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ANALYZING PASSENGERS' BEHAVIORAL INTENTION TO USE LOW COST CARRIERS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The airline industry's low cost carrier (LCC) segment has grown rapidly in recent years and now accounts for a significant part of the market. This study employs an extended theory of reasoned action to examine the factors that influence passengers' preference for low cost airlines in Thailand. A survey of 409 passengers was conducted in one major airport in Thailand to test the hypotheses. The results indicate that expectations of service quality and uncertainty avoidance have both direct and indirect influences on passengers' attitudes and preference for LCCs. Moreover, passengers' attitudes, subjective norms, and airline ticket prices are positively associated with passengers' purchase intention. This paper provides managers of LCCs and industry regulators valuable references for developing highly effective marketing strategies and customer service to stay competitive.

Keywords: Low cost carriers, Theory of reasoned action, Passenger behavioral intention, Structural equation modeling, Airline selection, Thailand

Introduction

Low cost carriers (LCCs) have become strong competitors of traditional full-service carriers (FSC), playing a significant role in global air transportation with effective cost-saving strategies. In particular, LCCs offer only economy class; use just one type of aircraft; and provide more frequent flights, improved flight times, and no-frills on-board services, among others (Cento, 2009; Lerrthaitrakul & Panjakajornsak, 2014; Rose, Hensher, & Greene, 2005). As reported by the International Civil Aviation Organization in 2015, LCCs carried 28% of the world's total scheduled passengers, a 10% increase from 2014. This translates to a growth rate that was 1.5 times that of the world's total average.

The LCC segment has grown significantly in Southeast Asian countries since the late 1990s to 2000s. During the same period, Thailand and the Philippines were considered two of the friendliest countries and markets for LCC operations (Teng & Perry, 2013 cited in Buaphiban & Truong, 2017), with their growing middle class, a dense population, and limited land transportation. Specifically, Thailand's LCC market share has grown from 9.75% to 50.84% in the past 15 years (AOT, 2019).

Most studies in the field of LCCs have adopted a comparative perspective, examining differences between the business models of LCCs and FSCs (Alderighi, Cento, Nijkamp, & Rietveld, 2005; Rose et al., 2005; Tretheway,

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2004). These studies have highlighted LCCs' pricing strategies based on customer's purchasing behavior, loyalty, and satisfaction (Fourie & Lubbe, 2006; Kim & Lee, 2011; Klophaus, 2005), or have focused on LCCs' interactions with government regulations and the market environment (Avenali et al., 2015; Oliveira, 2008; Pitfield, 2008; Zhang, Hanaoka, Inamura, & Ishikura, 2008). Some have conducted micro-level analysis on LCCs by discussing the evolution of their pricing strategies and business model (Costantino, Gravio, Nonino, & Patriarca, 2016; Pels & Rietveld, 2004; Pitfield, 2009).

Objectives of the Study

This study examines the key factors that might affect consumers' preference for LCCs and the relationships of these factors in the Asian context, particularly in Thailand.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Theory of reasoned action

The theory of reasoned action (TA) is one of the most well-known theoretical frameworks for understanding people's behaviors. It takes into consideration attitudinal and social factors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It was developed to explain factors that influence behaviors, including a person's conscious, sensible, and rational decision-making when faced with choices. TRA states that a person's behavior is determined by his behavioral intention to perform an action. The cornerstone of the theory is intention a motivational construct that is determined by attitude toward performing the behavior and by the perceived social pressure to perform the behavior (subjective norm), both of which are value-based.

Attitudes toward behaviors the attitude construct has been a focal point of theories and research regarding consumer behavior. In TRA, attitudes are specific to performing a behavior (e.g. choosing an airline), not the object, person, or organization (e.g. airline). Most studies have assumed that consumers' attitudes toward competing brands are important determinants of their buying decisions (Brunel, Tietje, & Greenwald, 2004; Coulter & Punj, 2004; Sengupta & Fitzsimons, 2004). Understanding the importance of attitudes (as determined usually through surveys) is helpful in designing intervention campaigns to address the component that best predicts behavioral intentions. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined a simple attitude as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. If attitudes represent the predisposition to act favorably or unfavorably, then understanding people's attitudes can help predict their behaviors. As argued by Ajzen (2008) customers likely select the alternative that projects the most favorable overall attitude when there are multiple alternative brands or services.

Given that attitudes are value-based, they could be influenced by cultural factors. Uncertainty avoidance, as a cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1984) has drawn much attention in the service industry (Reimann, Luenemann, & Chase, 2008). Uncertainty avoidance reflects people's attitudes toward specific risks; therefore, it can be used to predict human behaviors (Hofstede, 1980). Hillson and Murray-Webster (2007) stated that risk attitudes exist at the individual, group, corporate, and national levels, and these could be assessed and described with some degree of accuracy, thereby allowing sources of bias to be diagnosed to expose their influence throughout the risk process. People who are predisposed to avoiding uncertainty exercise caution when selecting services by carefully planning and evaluating their decisions (Donthu & Yoo, 1998).

Research shows that there is a negative relationship between uncertainty avoidance and passenger intention to use LCCs, meaning that passengers avoid using LCCs if they are faced with uncertainty and ambiguity (Pan & Truong, 2018). Asians are especially conservative when it comes to taking risks. They prefer to avoid risks and uncertainty when making decisions. Thus, their perceptions, emotions, and previous travel experiences could create positive attitudes toward selecting an airline (Buaphiban & Truong, 2017).

In addition to people's value-based beliefs, attitudes can also be determined by people's expectations of the level of service quality provided. Vroom's expectancy model (Vroom, 1964) explained that an individual's expectation could influence his or her motivation. When tourists have high expectations, they are more willing to take action, such as searching for travel information, acquiring relevant knowledge, and so on (Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011). This motivation may affect people's attitudes toward travel (Lam & Hsu, 2004, 2006). Furthermore, as argued by Hsu, Cai, and Li (2010), attitudes can be determined by a person's expectation of a specific object, in which the expectation is regarded as a proxy of belief in a specific context (Higgins, 1996; Hsu et al., 2010; Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996).

In this study, passengers' expectations toward service quality were chosen as a key factor for the success of an airline (Chou, Liu, Huang, Yih, & Han, 2011). Service quality is evaluated by comparing the difference between the perceived service performance and its expected level. In general, people weigh value for money against the service quality they receive. Therefore, service is measured through its monetary value. Low-cost airlines depend strongly on value for money, while full-service airlines balance value for money and service quality to achieve customer satisfaction and influence behavioral intentions (Rajaguru, 2016). Expected service quality is one of the main factors that influence passengers' choice of airlines through their attitudes (Pan & Truong, 2018; Yang, Hsieh, Li, & Yang, 2012). The perceived service quality also affects customer satisfaction. In turn, customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customers' behavioral intentions, including purchasing, recommending the service to others, complaining about the service, and so on (Kim & Lee, 2011; Yang et al., 2012). In addition to tangible in-flight services, Lerrthaitrakul and Panjakajornsak (2014) found that intangible services comprising assurance, reliability, and empathy also have a significant influence on passengers' post-purchase behavioral intentions.

Subjective norms

According to TRA, people's behavioral intention is also determined by subjective norms (SN), which is defined as the extent of perceived pressure from others to perform the behavior under consideration (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Social norms are influenced by both personal referents (e.g., friends and family) and societal referents (e.g., social medial; Ho, Liao, & Rosenthal, 2015). The former is generally considered to have a stronger influence than the latter (Yanovitzky, Stewart, & Lederman, 2006).

This type of social influence has a positive effect on certain individual behaviors, as individuals usually depend on others and make decisions in reference to their surrounding social environment (Choi & Geistfeld, 2004) and interpersonal influences, such as family (Kim, Lee, & Yoon, 2015). Furthermore, people who strongly identify with the reference group intend to perform the behaviors that are influenced by the perceived group norms (Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999). For instance, under Southeast Asian culture, people tend to make purchase decisions based on

recommendations from friends and family, or through observations of what their family and friends have used (Buaphiban & Truong, 2017). In addition to personal referents, social media has been proven to have a direct relationship with purchase intention (Hinz, Skiera, Barrot, & Becker, 2011; Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Füller, 2013; Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012). Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) are perceived to be ideal platforms for facilitating interactive information, user-created content, and collaboration (Chung, 2008; Carolyn, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In particular, Facebook is considered as the most popular facilitator of interactions for users to share their experiences and ideas (Rehman, Ilyas, Nawaz, & Hyder, 2014). For instance, Chinese backpackers, usually prefer to access their social network community to gather travel information, including hotel comments, recommendations, discounted tickets, and so on (Zhou, Wu, Zhou, Li, & McGuire, 2009).

Airline ticket price

An additional factor that has a strong impact on passengers' intention to use LCCs is the airline's ticket price. Apart from service quality, passengers of LCCs are more sensitive to price (Chiou & Chen, 2010). Naturally, low-cost airlines target customers in the middle and lower-income groups who are sensitive to ticket prices. Many studies have shown airline ticket price as a relatively significant factor in selecting an LCC (Bawa, 2011; Kurtulmusoglu, Can, & Tolon, 2016; Thanasupsin, Chaichana, & Pliankarom, 2010). Passengers usually evaluate airlines that fly in the same route by weighting the actual ticket price and the inclusion or exclusion of extra services such as drinks and snacks (Tsafarakis, Kokotas, & Pantouvakis, 2017). Leisure passengers who use online channels are more price-sensitive, as argued by Garrow, Jones, and Parker (2006). Online search engines for travel, such as Expedia, Skyscanner, Jetradar, and Traveloka, show different airfares across various airlines. These are useful to people who seek out the best ticket price, especially backpackers who prefer to spend on the main travel service rather than on in-flight services (Zhou et al., 2009).

Individual price sensitivity is similar to price consciousness; both allude to the price that is acceptable based on the customers' perception of the service and the ticket price (Juha, 2008). From a customer's perspective, perceived price is a monetary or non-monetary (e.g., time and effort) sacrifice (Lichtenstein et al., 1988 cited in Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2019; Zeithaml, 1988). Tourism research has shown that customers' perception toward price is highly influential in changing customers' behavior (Keaveney, 1995), decision-making, (Chang & Wildt, 1994), loyalty (Anuwichanont, 2011), price satisfaction (Poh & Mohayidin, 2011), and most importantly, their perceived value of tourism products (Zeithaml, 1988; Sanchez, Callarisa, Rodriguez, & Moliner, 2006).

Airport servicescape

Morrison and Mason (2008) observed that LCCs seem to adopt a hybrid business model, incorporating factors such as convenience, connectivity, and comfort, in addition to the conventional focus on cost and efficiency. This suggests the importance of examining airport selection in the current literature on LCCs. Previous research has shown that the principal reason for airport choice in metropolitan regions, where more than one airport exits, is airport access, including proximity to the passengers' desired destinations and short travel times (Harvey, 1987; Windle & Dresner, 1995). Neufville (2008) stated that LCCs have opportunities when flying directly from major metropolitan areas to secondary airports, which means that people tend to fly

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with airlines that operate at the nearest airport. A study in China has also shown that travel time to the airport plays an important role in the choice of passengers, as it influences passengers' intention to use low-cost airlines (Pan & Truong, 2018).

Moreover, the airport's physical environment has a significant effect on passengers' cognitive and affective satisfaction (Ali, Kim, & Ryu, 2016; Jin-Woo & Young, 2019). Bitner's servicescape framework (Bitner, 1992) provides a holistic view of the service environment, which emphasizes the influences of the service environment on both employees and customers. In the leisure service industry, servicescape is used to refer to layout accessibility, facility esthetics, seating comfort, and facility cleanliness (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). In the airport industry, Jeon and Kim (2012) argued that the environment, functionality, esthetics, safety, and the social factors of international airport services favorably influence positive emotions; in turn, positive emotions significantly affect behavioral intention.

Based on the above review of the existing literature, six hypotheses (H) are proposed in this study. The research model is depicted in Figure 1, and the operational definitions of key factors are shown in Table 1.

H1: Uncertainty avoidance is negatively related to passengers' attitudes toward LCCs.

H2: Expected service quality is positively related to passengers' attitudes toward LCCs.

H3: Passengers' attitudes are positively related to their intention to use LCCs.

H4: Subjective norms are positively related to passengers' intention to use LCCs.

H5: Airline ticket price is positively related to passengers' intention to use LCCs.

H6: Airport servicescape is positively related to passengers' intention to use LCCs.

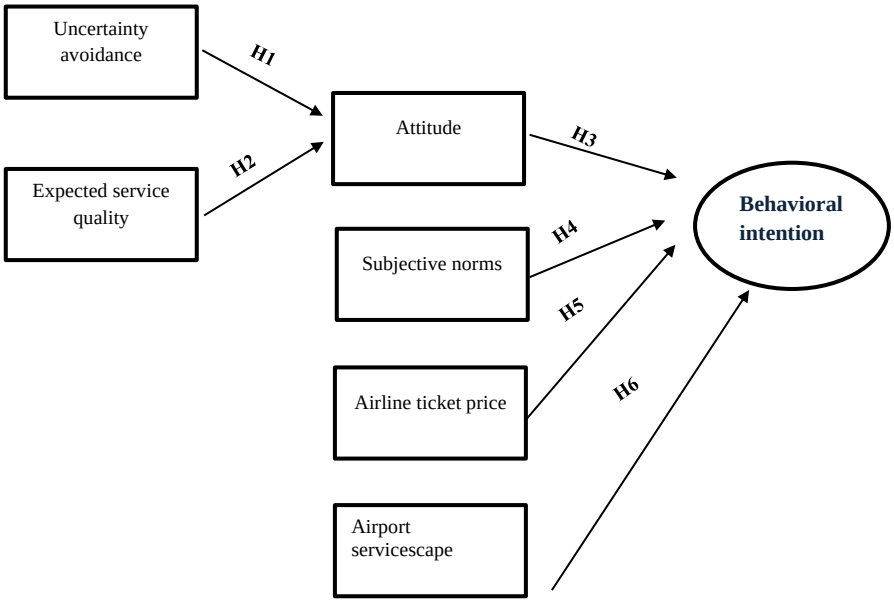


Figure 1 Research model

Table 1 Operational construct definitions

Factors	Operational definitions	Sources
Attitude (AT)	The customers' degree of favor or disfavor toward using an LCC.	Eagly and Chaiken (1993) Ajzen (2008)
Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)	The degree of customers' caution toward risk-taking when choosing an LCC.	Hofstede (1980) Donthu and Yoo (1998)
Expected Service Quality (ESQ)	The customers' expectation or degree of satisfaction toward both tangible (e.g., in-flight services) and intangible (e.g., assurance, reliability, and empathy) services that an LCC provides.	Yang et al. (2012) Kim and Lee (2011) Lerrthaitrakul and Panjakajornsak (2014)
Subjective Norm (SN)	The extent of perceived social pressure that a passenger feels from his/ her significant other when considering an LCC.	Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)
Airline Ticket Price (TP)	The extent to which perceived monetary or non-monetary (e.g., time and effort) sacrifices meet the customers' expectations when choosing an LCC.	Zeithaml (1988) Lichtenstein et al. (1988 cited in Kim et al., 2019)
Airport Servicescape (AS)	The customers' perception of the airport's holistic physical environment and access to the airport when choosing an LCC.	Bitner (1992) Ali et al. (2016) Jin-Woo and Young (2019)

Methodology

Measures

All the construct items used in this study were adopted from existing literature. There are 21 questions for the seven constructs of this study, each construct consists of three items. All items used in the survey questionnaires were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The survey questions were written in English and a double translation process was employed, meaning that the English version was first translated into Thai and then translated back to English. Both English versions were compared to ensure that there is no significant difference in content (Harkness, Pennell, & Schoua-Glusberg, 2004). The structural equation modeling (SEM) method was used to analyze the relationship between and among the factors. A pilot study with 30 LCC passengers was initially run to double-check the structure, clarity, and wording of the survey questions. The Cronbach's alpha is .927, and all items' alpha values were greater than the suggested threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstien, 1994), which indicates high internal reliability. The details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of reliability statistics in pilot study

	Scale mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
ESQ1	72.58	174.758	.937
ESQ2	72.41	177.066	.937
ESQ3	72.80	175.741	.937
UA1	72.51	174.422	.937
UA2	72.50	175.809	.938
UA3	72.50	175.760	.938
AT1	72.66	173.588	.936
AT2	72.53	176.024	.937
AT3	72.50	173.751	.936
SN1	72.86	173.785	.938
SN2	72.71	174.615	.938
SN3	72.71	173.433	.937
TP1	72.51	175.329	.937
TP2	72.51	174.853	.937
TP3	72.59	174.291	.937
AS1	73.17	176.673	.940
AS2	72.94	177.266	.940
AS3	72.94	178.244	.940
BI1	72.42	173.004	.937
BI2	72.38	173.100	.936
BI3	72.44	171.281	.935

Data collection

The survey was distributed during face-to-face interactions with passengers at the Don Mueang Airport (DMA), the main hub for LCCs with well-established operations in Thailand. Employing a convenience sample, only passengers who were waiting for their flights were approached, provided they fulfilled the study requirements of being Thai nationals aged above 18 years. They were informed about the purpose of the study, and they expressed willingness to participate.

Based on the report of the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand, the total number of passengers departing from DMA in 2018 was 1,649,426. This number was used as the total population size (N); therefore, the sample size (n) needed to reach at least 400, with a 95% confidence level. Excluding questionnaires with incomplete responses, a total of 409 qualified questionnaires were used for the final data analysis. This size is within the appropriate and effective range (200-500) when adopting SEM, as argued by Schumacker and Lomax (1996).

Twenty-one questions in the questionnaire were used to measure the influencing factors that affect passengers' behavioral intention to purchase LCC services in Thailand. Indicators and abbreviations were used to represent the questions. SPSS was used for data analysis, and BM® SPSS® Amos™ version 24 was used for hypotheses testing with path analysis.

Validity and reliability

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to examine the reliability or consistency of each measure. The SPPS program was used to conduct reliability and validity analysis (see Table 3). All α values were between 0.77 to 0.868 above the minimum acceptable level of 0.70 as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstien (1994). The calculated composite reliability (pc) or construct reliability value for each factor is greater than 0.6, which is regarded as reliable based on a 0.6 desirable level (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). The average variance extracted (ρv; greater than 0.6) was used as a complementary measure to support composite reliability. Correlations among factors were examined to assess discriminant validity. Brown (2006) suggested that correlations below the r = 0.85 cutoff indicate adequate discriminant validity. As shown in Tables 3, 4, and 5, all correlations are less than 0.85, indicating sufficient discriminant validity.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of factors and constructs

Constructs and items included	λ	α	ρ_c	ρ_v
Expected Service Quality (ESQ)		0.817	0.848	0.652
Punctuality	0.863			
Service-mindedness	0.777			
Comfortable seat	0.693			
Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)		0.843	0.851	0.655
Uncertainty of safety	0.802			
Timeliness of performance	0.82			
Overall uncertainty	0.784			
Attitude (AT)		0.868	0.881	0.713
Attitude of safety	0.768			
Pleasant attitude	0.757			
Positive attitude	0.857			
Subjective Norm (SN)		0.77	0.756	0.511
Recommended by friends	0.651			
Saw on social media	0.695			
Other influencing experience	0.831			
Airline Ticket Price (TP)		0.861	0.878	0.706
Reasonable price	0.792			
Reliable price	0.843			
Clear information about price	0.828			
Airport Servicescape (AS)		0.823	0.805	0.580
Airport	0.786			
Airport access	0.815			
Airport impact	0.738			

Table 3 (Continued)

Constructs and items included	λ	α	ρc	ρv
Behavioral Intention (BI)		0.864	0.837	0.633
Search for ticket	0.663			
High intention	0.773			
Recommend to others	0.793			

Remark All standardized factor loadings are significant at the 0.5 level.

Table 4 Construct correlation matrix

	Mean	**Std. deviation**	**ESQ**	**UA**	**AT**	**SN**	**TP**	**AS**	**BI**
ESQ	3.6618	.78277	1						
UA	3.7547	.84943	.627**	1					
AT	3.6960	.80488	.665**	.632**	1				
SN	3.5004	.86165	.549**	.509**	.616**	1			
TP	3.7229	.82370	.561**	.495**	.601**	.629**	1		
AS	3.2396	.91535	.365**	.315**	.398**	.483**	.426**	1	
BI	3.8443	.89354	.613**	.584**	.673**	.639**	.674**	.397**	1

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

Table 5 Item correlation matrix

	Mean	Std. deviation	ESQ1	ESQ2	ESQ3	UA1	UA2	UA3	AT1	AT2	AT3	SN1	SN2	SN3	TP1	TP2	TP3	AS1	AS2	AS3	BI1	BI2	BI3
ESQ1	3.6748	.94422	1																				
ESQ2	3.8484	.85262	.675**	1																			
ESQ3	3.4621	.94410	.595**	.532**	1																		
UA1	3.7531	.99022	.556**	.533**	.440**	1																	
UA2	3.7555	.94914	.518**	.487**	.435**	.668**	1																
UA3	3.7555	.98213	.456**	.468**	.334**	.611**	.646**	1															
AT1	3.6015	.96513	.567**	.492**	.480**	.471**	.474**	.461**	1														
AT2	3.7262	.85653	.511**	.500**	.427**	.527**	.418**	.480**	.639**	1													
AT3	3.7604	.88909	.573**	.527**	.488**	.553**	.503**	.533**	.714**	.718**	1												
SN1	3.3961	1.07082	.390**	.388**	.429**	.349**	.313**	.356**	.438**	.439**	.447**	1											
SN2	3.5526	1.03270	.398**	.340**	.384**	.328**	.348**	.305**	.440**	.390**	.446**	.484**	1										
SN3	3.5526	1.01836	.407**	.421**	.343**	.420**	.449**	.444**	.481**	.480**	.526**	.527**	.576**	1									
TP1	3.7531	.91026	.480**	.457**	.421**	.460**	.392**	.382**	.465**	.491**	.526**	.475**	.432**	.460**	1								
TP2	3.7506	.91898	.429**	.424**	.427**	.436**	.377**	.315**	.471**	.458**	.515**	.424**	.481**	.480**	.673**	1							
TP3	3.6650	.96395	.365**	.385**	.445**	.370**	.395**	.312**	.444**	.429**	.470**	.449**	.487**	.459**	.651**	.697**	1						
AS1	3.0856	1.09142	.251**	.251**	.409**	.231**	.217**	.202**	.314**	.295**	.324**	.392**	.402**	.259**	.288**	.385**	.426**	1					
AS2	3.3178	1.05798	.224**	.214**	.319**	.269**	.219**	.257**	.268**	.248**	.342**	.378**	.393**	.317**	.227**	.364**	.374**	.641**	1				
AS3	3.3154	1.04590	.191**	.208**	.339**	.201**	.233**	.300**	.292**	.318**	.342**	.315**	.317**	.312**	.213**	.289**	.331**	.582**	.600**	1			
BI1	3.8362	1.04321	.543**	.474**	.378**	.504**	.452**	.451**	.527**	.520**	.539**	.372**	.337**	.461**	.564**	.497**	.443**	.197**	.267**	.211**	1		
BI2	3.8753	.96335	.486**	.472**	.400**	.430**	.444**	.421**	.534**	.496**	.586**	.464**	.424**	.563**	.518**	.535**	.551**	.299**	.373**	.319**	.658**	1	
BI3	3.8215	1.01456	.489**	.467**	.480**	.468**	.456**	.436**	.523**	.496**	.564**	.501**	.518**	.601**	.515**	.557**	.585**	.364**	.350**	.356**	.648**	.740**	1

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

Results

Summary of respondents' profiles and travel experience

Table 6 Demographic profile of respondents

Demographics		Population (no.) n = 409	
Gender			
	Male	35.9%	147
	Female	64.1%	262
Age (in years)			
	Less than or equal to 20	8.6%	35
	21-30	60.9%	249
	31-40	23.2%	95
	41-50	6.1%	25
	51-60	1.2%	5
Education			
	Below bachelor's degree	11.2%	46
	Bachelor's degree	70.7%	289
	Master's degree	16.1%	66
	Doctorate degree and above	2.0%	8
Monthly Income (Baht)			
	Less than or equal to 15,000	19.1%	78
	15,001-30,000	60.1%	246
	30,001-45,000	13.4%	55
	45,001-60,000	4.9%	20
	60,001-75,000	1.5%	6
	More than 75,001	1.0%	4

The results of the passengers' demographic data are shown in Table 6. The number of female respondents (262, 64.1%) was greater than that of male respondents (147, 35.9%). More than half of the respondents (249, 60.9%) belonged to the 21-30 years age group, followed by age groups 31-40 (95, 23.2%), less than 20 (35, 8.5%), 41-50 (25, 6.1%), and 51-60 years (5, 1.2%). More than two-thirds of respondents were well-educated with at least a Bachelor's degree (289, 70.5%), a Master's degree (66, 16.1%), or a Doctor's degree (8, 2%). The majority (246, 60.1%) had a monthly income of 15,001-30,000 Baht.

Table 7 shows the passengers' travel-related information. More than two-thirds (282, 68.9%) of the respondents already had prior experience with their LCC of choice, with 38.1% of them flying 2-3 times per year. Leisure (277, 67.7%) was the main travel purpose, with the company of either family members (98, 24.0%), friends (63, 15.4%), or spouse (59, 14.4%). However, a number of passengers also traveled alone (107, 26.2%).

Table 7 Travel experience

General question	Population (no.) n = 409	
First time flying with the airlines		
Yes	31.1%	127
No	68.9%	282
Travel frequency with LCCs		
This is my first time	16.9%	69
Less than once per year	9.3%	38
Once per year	17.8%	73
2-3 times per year	38.1%	156
4-5 times per year	10.0%	41
More than 5 times per year	7.8%	32
Travel purpose		
Leisure	67.7%	277
Medical treatment	1.0%	4
Study	9.0%	37
Visit friends or relatives	11.7%	48
Business	7.8%	32
Other	2.7%	11
Travel companion		
Alone	26.2%	107
Spouse	14.4%	59
A family member	9.0%	37
Family members	24.0%	98
A friend	7.8%	32
Friends	15.4%	63
Tour	1.0%	4
Other	2.2%	9

Results of the Hypotheses Testing

Measurement model

Seven latent variables were included in the default research model. Each latent variable connects with three indicators, and each indicator and latent variable have one error to link to. EE and E denote the error variance of the latent variables and indicators sequentially. The model path of the latent variables, indicators, and errors are manifested in Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the measurement model; normality was subsequently checked. The kurtosis and skewness values are shown in Table 8. The normal distribution of data are deemed acceptable in reference to what are considered generally acceptable values within the range of -2 and +2 (George & Mallery, 2010).

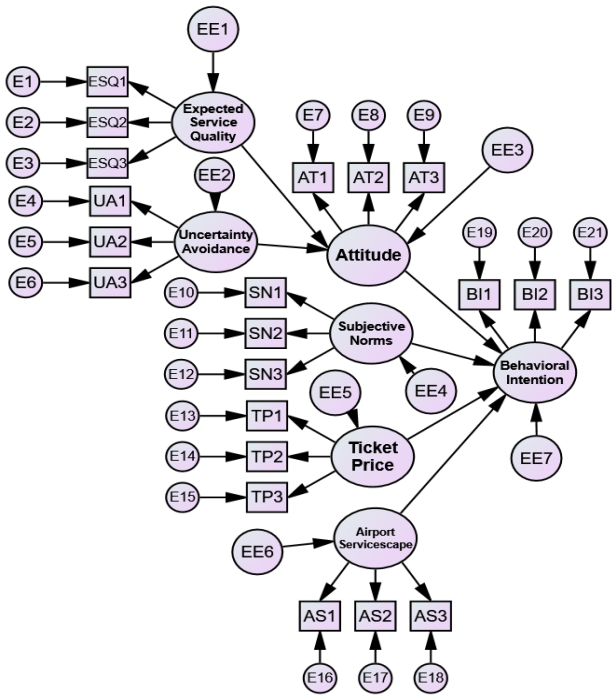


Figure 2 Research model

Table 8 Kurtosis and skewness

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
AS1	-0.261	-0.529
AS2	-0.374	-0.312
AS3	-0.296	-0.226
UA1	-0.78	0.517
UA2	-0.719	0.348
UA3	-0.661	0.078
ESQ1	-0.624	0.342
ESQ2	-0.513	-0.014
ESQ3	-0.372	0.074
TP1	-0.567	0.284
TP2	-0.645	0.391
TP3	-0.654	0.281
SN1	-0.37	-0.348
SN2	-0.576	-0.106
SN3	-0.47	-0.144

Table 8 (Continued)

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
BI3	-0.723	0.062
BI2	-0.704	0.234
BI1	-0.811	0.322
AT3	-0.644	0.526
AT2	-0.522	0.171
AT1	-0.559	0.189

The perfect model fit was determined by focusing on fit indices. Difference indices were reported to avoid leading or bias in this study. The reporting of the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), non-normed fit index (TLI), and incremental fit index (IFI) was suggested by many researchers (Bentler, 1990; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000; Hoelter, 1983; Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2006). GFI, CFI, NFI, TLI, and IFI were accepted as model fits for values above 0.90 or close to 1. However, some studies have mentioned that lower index values can also be accepted (Bollen, 1989; Cohen, 1988; Tanaka, 1993). Wong and Jeffery (2002) argued that 0.7 and 0.8 could describe the best cutoff values. The model fits in this study were GFI = 0.744, CFI = 0.8, NFI = 0.774, TLI = 0.771, IFI = 0.801. Because the calculated model fit indices could be affected by sample size and the number of latent variables (Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988), and a well-fitting model could be very unstable (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000), this study adopted the current model fits without running model modifications to cover all variables.

Results of hypotheses

Tables 9 to 10 and Figure 3 depict the results of the direct and indirect effects of uncertainty avoidance, expected service quality, attitude, subjective norms, ticket price, and servicescape on behavioral intentions.

Uncertainty avoidance and expected service quality have a direct significant effect on passengers' attitudes toward using LCCs, at 0.418 and 0.620, respectively. Thus, Hypothesis 1 (UA → AT) and Hypothesis 2 (ESQ → AT) are supported.

Attitudes, subjective norms, and airline ticket prices directly affect behavioral intention at 0.394, 0.286, and 0.331, respectively. Therefore, there is significant evidence to support Hypotheses 3 (AT → BI), 4 (SN → BI), and 5 (TP → BI). However, Hypothesis 6 (AS → BI) is rejected, as airport servicescape has little to no significant effect on passengers' choice of LCCs, at 0.04.

Furthermore, uncertainty avoidance and expected service quality have an indirect effect on behavioral intentions to use LCCs at 0.165 and 0.244, respectively. The results show partial mediation of expected service quality and uncertainty avoidance on the intention to use LCCs.

Table 9 Summary of hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Estimate	Standardized path coefficient (S.E.)	C.R. (T-value)	P-value	Result
H1: Uncertainty avoidance is negatively related to passengers' attitudes toward LCCs.	0.418	0.417	1	0.000***	Supported
H2: Expected service quality is positively related to passengers' attitudes toward LCCs.	0.620	0.594	1	0.000***	Supported
H3: Passengers' attitudes are positively related to passengers' intention to use LCCs.	0. 394	0.451	0.9	0.000***	Supported
H4: Subjective norms are positively related to passengers' intention to use LCCs.	0.286	0.405	0.7	0.000***	Supported
H5: Airline ticket price is positively related to passengers' intention to use LCCs.	0.331	0.442	0.7	0.000***	Supported
H6: Airport servicescape is positively related to passengers' intention to use LCCs	0.041	0.053	0.8	0.274	Not supported

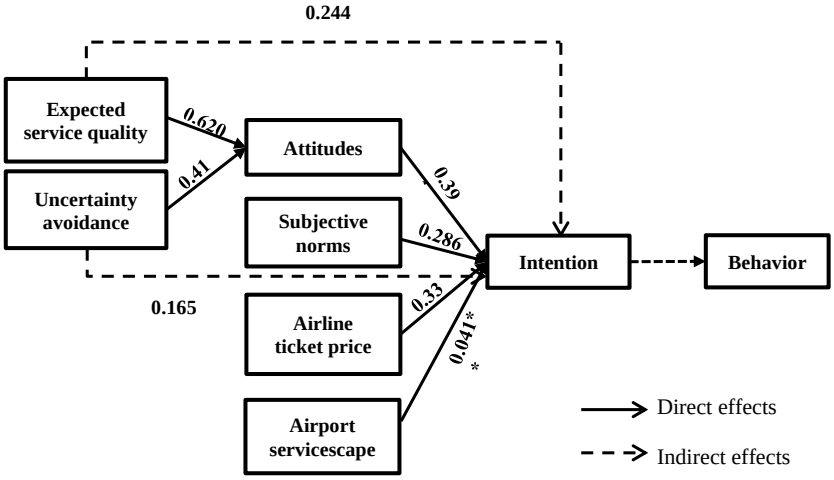
*** denotes significance at $p < 0.001$.

Table 10 Estimated direct and indirect effects

Construct	Effects		Standardized direct effects	Standardized indirect effects	Total effect
Uncertainty avoidance	Direct	Attitude	0.471		0.418
Expected service quality	Direct	Attitude	0.594		0.620
Attitude	Direct	Behavioral intention	0.451		0.394

Table 10 (Continued)

Construct	Effects		Standardized direct effects	Standardized indirect effects	Total effect
Subjective norm	Direct	Behavioral intention	0.405		0.286
Airline ticket price	Direct	Behavioral intention	0.442		0.331
Airport servicescape	Direct	Behavioral intention	0.053		0.041
Expected service quality	Indirect	Behavioral intention		0.268	0.244
Uncertainty avoidance	Indirect	Behavioral intention		0.212	0.165



* denotes significance at $p < 0.05$

Figure 3 Direct and indirect effects model

Discussion

The research model in this study is based on the behavioral intention model TRA developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), using empirical survey data collected from the LCC market in Thailand. The results indicate that compared with men, a high proportion of young women prefers LCCs. This could be explained from different angles. According to the survey results of the National Thailand, there are fewer men, as they have a higher mortality rate in Thailand. This has led to a gender imbalance in both marriage and labor markets. As demonstrated in a Thai government labor survey, starting from the second quarter of

2016, over half of those in the workforce with a university degree or equivalent professional education were women. In addition, Thai parents traditionally expect their daughters to earn money. Meanwhile, the traditional expectation for sons is to bring luck to the family by pursuing religion becoming monks, for example. Therefore, this gender proportion imbalance is explainable in the Thai context. This study's results also support the above-mentioned research findings, as the results suggest that those who prefer to travel by LCCs are mainly females from a relatively young group, aged 20-30 years. They are also relatively more educated, with monthly income between Baht 15,000-30,000, or USD 500–1,000, which is the average nationwide monthly income in Thailand.

The survey data also show that LCC passengers travel mostly for leisure and not for any other purposes. The results are consistent with previous literature that suggests LCCs mainly target young people with good educational background who travel for non-business purposes (Kim & Lee, 2011; Lerrthaitrakul & Panjakajornsak, 2014; Pan & Truong, 2018). Moreover, Costantino et al. (2016) concluded that LCCs should not fail to promote leisure travel. This study also urges LCCs to promote a more positive image to replace the stereotyped image in the literature of low-cost operations and low-income passengers (Pan & Truong, 2018).

Both the TRA components and the additional factors have produced either a direct or indirect influence on passengers' behavioral intention to use LCCs in Thailand. Attitude has the highest direct effect on behavioral intention; meanwhile, expected service quality and uncertainty avoidance also have significant effects on it. Expected service quality not only directly affects passengers' attitudes but also indirectly affects their selection of LCCs. Previous research has found that expected service value is more significant for LCC passengers in making selection decisions as compared with FSC passengers (Chiou & Liu, 2016). Moreover, Asian passengers tend to be more interested in both low fares and some degree of quality (Kim & Lee, 2011; Yeung, Tsang, & Lee, 2012), compared with Western passengers who see service elements as insignificant when choosing LCCs (Mikulic & Prebezac, 2011).

Uncertainty avoidance, as one of the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1984), is found to produce both a direct influence on passengers' attitudes and an indirect influence on passengers' selection of LCCs. Consistent with Pan and Truong's findings in 2018, this study shows that the more passengers feel uncertain about LCCs and avoid such uncertainties, the less intention they have to choose LCCs. This indicates a negative relationship between passengers' attitudes and selection of LCCs in the Thai context. Thai culture is relatively conservative, and Thais generally try to avoid making risky decisions. LCCs are commonly associated with low-cost business models, as they provide low-level services; this results in a perception of a lack of safety (Pan & Truong, 2018).

This research also reveals that subjective norms have a significant effect on passengers' behavioral intention toward LCCs, which indicates that Thai passengers prefer to seek suggestions or recommendations from their significant others. This result is consistent with Pan and Truong's (2018) study on Chinese customers, that is, passengers in both Thai and Chinese contexts share a similar relationship-oriented cultural background, in which they rely heavily on inputs from their trusted family members and friends.

Undoubtedly, price strongly and positively influences passengers' choices of LCCs, as

suggest by several previous studies (Chang & Sun, 2012; Jung & Yoo, 2016; Ong & Tan, 2010; Pan & Truong, 2018). However, from the passengers' perspective, using low-fare strategies alone is not enough. The business strategy must highlight a balance of service and price to ensure loyalty and passenger satisfaction (Costantino et al., 2016). This may be done by offering something more than simply cheap tickets, such as developing loyalty programs to increase customer loyalty and low-term profitability (Fourie & Lubbe, 2006). As argued by Kim and Lee (2011), loyalty based on price seems to be more important than perceived service quality for satisfying LCC passengers.

By contrast, this study reveals that airport service scape (access to the airport and the impression of the airport) has no direct influence on passengers' intention to choose LCCs. Even though the results are not in accordance with the existing literature, this may be attributed to specific features of the Thai context, wherein the majority of LCCs are run in one airport (DMA), and because Bangkok, Thailand is only a moderately sized city, which means access time could be ignored.

Conclusion

The emergence of LCCs has brought significant growth to the tourism industry since the launch of Southwest Airlines in 1971. The LCC segment has also grown significantly in Southeast Asian countries since the late 1990s-2000s. This study contributes to the existing literature by identifying the factors that influence passengers' behavioral intention to use LCCs and by examining the relationship among factors that affect behavioral intention in Thailand based on the TRA model. It extends the original TRA model developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) by including four additional factors expected service quality, uncertainty avoidance, ticket price, and airport servicescape. The results show that uncertainty avoidance and expected service quality have a direct effect on passenger attitudes and an indirect effect on behavioral intention. Attitudes, subjective norms, and airline ticket prices directly affect behavioral intention, whereas airport servicescape has no significant effect on passengers' choice of LCCs.

Theoretical implications

This study has several theoretical contributions to the existing literature on LCCs. First, in this study, the application of TRA has been broadened to include the LCC field. By applying the TRA model, this study has investigated what the relevant factors are and how these factors influence passengers' decision-making in using LCCs in Thailand, where LCCs have grown promisingly and rapidly. Second, although this study is based on TRA, it has expanded the model with additional factors to enhance its predictive power in the study of human actions, especially regarding LCCs. Third, this study's results not only support existing research but also bring a value dimension by analyzing uncertainty avoidance, which contributes by adding a cultural perspective.

Practical implications

At a practical level, the study's findings could serve as a valuable reference for LCC managers and regulators when designing strategies to survive the critical environment in the air industry by maintaining and increasing their competitiveness against FSCs and other LCCs. First, LCCs should maintain their pricing strategies, as ticket prices play a decisive role in passengers' selection of LCCs. Second, in addition to maintaining low fares, LCCs should focus their marketing strategies on promoting a positive image. This

could be achieved by providing quality service that exceeds passengers' expectations. Offering in-flight food and beverage, small souvenirs, or other minor accommodations for free or at uninflated prices would greatly impress passengers and help maintain passenger loyalty. As argued by Pan and Truong (2018), passengers still expect some service during a flight, even for LCCs. This also involves changing passengers' common perception that LCCs lack safety as they only pursue low-cost operations; such a perception may be due to many existing uncertainties. To avoid these uncertainties, LCCs may increase transparency in their communication with target passengers through various channels, such as detailed services including flight frequency, delay information, clarifications, and education on all kinds of risks that passengers might encounter during the flight, and so on. Third, it is suggested that LCCs should value long-term relationships with their existing customers by creating some loyalty programs to earn their long-term trust and loyalty, as well as attract new customers. Third, based on the detailed profile of existing passengers, the target group of LCCs includes those who are relatively younger, more educated, female, not business-oriented, and traveling with companions. Therefore, to increase their satisfaction, LCCs could offer corresponding or unique services to meet or even exceed this target group's travel expectations.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has limitations. First, the study was only conducted at one airport in one country, Thailand. Thus, the information based on data collected could affect the representativeness of the results. Although some similar studies have been conducted in China and Taiwan, it is necessary to repeat the study in other countries to verify the consistency of the results. Second, as the data relate to a single point in time, the results could only reflect passengers' responses at that time, without further consideration of different scenarios, such as airplane delays, cancellations, and so on. Therefore, it is, necessary for future researchers to take such situations into consideration. Third, this study's model only consists of four external factors and only targets Thai passengers. Further studies in the same line could include more factors and passengers of different nationalities. Fourth, for future studies in Thailand, it is suggested to either not include the airport's influence on behavioral intention, or to switch the research direction to the physical environment or facilities of the airport. Lastly, while this study only focuses on the factors' relationships with passengers' behavioral intention, future research could further study the relationships between intentions and actual behaviors.

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