technology allows you to engage quite a lot and that's the main key. Always all the other sorts of things happen. I think technology is the one that we continue to develop"*.

RAK Airways, "*RAK Airways is very active on Facebook. They try to engage people on FB as much as they can because just posting an offer or posting a piece of news is simply communication; tell them [customers] something. But if you can actually get*

people engaged and get them encouraged, even if they encourage people to tell them what's wrong, you will get people tell that. And then you are just expected to respond to them professionally and respond to them with an open mind, and in the sense quite humbly. If you have got something wrong, you need to fix it. Then you will get who will support you in that field and your reputation will start to grow".

Jazeera airways Senior Executive, "*We also have our very app. We keep up with the social media, so we get feedback from Twitter from Facebook*".

Senior executive not to be named, "*We have many ways of communication, you know, like mobile and, you know, like we keep and we have a regular newsletter, every year. At least you know with our agent, we do gather, we have a website where passengers do booking and they will receive information. We have a sort of every Tuesday airfares and we are trying to do our best*".

Marketing executive of Air Asia, "*Initial when we started, word of mouth branding was really working for us, and it was very important. We were new and people were sure they liked it, so word of mouth was really, ahh, initially driving us a lot. And then, after that, we became more popular and then we became more stronger. So then we started moving towards digital technology. Social media is used a lot more for commercial initiatives, operational initiatives. In terms of operational related messages, we are actually improving on it now. The other one, basically we have another communication channel: Ask Air Asia is a chat line. Basically, you ask the agents replying back to you, about what to go, what to go. So the profile of customers is changing, so then the digital engagements are also improving*".

In one of the conferences held in 2016, CEO of the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), shared that, airlines need to recognize that passengers in the Middle East use the highest ratio of smartphones and tablet devices in the world in flight. He also highlighted that, passengers in the Middle East have higher expectations for both comfort and entertainment connectivity according to a recent APEX Global Survey. "The Middle East has become a center point for very high expectations in these key passenger experience areas."

4.8.2. Expatriate Population:

The aviation expert discussed that he has seen several changes in the Middle East aviation market, especially in the demographics of the passengers, "*One more trend change is, five years back there were different types of passengers, those passengers are earning income exceeding 15000 Dirhams the expatriates were travelling back to their home countries once or twice in the year but now they are trying different parts of the world. The passengers have invented different offers in different destinations like they could travel to a different destination with cheap fares are offers*".

RAK Airways CEO, "*we are trying to build up in the business of the labour movement, with the recovery of post financial crisis 2007-10 the recovery is quite strong, particularly in Ras Al Khaimah, which wasn't so developed that time and didn't have massive developments, Industry and developments have continued significantly on a strong path. So the amount of labour coming into Ras Al Khaimah is very significant*".

This question was asked in the demographic section of the survey to identify the reason for the LCC passengers to travel, 49% of respondents travelled for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives (VFR). This is the major reason for people to travel in the Middle East, 80% of the population comprises expatriates that live and work in this region. Most people prefer to travel back home for vacations, including the researcher, as some expatriates living in GCC countries might have not seen their families for more than a year due to economic reasons. After the introduction of LCCs, travelling has increased in this region by giving the opportunity for low- and middle-income passenger groups to meet their family members.

4.8.3. Tourist Destinations

There are many suitable destinations within 3 to 4 hours of travel time from some Middle East countries such as the UAE, which could be another reason for passengers to travel. Therefore, many travellers take the opportunity for a long weekend as well as annual holidays. 28% of respondents were travelling for business purposes, making this another major reason for travelling between many GCC countries for work and other business related activities.

During the survey, 14% of respondents were travelling for leisure purposes, which is another significant area to cater to as places like Dubai are becoming shopping hubs, while other important destinations are becoming more and more popular amongst tourists. Some of the other reasons identified were travelling for visa renewal, health, education and spiritual reasons. One of the objectives of this research was fulfilled by the findings that the aviation experts and the senior executives identified that due to expatriate population the aviation industry especially the LCCs have greater opportunity of further development.

The survey results also confirmed that most of the LCC passengers travel to visit families, friends and relatives since they work in a different country.

4.9. Further Findings from Passenger In-depth and Focus Group Interviews:

The passengers of LCCs in the Middle East did expect basic but good service quality even though they are relatively paying less than to travel with a full fare airline. The passengers also expressed their experiences and feelings about being satisfied or unsatisfied based on their past travel experience on LCCs within GCC or other countries. It was identified that, the passengers considered price as a major influence while deciding to travel with a low cost, however to most of them service quality also was as much important.

The respondents expressed their thoughts regarding good service quality parallel with the SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman et al. 1985). Most variables were repeatedly stated by respondents during the interview process which matched with the modified SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman et al. 1988) however, there were other variables discussed, some of the variables were added in the survey questionnaire.

4.9.1. Culture

One of the variable highlighted by the respondents was ‘Culture of the Passengers’ in relation to their expectations, some of the respondents highlighted that expectations can be high or low depending on the culture of the passengers. Culture as defined by Hofstede (1991), "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". Many consumer behaviour studies (Blackwell et al. 2001) has discussed the influence of culture on customer’s expectation and

perception while making a purchase decision. Some of this study's respondents expressed:

"Once we become the citizen of the world your expectations also start to lessen or widen sometimes depending on our experience you live. As a person my habitual expectations comes from my culture and as a mother, a woman and as a high level citizen by means of education and everything I have expectation" Respondent no. one.

"Absolutely, I think culture influences what we expect a lot, I mean there are huge differences of people expect in terms of customer service because they are coming from different cultures" Respondent no. six.

The focus group interview also clearly highlighted that they expected the service to be better in terms of staff behaviour, polite and courteous staff, food provided on board. The Arab culture gives importance to respect and modesty also treating them with care is important since they do not like to be ignored. They also take collective decisions about most of the things they do not like or have had a bad experience. When the focus group interviewees were asked if they were treated well, they commented that:

> *"Focus Group Member 1: we thought that we will be fine till she reach us, we thought maybe she is busy we won't call her and annoy her to come and get our order, but then till she reach then she told us that there is no food, we got mad because she already ignored us and delayed us and then suddenly we don't have food or even water to drink on the plane.*

Focus Group Member 1: no no no while coming back we came back by fly dubai and it was the worst experience, but while going we went by Emirates airlines, that's why we are telling you that we swear that we won't travel by fly dubai. If there is no flight is ok, we won't travel, but fly dubai never".

4.9.2. Training the Staff/Crew

The next variable which was very important and high on passenger list related to the improvement of LCCs service, in this context - quality was identified as 'Training of the Staff' to improve their skill, knowledge and professionalism. The staff of any service organisation, especially, the front line staff becomes the "Face" of the organisation. This is critical and if they do not represent the company very well, customers/passengers will definitely be dissatisfied with the type of service received (Lovelock et al. 2010). Training the Frontline staff helps improve their customer service skills as well as knowledge about the service provided and regarding the organisation they work.

One of the great examples is Singapore Airlines (SIA) frequently winning International awards for top customer service and in-flight quality since SIA believes that, '*Training is not a one-time affair. SIA understands that daily customer contact can be draining and that customer expectations are always on the rise*', (Kaufman R., Chairman, UP! Your Service). In this study, some of the quality expressions mentioned by the passengers during the interviews are as follows:

"I think it is about three things; it's about training and personality. It definitely starts with recruitment, if you recruit people with right skills I think they can provide very good service and not everyone can" Respondent no. six.

"It all goes back to training. I think that is the basic thing in fact at the most difficult times like today companies cut down on training that is what you really need to concentrate on and give yourself a competitive advantage over other airlines" Respondent no. seven.

The LCCs in the Middle East aviation market should identify the gaps between the perception of the passengers and the service provided, to gain competitive advantage not only over other LCCs entering into the market but also indirect competitors such as legacy carriers.

4.9.3. Convenience

The interview respondents highlighted that convenience is another factor they expect when they decide to travel. The passengers in the UAE have the privilege of many airports such Dubai Terminal 2, Sharjah airport, and Ras Al Khaimah airport. They mentioned that when deciding to travel with LCC they not only give importance to price but also whether it is convenient to travel by Dubai airport or Sharjah airport.

"Fly Dubai is more convenient for timings and closer in Dubai since if I have to take taxi and have children along with me, I travel to fly Dubai, but if my husband is with me driving to Sharjah and travelling with me, I prefer flying with Air Arabia" Respondent no. five.

"First thing is that it should be very convenient, like we have a direct flight from Dubai to Mangalore that's one of the main that it should be convenient" Respondent no. two.

4.9.4. Airport Service Quality

Another important element highlighted in the interviews and the survey was the importance of receiving better service from the airport facilities and the staff since this dimension impacted the experience of the passengers. In most cases the LCC arrive and depart from secondary airport and have basic facilities with an outsourced staff. This factor can also create inconvenience to the passengers as in many cases the secondary airport is far from the regular airport, the LCCs is given odd timings for arrival and departures since it may interrupt the major traffic. Some of the passengers highlighted that they found the airport service quality impacting their experience in travelling with an LCC.

"While travelling with Al Jazeera there was too much walking distance, even after giving a bus transfer I felt that generally the Low Cost terminals are supposed to be closer to the Airport".

These were the responses given by a focus group who were 7 Emirati (UAE locals) ladies who travelled by Terminal 2 for the first time and were not satisfied.

Focus Group Member no. 4:"The sign posts [at the airport] were not very clear, it was in an isolated area. The signs were difficult to find and we had to ask someone to tell us, where is the Flydubai counter?"

"They [airport staff] were actually so busy they didn't care about the passengers, had to put our luggage by ourselves. The staff at the ticket counter was good".

4.10. Results of Cross Tabulation

The study also conducted cross tabulation on some of the variables and demographic information. It was important to understand if there is any significant relationship between the demographic information such as Age and Tangibility item testing modern looking and reliable aircraft. Table 10 shows the results:

Table 10: Age and P1 TAN: This LCC has modern looking and reliable aircraft which are safe to travel in.

Age * **P1TAN:** This LCC has a modern looking and reliable aircraft which is safe to travel.								
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Age	15-19	Count	8	31	2	0	0	41
		% of Total	1.6%	6.0%	.4%	0.0%	0.0%	7.9%
	20-24	Count	37	56	12	3	0	108
		% of Total	7.2%	11.1%	2.4%	.6%	0.0%	21.2%
	25-29	Count	37	65	15	6	0	123
		% of Total	7.2%	12.3%	2.8%	1.2%	0.0%	23.6%
	30-34	Count	20	41	9	4	0	74
		% of Total	3.9%	8.1%	1.8%	.8%	0.0%	14.5%
	35-39	Count	16	23	9	2	1	51
		% of Total	3.1%	4.2%	1.6%	.4%	.2%	9.5%
	40-44	Count	14	17	3	1	0	35
		% of Total	2.7%	3.2%	.6%	.2%	0.0%	6.7%
	45-49	Count	8	14	5	2	0	29
		% of Total	1.6%	2.8%	1.0%	.4%	0.0%	5.8%
	50-54	Count	6	10	2	1	0	19
		% of Total	1.2%	2.0%	.4%	.2%	0.0%	3.8%
	55-59	Count	6	14	3	0	0	23
		% of Total	1.2%	2.8%	.6%	0.0%	0.0%	4.6%
	60-64	Count	2	4	0	0	0	6
		% of Total	.4%	.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%
	65-69	Count	0	4	1	0	0	5
		% of Total	0.0%	.8%	.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
	70-74	Count	1	0	0	0	0	1
		% of Total	.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.2%
Total		Count	155	280	61	19	1	516
		% of Total	30.3%	54.0%	11.7%	3.8%	.2%	100.0%

Table 10 presents the cross-tabulation of age and perceptions about the modern look and reliability of LCC aircraft. 11% respondents from the age group of 20-24 years agreed that the LCC they travelled with has modern looking and reliable aircrafts which are safe to travel. Similarly, respondents from the age group of 25-29 years, 12% agreed that the aircraft they travelled were safe and reliable. Further analysis indicates that young and middle-aged travellers prefer LCCs since they experienced that the aircrafts are modern looking and it's very much a trend in the Middle East culture to prefer products and services which are modern looking.

Table 11: Cross Tabulation: Age and E 2.4 TAN Comfortable Seats

			E2.4 TAN : Comfortable Seats					Total
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Age	15-19	Count	18	18	3	1	1	41
		% of Total	3.5%	3.5%	.6%	.2%	.2%	7.9%
	20-24	Count	44	47	11	5	0	107
		% of Total	8.5%	9.1%	2.2%	1.0%	0.0%	21.2%
	25-29	Count	51	44	20	8	1	124
		% of Total	9.9%	8.5%	4.0%	1.6%	.2%	23.6%
	30-34	Count	31	30	9	1	3	74
		% of Total	6.0%	5.8%	1.4%	.2%	.6%	14.5%
	35-39	Count	26	18	4	2	1	51
		% of Total	5.0%	3.5%	.8%	.4%	.2%	9.5%
	40-44	Count	16	15	1	3	0	35
		% of Total	3.0%	2.9%	.2%	.6%	0.0%	6.7%
	45-49	Count	16	11	2	0	0	29
		% of Total	3.1%	2.1%	.4%	0.0%	0.0%	5.8%
	50-54	Count	11	7	1	0	0	19
		% of Total	2.1%	1.4%	.2%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%
	55-59	Count	10	10	1	2	0	23
		% of Total	2.0%	2.0%	.2%	.4%	0.0%	4.6%
	60-64	Count	2	2	1	0	1	6
		% of Total	.4%	.4%	.2%	0.0%	.2%	1.2%
	65-69	Count	4	1	0	0	0	5
		% of Total	.8%	.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
	70-74	Count	0	0	1	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	.2%	0.0%	0.0%	.2%
Total		Count	229	203	54	22	7	516
		% of Total	44.3%	39.5%	10.4%	4.4%	1.4%	100.0%

The Table 11 above displays the cross tabulation between age and expectations about seat comfort. Although older passengers might be expected to desire comfortable seats more than younger travellers, the results indicate that, a 10% passengers between 25-29 years of age strongly agreed that they expect comfortable seats even while they travel with LCC. The respondents between the age group of 25-29 years agreed that they expected comfortable seats more than the older passengers. This could mean many different things in terms of analysing generational differences.

Firstly, the young population [Millennials] are living in comfort with greater income and more technology at hand, whereas middle-aged and older passengers are more likely to have experienced hardships in their lives when they were young, therefore comfortable seats may not much matter to them.

Secondly, the younger generation is generally more demanding than the older generation since the former is better-educated and updated due to social media and technology, whereas the older population, which might be educated, but is less updated due to a lack of interest in technology and social media as they belong to generation X (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). Thus, this is an interesting area to research further on how age and tangibility matters when making purchase decisions on services such as airlines, in particular LCCs.

Table 12: **Cross Tabulation: Age and P 2.4 TAN Comfortable Seats**

			P2.4 TAN : Comfortable Seats					Total
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Age	15-19	Count	3	21	10	5	2	41
		% of Total	.6%	4.1%	1.9%	1.0%	.4%	7.9%
	20-24	Count	19	52	16	18	3	108
		% of Total	3.6%	10.1%	3.1%	3.6%	.6%	21.2%
	25-29	Count	25	52	28	15	3	123
		% of Total	4.8%	10.1%	5.4%	3.0%	.6%	23.6%
	30-34	Count	15	25	20	11	3	74
		% of Total	2.9%	4.8%	3.9%	2.2%	.6%	14.5%
	35-39	Count	7	18	15	9	2	51
		% of Total	1.4%	3.5%	2.9%	1.8%	.4%	9.5%
	40-44	Count	7	15	9	4	0	35
		% of Total	1.4%	2.9%	1.7%	.8%	0.0%	6.7%
	45-49	Count	5	13	7	2	2	29
		% of Total	1.0%	2.5%	1.4%	.4%	.4%	5.8%
	50-54	Count	2	7	5	5	0	19
		% of Total	.4%	1.4%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	3.8%
	55-59	Count	1	18	2	1	1	23
		% of Total	.2%	3.6%	.4%	.2%	.2%	4.6%
	60-64	Count	2	2	1	1	0	6
		% of Total	.4%	.4%	.2%	.2%	0.0%	1.2%
	65-69	Count	0	4	1	0	0	5
		% of Total	0.0%	.8%	.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
	70-74	Count	1	0	0	0	0	1
		% of Total	.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.2%
Total		Count	87	227	114	71	16	516
		% of Total	17.1%	44.0%	21.6%	14.1%	3.2%	100.0%

Table 12 highlights the experience of LCC seat comfort in the Middle East according to age. The results could be important for LCCs that are investing in modernising their aircraft in recent years. The age groups that travel more include young and middle-aged passengers, therefore, their experience really matters to the LCCs.

According to the cross tabulation results, 10% respondents between 20-24 years of age agreed that they experienced that the seats of LCC they travelled were comfortable. Similarly, respondents between the age group of 25 to 29 years experienced that the LCC they travelled had comfortable seats. This suggests that LCCs are improving their service factor based on the young passengers expectations and are satisfying them by providing comfortable seating to attract more younger and middle-aged passengers.

4.11. Factor Analysis:

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the hypothesis that a relationship between expected variables and perceived variables exists. The CFA requires research or theory to establish a relationship pattern a priori that is then tested statistically (Harrington, 2009). Therefore, a CFA was performed by using AMOS 21 with five loaded factors i.e. Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance, Empathy and Responsiveness with 25 final loaded items.

The reason of this choice was due to their superiority over other model fit indices in terms of their insensitively to sample size and misleading parameter estimates (Kline, 2005). CFAs were conducted separately for Passenger Expectations and Perceptions which are central to the LCCQUAL model. The table 13 below highlights individual items and their factor loadings.

Table 13: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Table - Expectations

Confirmatory Factor Analysis - Expectations

Tangibility			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
E1	<---	F1	0.55	Initially constrained to 1		
E2.1	<---	F1	0.70	0.15	11.58	0.00
E2.2	<---	F1	0.66	0.15	11.19	0.00
E2.3	<---	F1	0.72	0.14	11.76	0.00
E2.4	<---	F1	0.79	0.16	12.42	0.00
E2.5	<---	F1	0.67	0.17	11.31	0.00
E2.6	<---	F1	0.63	0.18	10.86	0.00
E3	<---	F1	0.55	0.13	9.94	0.00
E4	<---	F1	0.65	0.11	11.12	0.00
E5	<---	F1	0.63	0.12	10.83	0.00
E6	<---	F1	0.47	0.12	8.79	0.00

Reliability			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
E7	<---	F1	0.68	Initially constrained to 1		
E8	<---	F1	0.71	0.08	13.43	0.00
E9	<---	F1	0.60	0.07	11.64	0.00
E10	<---	F1	0.66	0.07	12.60	0.00
E11	<---	F1	0.68	0.07	12.91	0.00
E12	<---	F1	0.68	0.07	12.98	0.00

Assurance			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
E13	<---	F1	0.85	Initially constrained to 1		
E14	<---	F1	0.82	0.05	19.29	0.00
E15	<---	F1	0.78	0.05	18.64	0.00

Empathy			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
E16	<---	F1	0.52	Initially constrained to 1		
E17	<---	F1	0.71	0.15	10.43	0.00
E18	<---	F1	0.69	0.12	10.30	0.00
E19	<---	F1	0.75	0.17	10.69	0.00
E20	<---	F1	0.71	0.16	10.45	0.00

Responsiveness			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
E21	<---	F1	0.68	Initially constrained to 1		
E22	<---	F1	0.76	0.09	12.89	0.00
E23	<---	F1	0.70	0.09	12.45	0.00
E24	<---	F1	0.42	0.11	8.09	0.00
E25	<---	F1	0.52	0.09	9.78	0.00

The above Table 13 focused on the results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis on expectations conducted on the proposed five-dimensional scale. The proposed model evaluated five dimensions; each dimensions had different number of items/variables totalling to 25 items in each section. The Tangibility dimension had 11 items, Reliability dimension had 6 items, Assurance dimension had 3 items, Empathy dimension had 5 items and finally 5 items to represent the Responsiveness dimension. No items were deleted from any dimensions as they were all close to or above 0.5.

The next Table 14 represents the CFA for perceptions section, this analysis will test the same five dimensions with twenty-five items, and, these will be evaluating the passenger's experiences with the LCCs they travelled. The items under each dimension were the same number as in the expectations section.

Table 14: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Table – Perceptions

Confirmatory Factor Analysis - Perceptions

Tangibility			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
P1	<---	F1	0.57	Initially constrained to 1		
P2.1	<---	F1	0.68	0.13	11.80	0.00
P2.2	<---	F1	0.70	0.12	12.04	0.00
P2.3	<---	F1	0.70	0.12	12.10	0.00
P2.4	<---	F1	0.75	0.14	12.63	0.00
P2.5	<---	F1	0.59	0.15	10.67	0.00
P2.6	<---	F1	0.59	0.15	10.78	0.00
P3	<---	F1	0.62	0.13	11.05	0.00
P4	<---	F1	0.63	0.10	11.19	0.00
P5	<---	F1	0.65	0.11	11.46	0.00
P6	<---	F1	0.55	0.10	10.25	0.00

Reliability			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
P7	<---	F1	0.80	Initially constrained to 1		
P8	<---	F1	0.71	0.05	15.38	0.00
P9	<---	F1	0.73	0.07	15.94	0.00
P10	<---	F1	0.61	0.05	13.10	0.00
P11	<---	F1	0.60	0.06	13.07	0.00
P12	<---	F1	0.48	0.06	10.18	0.00

Assurance			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
P13	<---	F1	0.84	Initially constrained to 1		
P14	<---	F1	0.78	0.06	17.38	0.00
P15	<---	F1	0.79	0.06	17.42	0.00

Empathy			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
P16	<---	F1	0.73	Initially constrained to 1		
P17	<---	F1	0.77	0.06	16.77	0.00
P18	<---	F1	0.80	0.06	17.44	0.00
P19	<---	F1	0.85	0.06	18.47	0.00
P20	<---	F1	0.81	0.07	17.59	0.00

Responsiveness			Standardized Estimate (Confirmatory Factor loading)	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value (Sig)
P21	<---	F1	0.82	Initially constrained to 1		
P22	<---	F1	0.76	0.05	15.99	0.00
P23	<---	F1	0.66	0.05	14.04	0.00
P24	<---	F1	0.53	0.06	11.24	0.00
P25	<---	F1	0.54	0.06	11.54	0.00

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis was necessary to evaluate and refine the scales (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988) and items with standardised loadings below 0.40 are supposed to be eliminated. The Tables 13 and 14 indicated that all five service quality dimensions; Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance, Empathy and Responsiveness with twenty-five instrument items developed from the literature and with the help of passenger interviews and focus group discussion were valid in the context of LCC service quality in the Middle East.

4.11.1. Arab Versus Non-Arab Passengers t-test Table

Once all the dimensions and the items were validated using CFA, the next objective was to identify the significant difference in the results among different demographic groups. An independent sample t-test was conducted based on some of the demographic information such as Arabs vs Non-Arabs, Business vs. Leisure, and Male vs. Female. The first sample t-test was conducted on expectations and perceptions of Arabs vs Non-Arabs.

It was important to know if there were any significant differences between Arabs and non-Arabs, therefore, independent sample t-test was conducted. The test is considered necessary to compare two independent subgroups. Means for two subgroups; Arabs and non-Arabs were calculated and the below Table 15 highlights the results of descriptive Statistics on Arabs vs. non-Arabs

Table 15: Descriptive Statistics: Arab vs. non Arabs

Group Statistics – Arabs vs. non Arabs					
Non Arabs Vs Arabs		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
E-Tangibility	Non Arabs	420	4.30	0.57	0.03
	Arabs	96	4.23	0.61	0.06
E-Reliability	Non Arabs	420	4.54	0.49	0.02
	Arabs	96	4.48	0.47	0.05
E-Assurance	Non Arabs	420	4.45	0.62	0.03
	Arabs	96	4.33	0.68	0.07
E-Empathy	Non Arabs	420	4.27	0.60	0.03
	Arabs	96	4.28	0.62	0.06
E-Responsiveness	Non Arabs	420	4.32	0.54	0.03
	Arabs	96	4.37	0.57	0.06
P-Tangibility	Non Arabs	420	3.75	0.64	0.03
	Arabs	96	3.78	0.68	0.07
P-Reliability	Non Arabs	420	3.87	0.63	0.03
	Arabs	96	3.97	0.68	0.07
P-Assurance	Non Arabs	420	3.96	0.71	0.03
	Arabs	96	4.00	0.66	0.07
P-Empathy	Non Arabs	420	3.68	0.75	0.04
	Arabs	96	3.83	0.75	0.08
P-Responsiveness	Non Arabs	420	3.70	0.66	0.03
	Arabs	96	3.85	0.71	0.07

The above Table 15 focuses on understanding of statistical significance and p values. The table will highlight if there are any significant differences in the mean between Arabs and

no-Arabs. The study used the 0.10 cut off for the 90% confidence limit (Mimmack et al. 2001). The results of Arab vs Non-Arab passengers are given in the following table.

Table 16: Independent Sample Test: Arabs vs. non-Arabs

Independent Samples Test - Arabs vs. non Arabs									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
E-Tangibility	.16	.69	1.02	514.00	.306	.067	.065	-.061	.195
			.98	135.40	.328	.067	.068	-.068	.201
E-Reliability	.21	.65	1.20	514.00	.231	.066	.055	-.042	.175
			1.24	147.21	.217	.066	.054	-.039	.172
E-Assurance	.20	.65	1.67	514.00	.096	.118	.071	-.021	.258
			1.56	132.85	.120	.118	.076	-.031	.268
E-Empathy	.71	.40	-.12	514.00	.905	-.008	.068	-.143	.126
			-.12	138.32	.907	-.008	.070	-.147	.130
E-Responsiveness	.47	.49	-.74	514.00	.458	-.046	.062	-.168	.076
			-.72	137.61	.471	-.046	.064	-.173	.080
P-Tangibility	1.91	.17	-.43	514.00	.664	-.032	.073	-.175	.112
			-.42	135.26	.679	-.032	.076	-.183	.119
P-Reliability	.71	.40	-1.33	514.00	.185	-.095	.072	-.237	.046
			-1.26	134.04	.211	-.095	.076	-.246	.055
P-Assurance	.97	.33	-.49	514.00	.626	-.039	.080	-.195	.117
			-.51	149.77	.610	-.039	.076	-.189	.111
P-Empathy	.03	.87	-1.74	514.00	.082	-.149	.085	-.316	.019
			-1.75	142.37	.082	-.149	.085	-.317	.019
P-Responsiveness	1.68	.20	-1.95	514.00	.052	-.148	.076	-.298	.001
			-1.87	135.75	.064	-.148	.079	-.305	.009

A central point in this thesis explores the differences in expectations and perceptions based on ethnic identities. The literature is abound with explanations on how people from different cultural backgrounds demonstrate considerable heterogeneity in their thought

processes (Hofstede 2001). Following this line of thought, it was examined whether there existed significant differences between responses from those who identified themselves as coming from an Arab background vs. non Arabs based on nationality. This analysis was first of its kind and therefore, will be considered as a contribution to new knowledge. The study looked for differences in mean responses using t-tests as our basis for ensuring statistical validity. Table 16 above shows the results of our analysis.

The results of sample t-test indicate that among the five components of the expectations dimensions, the assurance dimension appeared to be marginally significant between Arabs and non-Arabs. Having a p-value less than 0.1 indicates that non-Arabs tend to have higher expectations in terms of Assurance dimension. Across all the other four dimensions, no statistically significant difference between Arabs and Non-Arabs was found. A study conducted in Thailand on airline service quality affecting post purchase behavioural intention by Lerrthaitrakul and Panjakajornsak (2014), highlighted that Assurance dimension referring to customers' feeling of security and their trust together with knowledge of airline staff had significant influence on consumers' post purchase behavioural intentions.

The focus group discussion and top management interviews highlighted that differences between Arabs and non-Arabs existed. The Arab passengers according to one of the top management of a well-known hybrid budget carrier in the Middle East discussed that '*passengers in this market have high expectations*'. It is important to note that there is an interesting divergent in the results of Arabs vs non-Arabs and future researchers should continue to research in this area to identify if the gap exists between the expectations of Arab and non-Arab passengers travelling with LCCs in the Middle East.

With respect to perceptions of actual service, we find that Arab's have significantly higher perceptions on two of the five dimensions: Empathy and Responsiveness. This could again be explained across cultural dimensions. Arab's in general have a strong preference for individual attention and care compared to non-Arabs. This would imply that Arab's tend to prefer higher level of empathy from the crew and solve any potential issues that may arise by themselves or around them.

This can again refer back to Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions, collectivist customer's desire harmony and interdependence in social relationships (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). They will therefore be more tolerant of mistakes and have lower expectations of reliability but will have a greater need for the service provider to show empathy, assurance and responsiveness. They will also have a greater need to be assured of the quality of service by using tangibles as surrogate evidence (Kueh and Voon, 2007). The result implies that, the Arab passengers while traveling with LCC experienced individual attention and care and therefore, significant difference was identified on Empathy dimension between the Arabs and non-Arabs.

There is also significant difference in the Responsive dimension signalling that Arabs view the service providers are high on responsiveness. Responsiveness is about willingness or readiness of employees or service providers to provide a service. The Arab passengers may have noticed willingness on the part of the crew in serving them in the right manner may it be giving them information or getting them food. The non-Arab passengers however experienced that, the crew or the service provider was less responsive i.e. less willing to provide the required service.

4.11.2. Gender t-test Table:

Out of the many aspects that can influence a customer's decision-making behaviour, one of the major factors is, 'Are there any differences in the quality expectations and perceptions toward LCC between male and female customers? To address this question, the independent t-test analysis was used to determine which service quality variables discriminate between male and female groups. The discriminant model developed in this study includes the service quality dimensions as the discriminating variables and gender of respondents (male versus female) as the categorical grouping variable.

Table 17: Descriptive Statistics – Gender Analysis

Group Statistics – Gender Analysis					
Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
E-Tangibility	M	362	4.256	0.572	0.030
	F	154	4.365	0.577	0.046
E-Reliability	M	362	4.503	0.503	0.026
	F	154	4.593	0.451	0.036
E-Assurance	M	362	4.394	0.628	0.033
	F	154	4.502	0.625	0.050
E-Empathy	M	362	4.231	0.603	0.032
	F	154	4.370	0.598	0.048
E-Responsiveness	M	362	4.312	0.551	0.029
	F	154	4.370	0.546	0.044
P-Tangibility	M	362	3.753	0.628	0.033
	F	154	3.760	0.688	0.055
P-Reliability	M	362	3.912	0.614	0.032
	F	154	3.847	0.688	0.055
P-Assurance	M	362	3.966	0.668	0.035
	F	154	3.963	0.780	0.063
P-Empathy	M	362	3.733	0.720	0.038
	F	154	3.651	0.832	0.067
P-Responsiveness	M	362	3.764	0.643	0.034
	F	154	3.634	0.738	0.059

Table 18: Independent t-test – Gender Analysis

Independent Samples Test - Gender Analysis									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
E-Tangibility	.05	.82	-1.98	514.00	.05	-.11	.06	-.22	.00
			-1.97	286.68	.05	-.11	.06	-.22	.00
E-Reliability	2.33	.13	-1.92	514.00	.06	-.09	.05	-.18	.00
			-2.00	320.28	.05	-.09	.04	-.18	.00
E-Assurance	.25	.62	-1.78	514.00	.07	-.11	.06	-.23	.01
			-1.79	289.87	.07	-.11	.06	-.23	.01
E-Empathy	.15	.70	-2.40	514.00	.02	-.14	.06	-.25	-.03
			-2.41	291.02	.02	-.14	.06	-.25	-.03
E-Responsiveness	.00	.99	-1.11	514.00	.27	-.06	.05	-.16	.05
			-1.11	290.99	.27	-.06	.05	-.16	.05
P-Tangibility	1.42	.23	-.10	514.00	.92	-.01	.06	-.13	.12
			-.10	266.45	.92	-.01	.06	-.13	.12
P-Reliability	3.60	.06	1.05	514.00	.29	.06	.06	-.06	.18
			1.01	261.57	.31	.06	.06	-.06	.19
P-Assurance	3.10	.08	.04	514.00	.97	.00	.07	-.13	.14
			.04	252.97	.97	.00	.07	-.14	.14
P-Empathy	2.51	.11	1.13	514.00	.26	.08	.07	-.06	.22
			1.06	255.09	.29	.08	.08	-.07	.23
P-Responsiveness	1.52	.22	2.01	514.00	.04	.13	.06	.00	.26
			1.91	256.37	.06	.13	.07	.00	.27

In the descriptive analysis, mean differences for male and female respondents were calculated for the service quality expectations and perceptions. There have been several studies conducted on gender difference and service quality, which shows that there are observable differences in how expectations and perceptions of men and women. The result of the t-test are highlighted in the above Tables 17 and 18. The results indicate that out of the five dimensions under expectations women tend to have significantly higher

expectations with respect to Tangibility, Reliability Assurance and Empathy. While Responsiveness dimension had no significant difference between male and female. This result was different than a research conducted by Daniel et al. 2010 where it was found that there was no significant difference found between male and female customers.

The Tangibility dimension identified significantly difference between male and female. The reason being that females generally have higher expectations of physical facilities such as interior of an aircraft, compared to males. The Reliability dimension also was found to be significantly different; the female passengers expected reliable service compared to male passengers. Reliable service in terms of clear information when asked, safe and secure aircraft and on-time performance. There was significant difference identified in the Assurance dimension as well. The female passengers expected more assurance for the staff of LCC compared to male passengers (Tolpa, 2012).

The next area where a significant difference was found was Empathy; where women had higher expectations towards empathy compared to men. Women in general expect somebody to empathise with them if they are in need or especially when handling very young children. This was also proved by a study conducted by Tolpa (2012) in which it was found that the end of flight experience should not end at the aircraft door. Female travellers are keen on receiving more help from a carrier upon arrival, since they may feel less secure.

In the perception area, the only dimension found to be significantly different between men and women was whether they felt that the service providers were more responsive towards them. The men perceived that the crew on board the aircraft were more responsive in

handling them. A similar study done on gender difference by Westwood et al. (2000), identified that the attitude of flight attendants have a tendency to pay more attention to men compared to women.

4.11.3. Young Versus Old t-test Table:

The next set of t-tests young and older groups of passengers travelling with LCC. For these tests young versus old t-test young was considered to be anyone under 30 years of age. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 19 in the form of descriptive analysis and Table 20 highlights the t-test. This test was to check if the young had different expectations compared to old passengers. Generally, the younger segment of passengers, were less satisfied with the in-flight service quality compared to passengers belonging to the 30+ age segment. The dimensions of service quality were evaluated based on mean differences and out of all the five dimensions, only two dimensions; Reliability and Responsiveness were found to be significantly different among the young and the old passengers.

Table 19: Descriptive Statistics – Young vs Old Analysis

Group Statistics – Young vs Old Passenger's Analysis					
Young Vs Non Young		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
E-Tangibility	Young	273	4.28	0.57	0.03
	Old	243	4.30	0.59	0.04
E-Reliability	Young	273	4.49	0.52	0.03
	Old	243	4.57	0.45	0.03
E-Assurance	Young	273	4.39	0.66	0.04
	Old	243	4.47	0.59	0.04
E-Empathy	Young	273	4.26	0.58	0.04
	Old	243	4.29	0.63	0.04
E-Responsiveness	Young	273	4.28	0.57	0.03
	Old	243	4.38	0.52	0.03
P-Tangibility	Young	273	3.78	0.64	0.04
	Old	243	3.73	0.66	0.04
P-Reliability	Young	273	3.86	0.66	0.04
	Old	243	3.92	0.61	0.04
P-Assurance	Young	273	3.95	0.68	0.04
	Old	243	3.99	0.73	0.05
P-Empathy	Young	273	3.73	0.77	0.05
	Old	243	3.68	0.74	0.05
P-Responsiveness	Young	273	3.75	0.69	0.04
	Old	243	3.70	0.66	0.04

Table 20: Independent t-test – Young vs Old Analysis

Independent Samples Test– Young vs Old Passenger's Analysis									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
E-Tangibility	.23	.63	.44	514.00	.66	.02	.05	-.08	.12
			.44	502.88	.66	.02	.05	-.08	.12
E-Reliability	.77	.38	1.92	514.00	.05	.08	.04	.00	.17
			1.94	513.70	.05	.08	.04	.00	.17
E-Assurance	.35	.55	1.46	514.00	.15	.08	.06	-.03	.19
			1.47	513.98	.14	.08	.05	-.03	.19
E-Empathy	5.67	.02	.46	514.00	.64	.02	.05	-.08	.13
			.46	494.49	.64	.02	.05	-.08	.13
E-Responsiveness	.41	.52	2.04	514.00	.04	.10	.05	.00	.19
			2.05	513.88	.04	.10	.05	.00	.19
P-Tangibility	.15	.70	-.89	514.00	.37	-.05	.06	-.16	.06
			-.89	503.15	.38	-.05	.06	-.16	.06
P-Reliability	.82	.37	1.06	514.00	.29	.06	.06	-.05	.17
			1.06	512.66	.29	.06	.06	-.05	.17
P-Assurance	.83	.36	.69	514.00	.49	.04	.06	-.08	.16
			.68	496.31	.50	.04	.06	-.08	.16
P-Empathy	.00	.97	-.85	514.00	.40	-.06	.07	-.19	.07
			-.85	511.64	.39	-.06	.07	-.19	.07
P-Responsiveness	.84	.36	-.92	514.00	.36	-.05	.06	-.17	.06
			-.92	510.58	.36	-.05	.06	-.17	.06

In the Reliability dimension the old passengers were found to have higher expectations than young passengers. The people living in the Middle East are 60 to 70% expatriates coming from other countries in order to make a career (Clawson, 2009). Older passengers generally have travelled frequently in the past with luxury carriers as there was a lack of other options. They always expect reliable services as their expectations higher compared to younger passengers.

The older passengers might be in a supervisory level position where they expect a timely task done and rightly done the first time. Similar expectations are held while they travel with a LCC i.e. the crew should perform services at the correct time, are accurate in giving information and in a timely manner. The young passengers on the other hand may have had less exposure to travelling as yet. Also, it may not matter to them that crew spent more time in serving them or were not able to answer their query accurately.

Another dimension where a significant mean difference was found was in the Responsiveness dimension. Again the older passengers expected higher level of responsiveness from the airline or the crew of the airline than the young passengers. Responsiveness can be shown by willingness to help or trying to solve the problems of passengers. The older passengers generally expect more support from the crew on board in terms of location of seating as well as providing other basic information.

The young passengers mostly prefer to locate their seats and manage their other requirements with minimum support from the cabin crew. While administering the questionnaires at the airport, one of the older passenger waiting for her next flight discussed that, she wasn't give appropriate service even though she was sick. The passenger also discussed that she was not allowed to sit next to her daughter even though they requested the crew for an arrangement with other passenger. She also expressed that even though it was a long flight for her, she was not even offered water on board. When the passenger asked for a blanket from the crew she was told rudely that we do not offer blankets on this flight.

4.11.4. Business Versus Non-Business t-test Table

During national recessions, the market niches of legacy and low cost carriers converge. Shrinking corporate travel budgets led business passengers to shift from legacy to low cost carriers in search of value (Baker, 2013). It was necessary to investigate the differences in expectations and perceptions between Business and Leisure travellers using t-tests. Passengers were divided into business passengers and all other reasons for travel were considered as leisure passengers.

Table 21: Descriptive Statistics – Business vs Non- Business Analysis

Group Statistics – Business vs non Business Analysis					
Business vs Leisure		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
E-Tangibility	Non-Business	374	4.27	0.61	0.03
	Business	142	4.35	0.48	0.04
E-Reliability	Non-Business	374	4.50	0.50	0.03
	Business	142	4.60	0.45	0.04
E-Assurance	Non-Business	374	4.39	0.65	0.03
	Business	142	4.52	0.56	0.05
E-Empathy	Non-Business	374	4.27	0.61	0.03
	Business	142	4.28	0.60	0.05
E-Responsiveness	Non-Business	374	4.34	0.56	0.03
	Business	142	4.31	0.52	0.04
P-Tangibility	Non-Business	374	3.74	0.66	0.03
	Business	142	3.79	0.61	0.05
P-Reliability	Non-Business	374	3.88	0.65	0.03
	Business	142	3.93	0.61	0.05
P-Assurance	Non-Business	374	3.93	0.73	0.04
	Business	142	4.05	0.63	0.05
P-Empathy	Non-Business	374	3.69	0.79	0.04
	Business	142	3.76	0.65	0.05
P-Responsiveness	Non-Business	374	3.72	0.71	0.04
	Business	142	3.73	0.59	0.05

Table 22: Independent t-test – Business vs Non- Business Analysis

Independent Samples Test – Business vs non Business Analysis									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
E-Tangibility	4.61	0.03	-1.52	514.00	0.13	-0.09	0.06	-0.20	0.03
			-1.68	318.27	0.09	-0.09	0.05	-0.19	0.01
E-Reliability	0.03	0.85	-2.01	514.00	0.04	-0.10	0.05	-0.19	0.00
			-2.10	278.81	0.04	-0.10	0.05	-0.19	-0.01
E-Assurance	0.74	0.39	-2.01	514.00	0.04	-0.12	0.06	-0.25	0.00
			-2.14	290.90	0.03	-0.12	0.06	-0.24	-0.01
E-Empathy	1.23	0.27	-0.18	514.00	0.86	-0.01	0.06	-0.13	0.11
			-0.18	259.53	0.86	-0.01	0.06	-0.13	0.11
E-Responsiveness	0.02	0.89	0.45	514.00	0.65	0.02	0.05	-0.08	0.13
			0.47	272.78	0.64	0.02	0.05	-0.08	0.13
P-Tangibility	0.88	0.35	-0.71	514.00	0.48	-0.04	0.06	-0.17	0.08
			-0.73	271.80	0.47	-0.04	0.06	-0.17	0.08
P-Reliability	1.05	0.30	-0.77	514.00	0.44	-0.05	0.06	-0.17	0.08
			-0.79	270.94	0.43	-0.05	0.06	-0.17	0.07
P-Assurance	1.27	0.26	-1.73	514.00	0.08	-0.12	0.07	-0.26	0.02
			-1.84	289.36	0.07	-0.12	0.07	-0.25	0.01
P-Empathy	5.07	0.02	-0.92	514.00	0.36	-0.07	0.07	-0.21	0.08
			-1.00	306.17	0.32	-0.07	0.07	-0.20	0.07
P-Responsiveness	4.70	0.03	-0.09	514.00	0.93	-0.01	0.07	-0.14	0.12
			-0.10	304.32	0.92	-0.01	0.06	-0.13	0.11

It was interesting to find that in the expectations section two dimensions i.e. Reliability and Assurance differed significantly between classes of travellers. Business travellers naturally value time of arrival and departure as they travel early in the morning and return back in the evening from their meetings and other business related tasks. However, leisure passengers are more relaxed and prefer cheaper tickets compared to on-time arrival and

departure (Budd and Ison, 2016). This result matches the research conducted by Mason (2001) that business travellers gave highest importance to punctuality and frequency.

The business travellers also expect that the service providers provide assurance compared to the leisure travellers according to the t-test table. The Assurance dimension is important for the business travellers as they look for competency and credibility among the crew on board or staff of the LCC (Gilbert and Wong, 2003). Business travellers do expect that they are provided with accurate information since they may have certain plans and they do not want to be inconvenienced by delays in flights. However, people travelling for leisure are more relaxed and have flexible plans, they are ready to wait or accept that the crew takes time to get them the right information (Gilbert and Wong, 2003.

In the perception section, only one dimension, i.e. Assurance, was found to have a significant difference between business and leisure passengers. It was highlighted that passengers travelling for leisure purpose experienced higher assurance from the airlines and their staff compared to the business passengers' experience. This highlights that there is a significant gap between the expectations Assurance dimension and perceptions Assurance dimension for business travellers. It also means that the business travellers' may through unsatisfactory experience while dealing with LCC may be due to flight delays, incompetent staff and crew members, or were not served as they expected.

4.11.5. Paired Sample t-test on Expectations versus Perceptions

The purpose of Paired Samples Test is a comparison of means across the service quality related questions of expected and perceived service. Hence, the objective is to analyse and

discuss the relative difference between the means of expectations vs. perceptions in order to assess the 'Gap' among the service quality attributes (Table no. 23).

Table 23: Descriptive Statistics – Paired Sample t-test

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
E-Tangibility	516	4.29	0.58
P-Tangibility	516	3.76	0.65
E-Reliability	516	4.53	0.49
P-Reliability	516	3.89	0.64
E-Assurance	516	4.43	0.63
P-Assurance	516	3.97	0.70
E-Empathy	516	4.27	0.60
P-Empathy	516	3.71	0.76
E-Responsiveness	516	4.33	0.55
P-Responsiveness	516	3.73	0.67

Table 24: Paired Sample Test – Expectations and Perceptions

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	E-Tangibility – P-Tangibility	.53	.75	.03	.47	.60	16.21	515.00	.00
Pair 2	E-Reliability – P-Reliability	.64	.73	.03	.57	.70	19.77	515.00	.00
Pair 3	E-Assurance – P-Assurance	.46	.85	.04	.39	.53	12.36	515.00	.00
Pair 4	E-Empathy – P-Empathy	.56	.83	.04	.49	.64	15.44	515.00	.00
Pair 5	E-Responsiveness – P-Responsiveness	.60	.76	.03	.54	.67	17.96	515.00	.00

A comparison of means could be carried out by simply balancing diverse means against each other. However, there needs to be statistical assurance that the difference between the means is real and has not occurred by chance, t-tests are applicable in the statistical assurance of any difference between the means. The specific paired-sample t-test is further suitable, as the purpose is to examine the difference in two related means (Jensen & Knudsen, 2006). Therefore, a paired-sample t-test is carried out for each service quality dimension in the modified research framework.

The Table 24 highlights that all five dimensions have a statistically significant difference between expectations and perceptions. This highlights that the passengers travelling with LCC have higher expectations than perceptions for each of the five dimensions. However, unfortunately their expectations are not met and, therefore, the passenger's perception are lower than their expectation scores in all dimensions namely: Tangibility, Reliability. Assurance, Empathy and Responsiveness.

4.12. Chapter Summary

To summarise this chapter, detailed data analysis was carried out using a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods. In the first part of the discussions chapter, demographic information was discussed since one of the objectives of this research was to investigate the development of LCCs due to demographic changes in the Middle East. Some specific observations regarding expectations and perceptions were discussed as well.

In the next part, the expectations and perceptions of the passenger results were compared, with each dimension and sub-dimension in detail, it is the best way of analysing results in the case of triangulation method. The comparisons highlighted gaps between expectations and perceptions, particularly for the tangibility and reliability dimensions. The in-depth interview responses indicated that passenger and manager perceptions match in some cases, such as regarding reliable aircraft and on-time performance, but it is also important to consider that the quantitative results, where passengers were not very satisfied with the on-time performance of some LCCs. This indicated that there are gaps concerning receiving clear information regarding delays, on-time performance and changes in policy.

Another area where a gap was identified was LCCs keeping promises, with passengers claiming that LCCs have not kept their promises. The largest gap concerned LCC on-time performance, which is a core service requirement for any LCC, irrespective of the country it is travelling from. LCCs in the Middle East need to work on this area and reduce the gaps between the management and passenger perceptions. Passengers also identified gaps in food and entertainment, where they were not very satisfied with the type of food provided or the complete lack of food in some cases.

Similarly, the passengers travelling by LCCs in the Middle East expect some kind of entertainment, such as a magazine or a newspaper. In the final part of the chapter, opportunities and challenges of LCCs were also discussed as a part of qualitative analysis of the senior executives and additional variables identified during the research were discussed in detail.

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted which confirmed that the LCCSQUAL model can be tested using the five dimensions originally tested by Parasuraman et al. (1988) however, the variables need to be adapted. A t-test on Arab vs. Non-Arab highlighted that non- Arabs have higher expectations on Assurance dimensions compared to Arabs as well as in the perceptions area the Arabs had high perception in the Empathy and Responsiveness dimensions.

Similarly, t-test were also conducted on Male vs Female to identify if there were any differences of opinion, females had higher expectations compared to male passengers on Tangibility and Empathy dimensions whereas, in the perception section male passengers experienced higher Responsiveness from the service providers compared to female's perception. The t-test on young vs old highlighted that passengers above 30 years had high expectations on Reliability and Responsiveness dimensions compared to young passengers.

The passengers traveling for the purpose of business had high expectations on Reliability and Assurance dimensions compared to passengers traveling for leisure purpose. Likewise, the business passengers also had experienced low perception on Assurance dimension which highlights that there is a major gap based on the t-test conducted. Using a paired sample test on all the dimensions of expectations and perceptions highlighted that there are gaps in each dimension of the service provided by LCC and this may lead to passenger dissatisfaction and negative behavioural intention.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

This is the final chapter of this PhD study, and it summarises the overall results of the research in relation to its research questions and objectives. As shown throughout, this research focused on developing a new model named LCCSQUAL. The chapter also provides recommendations to the LCC management based on the qualitative and quantitative research findings, such as on-time performance and providing clear information to the passengers. Every research has its own challenges, and some of the challenges faced by the researcher were discussed in the chapter as limitations. In the final part of the chapter, recommendations were suggested to the future researchers.

This research investigated passenger expectations and perceptions of LCC service quality by adapting the SERVQUAL model and creating an industry-specific model (Ladhari, 2008) as well as testing it in a new cultural setting (O'Cass and Carlsson, 2011). A multi methodology process was utilised to produce four data sets: interviews to obtain qualitative data from individual passengers who were regular travellers on LCCs, focus group interviews with a group of Emiratis (Arab passengers) first time travellers on LCCs and in-depth interviews with senior executives of LCC airlines.

In the quantitative method, a researcher assisted questionnaire was given to 540 LCC passenger respondents to obtain information regarding their expectations and perceptions about the service quality of LCCs in the Middle East. Thus, using a multi methodology enabled triangulation to better support the findings and conclusions because they could be

enriched and strengthened by the various approaches, thereby making the findings more valid and reliable (Saunders et al. 2007).

The data acquired from interviews with regular LCC passengers, senior executives of LCCs and focus group with Emirati first time travellers on LCCs provided major support for designing the quantitative survey questionnaire. The original five dimensions of the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al. 1988) along with new sub-dimensions/variables that were developed based on the interview responses, and literature review formed the final survey questionnaire. The questionnaire results either rejected or confirmed specific aspects of the information gained from the interviews and literature review.

The next section will focus on discussing the research objectives and emphasising the answers to the research questions. The chapter will summarise the newly developed LCCSQUAL model, along with recommendations for future research in this field, as well as major and key recommendations to the LCC senior management. The chapter will also highlight the limitations to this research dissertation.

This PhD study set out to answer the research questions:

1. What are the key service quality determinants of customer perceived service quality and customer satisfaction of LCCs in a new cultural background i.e. in the Middle East?
2. Which LCC service quality dimensions are the best predictors of overall perceived service quality in the Middle East?
3. Which service quality model ensures the appropriate measurement of LCC service quality in the Middle East since it is culturally different?

4. Have demographic changes such as increased expatriate population influenced the growth of LCCs in the Middle East region?

In order to answer the questions, six objectives were set and met through the literature review, research methodology, and data analysis and findings. The objectives were:

1. To explore the key determinants of service quality in the Low Cost Carrier (LCC) in the Middle East region;
2. To propose a conceptual model for service quality of LCC services by identifying its key antecedents in a new cultural setting;
3. To conduct pragmatic primary research to determine the interrelationships between the expectations and perceptions LCC passengers have based on the industry specific proposed model;
4. To construct the conceptual linkages between constructs of service quality and customer satisfaction;
5. To recommend service quality dimensions influencing overall LCC service quality, leading to customer satisfaction;
6. To evaluate the impact of changes in the passenger demographic factors on the growth of LCCs.

5.1.1. Key findings and contribution to knowledge

5.1.1.1. Expectations and Perceptions of Passengers

The first objective of this PhD study, was, to explore the key determinants of service quality in the Low Cost Carrier (LCC) in the Middle East region. The literature review in chapter three confirmed that, it is important to understand the expectations and perceptions of passengers travelling on LCCs Aksoy et al. (2003). The review also concluded that,

there is a lack of research conducted on service quality in the Middle East region compared to other countries (Martinez et al. 2012; Neal and Kassens, 2011), since most studies mainly investigated Western and Asian countries to test the SERVQUAL and other service quality models (Sultan and Simpson, 2000).

The literature review on Low Cost Carriers presented in chapter five, contributed that, passengers in the Middle East have different expectations than passengers in other regions. The passengers have been exposed to a more luxurious living style, and they have been mostly travelled with legacy carriers [Full Service Carriers] airlines like Emirates Airlines and Qatar Airways. Therefore, their expectations and perceptions have been influenced by a higher level of service provided by such airlines. In contrast, LCCs are a fairly new, albeit growing concept in the Middle East, therefore, many passengers may not yet have accepted the reality that LCCs provides less or in some cases no services, as discussed in the data analysis chapter seven.

This study can be considered as the first systematic study of the specific impact of linkage between passenger expectations and perceptions relating to the importance of service quality in selection of a Low Cost Carrier in the Middle East. While the study results can by no means be considered the only ones that can accurately predict passengers' likelihood of selecting specific LCC to travel, it does give a reasonable expectation of how passengers will react with regard to their decision-making based upon service quality delivery.

5.1.1.2. A modified SERVQUAL model – LCCSQUAL

The second and third research objectives was, 'to propose a conceptual model for LCC service quality by identifying its key antecedents' and 'to conduct pragmatic primary

research to determine the inter-relationships between the expectations and perceptions LCC passengers based on the proposed model'. These objectives contributed to acquiring new knowledge to meet this PhD criteria by developing a new model based on the multi method approach to measure the LCCs service quality based on a passenger perspective.

This PhD study investigated the service quality of LCCs in the Middle East. It argued that the SERVQUAL model was the most frequent model utilised to embark upon the demonstration of service quality assessment from the end-user point of view within the aviation industry. However, the study found that recently more literature had emerged which offered contradictory findings about the SERVQUAL's functionality Ladhari (2010) and Khan (2010).

Despite its generalisation, the model suffers from several major conceptual, methodological, and empirical drawbacks. Against this background, more completed model, on the conceptualisation of service quality helps to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter. This research has been undertaken to review the literature on service quality measurement and to evolve with a service quality model which is closer to evaluating service quality of LCCs. The study is designed to measure customer perceived service quality at the LCC services through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research.

In chapter three, several service quality models were discussed including the criticisms and validity of the models. This PhD study was initially based on the SERVQUAL model designed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) for evaluating LCC service quality. However, it gradually became clear in chapter three, section 3.3 that, even though the SERVQUAL dimensions matched the context of this study, other sub-dimensions needed to be

developed to be made industry specific (Ladhari, 2008) and that's the contribution to knowledge set out for a PhD degree.

It has been suggested by Ekiz and Bavik (2008); Ladhari (2008); Ladhari (2010) and O'Cass and Carlsson (2011) that, developing industry-specific scales for measuring service quality may be more appropriate than relying on a single generic scale and testing in a new cultural setting. This argument was also supported by Dabholkar et al. (1996), who claimed: "It appears that a measure of service quality across industries is not feasible; therefore, future research on service quality should involve the development of industry-specific measures of service quality".

Therefore, this PhD research followed the suggestions of Ekiz and Bavik (2008); Ladhari (2008) and Ladhari (2010) and determined the inter-relationship between the expectations and perceptions of LCC passengers. This study was the first systematic study of the specific impact of linkage between expectations and perceived performance relating to the importance of service quality of Low Cost Carrier. While the study results can by no means be considered the only ones that can accurately predict passenger likelihood of selecting an LCC, it does give a reasonable expectation of how passengers will react with regard to their decision-making based upon service quality delivery.

A modified SERVQUAL model has been created which adds to the existing knowledge of marketing and service quality as well as it is a valuable contribution in this field. The model has been designed based on the data analysis results (Qualitative and Quantitative), and the model would be known as LOW COST CARRIER SERVICE QUALITY (LCCSQUAL) model. (Khan, 2010) and (Carlson and O'Cass, 2011) suggested that the

service quality model should be investigated in a new cultural setting, therefore, to fulfil this recommendation the modified service quality LCCSQUAL model (D'Silva, 2015) was developed and tested in the Middle East; hence based in a new cultural setting. This study is the first of its kind in the Middle East region and the first of its kind in the LCC market worldwide. The five dimensions and twenty-five variables were tested with the help of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

The other research objectives of this PhD study were, "to construct the conceptual linkages between constructs of service quality and customer satisfaction"; and "to recommend service quality dimensions influencing overall LCC service quality, leading to customer satisfaction. These objectives were achieved through literature review and research methodology chapters by following the triangulation or multi methodology approach. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed such as conducting in-depth interviews, and focus group discussion. During the in-depth passenger interviews and focus group discussed in chapter seven (see 7.7), there were several variables discussed by the respondents deemed to be important while deciding to travel with LCC therefore, LCC specific variables were included and investigated in the form of a self-administered questionnaire survey.

A strong concept was stressed by the respondents during the in-depth interviews (see chapter seven, 7.8) that, the culture they belonged to influenced their expectations when deciding to travel, along with word-of-mouth, personal experience, past experience and technology. However, there is no importance given to customer's culture in the SERVQUAL model, originally designed and created by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and modified in 1988. This weakness of the SERVQUAL model was pointed out by the study

conducted by (Imrie et al. 2000; Raajpoot, 2004 and D'Silva et al. 2012) therefore, it is necessary to include culture while evaluating passenger expectations and perceptions of LCC service quality or customers' expectations of a service.

According to the consumer behaviour model (Blackwell et al. 2001), culture is an important environmental influence in consumer decision making. Therefore, it seemed significant to include culture in this study as one of the factors that might influence passenger expectations and perceptions.

Technology and social media have become a reality in today's lifestyle and airline passengers have embraced it as one of the means of receiving and giving information. Therefore, modern service quality models should include the influence of technology on passenger expectations and perceptions. As discussed by the respondents during the interview that, if the airline has passenger friendly website, entertainment in the flight then they would be very satisfied. Also strong evidence has been presented in recent top management discussion in business seminars and conferences that Middle East passengers use high ratio of smart phones and tablets devices in flight. Therefore, the newly developed LCCSQUAL model includes technology as another influence on passenger's expectations at the time of making a decision to travel on LCCs or other services.

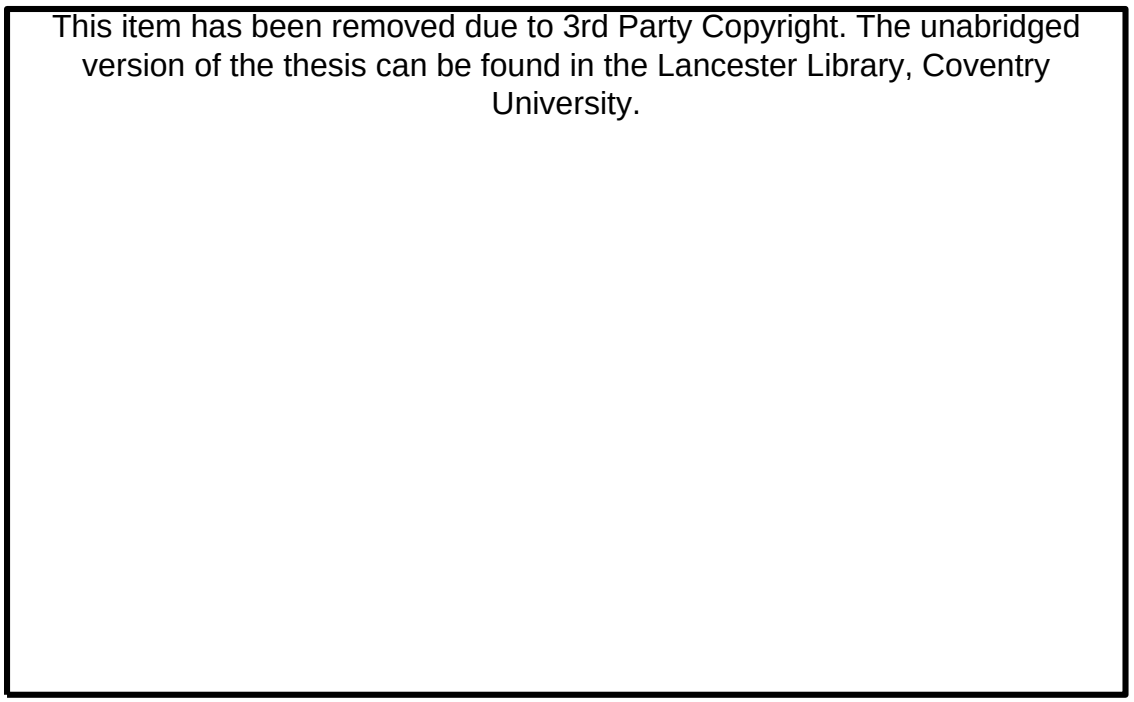
Both the in-depth interview passengers as well as focus group discussants identified that their perceptions are influenced by the airport service quality before experiencing the airline service quality. The respondents discussed variables such as convenience, airport staff, and airport facilities such as check in and check out, baggage counters were frequently mentioned during the interviews. The respondents discussed that, the variables

influenced them to take major decisions about whether to travel from nearest airport to save time, and experience poor airport service or to go for a far airport which has better service. Therefore, based on the qualitative data analysis of this study, another important dimension that was included in the modified SERVQUAL model in measuring LCC service quality was 'airport service quality', as this being an important dimension for passenger decision making while travelling with LCCs or competing legacy carrier.

The results from both quantitative and qualitative analysis highlighted that all the SERVQUAL dimensions, namely tangibility, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness tested were valid measures of LCC service quality. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis confirmed the LCCSQUAL model with five dimensions and twenty five items can be used in measuring the LCC service quality in the future. However, a suggestion for the future research can be made to combine assurance and empathy dimensions and redesigned as a single dimension named as the 'staff attitude' dimension since they both target the attitude and behaviour of staff towards the passengers.

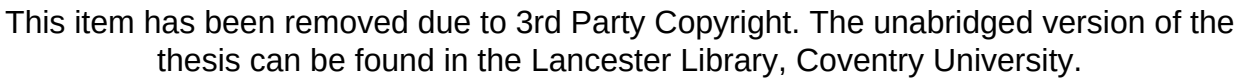
An additional dimension that was added to the revised model 'Airport Service Quality' or 'LCC Airport Service Quality', based on the results of in-depth interview and focus group discussion. According to the passengers' airport service quality is a major influence on a passenger before deciding the airline service quality. However, all the constructs mentioned in the discussion should be tested in the future, along with other recommendations stated in this chapter. By including all the factors that emerged from the research findings, this PhD study created a new model, LCCSQUAL, as summarised in Figure 25 below [the highlighted boxes are the contribution to knowledge]. For clear reference the original model has been shown in figure 24.

Figure 24: The Original SERVQUAL Model



(Source: Parasuraman et al. 1988)

Figure 25: Low Cost Carrier Service Quality Model (LCCSQUAL)



(Source: D'Silva, 2015)

The above two figures 24 and 25 highlight the transition from the original SERVQUAL model designed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and modified LCCSQUAL model by D'Silva (2015) show the contribution made by the researcher by adding Airport Quality as new dimension to be tested in the future. The additional dimension 'Airport Quality' is a result of qualitative data findings. Adding Airport Quality to LCCSQUAL is important to improve the experiences of the passengers. The LCCSQUAL with the new dimension should be tested in the future.

The last objective of this PhD study was, "to evaluate the impact of changes in the passenger demographic factors on the growth of LCCs". In chapter seven, findings and discussion (see 7.3.) demographic analysis concluded that, passengers travelling in LCCs is between the age group 20 to 30 years, which means, the younger generation is more often travelling and would prefer to travel in LCC. Another result, i.e. occupation highlighted some interesting facts that highest number of travellers were not labour class but professionals and people from managerial position (see 4.3.2.) also concluded that demographic factors are influencing the growth of LCCs.

The female passengers have increased than in the past and their expectations while travelling are high compared to the male passengers (Tolpa, 2012). The female passengers had high expectations on Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance and Empathy dimensions based on the sample t-test results. This segment of the population is becoming important for airline business and therefore, the airlines should understand the needs of female passengers. Similarly, business passengers are travelling frequently with LCC and their expectations were noted as high in Reliability and Assurance dimensions. The airlines

have to attract more and more business passengers as they are frequent flyers and can keep giving business to the airlines.

Independent sample test was conducted on Arabs and non-Arabs as the hypothesis was based that Arabs have higher expectations than non-Arabs. The qualitative analysis proved the hypothesis however, the t-test did not have any significant difference between Arab and non-Arabs expectations due to smaller Arab population travelling with LCCs. This clearly means that it is an interesting area of future research and such research will increase awareness about attracting more Arab passengers on Middle Eastern LCCs.

5.2. Recommendations to LCCs in the Middle East

The LCC model adopted in the Middle East market is unique compared to other international markets in terms of the service provided to the passengers. Middle East LCCs have taken a dynamic approach to satisfy their passengers and increase their loyalty towards LCCs. However, this is just the beginning, with challenges to come up in the future especially due to increased competition. The findings of this research are important not only in terms of adding new and contribute to knowledge by contributing to the academic research world, but also for LCCs in the Middle East market because they can utilise this information as support for improving service quality based on passenger expectations and perceptions. Among the key implications for LCCs are the following:

5.2.1. High expectations on Service Quality:

LCCs in the Middle East must understand that the segment they cater to include high, middle- and low-income passengers, therefore, pricing is the main tool to continue to

compete in this market with the Full Cost Carriers (FSC). However, passengers in the Middle East region have high expectations, even if they pay low fare, since, the passengers in this market have been long pampered by FSCs such as Emirates airlines and Qatar airways. In this case, passengers in the Middle East would prefer to choose an LCC that provides better service quality, if competitors' prices are similar.

LCCs in the Middle East should pay careful attention to tangibility factors especially to attract more female passengers, such as providing modern aircraft, because the younger generation and female passengers prefer to travel with modern, technologically advanced aircraft, which could even include windowless aircraft in the future. LCCs must therefore invest in better, fuel-efficient, and modern-looking aircraft.

In addition, passengers value cleanliness and hygiene in the aircraft, therefore, LCC staff should be well trained to maximise their efforts to maintain high levels of hygiene. Passengers also expect that, food on-board, whether free or paid must be offered as well as they also expect some variety in the food/meals provided on board. Similarly, they expect basic on-board entertainment facilities such as a magazine or a newspaper to be provided to reduce the boredom of flight.

5.2.2. Focus on Reliability

LCC passengers such as business and old passengers place a high value on reliability, such as on-time performance, a safe aircraft, receiving luggage on-time and a friendly website. LCCs must pay particular attention to being on time since passengers trust them to be on time, if this trust is broken, then the passengers may prefer to take other travel options such as travelling to Bahrain or Saudi by a car. Finally, the safety of the aircraft and the

safety equipment used must be of a specified standard to make passengers feel confident, comfortable and safe while travelling with an LCC.

Passengers' travelling on LCCs expect that they receive their luggage on time since it could be that they need to reach a specific destination or an important appointment therefore, the airlines should give particular importance to getting the passenger's luggage on time. Another important variable was the website of the LCC, an organised webpage is a great marketing tool in itself, therefore, the passenger's would be satisfied if they are directed correctly on the airlines website as well as the information is clear with less complication.

5.2.3. Staff Attitude

The interview respondents frequently made reference to improving staff attitude especially the Arab, female and old passengers, stating that LCC staff should receive more training to understand passenger needs and communicate with them in case of any emergency or other changes such as change in the boarding gate. The passengers on LCC expect to be provided them with timely information about policy changes and delays or changes in flight timings. Another important passenger expectations were that the staff should be polite and courteous at all times.

LCCs need to place a major emphasis on hiring new staff with better attitude, especially when recruiting cabin crew, since they may be unable to understand the needs of passengers if the crew has a negative attitude towards the passengers. This could lead to customer dissatisfaction and also a negative impact on future purchase intentions. LCCs should implement various methods of collecting regular information about passenger

expectations and perceptions, to identify if the LCC management is managing to fulfil passenger requirements.

5.2.4. Creating awareness about LCC model

A key recommendation to LCCs in the Middle East is that, they need to create more awareness about the Low Cost Carrier concept in the Middle East market since, it is growing concept however, as passenger expectations are currently unrealistically high regarding the services they expect to be provided. Therefore, LCCs should make continuous effort through social media and other marketing strategies such as demonstrations like road shows to help passengers learn to differentiate between legacy carrier services and LCC services.

5.3. Limitations of the study and final conclusion:

Various shortcomings of this research are discussed in detail in this part of the chapter. These challenges reveal some of the pressing issues that a researcher has to face during the research process in the Middle East context.

5.3.1. Research Culture in the Middle East

The research culture in the Middle East is not as developed as in the West and Asia, as this has been highlighted by several researchers doing work in the region. The challenges facing researchers in the Middle East has been recognised by Robertson et al. (2011) and Balakrishnan (2013) as studies done and published from the Middle East and North Africa

(MENA) region accounts for less than 1 percent of globally published research in business, management and accounting.

The researcher experienced this in various settings, for example, when it came to data collection this was a real challenge, most emails sent to LCC management/staff to participate in the survey remained unanswered even after repeated reminders, while those who did respond were not ready to participate. For example, an airline was not prepared to share even basic information regarding its service strategies. On the other hand, when the researcher attended a foreign Aviation Industry Business Conference senior LCC executives from Asia were supportive and even expressed their happiness that such a research was being conducted.

Another challenge faced when the researcher tried to interview passengers during her travel on LCC from UAE to India. The researcher requested the co-passengers to share their experiences regarding their travel experiences on LCCs flight, but it was strange to note that passengers were unwilling to talk for fear of losing their jobs in the Middle East.

5.3.2. Problems Faced during the Field work phase:

The researcher attended two aviation conferences, one in Singapore and the other in Dubai to conduct interviews with executives of LCCs from the Middle East and some senior executives from the Asian LCCs were also approached. Among all the top and senior executives approached to be interviewed, only one CEO of an LCC from the Middle East was ready to support this research study. The initial interview conducted with the LCC management team sounded positive, to the point of allowing the researcher to enter the airport in the city the airline was based in as well as access to travel on-board the airline

on all its sectors to carry out interviews and surveys. However, it was latter realised by the researcher that the LCC who had promised to support was not keen on moving ahead with the proposal. The LCCs top authorities were contacted, however, they did not intervene much in the process neither the replies were supportive.

The researcher had to identify different options, such as sending questionnaires to different social groups, although, many other airlines were contacted but they were unwilling to support the researcher. Fortunately, however, one of the airport managers at Dubai International airport was very supportive and helped the researcher gain permission to enter Dubai Airport Terminal 2, a terminal dedicated to LCCs. However, due to the strictly controlled environment and high security at the airport, the researcher was permitted to enter the airport for five days originally granted permission for 2 weeks to complete the field work.

5.4. Recommendations for future research

There are many ways through which future researchers can continue to develop this area of research as well as develop a research culture in the Middle East. The researchers must use multi-cases, cross-cultural analysis, behavioural studies, and industry specific studies.

1. Future research should include airport service quality while researching LCC service quality since the findings of this study suggest that it has a major impact on passenger expectations and perceptions.

2. The dimensions and variables identified in the original SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al. (1988) are not adequate to measure LCC service quality, therefore, it is important to test the newly developed LCCSQUAL model to measure the service quality of LCCs in other countries as well. It is recommended to utilise LCCSQUAL, developed by D'Silva (2015) to accurately measure LCC service quality than using the SERVQUAL model.
3. It is important that the future researchers undertake cross-cultural studies to identify the importance of culture in service quality as it will be an important dimension for passengers while expecting a certain level of service quality. Such study will assist LCC service providers to customise their service attributes and maximise customer satisfaction.
4. It is also recommended that such studies should be shared with the relevant LCC organisations since it will provide them with an insight about passenger expectations and perceptions. Such studies should bridge the gap between academics and industry knowledge.
5. Future researchers should conduct more research in the Middle East, especially in the aviation industry and its service quality, since it is an important revenue generator that supports economic development.
6. It is recommended that future studies should focus on developing alternative industry-specific measures of service quality to match the expectations, perceptions and customer satisfaction. This can be done by further modifying the original SERVQUAL model to address other strategic service related areas.

5.5. Concluding Thoughts:

Finally, to sum up, the main objective of this study was to develop a comprehensive service quality model to measure LCC service quality. It was fulfilled by designing and partially testing LCCSQUAL with five dimensions in the Middle Eastern LCC market. Since this study is first of its kind in the Middle East it was important to highlight significant development happening in the Middle East aviation industry and the growth of Low Cost Carriers, chapter four and five contributed to some great developments in the region. In the findings and discussion chapter, the demographic analysis contributed that, there has been significant impact of demographic changes on growth of LCC in the Middle East region. The results of this study will enhance the knowledge of LCCs in the Middle East and their passengers' perceptions about the service quality is valuable for both future academic as well as industry research.

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Table of Appendices

Appendix A – Passenger Questionnaire

Dear Passenger,

I am Jacinta D'Silva a PHD student with Coventry University UK, Dubai Campus. As a part of my field work, I am conducting a survey regarding passengers' expectations and experiences while traveling on Low Cost Carriers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The information provided will be treated confidentially and the results will be used as grouped data. The aim of this research is investigating the service quality level of Low Cost Carriers in the GCC region.

	Please initial
I confirm that I have understood the information for the above stud have had the opportunity to ask questions	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary (charitable) and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason	☐
I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence	☐
I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded (within one week)	☐
I agree to be recorded and for anonymised quotes to be used as part of the research project	☐
I agree to take part in the research project	☐

Name of participant (optional): _____ Signature _____
Date: _____

Name of Researcher: Jacinta D'Silva Signature _____Date: March 2013

SECTION I

Please rate the following service features which are important to you while choosing a Low Cost Carrier/Airline (LCC) according to your expectations as a passenger. If you strongly agree about the statement tick 1 and if strongly disagree than tick 5. You can also tick other options as suitable. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers, only your expectations as to what defines a LCC that delivers quality of service.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
TANGIBILITY					
Low Cost Airlines/Carriers (LCC) should have reliable aircrafts which are safe to travel.	1	2	3	4	5
The physical facilities of the aircraft should be of good standard compared to other airlines.					
Leg Space	1	2	3	4	5
Noise Level in the aircraft	1	2	3	4	5
Clean Toilets	1	2	3	4	5
Comfortable Seats	1	2	3	4	5
Food (on board or on sale)	1	2	3	4	5
Entertainment (Magazine, TV and/or Music)	1	2	3	4	5
LCC should give clear information to its passengers regarding policies, timings, offers and any changes made.	1	2	3	4	5
LCC should pay careful attention to the safety and security equipment in the aircraft.	1	2	3	4	5
LCC should maintain a required level of hygiene (cleanliness) in the aircraft during its flights.	1	2	3	4	5
Employees (Pilots, Cabin Crew and Ground Staff) should all appear professionally dressed.	1	2	3	4	5
RELIABILITY					
When a LCC promises, they should keep up to their promise.	1	2	3	4	5
The passengers should feel safe and secure when dealing with the airline and its staff.	1	2	3	4	5
To be a reliable airline it should give priority to on-time performance.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The staff of the airline should perform their tasks correctly.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The website of the airline should provide easy access and the right information regarding flight timings and other information.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The luggage should be received on time without any problems.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
ASSURANCE					
Employees in an airline should be friendly and accessible to assist the customers.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees of the airline should inspire confidence in the customers.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees should be polite and courteous at all times.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
EMPATHY					
LCC should frequently communicate with passengers in case of any problems or delays.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees of the airline should develop trust in their passengers.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The staff of LCC should have positive attitude towards its customers.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees of the LCC should give personal attention to each of their passengers.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
It is important for employees to know what the needs of their individual customers are.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
RESPONSIVENESS					
When a customer has a problem or complaint, LCC should show sincere effort in solving them.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
LCC employees should have the required skill and knowledge to answer questions of customers.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
LCC should give special preference to special needs passengers like Elderly, Disabled or Family with Infants.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The Crew on board should have more time and less stressed since they have less complicated service to handle compared to Full Fare Airlines.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
LCCs should be of value for money (VFM) compared to Full Fare Airlines.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

SECTION II

Below are features that relate to your experience about Low Cost Carrier/s you have flown with. If you feel they are doing extremely well for a particular feature tick 1 and if you think they are not, then tick 5. You may tick any one of the number in the middle which shows your strong feelings about that feature. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers - all we are interested in is the number which best represents your experience with this LCC.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
TANGIBILITY					
This LCC has a modern looking and reliable aircraft which is safe to travel.	1	2	3	4	5
The physical facilities of the aircraft are of good standard compared to other airlines.					
Leg Space	1	2	3	4	5
Noise Level in the aircraft	1	2	3	4	5
Clean Toilets	1	2	3	4	5
Comfortable Seats	1	2	3	4	5
Food (on board or on sale)	1	2	3	4	5
Entertainment (Magazine, TV and/or Music)	1	2	3	4	5
This LCC gives clear information to its passengers regarding policies, timings, offers and any changes made.	1	2	3	4	5
This airline pays careful attention to the safety and security equipment in the aircraft.	1	2	3	4	5
This LCC maintains a required level of hygiene (cleanliness) in the aircraft during its flights.	1	2	3	4	5
Employees (Pilots, Cabin Crew and Ground Staff) of this airline all appear professionally dressed.	1	2	3	4	5
RELIABILITY					
When this LCC promises, they keep up to their promise.	1	2	3	4	5
You feel safe and secure when dealing with this LCC and its staff.	1	2	3	4	5
This LCC is a reliable airline; it gives priority to on-time performance.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The staff of this airline perform their tasks correctly.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The website of this airline provides easy access and the right information regarding flight timings and other information.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
You have received your luggage on time without any problems from this LCC or any others that you traveled with.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
ASSURANCE					
The staff of this LCC is friendly and provides assistance whenever needed.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The staff of this airline inspires confidence in you while flying with them.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees are polite and courteous at all times.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
EMPATHY					
This LCC frequently communicates with passengers in case of any problems or delays.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees of the airline develops trust in their passengers while flying with them.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The staff of this airline has positive attitude towards its passengers.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees of this LCC attempts to provide attention to the needs of the passengers as early as possible.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The staff of this airline attempts to understand the needs of their individual customers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
RESPONSIVENESS					
When you have a problem or complaint, this LCC shows sincere effort in solving them.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The employees of this LCC have required skill and knowledge to answer your questions.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
This LCC and its staff give special preference to special needs passengers like Elderly, Disabled or Family with Infants.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The Crew on board is relaxed and less stressed since they have less complicated service to handle compared to Full Fare Airlines.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
This LCC is a value for money airline compared to Full Fare airlines.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Any further comments

_____

_____

_____

Section III: Demographic Information

a. Gender: Male ☐ **Female** ☐

b. Age: (Please tick)

15 – 19 ☐ **20 – 24** ☐ **25 - 29** ☐ **30 – 34** ☐ **35 - 39** ☐ **40 – 44** ☐ **45 – 49** ☐ **50-54** ☐

55 – 59 ☐ **60- 64** ☐ **65 – 69** ☐ **70 – 74** ☐ **75 – 79** ☐ **80 and above** ☐

c. Occupation (Please tick):

Managerial ☐ **Non-managerial** ☐ **Professional** ☐ **Self-Employed** ☐ **student** ☐

Home Maker ☐ **Retired** ☐ **Labour** ☐ **other, please specify**_____

d. Annual Income:

AED 10,000 - 15,000 ☐ **15,001 – 20,000** ☐ **20,001 – 25,000** ☐ **25,001 – 30,000** ☐

30,001 – 35,000 ☐ **35,001 – 40,000** ☐ **40,0001 - 45,000** ☐ **45,0001and above** ☐

e. Level of Education:

Primary School or below ☐ **Secondary School** ☐ **Diploma** ☐ **Bachelors andAbove** ☐

f. Nationality:_____

g. Family Status: Single ☐ **Married** ☐ **Other** ☐

h. Which LCC have you travelled with recently (past1 year)?_____

i. Which destination did you travel to with the above LCC? _____

j. Which airline are you traveling with today? _____ **destination** _____

k. Your main reason to take this trip (please tick as many as applicable)

Visiting Friends and Relatives ☐ **Business** ☐ **Leisure** ☐ **Education** ☐

Health ☐ **Spiritual** ☐ **Other (please specify)** _____

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix B - Approval letter for the Airport Authority (Arabic)

مطارات دبي
نصلكم بالعالم

Dubai Airports
Connecting the World

2013/02/10

سعادة اللواء الطيار ورئيس المجلس /أحمد محمد بن ثاني المحترم ، ، ،
مدير الإدارة العامة لأمن المطارات

تحية طيبة و بعد . . .

الموضوع: تصـريح دخول مبنى (2) لطالبة من كلية الإمارات للطيران

بالإشارة إلى الموضوع أعلاه و من ضمن إطار التعاون المشترك بين جميع الجهات العاملة في مطار دبي الدولي، نود أن نطلب من سيادتكم السماح للطالبة: جاسيتنا دا سيلفا هندية الجنسية من الدخول لمبنى (2) وذلك لعمل دراسة على شركات الطيران ضمن بحثها في إطار كلية الإمارات للطيران واعتماد جامعة كوفنتري البريطانية.

و تقبلوا منا فائق الاحترام و التقدير

[redacted]

علي الرئيسي
مدير إدارة العقود التجارية
وحدة الشؤون التجارية
مطارات دبي

مطارات دبي
DUBAI AIRPORTS
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COMMERCIAL UNIT

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ص.ب ٢٥٢٥، دبي
الإمارات العربية المتحدة

Appendix C – Approval Letter for the Airport Authority (English)

مطارات دبي
تصلكم بالعالم
Dubai Airports
Connecting the World

2013/02/10

To: Whom it may concern

Subject: Research of Ms. Jacinta D'Silva in Dubai Airport

I would like to inform you that Ms. Jacinta D'Silva is conducting a research on Airlines in Dubai Airport through Emirates Aviation College collaborative PhD Programme with Coventry College. Therefore, kindly show interest and provide her with supported information that give the study a clear and helpful facts.

Your cooperation with her study is highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

Ali Al Raeesi
Manager Commercial Contracts
Commercial Unit
Dubai Airports

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مطارات دبي
ص.ب ٢٥٢٥، دبي
الإمارات العربية المتحدة

Appendix D – Low Risk Research Ethics Approval

- **Low Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist**

- **Applicant Details**

Name JACINTA D'SILVA	E-mail JACINTADSILVA@YAHOO.COM
Department	Date JANUARY 27, 2011
Course PHD	Title of Project 'Investigating Consumer Decision Making of Economy Airline Travellers: Testing the SERVQUAL Model'

- **Project Details**

The objectives of the research are:

- To investigate the consumer decision making process of consumers who use low cost (budget) airlines
- Evaluate the perception of consumers who use low cost airlines.
- To analyze the marketing strategies used by low cost airlines, and do they take into account any research about consumer decision making
- To use SERVQUAL model of service quality framework in understanding various aspects including consumer attitude towards a low cost airline

Research Design:

- This research will include both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups will be the primary methods of collecting data for this study. Secondary data will be collected before primary research

Research Methodology:

- A survey based research will be conducted participants that have used low cost airlines will be invited to fill in research questionnaire, questions pertaining to customer choice, income group, life style, preferences will be asked
- The research will also aim to understand perception of the traveler and why he/she prefers low cost airlines
- A qualitative research approach will be the first primary method used. In-depth interviews and focus group techniques will be used as part of this research method

- **Participants in your research**

• Will the project involve human participants?	**Yes**	No

If you answered **Yes** to this questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Risk to Participants**

• Will the project involve human patients/clients, health professionals, and/or patient (client) data and/or health professional data?	Yes	No
• Will any invasive physical procedure, including collecting tissue or other samples, be used in the research?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk of physical discomfort to those taking part?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk of psychological or emotional distress to those taking part?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk of challenging the deeply held beliefs of those taking part?	Yes	No
• Is there a risk that previous, current or proposed criminal or illegal acts will be revealed by those taking part?	Yes	No
• Will the project involve giving any form of professional, medical or legal advice, either directly or indirectly to those taking part?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Risk to Researcher**

• Will this project put you or others at risk of physical harm, injury or death?	Yes	No
• Will project put you or others at risk of abduction, physical, mental or sexual abuse?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve participating in acts that may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve observing acts which may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve reading about, listening to or viewing materials that may cause psychological or emotional distress to you or to others?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve you disclosing personal data to the participants other than your name and EAC as your contact and e-mail address?	Yes	No
• Will this project involve you in unsupervised private discussion with people who are not already known to you?	Yes	No
• Will this project potentially place you in the situation where you may receive unwelcome media attention?	Yes	No
• Could the topic or results of this project be seen as illegal or attract the attention of the security services or other agencies?	Yes	No
• Could the topic or results of this project be viewed as controversial by anyone?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this is **not** a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Informed Consent of the Participant**

• Are any of the participants under the age of 18?	Yes	No
• Are any of the participants unable mentally or physically to give consent?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to observe the activities of individuals or groups without their knowledge and/or informed consent from each participant (or from his or her parent or guardian)?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Participant Confidentiality and Data Protection**

• Will the project involve collecting data and information from human participants who will be identifiable in the final report?	Yes	No
• Will information not already in the public domain about specific individuals or institutions be identifiable through data published or otherwise made available?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to record, photograph or film individuals or groups without their knowledge or informed consent?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to use the confidential information, knowledge or trade secrets gathered for any purpose other than this research project?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project: Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Gatekeeper Risk**

• Will this project involve collecting data outside EAC buildings?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to collect data in shopping centres or other public places?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to gather data within nurseries, schools or colleges?	Yes	No
• Do you intend to gather data within healthcare premises?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, this is **not** a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Other Ethical Issues**

• Is there any other risk or issue not covered above that may pose a risk to you or any of the participants?	Yes	No
• Will any activity associated with this project put you or the participants at an ethical, moral or legal risk?	Yes	No

If you answered **Yes** to these questions, this may **not** be a low risk project. Please discuss your project with your Supervisor.

- **Principal Investigator Certification**

If you answered **No** to **all** of the above questions, then you have described a low risk project. Please complete the following declaration to certify your project and keep a copy for your record as you may be asked for this at any time.

- **Agreed restrictions to project to allow Principal Investigator Certification**

Please identify any restrictions to the project, agreed with your Supervisor or the Dean of Postgraduate Studies to allow you to sign the Principal Investigator Certification declaration.

Participant Information Leaflet attached. Informed Consent Forms attached.

- **Principal Investigator's Declaration**

Please ensure that you:

- Tick all the boxes below and sign this checklist.
- Students must get their Supervisor to countersign this declaration.

I believe that this project **does not require research ethics approval**. I have completed the checklist and kept a copy for my own records. I realise I may be asked to provide a copy of this checklist at any time.	√
I confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.	√
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request a new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	√

- **Signatures**

If you submit this checklist and any attachments by e-mail, you should type your name in the signature space. An email attachment sent from your EAC inbox will be assumed to have been signed electronically.

- **Principal Investigator**

Signed **Jacinta D'Silva** (Principal Investigator or Student)

Date 27/1 2011

Students storing this checklist electronically must append to it an email from your Supervisor confirming that they are prepared to make the declaration above and to countersign this checklist. This-email will be taken as an electronic countersignature.

- **Student's Supervisor**

Countersigned **Dr. Ian Michael** (Supervisor) [redacted]

Date 1/2/2011

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Appendix E: List of Publications

1. D'Silva, J. and Michael, I. (2011) A conceptual paper investigating the SERVQUAL model on Low Cost Carrier in the GCC Market. *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Emerging Research Paradigms in Business and Social Science*. ERPBSS-2011, Dubai, UAE
2. D'Silva, J. and Michael, I. (2012) Managing In Uncertain Times: An Investigation of Airline Industries Survival during Economic Crisis. *Managing Through Uncertain Times, Conference Proceedings and Program- Academy of International Business Middle East and North Africa Chapter*. 2nd Annual International Conference, Dubai, UAE
3. D'Silva, J., Michael, I. and Dai, Y. (2012) Low Cost Carriers: Development in the Middle East Aviation Market. *Conference Proceedings of the First International Aviation Management Conference.* IAMC-2012, Dubai, UAE.
4. D'Silva, J. Michael, I. and Dai, Y. (2014) Changes in the aviation Industry and developments in the GCC Region. *Conference Proceedings of the International Conference on Tourism Management*. ICTM – 2014, Sharjah, UAE.
5. D'Silva, J. Michael, I. and Dai, Y. (2014) Service Quality of Low Cost Carriers in the GCC – Passenger's Perception. *Proceedings of the Second International Aviation Management Conference*. IAMC –2014, Dubai, UAE, pp. 63 – 71.