Examining the Differences in After-Sale Service Quality Perceptions between Managers and Customers in the Automobile Industry and Their Impact on Customer Satisfaction

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Examining the Differences in After-Sale Service Quality Perceptions between Managers and Customers in the Automobile Industry and Their Impact on Customer Satisfaction

By

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A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Service Leadership and Innovation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how service managers and their customers perceive the after-sale service quality provided by automobile service centers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with a goal to identify the existence of gaps, if any, between their perceptions and how they can impact customer satisfaction level. A qualitative phenomenological method was implemented to gather a description of the participants’ actual experiences, and data were collected using semi-structured interviews with seven service managers and 20 customers. The structure of the managers’ interview questions was designed to go beyond identifying the most important factors that customers insist on having and focus on the methods that managers use to gather customer data, the obstacles that prevent meeting customers’ needs, frequent customer complaints, and the effectiveness of aligning managers’ and customers’ perceptions to increase customer satisfaction. The questions used to interview customers were also designed to collect in-depth feedback regarding how they evaluate service managers’ understanding of their needs and how that can have a crucial impact on their future transactions. Existing literature on the same topic did not fully address the issues of having different perceptions between service managers and customers. The findings of this study endorse the need for service managers to discover the hidden and underestimated customer requirements that prevent them from having aligned perceptions between both parties. This study makes an important contribution to the literature by expanding and enriching the existing knowledge of the after-sale service quality in the UAE automobile industry.
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Introduction

Recently, many service centers have shared the concern of providing quality in their manufacturing organizations. Although these service sectors (including automobiles) took slow steps toward recognizing the effect of quality (Pakdil & Harwood, 2005), they have come to realize how important it is for them to ensure a sustained competitive market position (Kuei, 1998).

Growth in the automobile industry is highly dependent upon factors such as economic conditions, flexible financing terms, and favorable government and consumer purchasing power polices (Khan, 2010). These factors and more are strongly presented in a competitive market like the one in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). According to the United Arab Emirates Autos Report-Q4 2014, issued by Business Monitor International (BMI, 2013), car sales raised to 20%, to 199,277 sold units, compared to 166,290 units in the same period of time in 2013.

Nowadays, all automobile dealers strive hard to extend their relationships with their customers after completing their cars sales transactions. They do this through offering after-sale services, which include providing on-time feedback on customers’ various inquiries, offering superior maintenance packages with irresistible prices, and managing their warranty systems (Lin, Chen, & Chiu, 2010). The after-sale services can only show be effective in building long-term relationships if they are designed to fulfill customers’ varied requirements, which drives customers toward being highly satisfied. But what most sales managers cannot understand or sometimes negate is the role that a high level of satisfaction can play in optimizing their customers’ value in the long run (Elliott & Serna, 2005). Therefore, it is important for managers who are presented as service designers to clearly understand how the quality of their services are
perceived and judged by their customers (Andaleeb & Basu, 1994) so that they can have a unifying understanding between them and their customers.

Determining a specific method to identify the most significant service attributes that have the most effect on customers’ behavior will continuously be viewed as a challenge. There are multiple and complex factors resulting from the rapid change in technology (Shammot, 2011). For example, in order for customers to save the time they normally would spend waiting at the service center, it is perceived as crucial by these customers to have an online option to book their upcoming maintenance. On the other hand, it could be viewed as a non-value-added option to other customers—especially by those who are less inclined to use technological features.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985) argued that service centers find it difficult to ascertain what aspects contribute the most in being perceived as high quality to customers and what is the required level for those aspects to be delivered in high quality services.

It is critical for managers to have a comprehensive understanding and an effective service analysis of the after-sale services provided by their automobile service centers. They should design their perception of service quality based on the customers’ perceptions. Grönroos (1988) stated that “when the service provider understands how the clients evaluate its services, it can identify how to manage these evaluations and how to influence them in a desired direction” (p. 10). The diverse perceptions between managers and customers is the main reason why organizations do not have the proper information that can be used to solve the service quality dilemmas (Gowan, Seymour, Ibarreche, & Lackey, 2001).

The main reason for this research project was to investigate the relationship between how customers perceive quality, or the after-sale services provided by the automobile service centers in the UAE and how the service managers of these centers perceive quality in order to determine
if any gaps exist between the two perceptions. The existence of these gaps is highly linked to the level of customer satisfaction. Therefore, the research obtained results that can be utilized by automobiles service center managers to identify gaps in their current after-sale service processes in order to implement any corrective that is action needed that, in turn, would lead to stronger customer satisfaction.

**Problem Statement**

Automobile service centers have no less involvement than other retailers in strong market competition, which forces many of these centers to offer attractive after-sales promotions as a serious step toward improving their relationship with their customers and enhance their customers’ level of satisfaction. For example, Ford UAE offers free tinting as a part of their value proposition (Cooper, 2003). Al Tayer Motors, a Range Rover distributor, offers 60,000 Km or 3 years’ free warranty, whichever comes first, on major parts (Cooper, 2003). Al Nabooda, an Audi and Porsche distributor, and Al Arabiya, a Nissan Dubai and North Emirates distributor, launched multiple new and modern service centers in various locations so they could be reached by the majority of their customers (Cooper, 2003).

Although these companies have specified that a huge amount of their yearly budget is to be utilized on different after-sale services-improvement areas, the researcher observed that they still had many customers who perceived the quality of their after-sale service was not what they expected, and they expressed dissatisfaction through various non-written and/or written complaints. For example, the researcher noted, from a friendly chat he had with the customers while visiting these service centers, that most of the customers perceived the cost of services as too high and unreasonable. Others complained that the service advisors had weak skills in diagnosing problems or in understanding their comments. In addition, the researcher noted
during his visits that some customers had gone back to the service centers immediately after the required service was performed, and they complained that they had the same problem that they originally informed the service advisor about, and the problem still had not been fixed. Also, the researcher witnessed a huge argument over the lack of communication between the service advisor and the call center, which is the organization responsible for notifying the customers by short message service (SMS) or phone call, as soon as the car reaches the delivery stage. In some cases, customers went to the service center after receiving a notification SMS or a call, and they became frustrated after discovering that their cars were not repaired and not ready to be collected by them. Other customers were irritated by the service cycle time, stating that it needs to be revised and reduced due to the long time it currently takes for repairs.

Service managers might be aware that these issues that have been occurring for an extended period of time. The question that is significant is why have there been no corrective actions taken? Is that because service managers do not see these issues as serious issues as the customers do? Is it because the service managers have not prioritized these issues as urgent matters that need to be fixed? All of these questions highlight the importance of investigating the existing after-sale service-quality process that is provided by these companies to establish an improvement plan to recover the existence of any negative impact on their customers.

**Significance and Contributions of the Project**

The quality of the automobile after-sale services provided to customers is highly associated with their level of satisfaction, and quality can be used to control the customer behavior of switching to other brands. For example, Arabian Automobiles (Nissan) declared a market share loss over 2012 in favor of its strongest competitor, Al Futtaim (Toyota), allowing them to remain the dominate player in the UAE automobile market (BMI, 2014). It is difficult to
convince customers to accept a certain level of service quality, especially in today’s competitive market environment; customers always put high expectations on the type of services they receive. Their common response to defective service is what Keaveney and Parthasurathy (2001) referred to as “churn,” where customers of a certain type will move to a competing brand because the competitors convince the customers that they are the better service providers.

Losing market share is an indication of loss in profit and revenue. Therefore, this research project is designed to improve the quality of the after-sale services provided by the automobile service centers through detecting any gap that is generated from the perception differences between customers and service managers. Previous literature highlights how important it is for managers to understand what is important for their customers and take that information as a starting point to set up the various necessary processes that aim to fulfill customers’ requirements.

The results of this research project will benefit service centers managers in:

1. Highlighting the most significant factors affecting customers’ satisfaction.
2. Perceiving these factors as important to them as they are for their customers.

The results will also help automobile companies to be prepared for the future when customers will expect these companies to know all of their requirements without addressing them. This would address new challenges for service managers because they would not have any space for defective service delivery.

**Literature Review**

There are various types of literature in different sectors, such as healthcare and hospitality, that highlight the relationship between the discrepancy of the customers’ and managers’ perceptions on the quality of the after-sale services and their relationship to customer
satisfaction. On the other hand, there are limited studies related to the automobile sector. Most of the results indicate a strong relationship between both perception and the level of customers’ satisfaction, which are highly dependent upon how much the perceptions align together.

**Service Quality**

Service quality is becoming one of the critical success factors in providing competitive advantages in the current era (Edvardsson, 2005; Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham, 1995). It has a strong influence in multiple factors such as customer satisfaction (Amin, Yahya, & Aniza, 2013), intentions (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2013; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013), and value perception (Wu, 2013).

Different researchers have different views toward service quality. Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml (1988) referred to service quality as the obtained results from comparing special customer requirements with performance after utilizing that service. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1994) stated that customer perception can be identified after the customer purchases the service. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) linked service quality with long-term customer evaluations of service. Others, such as Kandampully (1997), perceived service quality as being intangible in nature. Therefore, providing a sufficient level of service quality in environments, such as automobile maintenance services, has a certain level of complexity, and there is unfair customer judgment due to the technical nature of automobiles and because customers are not regularly involved in evaluating and monitoring the repair process of their cars as it relates to the detailed knowledge that service providers possess.

Service from automobile service providers concerning the mechanical repair of an automobile is completely different from guest services provided by hotels, where customers can evaluate the cost based on the human attention and care provided (Andaleeb & Basu, 1994).

**After-Sale Service Quality**

Omotuyi and Zairi’s (1996) definition of after-sales service fit properly in fulfilling the purpose of this research project. They defined it as “all activities geared towards maintaining the quality and reliability of the car carried out after the customer has taken delivery with the goal of ensuring customer satisfaction” (p. 2).

Many car dealerships in various markets have observed how small the profit margin is if they only rely on the vehicles sale (Senter & Flynn, 2010). Therefore, they started to include the after-sales activities, such as maintenance and part sales, to improve their profit and revenue (Senter & Flynn, 2010). Some authors estimate that the revenue generated from after-sales and spare parts maintenance services to go beyond the initial purchase by three times (Saccani, Johansson, & Perona, 2007; Wise & Baumgartner, 1999). Other authors increased the estimation up to five times (Bundschuh & Dezvane, 2003; Saccani et al., 2007).

Logically, it can be determined that the better the after-sale service quality an organization provides, the better the organization’s profit; plus, valuable long-term relationships can be built. There is a strong correlation between the willingness of customers to pay an increased price and gaining an attractive warranty program with trustworthy after-sales service. These strengths also could help in the organization achieving sustainable growth (Eagle, Kitchen, Rose, & Molye, 2003). Godlevskaja, Iwaarden, & Wiele (2011) found that automotive organizations filled the gap on achieving product-based differentiation due to their complexities and limitations through investing in services areas.
Perceived Quality

The National Quality Research Center (NQRC) (2005) highlighted two main factors when defining perceived quality. The first one is “customization,” which refers to the degree to which the product or service can fulfill the customer’s desires. The second one is “reliability,” referring to the ability of delivering these desires to the customer. Other authors, such as Aaker (1991) and Zeithaml (1988), argued that perceived quality is related to a customer’s judgment about the service experience, in general, rather than the quality of the brands or products.

Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman (1988) stated that customers judge the quality of the service based on intrinsic and extrinsic cues. For the automobile companies, the intrinsic cues are reliability and serviceability, and the extrinsic cues are price, brand name, and brand image. Perceived quality is strongly associated with the customers’ purchasing decisions; they will always compare what competitors in the same category are providing while putting the price into consideration (Jin & Suh, 2005).

Customers’ Perception of After-Sale Service Quality

Customers have always been viewed as the main judge on quality. These ideas were seen in the early writings of quality gurus, such as Juran and Godfrey (1989), who defined quality as “fitness for use” (p. 2.2), and Crosby (1979), who defined quality as “conformance to requirements” (p. 8). Both definitions support the idea that states that “the consumer is the final authority on quality” (Gowan et al., 2001, p. 276). Clemmer and Sheehy (1992) supported the same idea stating, “your customers’ perceptions of the value they are receiving must become the common yardstick against which all activities throughout your entire organization are measured” (p. 25).
Meeting and exceeding customer expectations cannot be better practiced in areas other than the area of service quality. Many organizations have well understood that the characteristics of service cannot be treated as less important than the physical characteristics of service (Gowan et al., 2001). Boyet and Conn’s (1991) research results supported the previous statement when they identified reasons for customers to leave a company when it had nothing to do with the quality of the product: 20% of the customers suffered from the lack of personal attention, 49% left because of rudeness and unhelpful service, and they concluded that no less than 69% left mainly because of issues related to service quality. Also, Evans and Lindsay (2002) estimated that companies lose 35% of their customers on a yearly basis due to poor customer service. These percentages position companies’ market shares at a serious risk. Customers will only go back to do business with the same company if they are satisfied with the quality of the services provided (Gowan et al., 2001). In addition, customers will communicate positively with others and promote the image of the business through a word of mouth (Wu, 2013).

There have been limited studies conducted on analyzing the perception of customers toward the service quality provided in the automobile service sectors (Saravanan & Roa, 2007). Most of the studies were concerned with hotels and the healthcare sectors. The most common measurement tool, which has been mentioned in many research articles and has been used effectively to measure the quality of the services provided in various sectors, is SERVQUAL. The SERVQUAL instrument measures the quality of services along five factors: (a) reliability, (b) responsiveness, (c) assurance, (d) empathy, and (e) tangibility (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Another way to measure service quality by performance is through using SERVPERF. Although the SERVPERF instrument shares the same dimensions for measuring service quality, it does not seek to identify the gap between customer expectation and what they
have experienced (Palmer, 2001). Sureshchandar, Rajendran, and Anatharaman (2002b) measured the service quality of the banking sector in India, and Saravanan and Roa (2007) measured the service quality in the automobile service stations in India and used the five factors of service quality that they perceived as critically from the customers’ point of view: (a) human element of service delivery, (b) core service, (c) systematization of service delivery: non-human element, (d) tangibles of service (servicescapes), and (e) social responsibility. The first study (Sureshchandar et al., 2002b) indicated that people-oriented issues are more significant to service quality than technology-related issues, while the second study (Saravanan and Roa, 2007) indicated that the non-human factors have higher ratings than human factors regarding perceiving service quality.

**Managers’ Perception of After-Sale Service Quality**

Since 2001, managers from different sectors have realized that the intangibility of service has introduced a challenging task due to the high level of interaction between the customers and the service providers (Gowan et al., 2001). It has become difficult to clarify the needed level of quality when providing a service. Cottle (1990) described it as being “held hostage by the client’s cooperation” (p. 49). Some of the high-level service-delivery processes are so difficult to control by managers because they are not physically present at each transaction. This also allows the customers to be more familiar with the service process and it is a problem for the managers (Gowan et al., 2001).

Service managers have always been viewed as the main source for detecting customers’ expectations and requirements; they can do so through deeply perceiving and examining the current quality of the service offered. Their service quality standard should be built based on the customers’ evaluations (Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015). Hussain, Bhatti, and Jilani (2011) stated
earlier that management should build their service strategy emphasizing the performance perceived by customers. The Gowan et al. (2001) study on service quality perceptions among managers, employees, and customers, which was conducted on a public agency, indicated that the level of customer perception on service quality is higher than the employees’ and managers’ perceptions of quality. The differences in perception explained by the researchers declared that managers are more focused on meeting the organization goals and objectives through reasonable cost, while customers’ emphasis is on having their needs met regardless of the cost. Opposite results were obtained from Dedeoğlu and Demirer’s (2015) study on the hotel industry where the managers’ perceptions of service quality are higher than the customers’ perceptions, which also goes in line with Tsang and Qu’s (2000) study results. They explained the reason for their findings was because of different organizational aspects such as management techniques, the laborers are emotionally engaged, and personality characteristics.

The existence of these differences might be because employees and managers do not like to criticize the quality of the service delivered to the customers (Grandey, 2000). On the other hand, the customers would not accept any deficiencies in the service that was delivered. Both scenarios can lead to creating barriers to achieve the favorite level of service quality.

**After-Sale Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction**

The term customer satisfaction (CS) has been used in the service industry to evaluate service performance and how well the service center provides the services that are fulfilling customers’ requirements. Raphel and Raphel (1995) said that the cost of creating new customers could reach up to nine times more than maintaining existing customers. Yu et al. (2014) pointed out that it is better to utilize the market resources in maintaining the existing customers rather than looking for new ones. Also, if the companies focus on increasing their customers’ loyalty by
5%, that would lead them to obtaining up to 85% profit improvement (Raphel & Raphel, 1995). High service quality is critical to enhance customer satisfaction and to the increase the probability of success of the organization (Mao & Zhang, 2012).

Limited studies have measured the effect of time on the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, and the focus was concerning product satisfaction and loyalty (Mittal, Kumar, & Tsiros, 1999). Oliver (1997) found that there are emotional factors derived from consuming a service and those emotional factors are highly related to customer satisfaction.

Most researchers measured the quality of service and its effectiveness on customer satisfaction through the five SERVQUAL dimensions. For example, Wang and Shieh (2006) found that all of the five dimensions are significant to customers’ satisfaction of an expected responsiveness. Other researchers, such as Jamal and Naser (2003) and Blodgett and Wakefield (1999), confirmed that there is no strong relationship between the tangibility dimensions and customer satisfaction, but Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz (1996) confirmed the opposite. Arasli, Turan, and Mehtap-Smadi (2005) highlighted the importance of reliability, while Chaniotakis and Lymeropoulos (2009) disagreed with their conclusion.

Shammot’s (2011) study examining the impact of service quality provided by the Peugeot Company in Jordan on customer satisfaction used a descriptive, analytical approach in measuring the level of customer satisfaction for the after-sale maintenance service. The results highlight three main factors that have significant impact on customer satisfaction, and they are price, maintenance efficiency, and employee presentation.

Andronikidis’s (2009) study on perceiving service quality in the Greek automotive repair industry used SERVPERF as a measurement tool. The study results confirmed that the five SERVQUAL dimensions of service quality do not appear as effective dimensions; instead, the
study produced three new dimensions: holistic customer consideration, infrastructure, and empathy.

There are two main outcomes that can be concluded from the above results. The first outcome is that a customer will be satisfied by a service center if he or she perceives the service center delivers high quality service. The second outcome is there is no standard measurement system, attributes, or dimensions that can be used by all firms to measure their customers’ satisfaction levels.

**Methodology**

**Research Questions**

The qualitative study requires the researcher to present research questions. Such questions are not aimed at identifying the specific objectives of the study or hypotheses based on some variables and statistical tests like the ones that can be found in the quantitative studies. Alternatively, it aims to explore the general research idea to investigate the related factors around the main phenomenon and to identify the different perceptions each participant held throughout formulating a central research question (Creswell, 2014). The central question was defined by Creswell (2014) as “a broad question that asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept in a study” (p. 139).

The design of the central question for this study was based on a phenomenological qualitative research strategy, which differs from other qualitative strategies such as ethnography research and grounded theory. The questions of the phenomenological research strategy cannot be formulated based on the information in the existing literature. Instead, it is based on the expression of the participants for a specific phenomenon or their experience in a certain situation (Creswell, 2014).
The researcher for this study used phenomenological processes to document the perceptions of the after-sale service provided by a number of automobile service managers and the perceptions of their customers as receivers of the mentioned services. The researcher used interviews as a method to explore the possibility of having an existing gap between both the perceptions and how they could affect customers’ satisfaction levels. The central research questions of this study are:

1. What are the most common factors that impact managers’ and customers’ perception of the after-sale service quality?
2. How can service managers improve customers’ satisfaction level through determining their needs?

As suggested by Creswell (2014), the central questions began with the word “what” in the first question and with “how” in the second question in order to “convey an open and emerging design” (p. 140). Moreover, both questions included open-ended verbs, such as “perceive” and “improve,” which tell the reader that the study will describe the core of the customers’ and managers’ experiences. Furthermore, it focuses on two aspects that are the quality of the after-sale service and customers’ satisfaction level. Finally, the questions mentioned the participants who are service managers of automobile service centers and their customers who were involved in experiencing the provided after-sale service.

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

Quantitative research through questionnaires is the most common method used by researchers when examining the impact of dissimilar perceptions of service quality between customers and managers in various sectors. As mentioned previously, the quantitative research method failed to result in standard procedures or dimensions that could significantly confirm an
impact on service quality and customer satisfaction. Therefore, and in order to perform a large and in depth investigation, the qualitative method was used.

Miller (1992) described the characteristics that can be used to distinguish the qualitative scholarly research from quantitative scholarly research:

- Qualitative research fits well with the occurrence of human behaviors and events.
- Qualitative research relies on assumptions, while the quantitative research is based on theory or an hypothesis.
- The researcher is the primary source for data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- Qualitative research data are descriptive.
- Qualitative research focuses on perceptions and experiences of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Phenomenological Research Design

This study followed the phenomenological research method. This design comes from the field of psychology and philosophy where the researcher describes the participants’ experiences with a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The phenomenological research method is the most appropriate method for studies that require deep examination and further explanation. The qualitative phenomenological method focuses on everyday phenomena that people live with. It is useful for obtaining a deep understanding of how a process works or how people evaluate and describe things (Malterud, 2001). Creswell (2007) stated that applying the phenomenological research approach helps the researcher to uncover new phenomena that he or she has not experienced before. The researcher of this present study was interested in exploring how managers of service centers and their customers perceive the quality of the after-sale services that are provided by the service centers and how different or unified perceptions can contribute
to fluctuating customer satisfaction levels. Such deep descriptions can be perfectly obtained through interviews.

**Interview Research Design**

Qualitative interviewing has become a widely used method in many important areas such as human and social sciences, education, and healthcare (Brinkmann, 2013). Rapley (2001) argued that qualitative interviewing is the main source for conducting information about society and social science issues that concern us. Interviewing is used as a sort of conversation to gather knowledge about the others’ experiences, habits, motivations, and acts (Brinkmann, 2013). An example of this is Ernest Dichter’s (1960) in-depth interview study about consumer motivation for buying a car. Besides using observation, focus groups, and case studies as data-gathering tools, qualitative research studies use interviews with participants as a data-collection method where the researcher is able to document in his or her own words the participants’ feelings, attitudes, values, and beliefs about their personal experiences (Brinkmann, 2013). The researcher uses interviews as the primary research method to gather in-depth and complex data that cannot be easily obtained through other questionnaire instruments such as SERVQUAL or SERVPERF.

Face-to-face interviews were the main method used for conducting the interviews for this research study with the service center managers and their customers. The researcher was planning to use a combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews, which was described by Shuy (2002) as one of the dominant approaches used within the last 14 years in recent years with regular customers of service centers because such methods are very useful in explaining “certain core features of human talk” (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 29). Unfortunately, this researcher did not conduct telephone interview sessions with customers as a result of some limitations, such as not having formal approval from the service managers to share some customers’ contact numbers.
In general, the qualitative interviewing method is advantageous over other methods because when facing the difficulties of the participants, the researcher can observe directly, and the interviewing method can reveal vital historical information provided by the participants, such as previous (bad or good) situations that the customer or manager participants experienced while dealing with past customer complaints or service managers’ behavior. Also, the interviewing method puts the researcher in control through his or her role of questioning (Creswell, 2014). Face-to-face interviews are the standard research method for the phenomenological research approach because the nature of such an approach requires gathering information that is mainly about human experiences and an individual’s views (Denscomb, 2014). Also, the collection of the data that are related to these experiences require deep explanation and investigation, which cannot be better detailed with any other type of data collection methods that does not involve face-to-face interviews. The desired outcome of the phenomenological research approach can be fulfilled through face-to-face interviews because the interviewees describe how things were experienced by those who were involved (Denscomb, 2014). For example, the phenomenological investigation of something likes customers’ satisfaction toward the quality of the after-sale services provided by their automobile dealers focuses on the experiences of being satisfied or dissatisfied with the variety of the after-sale services provided. This method helps the researcher try to understand how customers judge types of services from their point of view and how they evaluate or explain the causes of being satisfied or dissatisfied. Moreover, face-to-face interviews help by providing a description of the authentic experience. Such a description is vital to undercover the complexity of different situations by dealing with the things in depth without trying “to gloss over the subtleties and complications” that can be considered as crucial aspects of human different experience (Denscomb, 2014, p. 98). The phenomenological research
approach requires a detailed explanation of the experiences that were encountered by the participants, and face-to-face interviews play a significant role in obtaining such details.

The disadvantages of the qualitative interviewing method are that some critical information can be filtered through the view of the participant. Moreover, the quality of the responses might differ due to participants’ having different levels of articulation and perceptive. Furthermore, the existence of the researcher may bias the responses (Creswell, 2014). For example, the participants’ responses might be affected by the interviewer’s personality traits, which means participants might be engaged in in-depth communication with the interviewer who appears to be friendly by demonstrating high levels of smiling, laughing, and eye contact, which results in the collection of a greater amount of quality information and responses (McAdams, Jackson, & Kirschnit, 1984). Also, the interviewer’s presence might bias the participants’ responses if they were to perceive that the interviewer was biased in some why. Such bias could occur if the participants wrongly understood what the interviewer wanted to hear rather than what the situation is really like. Additionally, managers, in most cases, do not like to highlight deficiencies in the quality of the services they provide. In other words, they avoid degrading the services they are delivering (Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015), which highly affects achieving accurate responses.

In order to minimize the negative effects of the abovementioned biases, the researcher, first, carefully follows the prepared interview protocol (Appendix I) to ensure having a standard interview procedure and process in place while conducting all of the interviews activities. Second, the interviewer has to ensure the same physical-friendly appearance through all of the interviews in order to establish an appropriate interview environment that helps the participants to be more relaxed and comfortable in providing rich answers to the questions. A perfect
technique that the interviewer started with for establishing such a welcoming environment was to use an ice breaking question. For example, the interviewer started each interview with questions, such as, “How was your day so far?” or “How was the traffic on your way to work?” Last, the interviewer made sure that the reason behind the research, in general, and the interview, specifically, was properly transmitted and delivered to the participants in order to avoid any type of confusion or fears in responding to the questions. It was critical for the participants to have a good understand that the main purpose of the research was to enhance and improve their existing after-sale services that were provided rather than to criticize them.

The Researcher’s Role

As stated before, the researcher is the primary source for the data collection. The researcher’s perceptions of the after-sale services provided by the automobile companies that were chosen for this project were shaped by his personal experience. The researcher had been a customer of some of the dealers that were included in this research and he had several experiences in evaluating the quality of the services they provided.

As a result of some of these experiences, especially the most frustrating ones, the researcher could have included biases into this study. Great efforts were made to prevent these biases from shaping the way the data was collected and interpreted. For example, both interviews questions (with customer and manager participants) were designed as open-ended questions that aimed to give the participants enough space to express all of their ideas and thoughts. This practice prevented the researcher from understanding the problem from one single perspective, and it also made it much difficult for the researcher to overlook several participants’ answers, especially the ones that the researcher may not have favored. The researcher worked to avoid collecting faulty and unreliable answers by making sure the participants were not rushed, they
were ready for the interview, the questions were clear enough, and they enough time was given to the participant to answer each question. In the interpretation process, the researcher made sure all collected data were fully presented in order to minimize the possibility of results being omitted. Also, the researcher concluded with what the data was showing without manipulating the results. The researcher started this project assuming that the automobile after-sale services included many complex factors that might prevent the service managers from perceiving what was critical for their customers. The researcher was questioning how aligned were the existing managers’ perceptions of the after-sale service quality with the customers’ perceptions and what was the process they are using to identify the most significant factors that had the most effect on their customers’ satisfaction.

**Setting**

The service managers’ interviews were conducted at the workshop facilities and specifically in the managers’ offices. These facilities provided various services, such as scheduled and non-scheduled maintenance activities, structural repairs, painting, and quick services where the customers only required an oil change. The customers’ interviews were conducted in a quiet corner of the customers’ seating area located in the service centers.

**Sample**

In general, the targeted population of this study was the automobile dealers who were operating in the UAE and their regular customers. They were familiar with sharing common features related to the after-sale services they provided. Specifically, the targeted sample of this study was the service managers who were employed by the best-five automobile dealers in the UAE in 2014: Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Hyundai, and Ford (BMI, 2013), and their regular customers who were using these companies’ different post-sale services on a continuing basis.
The manager interview dates and times were scheduled by phone and the objective for the project was discussed with the participants to clarify the reason behind the interviews. The customers’ face-to-face interviews were conducted in the customers’ seating area, which was located in each of mentioned companies’ service centers, after permissions were obtained from such customers. The second method that the researcher was planning to use was phone interviews where the researcher requested an access to phone numbers of customers who had visited the service center regularly, especially those who showed a previous interest when participating in similar interviews or surveys. The researcher asked for permission to access data that indicated the level of interaction of the regular customers with previous and similar surveys or interviews questions, which would have helped to determine and select the proper sample type needed, but the request was refused by the service managers due to their companies’ customer privacy policies, which insist on protecting their customers’ private information as they described it. In both manager and customer interviews, the reason behind the interviews was discussed and clarified for the participants in order to gain their approval prior to the start of the interview sessions.

Event

By using an interview research methodology, the focus of the study was to determine how far managers’ perceptions of after-sale services differ from customers’ perceptions. If a gap between the perceptions exists, what are the common factors or dimensions that managers do not detect?

Processes

The interview protocol was developed as a guide to be used during both the managers’ and customers’ qualitative interview processes. The information from the interviews was
recorded by using digital audiotaping device and handwriting notes as a backup plan to recover any sudden or unexpected failures with the recording device (Creswell, 2014).

**Ethical Considerations**

The following ethical interview circumstances were taken into consideration during and after the interview process:

- The purpose of the research was clarified verbally and in writing format and was handed to the participants for their review.
- Permission was asked from the participants for the ability of the researcher to use a recording device.
- The participants were informed that the study results would be available for their review and implementation as they desired.
- Any participant requests or wishes, such as not declaring their names, were taken into consideration. Including anonymity in the sample size could have positively or negatively affected how honest the participants might have been in responding to the interview questions. Complete anonymity could encourage the participants to give more accurate answers because it could minimize social pressure. An example of such pressure might result in harming the company’s reputation if the service manager willingly declared a deficiency in the existing after-sale services provided to customers. On the other hand, complete anonymity could negatively encourage the participants to be less accountable and less responsible for their answers. Complete anonymity could motivate the participants to respond with less detailed and less honest answers, which, in the end, might affect the research results. Therefore, the researcher tried to minimize the accuracy of such negative impacts by striving to
make the participants sense that the accuracy of the research results would depend highly on the accuracy of their responses. The researcher clarified to the participants that the main objective of the research was to create an effective, efficient, and robust after-sale service-quality process that would help in enhancing the customers’ future experiences and increase automobile industry profits.

**Data Collection Strategies**

The first part of the data collection was from a total number of seven interviews, consisting in length of approximately 45 minutes, with service managers who were working for the previously mentioned automobile dealers. The interview consisted of eight unstructured and open-ended questions that aimed to stimulate opinions and points of view as the participants perceived them (Creswell, 2014). The structure of the interview questions (Appendix II) was based on the information gathered from the secondary data, which was the literature review information. The questions covered the following core study areas:

- How do services managers currently perceive the after-sale service, and how do they evaluate it?
- How do service managers identify the significant dimensions or factors customers perceive as critical for delivering high quality service?
- How do service managers treat customer complaints, and how do they ensure the complaint will not happen again?
- How do service managers shape their perception about the quality of the after-sale services provided, and what is the customer’s role in that?
- What does customer satisfaction mean to service managers, and how do they evaluate it?
For the second part of the data collection, there were a total of 20 interviews, which included face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes each. The researcher tried to minimize the interview time with the customers as much as possible so they would not be delayed in their schedules, which encouraged them to participate. As was the case with the managers’ interviews, the interview questions for the customers consisted of five open-ended and unstructured questions (Appendix II) that aimed to help with a deep description about the customers’ opinions on the quality of the after-sale service they usually received. Some of the customer interview questions were structured based on information obtained from the literature review, and some were structured by the researcher’s personal effort to explore and obtain insight regarding the central research question. The questions covered the following customer areas:

- How do customers evaluate the quality level of the after-sale service provided to them?
- What would cause a customer to be unhappy?
- What matters the most to the customers, and what could affect their level of satisfaction?

The researcher developed an interview protocol (Appendix I) as a guide for use during the interview sessions and for recording the answers for the qualitative interview process. The researcher used audiotaping and note-taking methods to record the participants’ answers. The note-taking process was used as a recovery procedure in case the audiotaping device failed to function. The manager and customer interview protocol included the following components suggested by Creswell (2014):
• A heading: Each service manager’s interview included the date and time that was scheduled by telephone, including the interviewer’s and interviewee’s names. Each face-to-face customer interview was conducted in the customer seating area after the interviewer obtained the required permissions.

• The interviewer followed one, standard-procedure written instruction sheet in conducting all of the interviews (Appendix I), such as using an ice-breaking question at the beginning of the interview. The interviewer asked the participant how the traffic was on the participant’s way to work, dropping, or picking up his or her car, followed by sub questions for the research plan.

• One question was designed to help the participants elaborate more or explain their ideas in further detail.

• The answers were recorded and there was also enough space on the one, standard-procedure written instruction sheet to have written notes for each question.

• A log was developed to document all of the collected data for the analysis process. The log was divided separately, which means the managers’ interview responses were separated from the customers’ responses in order to create a smoother retrieval method.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher started with extensively transcribing the recorded audio of the managers’ and the customers’ interviews to ensure examining and defining of the main structure of the talk and to have an implied meaning of each discussion. The researcher intensively prepared prior to starting the transcribing process. First, Denscomb (2014) stated that it would take several hours to transcribe the audio recordings, which reflects how time consuming transcribing audio
recordings into tasks can be. Therefore, a suitable amount of time, approximately 1 month, was scheduled for the process, based on the number of the interviews that were conducted and the length of those interviews. Second, factors such as the clarity of the recording and typing speed of the researcher, was also taken into consideration because of their roles in reducing the transcription time. Third, the transcription page layout was structured in accordance with the interview transcription requirements. For example, there was sufficient space on the pages for recording notes clearly, plus there were wide margins on the side of the page that were used for data coding and classification purposes (Denscomb, 2014). Last, but not the least, Mazza, Chapman, and Michie (2013) stated that while analyzing the data, the researcher needs to go over the transcripts more than once. Therefore, the researcher reviewed the interview answers three times to ensure that all the information was included that was mentioned by the participants.

Following the proper procedure for transcribing the recorded interviews allows for the qualitative data to be prepared and organized in a way that makes them amenable to analysis. First, the researcher started with preparing back-up copies for all of the originally collected data by storing them in two different locations (laptop hard drive + dropbox) (Denscomb, 2014). Second, the researcher used HyberRESEARCH software, version 3.7.3, for coding and categorizing all of the raw data. Using such software helped the researcher have a smoother navigation process by making it easy to go back and forth over the collected data taking less time (Denscomb, 2014). Moreover, it helped eliminate errors and contractions that were not relevant to the main purpose of this study. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to generate themes based on grouping and categorizing the data. In addition, the software enabled the researcher to better visualize the collected data in order to define the relationship between the codes and
themes (Creswell, 2007). The managers and customers transcribed interviews where coded as separate cases in order for the researcher to identify factors that affected each category of perceptions and to develop the core themes that were relevant to the after-sale service quality. The coding system was established to help find similar or adjacent words that had been presented in the interviewees’ answers. The researcher was able to form themes from the participants’ repetitive answers by reading the answers to each question repeatedly to identify the common issues and points of view that kept occurring.

Gläser and Laudel (2013) stated that the coding process is similar to tagging where the researcher gives a unique number or letter to the data to allow for a smoother identification process. Therefore, the researcher assigned each of the interviewed managers’ cases with a special code starting from “M1,” which referred to the first interviewed manager, until “M7,” which referred to the last interviewed manager, or in other words, manager number seven. The same process was followed for coding each of the customers’ cases. The first interviewed customer was given the “C1” code until the last customer, who was given the “C20” code. Each of the managers’ and customers’ interviews were entered into the HyberRESEARCH software as a separate case in order to assign suitable keywords, which helped with creating two lists that included the common and most repetitive factors that underlined how managers and customers perceived the level of the after-sale service quality and how determining such factors could help managers improve their customers’ satisfaction level. The coding process led the researcher to come up with a list of themes, which were considered the major themes that were identified by the participants and sub-themes that were listed under each of the identified major themes. These themes and sub-themes became the core categories for the analysis procedure. They were used to determine the most effective responses that contributed to highlighting the factors that
significantly affect managers’ and customers’ perceptions of the after-sale service quality and how these factors are directly linked to the customer satisfaction level. In addition, the coding process included highlighting chunks of text that presented some of the past satisfying or frustrating experiences that the customers had gone through, which also helped support the emerging themes founded by the researcher. Also, the data analysis process included comparing the research findings with the previous literature findings in order to confirm the existence of supporting relationships between the findings or to address new findings as value-added information to the research topic that could be viewed in the conclusion section of this paper.

**Verification**

The following recommend strategies by Creswell (2014) and Denscomb (2014) were employed to validate and make reliable the data:

- Triangulate by collecting the data from different sources. The primary source is the participant’s information, and the secondary source is the literature information that was gathered from books and scholarly journals.
- Member checking through going back to the participants’ answers to determine if they had been accurate enough or some change needed to take place.
- Peer debriefing by the subject professor or the project advisor who was acting as a peer examiner.
- The researcher strived to find a common theme across a number of interviews to avoid relying on one person’s statement as the only source of what was real. Such themes indicated the same idea that was shared among many people. Therefore, the researcher referred to the idea with a more confident manner than any other idea that had been created based on one individual’s point of view.
Most of the collected data was grounded extensively in the field work, which was, in this case, the service centers’ or customers’ seating areas. That provided a solid evident that the data were built on detailed examinations of the interviews involved, and it increased the credibility of the research.

The researcher supplied information that could enable others to examine how applicable are the findings to be used in another settings or organizations. For example, the researcher was targeting to interview 20 regular, automobile after-sale services customers. The number cannot be generalized to the whole population, but information such as age, sex, job description, and monthly income might help in thinking about how the similar findings can be applied to the whole automobile industry in the UAE.

**Evaluation and Outcomes**

The outcomes of this research project will contribute to advancing and enriching the knowledge regarding the quality of the after-sale service provided by various automobile dealers in the United Arab Emirates. Research on the effectiveness of the after-sale service quality in the same industry, in general, and in the UAE, specifically, are limited. Previous literature confirms that there are no consistent or proven service-quality dimensions or factors that can be generalized and that properly fit all service industries. Therefore, such a study will be useful, especially for the service providers, so they can explore the significant areas that customers perceive as crucial to classifying their service centers as having high quality service.

Service managers can utilize the study results to identify any differences between their perceptions and the customers’ on the quality of the services provided after the sale of their automobiles. The results will be also useful in predicting customers’ future requirements and to
help fulfill those requirements ahead of time. Such a practice is essential in the current competitive environment. Customer satisfaction is the key element that prevents the automobile companies from losing market shares, which cannot be obtained without focusing on the customer requirements and striving to fulfill them.

**Results and Interpretations**

The purpose of this study was to determine how service managers and their customers perceive the after-sale services quality provided by the top five selling automobiles companies in the UAE and how customer satisfaction level could be affected by having an existence gap between the perceptions. Seven service managers and 20 customers participated in face-to-face interviews to gather details about the after-sale services based on their knowledge or experiences.

Although demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, experience, education level, etc., can have a significant effect on customer satisfaction level, as stated by Danaher (1998) and the Mittal and Kumar (2001) study finding that showed that customer satisfaction is moderated by the outcomes of such demographic characteristics, which includes the customer repurchasing behavior as an example. But the researcher did not take any of their characteristics into consideration because the main research objective was to highlight the common and general factors that customers and managers perceive as crucial regardless of the segment to which they belong. Also, the researcher assumed that customers in different segments would have similar perceptions and requirements regarding the quality of the after-sale service they wish to receive, and they would share similar factors that affected their level of satisfaction. Kumar (2012) supported this researcher through stating that various segmentations suffer from the same issues by the service they receive, and the segmentation process is vital for categorizing and classifying
customers based on various aspects, but it would not help in differentiating the individuals and their needs within the marketplace.

Manager interviews were conducted in their offices, while the customer interviews were conducted in the customer seating areas located in the various service centers. The participants’ answers showed a variety of opinions, points of view, and interesting outcomes regarding the existing after-sale services. The research questions directed the phenomenological examination toward being more focused on understanding and evaluating what are the participants’ insights and perspectives were regarding the after-sale services and how they could be linked to overall customer satisfaction level.

The findings of this research study are divided into two main sections. The first section, which is related to Research Question 1, is divided into three main parts. The first part is the data collected from the service manager interviews, the second part is the data collected from the customer interviews, which contain both parties’ perceptions on the quality of the after-sale services and their beliefs about the most important factors that significantly enhance the way they perceive the quality of the after-sale services. The third part presents a cross comparisons of service managers’ and customers’ perceptions. The second section, which is related to Research Question 2, reflects data that presented the significant link between managers’ and customers’ perceptions of the after-sale service quality and customer satisfaction level.

**Section 1**

**Part 1: Service Managers’ Perception of Post-Sale Service Quality**

The series of the interview open-end questions were structured to go beyond the managers’ perspective about the most important factors customers required to have in the after-sale services, focusing on what services managers use to gather customer data, obstacles, and
repeated customer’s complaints to have a comprehensive overview of the managers’ perceptions. Four main themes emerged in the analysis of the service managers’ interviews: managers’ perception of the customers’ common needs, methods managers use to identify customers’ needs, factors that prevent managers from meeting customers’ expectations, and common customer complaints from the managers’ perception.

Theme number 1: Managers perception of the customers’ common needs.

The researcher pursued to stimulate service managers to provide a list that contained critical elements related to the customers’ common needs as they perceive them. Eight sub-themes emerged from interviewing the service managers in relation to customers’ common needs: high quality service, sufficient cost, fast delivery process, service advisors’ proficient and attitudes, spare parts availability, proper car washing, detailed service reports, and service center location.

High quality service, fast delivery process, and sufficient cost were the most consistent elements that were mentioned by all of the service managers. The interesting finding, though, was that there was no similar definition or interpretation to what they meant by “high quality service” among all seven interviewed service managers. Some of the managers referred to high quality service as performing the maintenance activities in authorized dealer workshops, doing the needed jobs with high standards, and fixing the issues the first time. Others perceived high quality service as a customer judgment at the delivery stage of the service, while one of the service managers described high quality service as delivering the cars to the customers in safe condition. Also, some of the service managers mentioned that high quality service meant “fault-free service” or “zero-defects service,” which they described further by saying it was about eliminating the appearance of any type of defect that was caused during the service when
delivering the cars to the customers. Participant M5 used a different term, which was “peace of mind.” He explained it further by stating, “customers don’t expect to see any type of problems with the vehicles after the service.”

All the seven service managers referred to the service cost as one of the most important requirements for their customers. M3 and M4 ranked service cost at the top of the customers’ priority list, M3 stated “

From the customers’ perspective, all the three elements, which are cost, speed, and quality are important; but as a service manager, I think cost is the most important need for the customers. They would always negotiate the price trying to get the maximum discount they can, of course they would not sacrifice on the other two elements to get a better a discounted price, but you would still notice that their interest regarding the price is more than delivery speed and the quality of the service.”

M4 stated “customers usually put the cost of the service as their first priority because they assume that they paid for brand new cars, which should not break, and everything is included under the warranty contract.” Other service managers emphasized the continuous customer request of having suitable service chargers, assuming that the prices were too high. M1 was the only manager who admitted that their service prices were too high by stating “we admit that we offer high service prices, but that is due to the high quality services and materials we are using in our inspections, which is not offered by our competitors.”

The majority of the service managers emphasized the importance of service speed as a core element in their customers’ needs list. The only manager who did not include service speed in the customers’ needs list was M6. Instead he highlighted other elements, such as high quality service, service cost, and proper washing. The interesting finding about service speed was that all six managers linked the service speed to how long it would take until the customer would get his car back, neglecting an important aspect, which was the drop off process or how long the customer should wait until he gets serviced. M3 and M7 shared the reasons behind the strong
insistence from most of the customers to have their cars back as soon as possible, while the other managers did not highlight any specific reasons that reflect the customers’ points of view. M3 stated, “customers always require us to speed up the maintenance activities, because most of the customers consider their cars as the only way of transportation” and M7 stated,

Customers always expect their cars to be ready as soon as possible because cars here in the UAE are the main source of transportation and customers cannot live without it for half a day and they do not have another alternative except taxi which cost quite high and the public buses which are not available where they live.

Some of the relevant quotes regarding high quality service, service cost, and service speed as being the most three main consistent elements as the service managers stated them are:

Customers’ most common needs are after-sale service quality of the products in terms of receiving their cars back with zero defects. Customers usually have a solid perception toward performing maintenance in a trusted dealer automobile company. They view the services that will be done as high quality standard, so they are not expecting to discover any type of defects (small or big) when they come to receive their cars. They also insist on having their cars delivered with the time promised by the service advisors because most of the customers don’t accept any delays. Lastly, they always require the management to reconsider and evaluate the prices for the services as it appears to be too high. (M1)

The most important customers’ needs are the speed in performing the job and, solving the problem, and the cost you will offer them. Usually customers judge the quality of the after-sale services provided to them when they pick up their cars. They considered factors such as how long the maintenance took, how many problems or issues with the car have been detected, the availability of the spare parts, the price of the spare parts, and the cost of the labor charges, before making the final judgment about the quality of the provided services. (M2)

The most common needs for our customers are quality, which means they need their cars to be fixed from the first time because they hate to come back again for issues they raised previously, speed in performing the required maintenance because most of the customers consider their cars as the only source of transportation, and suitable price which can fit their budget. (M3)

M4 stated that “I would say the primary needs for most of our customers, and I will rank them from high to low are cost, good quality service, availability of spare parts, and less time consuming.” M5 stated: “Our customers’ most common needs are to receive their vehicles with
safe condition after we perform the service, no delays expected because most of the customers want it to get done as soon as possible.” M6 replied, “I can say our customers most needs are high service quality, which means they need to get their cars back from the service with excellent driving condition and to be fault free.”

The common needs for our customers are to have affordable service charges, to get their car as fast as possible, which means if they drop the car in the morning, they are wishing [for it] to be collected within [a] couple of hours, and [at a] high care and service level, which means they need their cars to be served with care and with high quality service. (M7)

Three out of the seven managers added “service advisor proficient” and “attitude to the customers’ needs list.” All three agreed that customer[s] would prefer to deal with service advisor[s] who can show them high level of soft skills in terms of treating them with respect and with warm welcoming. Also they indicated that customers would prefer to be serviced from a service advisor who has high technical knowledge so he can easily diagnose their issues and quickly fix them. The three service managers’ quotes are: “Customers prefer to work with [a] service advisor who has soft skills and kindesses, such as smiling to their face[s] listen[ing] to them and make their wishes real.” M5 said that “customers require to see [a] high level of customer service, which includes treating them with high level of respect, listen[ing] and record[ing] all complaints they mention, provide feedback, and they expect us to react immediately to solve their problems.” M6 said that “in addition to what I have mentioned, customers need to deal with smiley-face service advisors who can clearly understand their needs and make sure all their needs are met.”

The availability of spare parts is another element. Four out of the seven service managers added it to the customers’ needs list. M2 was the only manager who highlighted the charges of the spare parts beside their availability. He stated, “customers care about the availability of the
spare parts and the price they will pay for them.” M5 added the term “genuine spare part” by stating, “customers expect us to replace their old spare parts with genuine ones.” M4 and M7 mentioned the availability of the spare parts as a general statement while listing all of the other important elements without any further details.

Two of the seven service managers mentioned that their customers show special interest toward having a proper cleaning done to their cars after finishing the service. M1 stated that “our customers insist on having a quality washing and cleaning performed to their cars.” M6 further explained what customers expect from the washing process by stating, “customers require their car to be super clean when the service is done, which should cover the external and the internal parts of the car.”

M5 is the only participant who highlighted the importance of providing the customers with a detailed service report whenever they ask for it. He believed that such reports allow the customers to feel the value of their money, and also it helps in gaining customers’ trust. M5 stated,

Usually and from my experience, 70% of the customers will ask the service advisor for detailed explanations for the services performed so they can evaluate and compare it with the amount of money they paid. This kind of detailed explanation make[s] the customers feel more confident and help[s] in increasing their trust level toward us as [a] service provider.

Out of the seven service managers, two mentioned that customers request to have service centers in different locations so they can have variety of options to choose from and that would fit their schedule. M7 said, “customers would expect the service center to be near to where they live so they can reach to it easily.” M1 described having multiple service centers in different locations as a kind of after-sale support, as a company, that would work on improving continually, he stated,
Our customers always require to have strong after-sale service support, which means having multiple workshop branches in different locations with extended working hours, so they can have a variety of choices depending on their time and locations. Thus, our company started to expand all over the country by opening 12 service center[s] operating with different timing to allow the customers [to] feel more convenient with the after-sale service process.

Table 1 displays a breakdown of the sub-themes related to theme number one. All service managers (100%) shared the same perceptions of having high quality service and sufficient service cost as a core element in the customers’ needs list. The second most important element is fast service (86%). The availability of spare parts came next with 57%. The service advisor’s attitude & proficiency obtained was at 43%. Proper washing and service center location shared the same value at 28%, and a detailed service report obtained the lowest percentage at 14%.

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Theme Number 1: Managers’ Perception of the Customers’ Common Needs</th>
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<td>Response</td>
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<td>Sufficient Cost</td>
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<td>Fast Service</td>
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<td>Spare Parts Availability</td>
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<td>Service Advisor Proficient &amp; Attitudes</td>
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<td>Proper Washing</td>
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<td>Service Center Location</td>
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<td>Detailed Service Report</td>
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**Theme number 2: Methods managers use to identify customers’ needs.**

The researcher focused on identifying the different approaches managers were taking to track their customers’ various needs. Seven sub-themes emerged from the managers’ answers:
customer relationship management (CRM), customer feedback through service advisors, experience, gut feeling, open door policy, suggestion box, and survey.

Six out of the seven service managers mentioned that the CRM departments in their companies were responsible for gathering all customer feedback and concerns. All of the service managers’ answers explained how the CRM department gathers the customer data, which is through after-service follow-up calls that the department performs. The only company that hired a third-party company to do the follow up call is M3’s company. The service manager explained the reason was to make the customers more confident while sharing their experiences. M3 added:

Our company contracted third-party company to get the customers’ feedback believing that customers would be more honest in their feedback when talking to others than the one they use to deal with, especially when answering questions such as did the service advisor explain the cost you will pay in details? Why you are paying it? What is needed for replacement? The general condition of the car and the time required to finish the entire job.

M4 and M3 were the only service managers who stated that their CRM department called every single customer who they performed service for because each customer’s need should be met. M5 and M6 mentioned that calling their customers was done on random basis, which means they heard from a random sampling of their customers and then generalized the experience. M7 was the only manager who did not mention any CRM role in gathering the customers’ needs. He assigned this role to the service advisor by stating “the service advisor will make after-service call to the customers he serviced within 24 hours from performing the service to make sure that everything is going good and the customer is happy about the service he got.” Some of the quotes related to the CRM method were, “We track our customers’ needs through post-service follow-up call[s] where we call our customers the next day from receiving their cars to find out more about their experience with us and to record their feedback” (M1).
M2 stated,

Our customer relationship management (CRM) team performs continuous after-service call[s] to our customers, asking them about their impressions about the service, their comments, feedback, or any kind of suggestion they have.

M3 commented that,

Our company outsourced a third-party company to track the customers’ feedback. This company would call each customer after performing the service in one of our workshops asking them about their impressions, needs, requirements, suggestion, and cost, [and] how they have been treated, and so on.

M4 stated:

Our company established a system which tracks all our customers’ needs, requirements, complains, and feedbacks used by the CRM department. We have a record of all our customers, so we call them after each service they perform in our workshop to hear about their experience and for any further requirements they need to see and touch in their next visit. They are responsible about calling each single customer after visiting the workshop to ask them to rate their experiences in terms of the quality of the service they got, the service advisor behavior, the money they paid, the condition of the car, waiting time, and so on.

M5 answered that,

We have a system that we call it “after service post call.” The purpose of this system is to call the customers on [a] random basis, who have performed the services in our facility within 72 hours asking them various questions such as how do they evaluate their experience with us? How the service advisors welcomed them? Do they feel the value of the paid money according to the service they received?

M6 responded with,

The first one is through the CRM department that I have previously mentioned. The department will choose random customers who have performed services with us and call them to ask about how satisfied they are from their past service experience.

The majority of the service managers gathered information about their customers’ needs through their service advisors who are a vital source for recording all of the customers’ requirements, feedback, and issues. The service advisors get a chance to collect all of the
information in the face-to-face interaction with the customers during the drop-off or the delivery process. Some of the quotes related to this method were:

The service advisor will spend enough time noting all the customer issues and concerns in details. If something appears to be so technical and beyond his capability, a technical representative will be presented to have a better understanding of the customers’ needs. Usually customers provide feedback when they receive their cars after completing scheduled or non-scheduled maintenance activities. (M1)

We identify our customers’ needs directly from their feedback provided to the service advisor. We always consider hearing the customers in the top of our priority list. We try to determine their needs when they come and drop their cars for the different purposes such as scheduled maintenance, non-scheduled maintenance, and body repair activities in case of accident. (M3)

Our service advisors always try to get closer to the customers to have a better and clearer perception about all their needs. Usually what we are trying to do is to keep asking the customers questions until we reach to detailed answers. For example, if the customer came to us complaining about specific failure in the car, we would keep asking him questions such as do you experience such a failure while driving or stopping? Do you feel the car become[s] unstable? Do you hear any strange voices, and so on, until we can detect the root cause of the problem so we easily fix it from the first time? (M5)

First of all, we give the responsibility to our service advisors to record and clearly understand all the customers’ needs very accurately. For example, when the customer will come to drop his car for the service, the service advisor will make sure that all the customers’ comments and notes have been clearly written down. Also we ask the service advisors on [a] continuous basis to clearly understand what the customers meant, if they fail to understand, a technician from the maintenance department will go for a test drive with the customer just to be sure the problem is detected. (M6)

We track our entire customers’ request through the service advisors’ physical interactions with our customers. The service advisor interacts and talk[s] with the customer to identify all the requirements related to the car and take[s] any special request the customer would like to ask for, such as quick[er] service than usual. (M7)

Two out of the seven managers mentioned that they use the suggestion boxes as a method to collect their customers’ needs. M2 stated, “We also have our suggestion box that we look at periodically to identify all our customers’ concerns and also to use the information for our future improvement process.” M3 added, “We locate our suggestion and complaint box in the customers’ waiting area so they can have a chance to express and share with us their
experiences.” The rest of the service managers did not highlight any use of a suggestion box for data collection.

The use of the survey tool was only mentioned by two service managers. M1’s company used a survey system, which they referred to as the service value survey (SVS). Basically, the company distributes the survey forms to their customers in the delivery stage hoping that, in return, they will complete it and provide the company with valuable feedback. M1 elaborated more in the survey design and how their design encouraged the customers to participate, he stated:

We distribute the survey forms [to] our customers after they received their cars and encourage them to highly participate on it by making them understand that we use their comments, feedbacks, and requirements for the future improvement. We ensure that our survey is short, which will not take much time from the customer, and also include all the important factors that directly affect their level of satisfaction, such as how happy they are regarding the time they spend during the after-sale service process; how clean they received the car; how happy they are from the level of the service quality provided; how happy they are about the price they paid; and if they would recommend our workshop to others or not.”

M7 mentioned that the survey system they used was an important channel for tracking customers’ needs, and they always encourage customers to participate because their feedback is important to improve the customer service activities.

M2 was the only service manager who considered that one of his duties was to listen to the customers’ needs. He referred to that as an “open door policy.” One of his company’s policies is to get closer to their customers in order to understand them well. M2 added,

In our company, we implement the open door policy to be able to get closer to our customers, in order to identify all their needs. For example, if you can realize that as a service manager, I do not have a hidden back office, my office is reachable and all the customers can see it, so if they have any concerns, needs, special requirements, and so on, I will be at their service to solve their issues or to note their requirements.
Also, M2 was the only manager who mentioned the role of having experienced service managers in identifying customers’ needs. As he mentioned, in all of his company branches, the service manager had no less than 15 years of experience in the same position. He further said that,

In our company, we identify our customers’ needs through our long experience in the automobile market. For example, I have 26 years of experience working with this company here in the UAE. So based on that, we can easily identify all the common needs, and because most these needs are consistent and would not change over time.

M6 was the only manager who relied on his gut feeling to identify what his customers wanted. He explained the reason behind this by saying, humans share similar common needs; they all love to be treated nicely and respectfully. They also love to see others showing them high level of attention, and they love to see their requirements accomplished. All customers share the same needs, which are easy to identify.

Table 2 summarizes all of the sub-themes related to Theme 2. Of the service managers interviewed, 86% got the information regarding their customers’ needs through the CRM department.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Number 2: Methods Managers Use to Identify Customers’ Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback Through Service Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Door Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gut Feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the service managers interviewed, 71% used their service advisors to collect such information by face-to-face interaction with the customers. Suggestion boxes and surveys were only used by 28% of the service managers, and an open door policy, experience, and gut feeling came at the bottom of the list with 14% of the service managers using these methods.

**Theme number 3: Factors preventing managers from meeting customers’ needs.**

Six sub-themes emerged while the researcher was asking the service managers to identify the obstacles that can prevent them from fulfilling the customers’ requirements. These sub-themes were price and feature comparison, lack of warranty knowledge, lack of clarification or failure to clarify, rigid polices, lack of manpower, and long process.

Five out of the seven managers agreed that their jobs became difficult when they tried to convince customers who started arguing about the features of their cars or the service price they were required to pay based on comparing other cars’ brands. Such comparisons made most of what the customers asked for hard to obtain. M3 elaborated that by stating such, most of the customers do not pay attention to the features of the new car they are going to buy. They are shocked when they discover that the new car they purchased is missing many of the important features they used to have in their previous car. He also added that it is the same with the service price. “When customers start complaining about the price being too high, comparing it with other competitors, they don’t put in consideration many important factors such as quality of the service, car category, brand’s name, and so on.” The following are some quotes related to this sub-theme of price and feature comparison:

Customers always view the prices we offer as too high, which always drive them to do the minimum services for their cars. For example, if there is any additional preventive service, which can ensure long-term serviceability, they will refuse doing it, assuming that it’s expensive. The reason for such a perception is that they always compare the price we offer with the competitors.” (M1)
When customers start comparing our service prices with competitors by saying they charge much less for the services they provide, that could be true because the quality of the services differ from one company to another, but also don’t forget that there are many others who charge much more than us. (M3)

M4 stated that “customers always assume that we charge our services too high. They set such an assumption based on the comparison they perform between us and other competitors.”

Customers always compare our service prices with other competitors or un-authorized dealers. They do not understand that we base our prices according to the quality of the job, genuine spare parts, and the high qualified labors to perform the job which totally differ us from others. (M5)

M6 commented that “customers always compare our prices with competitors. For example, they would say I have company (A) car with the same class, and I service it cheaper than here.

The majority of the service managers, five out of seven, considered the lack of knowledge regarding the car warranty terms and conditions as a barrier to fulfill their customers’ requirements. M7 spoke about the customers’ responsibility to become familiar with the needed information about the warranty of their cars. He stated “few customers would read or even have [take the] time to open the car booklet, which explains many terms and conditions of the warranty and the service contract policies.” M5 shared the same point of view, which is that a customer can lose the validity of their warranty if they do not read the terms and conditions by stating, “most of the customers do not read the warranty terms and conditions, which insist on doing the periodic car inspections in our workshop in order to keep their warranty valid.” M6’s point of view was that most of the customers assume that all the faults and the defects, which will appear during the warranty period, will be covered by saying:

Customers assume whatever happens to the car during the warranty period will be fixed for free which is not completely true. For example, if the customer abused using the car or use[s] it in the wrong condition such as taking a salon car to the desert and got [it] damaged, then it will not be covered under the warranty.
M4 mentioned that customers with solid information about the warranty are able to distinguish the items that can be replaced under warranty and which cannot be by saying:

Customers set their minds that [the] defects which will be discovered during the periodic services will be replaced for free, which is not true because there are parts which are not included under the warranty, like the consumable ones such as the tire and the car battery, as an example.

M3 had the same perception about the issue by saying “most of the customers think that the warranty, which comes with the car, will cover everything, and they do not need to pay anything, even for the scheduled maintenance, which is to some extend not true.

Two out of the seven managers highlighted the importance of having clear customer clarification of the problem they face in order to accurately diagnose and solve their issues. M4 emphasized on the importance of having detailed clarifications in order to identify the main source of the problem. He said, “It is the customers’ responsibility to clarify exactly what is annoying them, because without their clarifications, we cannot identify the root cause of the problem in order to fix it.” M7 talked about customers who had no time to spend with the service advisor. He elaborated by saying “most of the customers do not have enough time to spend with the service advisor to explain the problem in details, which makes it hard for us to identify the exact problem and fix it from the first time.”

Out of the seven service managers, only two mentioned how their companies’ policies could be strong barriers that prevent them from obtaining what customers are willing to have. M4 described his company policy regarding the service price as a rigid one that he cannot break by saying, “we have a structured and studied discount amount that I am not authorized to go below.” M7 elaborated further by stating:

The manufacture policy, the company policy, or the ministry of economy policy could act as barriers on meeting the customers’ expectation. For example, some customers would ask us to go beyond the warranty policy and fix or replace some parts of their cars which
are not included in the warranty. Most of the time, we face [a] serious problem with such customers.

M2 was the only manager who described how the lack of manpower can delay achieving what the customers are waiting for by saying “the lack of manpower, which we sometimes have in the workshop, could delay the maintenance activities and result in delaying the cars’ delivery to our customers.” Also, he was the only manager who talked about the slow internal process and its effects on meeting the customers’ needs. M2 stated:

Sometimes, it is the company internal process which requires my direct interaction as a service manager. For example, some of the customers’ cars might require spare parts, and these parts are not available in our workshop, which needed to be requested from our spare parts facility store located in Dubai. Such a process might take [a] long time due to the need of many people approve, so as a service manager, I would try to speed up the process by making phone calls explaining the situation or even visit the spare parts manager in his office to find a suitable resolution to prevent the customers waiting for a long time.

Table 3 shows a list of management factors that prevent meeting the customers’ needs. Price and feature comparisons and lack of warranty knowledge was the leading factors at 71%.

Table 3

| Theme Number 3: Factors Preventing Managers from Meeting Customers’ Needs |
|-----------------|-------|------|
| Response        | n    | %    |
| Price & Features Comparison | 5    | 71%  |
| Lack of Warranty Knowledge | 5    | 71%  |
| Lack of Failure Clarification | 2    | 28%  |
| Rigid Policies  | 1    | 14%  |
| Lack of manpower| 1    | 14%  |
| Long process    | 1    | 14%  |
Others (28%) mentioned the importance of having clear customer clarification for the problem they were facing. Of the service managers, 14% talked about the negative effect of the companies’ rigid polices. Lack of manpower and long process came at the bottom of the list at 14%.

**Theme number 4: Common customer complaints from service managers’ perspectives.** The researcher aimed to identify factors that customers complained about the most as described by the service managers. Five sub-themes emerged throughout the discussions with the service managers, which were expensive service charges, slow delivery, repeated defects, service advisor behavior, and washing condition.

All of the service managers shared the same point of view regarding the service charges. All of them mentioned that customers feel unhappy about the service charges they have to pay, assuming that they are too high, and they always ask for discounts in order to reduce the amount of the total amount. M1 stated, “customers always feel unhappy about the service price.” M2 elaborated more by saying, “customers would also negotiate the cost of the maintenance they have to pay to get the best discount they could have.” M3 mentioned the reason behind the customer assumption regarding the price being too high by saying, “customers always complain about the price they will pay for the service because they compare our service prices with competitors who charge less than what we do.” M4 and M5 stated that most of the customers were not satisfied with the amount of their final bill, and they would always fight to get the maximum discount they could receive. M6 stated that “most of the customers will not walk away without having some discounted price,” and M7 said “the service price make[s] the customers unhappy, therefore, they seek for some discount.”
Out of the seven managers, four of them talked about the customers’ complaint regarding the washing condition of the car. M1 said that during his experience as a service manager, he has noticed that customers complain about the quality of the washing on continuous basis. M5 elaborated more, talking about the issue by mentioning the solution his company used to prevent this type of customer complaint. He stated,

The primary customer complaint is about washing. Previously, in all the branches, we used to issue washing coupons so the customers can use them to wash their car outside, they were happy about it, but the company stopped it for some reasons.

M7 went further in the discussion, talking about the gap between what customers expected according to the quality standard. He said:

Customers complain about cleanness of their cars after the performed service. The washing and cleaning we provide here is not part for the service, and we charge nothing for it. We just provide it as a complimentary service for our customers, so what we try to do is to explain for them that we can do a super cleaning, which will make their car look brand new, but it has an extra charge they have to pay.

Also, M6 added “some customers will complain about not being satisfied with the cleaning done to their cars after the service.”

Three out of the seven managers talked about the slow delivery process as a source of customer complaints. M2 talked about how fast the customers want to receive their cars after maintenance by stating “customers mostly complain about the speed of accomplishing the job because most of them would require us to be super-fast in performing the needed maintenance.” M5 discussed the issue further by saying “customers hate when we cannot keep up with our promises, especially if it is related to the delivery of their cars, which sometimes could happen due to the unexpected work pressure.” M7 said “customers will feel much better if they have their car delivered to them as fast as possible.”
Repeated defects were mentioned by six out of the seven managers, and service advisor behavior was mentioned by four out of the seven managers. All of them shared a common thought. All believed that both factors were so rare to happen, and they did not see it appearing continuously. The following are some quotes related to repeated defects and service advisor behavior:

There are some other rare factors customers complain about, such as the customer might drop the car complaining about a specific matter, and he would discover later on when he receives the car that the same problem is not being fixed. (M2)

M4 stated that “also there are some rare problems which do not happen more often, such as the customer who would come back with the same problem he dropped the car for.” M5 mentioned that “there are very rare complaints about customers coming back complaining about the same problems they dropped the car into the service for.” M3 commented that “the second rare issue is some of the customers might complain about the service advisor due to misunderstanding or language barrier; therefore, we try to hire different nationalities in order to avoid such misunderstanding.”

In some occasions, customers will complain about not having personal care, which means that some of them would like to have [a] personal relation[ship] with the service advisor, so they feel that they are more engaged with the person they are talking with so he can understand all their needs, in [a] simple manner. (M7)

Table 4 displays some of the factors that drive customers to complain, as the service managers perceived them. All (100%) of the service managers viewed expensive service charges as core factors for the customer complaints. Washing condition not meeting what customers’ expectation occurred 67% in the interviews, and 43% of said customers needed the delivery process to be as fast as possible.
Table 4

Theme Number 4: Common Customers Complaints from Managers’ Perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expensive Service Charges</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated Defects</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Advisor Behaviour</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Condition</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow Delivery</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Repeated defects (68%) and service advisor behavior (67%) were the factors that were considered rare from the service managers’ points of view.

Part 2: Customers Perception of the Post-Sale Service Quality

The aim of the structured open-ended questions used to interview the customers was to elicit information regarding their expectations of the after-sale service quality and also to explore whether the experiences they had matched their expectations. Furthermore, the questions concentrated on highlighting factors that customers complained about and also to explore what prevented them from raising their complaint to the managers. Three main themes emerged in the analysis of the customers’ interviews: customers’ expectations of the after-sale service quality, factors customers complain about frequently, and reasons for not complaining to the service centers’ management.

Theme number 5: Customers’ expectations of the after-sale service quality. Eight sub-themes emerged while the researcher asked the participants to explore what their experiences were in the service center. These sub-themes were high quality service, fast service, reasonable
service cost, experienced service advisor, friendly atmosphere, parking space, a detailed service report, and proper washing of their cars.

Out of the 20 participants, 19 mentioned the term “high quality service” as something they needed to experience, but they had different definitions for the term. Some participants described high quality service as performing the necessary checks to their cars’ major components. C1 said “first of all, I am expecting to have quality of the service, which means they should check all the major parts in my car.” C2 supported what C4 mentioned, but he provided more details by highlighting some of the major car components he expected the service center to check. He stated, “I am looking for high quality service, which means I expect them to have a careful inspection, which includes the tires, engine, and the other main components.” C8 thought that doing such high quality maintenance would prevent him from visiting the service center so often. C10 considered such high quality maintenance as a vital need because he is driving his car for long distances every day. For C14, high quality service meant any problem with the car should be solved from the first time. C15 looked at high quality service from another perspective, he said, “

I would expect them to provide me with high quality services because, as an authorized dealer, they should use genuine parts in my car and also have high skilled technicians who got their training based on the criteria of the mother company in Japan.

Others, such as C18 and C11, used the terms “excellent service,” “safety,” and the “best service to be done to my car,” as they were describing what high quality service meant to them.

Of the 20 participants, 18 discussed the importance of experiencing fast service activities in terms of dropping or collecting their cars. C3 talked about the importance of serving the customers as fast as possible in all conditions by stating,
I would like to spend less time as I can until I get serviced no matter what time I would come in. For example, sometimes, and especially when there are too many customers waiting to be serviced, it would take me up to 45 minutes.

C4 discussed fast service from both dimensions, the first one is the drop off and the waiting time by saying “I would expect them to serve me fast,” and the second dimension is the delivery time by saying, “and also to get my car ready for me as soon as possible.” C6 had the same point of view by saying, “I expect to come here at 8:00 and drop off my car directly to the service without keeping me waiting and also want them to finish my car within 1 day.” The same with C9, he stated that “I am strongly expecting that I will not stay here for long waiting to be served, and my car will ready as fast as possible.” C10 elaborated more by stating the reason behind the strong need of having the car delivered as soon as possible is that “it is my only transportation to move from [one] place to another so, I cannot leave it for a whole day here in the service.” C11 looked at fast service from a different angle. He gave the responsibility of the service advisor to clearly identify how long the car will be in the service. He mentioned,

I expect the service advisor to be punctual in delivering my car, for example, if the service advisor told me that my car will be ready after 3 hours, I need to come after 3 hours and find my car ready for collection.

C17 shared the same view by saying, “I would expect my car to finish from the service as soon as possible, for example, today the service advisor promised me that my car will finish within two hours that’s why I decided to wait.” The rest of the customers shared the idea of having fast delivery service and minimum drop off time.

Out of the 20 customers, 16 emphasized on the importance of dealing with proficient and experienced service advisor. The participants highlighted that, for various reasons, some of them required the service advisor to carefully record all their comments and fix them straight away C1 said “I would like to deal with [an] experienced service advisor who will understand all my
concerns and solve it from the first time.” C2 elaborated more by saying that the way the service advisor treats him reflects how proficient he is in performing his job. He said “Also, I would like to see how proficient he is in dealing with me, which means he should understand all my concerns from the first time and resolve them immediately.” C4 agreed with both statements by saying, “I am also expecting that they will record and understand all my service needs and fix it from the first time.” Other customers highlighted the importance of communication and how it could be a strong barrier between them and the service advisors. C3 stated “I would like to see a proficient service advisor who can speak English very well and can understand all my needs and requirements.” C8 elaborated further by saying, “I am expecting to have a good communication with the service advisor, which means I need him to explain for me in details what is the problem with my car and how they are going to fix it.” Also, some of the participants felt that the service advisor should be able to offer efficient and cost-effective solutions. C19 said:

The service advisor should be able to give me good advice and alterative solutions for what I should change or what I can keep for the next service rather than insisting on changing everything, which will help me save money at the end.

C17 mentioned the same point by saying:

The service advisor, which I deal with, should be able to well explain what is wrong with my car and also offer me alternative, cost-effective solutions that I can choose from. What would make me feel more confident [is] if I feel that his purpose is not to make me spend money for unnecessary staff.

The other participants shared a common thought which was that the service advisor should understand their needs and work on them.

Out of the 20 customers, 14 agreed that reasonable service cost is something they seek. C1, C4, and C10 were the only participants who linked the service cost with examples from their previous experiences. C1 stated, “I would expect the bill to be reasonable, which is too high in this company, comparing it with other brands,” and C10 stated,
Also, I expect that they will charge me [a] reasonable price, for example, if I do the oil change in petrol station it will cost me less but the good thing here is they do all the necessary inspections for my car, which you don’t have outside, but I still think that the price is too high.

C4’s example was, “I expect a good price, for example, the oil change here cost me 700 Dirham, but if I do the same thing in the petrol stations, it would cost me around 100 Dirham.” The remainder of the customers used terms such as “affordable price,” “best price I can have,” and “best discount.”

Out of the 20 customer participants, six talked about their hope to have a friendly atmosphere at the service centers they visit. C5, C7, and C9 described the friendly atmosphere with the word “welcoming.” C11 explained it further by saying “friendly staff that can understand my needs and help me if I need something urgent.” C12 linked it with the physical appearance of the service advisor by saying “nice smiley attitude from the service advisors.” C17 also gave more details in his discussion by mentioning that:

Accommodating in the way they treat the customers, for example, having a person who guides where to park. The same when I enter the service center, I would expect someone to approach me and offer help like which counter I should go to and who is the person who can help me.

Three out of the 20 participants emphasized how the detailed service reports are important in various ways. C7 described it as a way of being transparent with the customers by mentioning that a “detailed service report reflects the level of the company transparency.” The other two participants, C3 and C6, looked at this type of reports as a way that they could improve their trust with the company, and it made them feel safer while driving.

Also, three out of the 20 customers insisted on the need of having car ample parking space. C16 said, “I need to see enough parking spaces, so I don’t need to keep looking for parking.” C19 shared the same comment by saying, “parking space should be always available.”
C17 talked about the parking space by saying, “I would like to [a] have convenient parking space.” Proper washing was only mentioned by C14 who said, “washing and cleaning of my car after the service should be properly done.”

Table 5 recaps all of the sub-themes associated with Theme 5. Of participants, 95% highlighted high service quality as a major need they expected to experience, 90% of the participants expressed their need of fast service, and more than half of the customers (70%) believed that the role of the proficient service advisor was significant in enhancing their experiences. Of the participants, 30% expected to pay a reasonable cost for the services, less than half (20%) talked about the friendly atmosphere they are looking for, a low percentage of the customers (15%) described the detailed service report as a way to improve their trust, and the same percentage (15%) spoke of the need for the availability of parking spaces. Proper washing came at the bottom of the list at 5%.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Service Quality</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Service</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable Service Cost</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly Atmosphere</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed Service Report</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Space</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper Washing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme number 6: Frequent customer complaints. Six sub-themes emerged while the participants were discussing the most common factors that made them unhappy with their previous experiences: delays in car drop off and delivery processes, repeated defects, service advisor’s soft and hard skills, bad service center locations, lack of parking space, and high service cost.

Of the 20 customers, 16 mentioned that they were unhappy about the delays caused by either the drop off and the delivery processes. C10 and C11 expressed their frustrating from the delays in receiving their cars after the service was accomplished and how that caused C10 to pay additional charges.

The main reason which makes me unhappy is when they promise to deliver my car in a specific time and they don’t do so. I brought the car yesterday for the service and they promised me that it will finish today early morning so I came and I discovered that they didn’t finish it. They said it will finish in the afternoon so I left to go to work by taxi which cost me money, and I came back at 1:00 and also I paid for the taxi, and still I did not receive my car, and I am still waiting. (C10)

The long time I spend here makes me unhappy, for example, yesterday the service staff called me and he said my car will be ready at 12 o’clock. When I came exactly on time, I discovered that my car was not ready yet, so they told me to wait a bit, now I am waiting since 3 hours. (C11)

C12 and C6 both talked about the inefficient service appointment system the company was using and how it did not help them to be serve customers faster as expected. C6 said, “I always have problem with the appointments, whenever I come here to drop my car. The appointment system force[s] me to keep waiting.” C12 said,

I took an appointment at 3 o’clock to drop my car. Now it’s 3:20, and no one approached me and asked me how can [they] help [me] and why you are waiting? It will be nice if someone can approach me with explanations. Yes, I understand that the place is too busy as you can see, but I think it is the responsibility of the customer service staff to reach the customers who are waiting and explain what is going on.
C18 also shared his experience when he dropped his car to change a part, which was included under the warranty. He waited more than 5 hours, although the part was available. He said, “I thought the process of changing under warranty parts are so fast, but it seems that their process in changing such parts can take so long. I was stuck in the service center and could not go anywhere.” C3 had the same service delay experience. He said, “my car battery died, so I called, and they told me that I can bring the car now and they will change it under warranty in less than an hour. I already spent more than 1 hour, and the car [isn’t] finish[ed] yet.” C2 also had issues with both processes. He said,

What really makes me unhappy is the delay. When I come to drop my car, the service advisor consumes my time in taking my request and also takes 2 to 3 days to finish my car, which make[s] me face problems with transportation. (C2)

C8 complained about the queuing system his service provider has for service drop off. He stated:

Although they have queuing system, every time I come here, I have to wait, but it seems that the system is not working as it [is] supposed to work, and I do not know why. Maybe they need to have more staff [at] the counters to service the customers faster.

The remainder of the participants shared the same view by saying the drop off or the delivery process was slow and they always spent a long time before getting service or until they get their cars back.

Six out of the 20 customers complained about the service advisors’ soft and hard skills. C11 described how unfriendly the service advisor was in replying to him when he asked him to speed up the delivery of his car. He said the service advisor shouted at me and said, “What you want me to do. Can’t you see that the place is too busy? Just wait, and you will get your car when it is ready.” C9 had been treated nearly the same from the service advisor he said, “Not all the service advisors will show the same level of interest in serving the customer. I dealt once
with one of them and I didn’t like his attitude because he was in hurry to finish me without giving me a chance to explain the problems I have with my car.” Other customers mentioned that the service advisor should be more honest in dealing with them. They supported their statements with examples of previous experiences that they went through. C13 said,

When I bought my service contract through the service advisor, he told me all my service expenses will be covered, but later on I realized that it’s not true because there are some jobs I need to pay for, and they are not covered. I would prefer to know about that from the beginning, so I don’t start thinking that they are hiding some facts from me.

C16 had a similar experience; he stated,

Also, what made me unhappy from the previous experience is when my car reached the first major service, they asked me to pay an additional charge for the engine flushing. I told the service advisor, why I should pay and I have a service contract, which should cover all my services expenses. He said this type of service is not included in the service contract. Such things should be explained from the beginning before they offered such contract[s] for the customers.

C7’s point of view was that the long list of problems the service advisor came up every time he visited the service center made him feel that they were not honest and he added “instead of doing this and making me unhappy about the amount they will charge me to change all these parts, the service advisor should highlight the things that should be changed immediately, because it will affect my safety.” C14 described his service center being less honest from a different perspective. He said,

Me and my friend had the same problem with our cars where we had the belt for the power steering cut, they refused to change it for me under the warranty, but they changed it for my friend. When I asked the service advisor about it, he didn’t provide me with any logical answer.”

C14 also had doubts about the service advisor technical skills. He mentioned,

I had strange noise coming from somewhere in my car. At the beginning, the service advisor told me that they cannot diagnose any strange sound, and what I am hearing is
normal, so I told him to bring another car and compare between both. When they did so, they discovered that there is a strange sound in my car, and they agreed to inspect it further and see what is wrong with it.

C14 was not the only customer who questioned the service advisor capability in diagnosing some of the problems. C7 had a similar experience that pushed him to perform some of his car maintenance outside the authorized dealer service center, he stated “they couldn’t diagnose the cause of a strange noise which was coming from my engine cooling fan which made me decide to take my car to a normal garage and get it fixed.”

Out of the 20 participants, six of them said they hate to come back to the service center to fix a problem that has been already fixed before. Some of the quotes related to the mentioned sub-themes were:

Last time, I told the service advisor that I need someone to have a look at my side mirror because it was making strange noise. When I received the car after the service, I discovered that they didn’t fix it, which made me to waste my time coming back to them and complaining about it again. (C1)

I brought my car here 2 days ago, complaining about the transmission, which I feel was not working properly, and now I am back here again because the problem [is] still there. I hate coming back every time due to my limited time. (C12)

Well, the first problem I had, which made me unhappy, is that I was hearing a strange noise in the lower side of my car, so I brought the car here and told the service advisor about it. When I came to collect it, the service advisor told me that the problem has been fixed, but I discovered later that the problem is still there and they didn’t do anything about it.” (C14)

When I bought the car from them, I had a problem with the vibration. When my speed reaches to 80 km/hr, the car starts vibrating badly. I told the service advisor about the problem twice, but it seems that he didn’t understand my point or the cause of the problem because this is my third time here and every time they try to convince me that the problem is from the car brake that I have to replace which I cannot see any problem with. (C16)

The bad service center was mentioned by three customers, C8, C15, and C17. All of them had the same concern that their service centers were located in the middle of town, so they had to
spend too much time in traffic every time they needed to go there. Also, the service centers are always crowded, so they received the service on their cars after waiting a long time. C8, C14, and C17 were the only participants who described the parking space as “too small” and “too little” and that the situation required “expansion” to prevent them, as customers, to keep waiting.

Only two customers complained about the high service cost. C19 was bothered with the unreasonable cost that was increasing. He elaborated more by stating:

When I complained about the cost, the service advisor offered me the service contract option, but when I did the calculation, I didn’t see any difference, because every time I do the service, they provide me with good discounts, so it was useless for me, and I didn’t go for it.

C9 also talked about the service cost, and he used the term “unbelievable” to describe it.

Table 6 concludes all of the sub-themes related to Theme Number 6. The majority of the customers (80%) were bothered and unhappy about the service delay, and 30% were upset about coming back for problems that had not been solved from the first time. The same percentage (30%) complained about the service advisors’ soft and hard skills, 15% were unhappy about the crowded areas their service centers were located in, the same percentage (15%) insisted on the need for more parking spaces, and 10% described that the service cost was too high.

Theme number 7: Reasons for not complaining to the service centers’ management.

Three sub-themes emerged while the customers were asked to identify if they would share their complaints with the management or not, and what methods they would use to do so. The sub-themes are complicated and time consuming, insufficient follow-up system, and doubt to solve a single customer complaint.
Table 6

Theme Number 6: Frequent Customer Complaints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delays on Car Drop Off and Delivery Processes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated Defects</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Advisors’ Soft &amp; Hard Skills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Service Center Location</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Parking Space</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Service Cost</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 20 participants, 13 said if they complain, they do not take it beyond the service advisor because they believe that the complaint processes are complicated and waste of time because at the end no one would listen to their complaint or do anything about it. Moreover, they do not have time to complain. C3 stated, “No, I don’t, because I personally believe nobody will bother to read or listen to your complaint. They might look at themselves, but nothing will happen as a result of that.” C19 commented that, “I would not call in a complaint because I usually talk informally with the service advisor about the things that bother me, such as cost or delays, and I really don’t wait for something to be improved.” The following are some quotes as the customers express them:

I didn’t complain because I don’t have time to do so, and I don’t believe they will do something, because I already talked with the service advisor three times before, and the problem [is] still there, so as I told you I will do it outside. (C16)

Usually, I don’t complain, because I don’t have time to complain. What I know of the complaint process is too long and too complicated, and I don’t have time for it and I am quite sure that they will not come back to me regarding what I have complaint about” (C12)

I usually don’t complain, because I don’t think something will happen and the process of the complaint is too long, and usually, I don’t have time to complain. I might complain to
the service advisor about things I was not happy about in the last service, but he will not do anything because he will simply say I am not the one who received your car last time. (C7)

I don’t complain because it is a waste of time, and I am sure they will not do anything about it. I know if I complain to the service advisor, he will say it is out of our control, we have too many customers and they are all waiting, we are trying our best to finish all the cars. (C11)

I talked once with the service advisor about the service charges, telling him that it is too high. He simply answered me by we provide high quality services that’s why we have to charge a bit more than the others because we don’t compromise on the quality. I think complaining about it is just a waste of time.” (C20)

I don’t complain, but if it’s something related to the delays of my car being washed after maintenance, then I will talk about it to the service advisor in the next time I drop my car hoping not to see the same problem again.” (C6)

The remainder of the participants just provided answers with less detail. The terms they used were “I don’t have time to complain,” “it’s too complicated,” “it will take time,” and “if I talk to the service advisor, nothing will happen.”

Out of the 20 customers, seven stated that they do not complain because they feel the follow up system their companies are using is insufficient because their companies do not call them back and ask them about their experiences. C1 said “the company never called me after the service to check [to see] if everything went fine or not.” The same concern was brought up by C4. He said, “I might provide feedback, if they call me, and ask me about my service experience, but it seems that they are not interested to hear, so why I should be bothered to do so.” C6 added to that by saying,

I don’t think the management wants to hear any customer complaints or feedback because they don’t show any initiative. For example, they don’t call after performing the service to ask about my experience with them, and what I liked and what I didn’t like.

C7 had an aligned point of view, he said,
The company doesn’t follow up with me after [they] perform the service. I mean, they don’t call me to ask about what was good and what was bad, and even when I come for the next service, they don’t bother asking about my last experience.”

C10 and C19 said they stopped providing comments or feedback because they did not believe that the management would take their comments or feedback into consideration to implement changes. C10 said, “I used to provide feedback when they called me after I finished the service. They have a good system for following up with the customer, but I still cannot see any change.” C19 elaborated more by stating that, “I used to provide feedback about the time delay and the cost when they call[ed] me after completing every service for the past 2 years, but until now I still cannot see any kind of improvement.”

A total of three participants did not complain because they doubted that the management would track each customer complaint and try to resolve it. C12 stated that, “I don’t really think the management will go after each customer’s need and try to satisfy it.” C2 had a feeling from what he noticed during his visits and from hearing other people’s stories, by saying, “I don’t think they will provide any action for a single customer complaint. I am saying that because this is what I feel and what I hear people are talking about.” C3 elaborated more by mentioning his previous experiences in how big companies treat single customer complaints. He said,

No, I don’t complain, because I personally believe nobody will bother reading or listening to them. They might look at them, but nothing will happen. Usually big companies don’t positively react to a single customer complaint, so I don’t waste my time doing a formal written complaint because, at the end, I am quite sure no one will do anything about it.

Table 7 highlights the sub-themes related to Theme Number 7: 65% of the customers did not go further with their complaint beyond the service advisor for various reasons, such as the complaint process is complicated and time consuming; 35% did not complain because they
thought the follow-up system their service centers used is insufficient; 15% did not complain because they doubted there would be any management response for a single customer issue.

Table 7

*Theme Number 7: Reasons for Not Complaining to the Service Center’s Management*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complicated and Time Consuming</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Follow-Up System</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubt Solving a Single Customer Complaint</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 2**

**Part 3: Cross Comparison of Managers’ and Customers’ Perception of the Post-Sale Service Quality**

Research Question 1 stated: What are the most common factors that impact managers’ and customers’ perception of the after-sale service quality? To answer Research Question 1, service managers and customers were asked a series of open-ended questions in association with Research Question 1 to obtain a deep insight on how both parties perceive after-sale service quality. The findings of the study indicate that managers identified the most common three factors that most customers would expect to have in their after-sale service quality, and they were high quality service, reasonable cost, and fast service.

Of all of the customers interviewed, 80% had complaints about the delays in dropping off or receiving their cars, while only 43% of the managers thought it would be common for the customers to complain about. Moreover, more than half of the service managers agreed that repeated defects and service advisor behaviors were factors that rarely occur, while both factors were present in 30% of the customers’ complaints.
The researcher assumes the presented gap between both perceptions is the result of not properly utilizing the available methods to gather the customers’ needs and/or complaints. Nearly all of the managers heavily relied on the CRM system to collect such data, while 35% of the customers said they did not receive any follow-up calls from their service centers, asking them about their experiences. Furthermore, 71% of the managers stated that the feedback provided from customers through the service advisor was the second method they used. On the other hand, 65% of the customers believed that their feedback or complaints through the service advisors would not be heard and they described it as a waste of time. There were some factors mentioned by the managers that could formulate strong barriers in fulfilling customers’ needs such as price and feature comparison, lack of warranty knowledge, and lack of clarification.

The open-ended interview questions relating to Research Question 2 were designed to examine how important it was for the managers to satisfy their customers’ requirements and how they thought aligning their perceptions of the post-sale service quality with their customers’ perceptions could help improve the customers’ satisfaction level. Furthermore, the questions aimed to explore the customers’ evaluation of the managers’ understanding of the customers’ various needs and how the managers’ thoughts were linked with the way the customers would positively or negatively react.

Two themes appeared as a result of the analysis on managers’ and customers’ answers to the interview questions. These themes point out the importance of customer satisfaction from managers’ and customers’ evaluation on the managers’ understanding of the customers’ needs.

**Theme number 8: The importance of customers’ satisfaction.** Five sub-themes emerged from the managers being asked to identify how common customer problems could affect their satisfaction negatively, and would it be possible to overcome such matters if the
managers’ perceptions were aligned with the customers’ perceptions. These sub-themes are to prevent losing customers, strong relationships, switch behavior, word of the mouth, and hard to have unifying perceptions.

All of the managers restated that they use different methods and strategies to retain their customers and to prevent losing them. Some of the research participants indicated that measuring customer satisfaction to a certain level is something they continually strive to maintain. M1 stated, “We always have a target of maintaining 80% of [a] customer satisfaction rate all the time.” M4 also said, “The 80% of customer satisfaction rate that [we are] supposed to achieve every month is a challenge, and what makes it more difficult is to go above the 80%, which we are trying to do all the time.” M1 mentioned his company used the customer feedback as an opportunity to improve and to highlight their weaknesses. He also stated, “When the customers will notice that all their previous problems have been resolved and cannot be seen in their next visit, that will encourage them to provide more feedback, and we would ensure preventing losing them.” M2 talked in details about different options they use to keep their customers happy and to prevent losing them. He stated,

In our company, we do our best to prevent losing any customer. For example, we offer replacement cars for the customers who have to leave their cars in the maintenance for more than 3 days. Moreover, we have home-to-home delivery service. Also, we use the “good will budget” to make extra discounts for the customers, and we provide variety of service contract options to save the customers money and time.

M3 was the one who talked about how effectively educating the customers could help to prevent losing them. He mentioned, “We use an education customer strategy through explaining to them, in detail, how they can prevent facing common problems with their cars in the future to ensure they have smooth driving.” He also added, “We also offer them special discounts to show them
how valuable they are [to] us, and we don’t want to lose them.” M4 shared his company’s practice on how they prevent losing customers. He said,

Here, we do care about all our customers’ concerns, no matter if it is big or small, by not neglecting any of them. We always try our best to solve all the customers’ issues to keep them satisfied and happy and to ensure they will come back again and do business with us.

M5 was another participant who discussed the role of each management level in preventing the loss of customers. He stated, “We involve all management levels in solving our customers’ issues, depending on how complicated they are, because each level has its own authority and influence. At the end, we aim to retain all our customers and make them happy.”

M6 discussed the value of providing the customers with the proper information to prevent losing them. He said,

If the customer complains about washing his car, we convince him that it is either the washing supervisor’s mistake or because of the crowded washing stations, and we will do our [best] to prevent it from happening in the future. This technique [does] convince most of our customer and [it] drive[s] them to cool down a bit, and [we] also make them feel satisfied.

M7 talked about taking extra care with their customers to prevent losing them. He stated, “We make sure that all our customer complaints have been resolved before they leave the service center. We don’t want only to see them once. We always strive to make them feel happy and to be their first choice.”

Five out of the seven interviewed managers cited that the strong relationship between them and their customers was built based on having unified perceptions between both parties, which was critical for their success. M1 stated,

The strong relationship between us and our customers is based on transparency, which means we don’t hide any facts from our customers, and they can notice that when we work hard to solve or to take in[to] consideration their issues and requirements.
M2 said it would help them to get closer to their customers as a result of having continuous interactions with them. He also added, “Our relation[ship] with the customers will be based on cooperating rather than [relating as a] service provider to [the]customer.” M2 shared an example that supported his previous statement. He said,

[A] few months back, we asked our customers about their idea on extending our working time to be 24/7. Some customer[s] said, yes, that would be great, but others said, no, I don’t agree, because the staff should have at least one day off to have rest and to enjoy their time with their families. Such a response indicate[s] how satisfy[ied] our customer[s] are and how much they also care about us, as we do.

M3 mentioned that they train their service advisors on how to deal with all types of customers—especially the angry ones—in order to identify what they require. He discussed it further by saying,

We are looking to build strong relationships with all our customers, especially the angry ones. You cannot clearly understand what an angry customer want[s], so first of all you need to calm him down and then start to understand his perception, and [at] the same time, educate him and make him understand your perception as a service provider. [In] the end, you will come up with win-win situation where all will have the same vision and be satisfied.

M4 indicated that the closer you get with the customer, the better you can detect what he wants. He added,

When the customers witness and feel that their requirements have [taken] place, that will improve their level of satisfaction, because they would deeply think about how you care about them and how you do your best to make them happy and satisfied.

M5’s point of view regarding building strong relationships with customers was aligned with M4’s point of view, but he mentioned another technique his company used to clarify what customers were looking for in order to make it happen. He stated,

If the customer came to us complaining about [a] specific failure in the car, we would keep asking him follow-up questions, such as do you experience such a failure while driving or stopping? Do you feel the car become unstable? Do you hear any strange [noises] and so on, until we can detect the root cause of the problem, so we easily can fix
[it] from the first time, which also would increase our customer satisfaction level and enable us [to have a] strong relation[ship] with them?

Among the seven participants, five talked about “switching behavior” as a customer action that reflects being unhappy about the level of service they received. M1 said the switching behavior is an indication of losing customer loyalty. He elaborated more by saying, “When the customer leave[s] us, that means he become less loyal, and we could witness many of them moving to our competitor’s brands, and for us, losing one customer equal[s] losing 10 of them.”

M2 shared the same vision with M1 that as a company they should retain their customers. He stated,

it is always better to hear from the customers rather than leaving them taking action alone, because when they will complain, that’s a good indication for their requirements and what they would like to have, while leaving them isolated will drive them to move to other competitors. Losing one customer will lead to loose many of them in the future.

M4 mentioned that it is one of his responsibilities to prevent customers from moving to another brands through meeting their needs. He said,

One of the most important role[s] I play as a service manager is to resolve all our customers’ issues. We don’t want them to leave to other competitors because that is what the customers usually do when they are not happy about the service they get. They will easily move to other competitors where they think that they will get better services.

M5 supported what the previous managers said by saying, “If the customers are not satisfied, surely they will stop doing business with us and move to other competitors, or any un-authorized dealers, which we don’t want to experience.” M6 was the only manager who had a different perspective, he was confident that the unsatisfied customer would not switch to another brand by saying,

Even if we have unhappy and angry customers, I don’t think [they] will go far than being angry for a short period, and I don’t think it will stop them from doing business with us because it is just small problems that we have a control over.
Out of the seven service manager participants, three realized the importance of keeping their customers satisfied in order to prevent negative word of mouth. M1 stated that having unhappy customers means that they would start talking badly about their experiences among their parents, relatives, or friends, which, in the end, would affect the company’s reputation badly. M2 also expressed the same. He said, “Losing one customer will lead to loosing many of them in the future, and that would tell us that we have some leaks in our feedback process due [to] unsolved requirements.” He also shared his company’s efforts to stop the negative impact of word of mouth. He cited,

We do our best by providing complementary service and special discount rate[s] to reduce the negative affect on our customers’ level of satisfaction, which can be caused by word of mouth, and which will also stop the customers from dealing with us in the future.

M7 was the only manager who mentioned the bright side of word of mouth. He stated,

We try to do our best to understand what our customers are requiring us to do, because we want them to leave us happy about what they got, and we want them to start talking positively about us, which will help us in gaining more customers and increase our profits.

M6 and M7 were the only managers who mentioned that it is quite impossible to have a unified perception between them and their customers. M6 stated,

I think it is very difficult, or quite impossible, to have a unified perception between the manager and the customer, because [there] will still be that something we would never agree on, so what we are trying to do is to make the gap between our perception and theirs as small as possible, which will help in understanding most of their needs.

M7 agreed with the previous statement by saying, “Reaching 100% aligned perception with the customers is a very difficult task, but we try our best to identify all the customers’ needs and work on achieving them.”

Table 8 summarizes the sub-themes associated with Theme Number 8. All of the managers (100%) highlighted different strategies they use to prevent losing customers. Of the
service manager participants, 71% indicated that building strong relationships with their customers should be based on having unified perceptions between them. Switching behavior was mentioned by 71% of the managers as an indication of the customer not being satisfied; 43% talked about word of mouth and how it could be a strong reason for losing customers. Only 28% of the participants found it difficult to have unified perceptions between them and their customers.

Table 8

**Theme Number 8: The Importance of Customers’ Satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
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<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preventing Loosing Customer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Relationship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switching Behavior</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of Mouth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified Perceptions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme number 9: Customers’ evaluation on the managers’ understanding of their various needs.** Six sub-themes emerged through the customer interviews in relation to how they evaluated the managers’ understanding of their needs based on their previous experiences and how that understanding could be reflected in the way the service managers react. These themes consist of proactive managers’ movement, negative managers’ reaction, positive managers’ reaction, managers’ link to solving customers’ issues with cost, short-term relationships, and through negative word of mouth.

Out of the 20 customer participants, 15 described their relationships with their service companies as a “short-term relationship.” That means that the relationships might end after short
period of time or under unpleasant circumstances. All of the participants who highlighted the short-term relationship said that they were forced to do have the services done at the dealerships in order to adhere to the car warranty terms and conditions, which insist on performing the service regularly at the dealers’ workshops to ensure keeping a valid warranty, although they were unhappy about the service prices and the delays in the drop-off and delivery processes.

C1 stated that, “I am forced to do the service with them to keep my warranty valid, then I might sell my car and look for any other brand, which is more convenient to me.” C18 remarked that, “The price will affect my level of satisfaction, especially if they keep increasing it for no reasons. In that case I will stop dealing with them.” The following are some of the relevant quotes:

Honestly, I am thinking seriously to stop dealing with them because of the delays I always face, but my problem is, if I do so, I will lose my car warranty, but when that will be over, I might do the service in another place or sell the car and different brand. (C10)

The problem is I have to keep doing the periodic service here or I will lose the warranty, but when it’s over, I will wait for improvement, otherwise I will look for another dealer who has better control over the appointment[s] provided to the customers. (C11)

The problem is [that] I have to do the service here because my car is under warranty, but when that will pass, I will, for sure, switch to another company, if I cannot see any kind of improvement in the delivery process they are following. (C12)

At the moment, I have no problem with the service cost because I am covered under the service contract and the warranty. Honestly, I am planning to do the service outside when the warranty will get over, because what I heard from my friends is the service here is so costly, and I will save more if I do it outside, so if I discover what they were saying is true, then, for sure, I will stop dealing with them and will look for [an] alternative. (C11)

At the moment, I am forced to do the periodic inspection here with them to keep my warranty going, and I still can feel that the price is too high, so after finishing from the warranty and if I cannot see any reduction in the prices, I will stop dealing with them and will look for [an] alternative. (C16)

What is keeping me stuck with this company, at the moment, is the warranty terms and conditions that I have to do regular service with them to keep my warranty effective, but
when the warranty periods get over, instead of renewing it, I would seriously think about changing the brand especially with the delays I am facing every time I come here. (C3)

Currently, I am forced to keep doing my maintenance here because of the warranty terms and conditions, but when that will finish, and I still didn’t notice any improvement in getting better delivery system that will be strong reason for me to stop doing business with them. (C5)

Out of the 20 participants, 15 talked about the improvement that should take place within the managers’ actions toward the customers’ needs. Some of the customers believed that it is the managers’ responsibility to identify the root cause of the customers’ complaints which is mostly hover around the speed of the service before receiving the same complaint from others. Follow are some of the relevant quotes:

I think the manager can do a better job. I mean, if the problem with the service advisor’s skills, he needs to hire more proficient people or enroll their current employees [in] trainings. If the problem with the lack of manpower, he needs to hire more people to cope with the increase number of customers, I think they can easily estimate that from the system they have. (C1)

I am sure not only [with] me, but with many other customer complaints about the waiting time and the car delivery time but still the management don’t do anything about it which in reality they should by opining more front desks or expand their facility to keep their customers happy. (C10)

I think the management should do something about organizing and speeding-up the delivery time. They should put in[to] consideration that when telling the customer[s] [that their] car will be ready [at a] specific time, it should be ready, because [the customers] will arrange their schedule, meetings, and appointments based on the mentioned time. (C11)

I think they still can do better, for example, they are able to prevent the customer from being unhappy from the first stage by giving him an accurate estimated time for the delivery. If they noticed any problem with the car, which will cause a delay in the delivery, they should quickly inform him, but bringing him all the way from home to discover that his car is not ready yet, will [make] him so angry.” (C13)

I still think that there is an area for improvement, for example, the management should be more proactive by not letting the customer wait from the beginning. That could be done by training the service advisor on such skills. (C18)
I would evaluate their level of understanding as good. For example, the time the customer spend[s] from the time he enter[s] the service center until he [gets the car] serviced by the service advisor is too long, which most of the customers complained about. So the management started to implement the queuing system where each customer is required to take a token number and wait for his turn. I can’t say the problem has been totally resolved, but I can say it [has] improved [over] what it used to be, but [it] still needs further follow-up and more improvement stages. (C2)

Their understanding is ok, but they still can do more. For example, they understand how the customers want to have their car finished as soon as possible because it is their main source of transportation, so they should work on that by providing extra manpower in the workshop just to move the delivery process much faster, or at least they can recommend these things to their top management and explain how badly the customers are asking for that. (C4)

They are fine, but they can do better. For example, at the moment, they have [a] problem with the queuing system, which is too slow and make[s] the customer waiting a long time, so they need to figure out a way to speed it up by adding more counters or maybe hire more staff as an example.” (C6)

I think the management can resolve at least the queuing system issue that makes the customers wait for a long time. I believe they have the influence to do so. They don’t need to wait until many customers complain about it.” (C8)

Other participants stated the importance of listening and recording all of their feedback and comments to management. C19 said,

I would say it’s not enough to listen and record what the customer asked for. For example, I gave them my comments about the delay time and the cost many times, here and by the phone, but they didn’t do anything about it, and I don’t know why, maybe they don’t feel it’s so important.

C20 also mentioned that the management was good at listening and recording the issues, but it was not enough, and they needed to go beyond that. He elaborated more by saying, “If the manager cannot do anything about my comments or feedback, he should raise it to the top management and keep following up, and at the same time, keep [me] informed about the status of my feedback.” C5 had the same perspective, which is that the action taken should be more than just listening and recoding. He said, “Some of the service advisors will record everything the customer asks for, but they will not track it, and they will not escalate it to top management if
it’s above their authority.” C16 highlighted the effective role of the manager when receiving any issue, feedback, or complaint that has reached his doorstep. He stated,

The manager knows how to listen and record things, but I am sure they can do better. For example, if the feedback, comment, issue, or whatever reached his door, [it] should be followed and resolved as soon as possible or even dedicate someone who would follow it and speed it up if he is busy with other staff. This action would reflect how important the customer [is] for the company, and they are ready to do anything in order to satisfy the customer and make him feel happy.

C18 shared what he noticed during the past five years in doing service with the same company, which is they did not implement any notable improvement in the services they provide. He explained more by saying,

I am doing the service here for the past 5 years, and honestly, I cannot see any type of improvement in the services they provide for the customers. I would say, yes, there are improvements in their buildings, which means they have been moved to [a] bigger building, but what is related to the services, nothing improved. I think the management should also think about how to improve their services, for example, every time I come here, I have to wait for 3 to 4 hours [for them] to finish my car. The improvement I would like to see is to spend less time at every visit and what will help them by putting things in action.”

Out of the 20 participants, 12 confirmed what was mentioned above regarding the managers who do not usually go beyond being a good listener and recorder of the issues. The participants expressed that while sharing some of their past negative experiences with some of the managers. C2 said, “I think the management should show high level of interest in the way they listen and treat what the customer is requesting, but the most important thing is the follow-up action, which is always missing.” The following are some quotes related to the above sub-theme:

They listen to my complaint carefully and recorded it down, but the problem is they don’t take any further action. For example, with my mirror problem, the service manager got engaged in at a late stage when he saw how angry I was. He should not let this problem happen from the beginning by making sure the service advisor is capable to understand all the customer problems so they do not come back for the same problem again. (C1)
The management here would listen to your complaint carefully, but I really doubt if they will do something. For example, when the service advisor told me to go and see the manager to speed up the delivery of my car before 3:00, I went to see him, and I explained the whole situation and how bad I need the car, and he promised me that he will push it so I can get the car on time, but the time has passed 3:00, and I am still waiting. (C10)

Well, I didn’t feel that I had the care and the attention I should have as a customer, because at the beginning, when I complained to the service manager about the strange noise I keep hearing, he didn’t show any proper attention to what I am complaining about. He went out with me and inspected the car visually and simply replied by saying “There is nothing wrong with it,” and he left without any further action. (C14)

If it is something related to the problem with the car, they would listen to it carefully and do their best to solve my problem, but if I would complain about the time I spend waiting to be served, I don’t think they will do much about it, and I honestly do not know why. Maybe because it is out of their authority. For example, if they want to hire more staff, they cannot do it without an approval from the top management. (C4)

C3 and C5 were the only participants who discussed how the long and complicated processes at their service companies were followed, which can stop managers from taking immediate action. C3 said,

When I asked the service advisor to change my car battery under warranty, he transferred me to the service manager because he is the one who requests the change approval form their main office in Dubai. At the end, it took me 2 days until I got my battery changed, but I still can’t understand why I should follow this long process when my car is brand new.

C5 had the same experience for replacing a damaged part of his car. He said, “It took me around 3 days until the approval came from the main office in Dubai. My car is covered under warranty, so why I should keep waiting for something that should be immediately replaced.”

On the other hand, six out of the 20 interviewed customers mentioned that the service managers showed notable efforts in the way they handled, resolved, and prevented their complaints from happening again. C13 said,

When I complained to the service manager about the delays in delivering my car, he listened carefully to what I said and noted everything down, and also he promised me that
he will prevent such things from happening again, and from that time, I didn’t face the same situation again.

C15 explained his positive experience with the manager who showed him a high level of customer service. He said,

When I had an accident and got my car into the repair[ed], the manager was the one who used to call me and update me about the status of my car, like, when it will be ready, what is missing from the spare part[s], and the delivery time. I was really satisfied from his reaction.

C17 talked about how the management listened to their customer feedback and included them in their future plans. He said,

I used to take my car to [a] much smaller branch to do the service and it was crowded all the time. I think the management realized that and took the customer feedback to expand the facility, in consideration. They built this one, which is double the size of the old one.

C18 said,

Once I was waiting for around 2 hours before I got served, so I complained about it to the service manager who was so nice with me. He cooled me down and offered me [a] special discount on the service I [had] done, which made me feel so happy.

C8 also talked about how the service manager was glad to change a part on his car, which was under warranty, while the service advisor refused to do so. He described that as a positive management reaction, which he would like to see all the time. C9 stated that he was so happy in the way that the service center solved all his requests. He said, “I remember when I first bought the car, I had a technical issue with it, and I complained about it to service manager who took it seriously and pushed to fix it fast.”

Out of the 20 interviewed customers, six of them described the relationship with the service centers they were dealing with, as a business relationship. All six participants agreed that the service managers simply ignore or are slow to solve their requests. C10 expressed that while sharing one of his past experiences. He said,
While I was receiving my car in the last service, I discovered that they lost one of letter for the TIIDA logo. I complained about it to the manager, and he asked me to do a formal complaint, which I did, and he promised me that he will put for me a new one in the next service, and here I am in the next service and he didn’t do anything about it. When I remind[ed] him about it, he said we will do it next time you come. I think he ignored my request because it is an additional cost for his company. It may cost less than 100 dirhams to put new logo [on], but he didn’t bother to do it.

C18 elaborated further by saying,

I think if you recommend something costly to the management, such as implementing [a] more advanced booking system, they will simply ignore it because they clearly understand that the approval for such thing will take very long time and might not happen, because at the end, it will cost the company huge amount of money, which from their point of view, they don’t need to spend.

C7 had the exact point of view. He mentioned that,

If the solution will make them pay money, they will simply ignore it and will not do anything about it. For example, they know very well that the parking space is not enough, but until now, they didn’t do anything to expand. They also know that they need more service advisors to prevent the customers waiting for [a] long time, and they didn’t do anything about it either. I think their first priority is cost and the second priority is customer.

C6 had a similar experience relating to changing parts under the warranty. He said,

They will simply ignore a request, which make[s] them pay money. For example, [the] last time I had a problem with a part of my car, which should be replaced under warranty, they told me that the part is not available and will call me when it will be available in stock. Since that time, they didn’t follow up with me to schedule an appointment to replace the part.

C8 did not go far with his thought from the previous participant’s opinion. He also stated that, “I will talk about the parking space. I am sure they will not listen if I provide feedback about it, because it will cost them money to expand.” C3 was the only participant who mentioned that the relationship with his service center was as business relationship not a personal one. He added,

The company will not bother to do something to solve or satisfy a single customer’s request, even by offering a special discount or giving a service for free as a kind of
appreciation, because at the end, all this stuff is costly for them and make them loose money instead of generating profits.

From the 20 participants in total, seven were willing to talk about the negative experience they had with their friends, colleagues, or relatives. C1 said, “not taking action regarding the current service prices and the delays will push me to talk about it to other people, especially the ones I know who want to buy [the] same car brand.” C12 said he always shares his experiences with his family members and he also listen to their experiences. He also added “we always compare between the companies’ services, so if anyone is planning to change his car or buy new one, [he] can go for the company who provide[s] high class services.” C19 also talked about the positive and negative service experiences with his family members. He said,

In my family, we deal with three different brands, so we keep discussing and sharing stories with each other about our service experiences and compare between all the companies. So things which I am facing right now, like the delivery delay, will sure[ly] be transferred to my family members.

C4 had experienced many car brands, so his family members and friends always ask about his opinion before they make their final decision for buying a car. He also added, “They always ask me specifically about the cost of the service and the time it takes, so, for sure, I would not recommend [this] company, which keeps me waiting for a long time like what happening right now.” The remainder of the participants reflected their opinions by saying that they would share their experiences, both the negative and the positive, with their family members and friends.

Table 9 reviews the sub-themes associated with Theme Number 9. Of the total participants, 75% described their relationship with their service centers as short term, which means they might end the relationships if they did not witness any notable improvements. Of the customer participants interviewed, 75% believed that the managers should always have proactive
actions toward their needs; 30% were satisfied with the managers’ positive reactions, 60% were not satisfied with the managers’ negative reactions; 30% said their service centers considered some of their problems as external costs they had to ignore, and 35% of the participants would transfer the information of the negative experiences to their family members and friends.

Table 9

*Theme Number 9: Customers Evaluation of the Managers’ Understanding of Their Various Needs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-Term Relationship</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers’ Proactive Movement</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers’ Negative Reactions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Word of the Mouth</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers’ Positive Reactions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers Link Solving Customers’ Issue with Cost</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how automobile service center managers and their customers in the UAE perceive after-sale service quality in order to determine any gaps that resulted from nonaligned perceptions between both parties. Moreover, the researcher aimed to identify how such gaps could significantly affect customers’ satisfaction levels and how service managers could utilize the new findings to have better aligned perceptions with their customers, based on the customers’ preferences, which would result in alleviating customer dissatisfaction rates.
The research followed a qualitative phenomenological design. The researcher aimed to use such a design in order to gather deep insight and explanations from the participants based on their experiences at various service centers. Additionally, the method helped the researcher reveal different factors that contributed the most when gathering various perceptions of the after-sale service quality between the service managers and customers and also how these factors could be considered core reasons for satisfied or unsatisfied customers.

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with a total of seven service managers and 20 customers. The manager interviews were conducted in the managers’ back offices, while the customer interviews were conducted in the customer seating areas located in the various service centers. The research was based on two research questions to discover the crucial factors in formulating customers’ perceptions of after-sale service quality and how managers can improve customer satisfaction levels.

The analysis on the data was based on performing a thematic analysis approach. The findings of the study were divided into two main sections. Section 1 related to Research Question 1 and was divided into three main parts. The first part was the data that contained the most significant factors that shaped the managers’ perception of the after-sale service quality. The second part contained data that highlighted various factors that customers perceived as essential in the after-sale service quality experience, and the third part was a cross comparison between the two groups in order to identify the existence of gaps between both perceptions. The second analysis section, Part 2, related to Research Question 2 and reflected how customer satisfaction is inextricably linked with the factors that were identified in the previous section. Managers with a high level of awareness of such factors could gain a competitive advantage if they plan to utilize them as a key factor for increasing the level of their customers’ satisfaction.
As discussed in the literature review, service quality, as a concept, does not have a universal definition because there are various ways service quality can be viewed. For example, Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) linked service quality with customer evaluations in the long run. Berry et al. (1988) stated that service quality is the end result gained from the customers utilizing their special requirements. Parasuraman et al. (1994) argued that customers’ views about the service cannot be done before purchasing the service. The existing research findings support the idea of not having a unified definition of service quality from the numerous definitions of the term from managers’ and customers’ definitions. Some managers defined service quality as doing the required maintenance in authorized dealer workshops, high work standard, and doing it right the first time. Others described service quality as “fault-free services” or as M5 called it, “peace of mind.” Customers’ interview results underlined the same finding, such that 95% of the participants determined their need to experience high service quality but with different definitions. Some of the participants referred to high quality service as performing the necessary checks to their cars. Others, such as C8, described it as a tool that he relied on to prevent him from visiting the service center so often. C10 described service quality as high level of maintenance that made him feel safe while driving for long distance every day. Others used terms such as “best” or “excellent” service to be done to their cars. Dedeoğlu and Demirer (2015) argued that service quality managers should set their service quality standards based on the customers’ evaluations. Hussain et al. (2011) also emphasized building the service strategy that managers use based on performance perceived by the customers. Therefore, these research findings suggest that managers should start by developing a comprehensive service quality definition based on observing the customers’ different practices as a fundamental step toward having a unified perception of service quality between both parties.
Moreover, the research findings support previous literature findings related to customers being the final judge on the quality of the service after receiving it. M2 said that, generally, customers judge the quality of the service during the car pick-up stage. They look at factors such as resolving issues, how long the service took, and how much they pay, and then they evaluate the quality of the service. Zeithaml et al. (1988) supported that perception by stating that customers base their service quality judgment on the intrinsic, such as reliability and serviceability and on the extrinsic, such as price, brand name, and brand image cues. Furthermore, Clemmer and Sheehy (1992) identified that customers are the final service quality judges by stating that customer perception of the value they receive should be embedded in all activities throughout the organization. In addition, the definition the researcher has chosen as a best fit for the purpose of this research was “all activities geared toward maintaining the quality and reliability of the car, carried out after the customer has taken delivery with the goal of ensuring customer satisfaction” (Omotuyi & Zairi, 1996, p. 2) support the idea of the customers being the final quality judges.

The intention of dividing the first analysis section, which is related to Research Question 1, “What are the most common factors that impact managers’ and customers’ perception of the after-sale service quality?” into three main parts was not only to highlight the plain factors that affect managers’ and customers’ perceptions of the after-sale service quality, but also to indicate any external or internal aspects that significantly contribute to create the final list of elements from managers’ and customers’ perceptions. In Part 1, besides asking managers straightforward questions, such as “What are the common needs of customers in the after-sale service quality?” the researcher structured the remainder of the open-ended questions used in the manager interviews to go beyond through using questions related to the techniques managers use
to indicate customers’ needs, obstacles that prevented them from meeting such needs, and repeated customer complaints.

The researcher followed the same technique with structuring the questions used for the customer interviews as Part 2 in the analysis process. Besides asking the customers a direct question, such as “What are your expectations of the after-sale services provided?” the researcher used in-depth open-ended interview questions to identify weather their experiences matched their expectations, the factors they continually complained about, and why most of the time they did not tell the managers to hear their complaints.

Part 3, which is a comparison between managers’ and customers’ perceptions of the after-sale service quality was created based on the critical results gained from Parts 1 and 2. It also helped in having a comprehensive and structured answer to the first research question, which was “What are the most common factors that impact managers’ and customers’ perception of the after-sale service quality?”

The findings of the research identified that service managers and customers have a unified perception of the most crucial factors that should be presented in the after-sale service quality. They are high quality service, reasonable price, and fast service. Systematization of service delivery was presented in Sureshchandar et al. (2002b) and in the Saravanan and Roa (2007) study, which was about measuring the quality of the after-sale service in Indian automobile service stations as a core factor in both studies. What’s interested in the research finding is that 100% of the service managers presented in Theme Number 1 (managers’ perception of the customers’ common needs) agreed that service cost is the customer top priority in after-sale service quality. M4 said that customers’ needs in after-sale service quality can be ranked from the highest to lowest as service cost, good quality service, availability of spare parts,
and less time consuming. M3 supported M4's statement by mentioning that customers put the service cost at the top of their priority list, assuming that a brand new car should not break down, and the customers should not pay any additional fees for a service cost. Others expressed their opinion regarding the service charge by saying that customers will continually emphasize having suitable service costs, assuming that the current costs are too high. On the other hand, customers’ data presented in Theme Number 5 (customers’ expectations of the after-sale service quality) shows that 70% of the customers expressed their interested in having sufficient service costs. Factors, such as high quality service (95%) and fast service (90%), came in at the top of their priority list. The researcher believes that managers regard the service cost, which might be also generated from some interactions with the customers, has a significant effect on the way all of them (100%) ranked service cost as a factor that customers will always complain about. That was clearly reflected in the data presented in Theme Number 4 (common customer complaints from a managers’ perspective). M1 said “customers always feel unhappy about the service price.” M2 gave further explanation by saying that negotiating the service price is a continuous habit by the customers to have the highest most possible reduction in the amount they are supposed to pay. M6 said “customers would never leave us without asking for discounts on their bills.” Opposite to that, customers’ data, which can be allocated from Theme Number 6 (frequent customer complaints) explored that high service cost comes in at the bottom of their complaint list with an average of 10%. This finding supports the Gowan et al. (2001) research finding that customers differ from managers in the way they emphasize having their needs met, regardless of the service cost. There are other factors that are more important to be complained about from the customers’ point of view, such as delays in the process of dropping and delivering their car, which formulated 80% of the customers’ complaints; repeated defects, which presented at 30% of the
total complaints; and service advisors lacking soft and hard skills, which also represented 30% of the overall complaints on the list. The good thing to be noticed here, which presented a huge gap between both perceptions, is that 86% of the service managers thought that repeated defects and service advisors lacking soft and hard skills (67%) are rare factors that customers complain about, while customer data reflects the opposite. This finding goes in line with Gowan et al. (2001) where they stated that although the level of interactions between customers and service providers are high, identifying the needed level of service quality required by the customers is still considered a challenging task due to the intangible nature of the service. The differences are presented in the data collected in Theme Number 4 (common customer complaints from the managers’ perspective) and Theme Number 6 (frequent customer complaints). For example, M4 stated “there are some rare problems which don’t happen more often, such as the customer would come back with the same problem he dropped the car for” while the data presented in Theme Number 6 reflected opposite results. For example, C12 said that he was back (again) in the workshop because of a problem with his car’s transmission, which had not been fixed from the previous service. M3 said some complaints regarding the service advisor’s attitude might be related to the language barriers that they try to overcome by hiring staff of different nationalities, but M3 also said that it was rare that customers complained about the service advisors. The customer data, though, presented in Theme Number 6, shows another perspective. For example, and related to the service advisors’ soft skills, C9 said that not all the service advisors show a high level of interest in the way they serve the customers. Most are in a hurry and will not give the customers time to clarify or discuss issues. Another example relating to the service advisors’ hard skills, C14 had doubts about the ability of the service advisor to diagnose problems because
he brought the car to the workshop three times complaining about a strange noise coming from his car, and the service advisor was unable to diagnose it.

Moreover, the managers’ data regarding service delivery speed does not reflect any issues related to the car drop-off process, which does not support what the customers were experiencing. Theme Number 6 (frequent customer complaints) explored some examples of the unpleasant drop-off process customers face. C12 elaborated by saying that the appointment system the service center followed did not support him to drop his car within the appointed time; he would always experience unjustified delays, which is the responsibility of the customer service staff, as he commented. C6 was not experiencing any better drop-off practice issues than C12, who said, “I always have problem with the appointments. Whenever I come here to drop my car, the appointment system enforces me to wait.” C8 commented on the queuing system his company is implementing for the drop-off process. He described it as not helping him to save time because the delay in dropping the car into the service center becomes a routine he is expecting to experience.

The researcher concluded that managers were unaware of some of the vital factors negatively affecting their customers’ experiences, such as delays in the drop-off process, mainly because they did not effectively utilize some of the methods that were in place to identify their customers’ needs. Dedeoğlu and Demirer (2015) argued that service managers are required to perform close observations on the currently offered services because they are considered the main source of detecting the customers’ requirements, which was not the case in this study. Instead, most of the service managers used two common techniques, and they were the CRM system (86%) and feedback through the service advisor (71%), which was highlighted in Theme Number 2. The CRM department in each of these companies used the follow-up technique to
gather the customer feedback regarding the service they had completed. Some of the managers, such as M4 and M3, mentioned that all customers, without exception, who had services performed in their workshops received follow-up calls to collect their feedback, suggestions, and comments. M5 and M6 mentioned that the follow-up calls were done on a random basis, which means that not all of the customers received follow-up calls. On the other hand, and what was confirmed in the data presented in Theme Number 7, the reasons for not complaining to the service centers management, 35% of the customers believed that the follow-up systems were not sufficient because they never received calls asking them about their opinions and feedback. C1 said, “The company never called me after the service to check if everything went fine or not.” C4 mentioned that he might have provided feedback if they had called him and asked about it, but he thought the company was not interested in doing so. Others, such as C10 and C19, stopped providing their companies with feedback because they did not notice any changes based on their previous requests.

In addition, and what related to the service advisor as a source of collecting customer feedback, 71% of the service managers expressed the importance of gathering customers’ feedback through face-to-face interactions with the service advisor. M1 explained that the service advisor would spend enough time with the customers in order to note all of their concerns. M3 mentioned that hearing their customers’ feedback through the service advisors is at the top of their priority list. M5 added to that by saying, “Our service advisors always try to get closer to the customers to have a better and clearer perception about all their needs.” In opposition to M5’s comment, and based on what was declared in the customer data collected in Theme Number 7, reasons for not complaining to the service centers management, C3 said the service advisor might have listened to what he was requesting, but he personally believed that
nothing would happen. C7 talked about not complaining by saying that if he had a comment from the previous service, he would not bother to mention it again in the next one, because the service advisor would simply answer him by saying that he was not the one who received his car last time. C11 elaborated by saying that the answer he would usually get from the service advisor, when he talked to him about the appointment system, was that it “is out of my control and I cannot do anything about it.” This finding agrees with the notion presented by Sureshchandar et al. (2002a) that people-oriented issues are more significant to service quality than to technological issues. Some of the customers were in the stage of providing feedback, but they stopped doing so when they realized their companies’ did not take their comments into consideration. Also, they stopped providing feedback when they realized that their feedback would not be addressed, as C3 said, “Usually big companies don’t positively react to a single customer complaint,” so the customers thought the complaint was a waste of time. Furthermore, unsatisfactory answers, such as “it is out of my control” or “the place is crowded, and I cannot help,” which were stated by the service advisors, made customers take a firm stand against providing feedback. In addition, some of the customers described their willingness to trust service advisors who they can rely on while making some of their maintenance decisions, for example, C7 said that instead of showing him a long costly list containing parts that needed to be changed, he thought it was more appropriate to have honest and trusted advice from the service advisor on the necessary parts that required an immediate change due to its impact on safe driving. Thus, service advisors’ people-oriented skills, such as consulting and listening to customers’ requests, should be effectively utilized to help the customers have a better experience during their next visit, and this behavior would also have a vital role in keeping the continuous feedback loop alive.
Theme Number 3 highlighted some factors that prevent managers from meeting customers’ needs. Of the managers interviewed, 71% described convincing customers, who started out comparing features and service costs of their cars with other brands, as a challenging task. This finding supports what Jin and Suh (2005) stated that customers will make the purchasing decisions after they compare what competitors from the same category are offering. M3 discussed this matter by saying that when customers start comparing his prices with competitors’ prices, they do not take into consideration many important factors, such as the high quality services his organization offers that include genuine spare parts and highly qualified trained laborers. M4 also said, “Customers always assume that we charge our services too high, they set such an assumption based on the comparison they perform between us and other competitors.” M5 elaborated more by saying that customers’ comparisons are not fair to some extend because the quality of the service they were offering was high and could not be found with their competitors or unauthorized dealers. The researcher believes that such a finding is related to the customers who could not observe the repair process because they were not authorized to access the workshop. Kandampully (1997) agreed with this finding by saying that judging the quality of automobile maintenance services has its own level of complexity and unfair customer judgment, because customers cannot monitor and evaluate the repair process closely, and they are not familiar with the detailed input that the service providers are implementing.

The majority of the managers (71%) agreed that lack of knowledge of the customers regarding the car warranty terms and conditions were considered a barrier to fulfill their requirements. M7 said it was the customers’ responsibility to become familiar with the warranty terms and conditions, because very few of them would read their car’s booklet. M5 said the main
reason for the customers losing their warranty validity was not obeying to the contract terms and conditions. M3 mentioned that customers had a wrong perception toward their car warranty, and they thought any faults or defects that appeared during the warranty period would be fixed for free.

Of the service managers interviewed, 28% mentioned it was difficult to clarify what the customers’ needs were if they did not perfectly clarify them. M4 said, “It is the customers’ responsibility to clarify exactly what is annoying them because without their clarifications, they cannot identify the root cause of the problem in order to fix it.” M7 highlighted the reason for not gathering specific problem clarification from the customers is because they do not have much time to spend with the service advisor. The researcher believes that the technicality issues that most of the customers are not aware of might be one of the strong reasons for them not having a clear definition of the problem. Kandampully (1997) supported this finding by saying the technicality involvement in automobile maintenance services could have a significant effect on not achieving the expected level of service quality from the customer’s point of view.

Section 2 of the analysis process, which is related to Research Question 2, “How can service managers improve customers’ satisfaction level through determining their needs?” aimed to measure the importance of customer satisfaction perceived by the service managers. In order to have an effective answer to the Research Question 2, the research was designed with in-depth questions that were used to interview the service managers in a way that started asking them about their perceptions of the negative effects some of the factors identified in Section 1 could have on their customer satisfaction level then, and how the aligned perceptions between managers and customers on the level of after-sale service quality is linked with customer satisfaction level. The structure of the questions used with in the customers’ interviews did not
stray far from that of the service managers’ questions. The researcher designed the in-depth questions to examine how customers evaluated the managers’ understanding of the customers’ various needs and how such evaluations were linked with their future reactions.

Concerning Theme Number 8, the importance of customers’ satisfaction, all of the service managers (100%) agreed on the importance of having a strategy to retain their customers because, as M1 described, “Losing one customer is equal losing 10 of them,” and as M2 described, “Losing one customer will lead to [you to] loose many of them in the future.” This was also supported by Boyet and Conn’s (1991) research result that 69% of customers leave mainly due to poor service quality the customers have experienced. The service managers mentioned various techniques they followed to reduce such losses, like solving all of the customers’ problems immediately so they would not experience them again in their next visit, offering replacement cars for customers whose car is expected to stay in the workshop for more than 3 days, home-to-home delivery, special discounts, and involving top management because of their higher authority and ability to fix complex customers issues.

Customer retention is linked with building strong relationship between the managers and their customers based on having unified perceptions between both parties. Of the managers interviewed, 71% acknowledged the importance of building strong relationships with their customers based on various aspects. M2 stated that having continuous interactions between them and their customers allowed the company to have a broader perception on all of the customers’ needs. M3 mentioned that having well-trained service advisors is crucial for providing remarkable customer service. M4 added that when the customers witnessed that their requirements were fulfilled, it helped to improve their satisfaction level and strengthened both parties’ relationship. On the other hand, and based on the data presented in Theme Number 9,
customers’ evaluation on the managers’ understanding of their various needs, 75% of the customers described their relationship with their companies as short-term relationships that might end after a short period of time or due to them continuously experiencing unpleasant situations. This finding revealed significant gaps between what the managers were assuming to offer regarding keeping their customers satisfied and what the customers were experiencing, as presented in their various evaluation statements. C10, C11, and C3 are examples of customers who were forced to do their cars’ periodic inspections in their companies’ workshop in order to keep their cars’ warranties valid. They stated that if they did not improve the poor appointment system their companies are following, they will stop doing business with them and look for alternatives. C5 and C12 are other examples of customers who faced delays in the car delivery process. They also said that they were currently forced to have the services performed in their companies’ workshop due to the warranty terms, and they would also seek alternatives if they did not witness any improvement. In addition, C16, C13, and C18 are also examples of customers who were bothered by the current high service cost. They expressed their willingness to leave their current service providers if they did not see any reduction in the service cost. This finding supports the Eagle et al. (2003) study statement that service companies secure their sustainable growth through issuing trustworthy and attractive warranty programs to purchase, even if they are expensive. But it would not stop the customers from leaving if they experienced poor customer services, which is also supported by Evans and Lindsay’s (2002) study estimation that 35% of customers leave their companies on yearly basis due to the poor customer service.

Theme Number 8 shows that 71% of the managers thoroughly realized the effect of customers’ switching behavior as an indication of having dissatisfied customers who intended to leave. Gowan et al. (2001) stated that customers will come back again to do businesses with the
same company only if they are satisfied with the level of service and quality provided. M1 said that switching behavior is an indication of losing customer loyalty. M2 elaborated on the switching behavior matter by saying it is better to talk to the customers about their problems rather than leave them to take unwanted action, which is switching to another competitor. M5 discussed the matter by saying, “If the customers are not satisfied, surely they will stop doing business with us and move to other competitors or any unauthorized dealers, which we don’t want to experience.” The finding indicates that losing market share is a serious danger that all the service managers are trying to prevent due to its significant effect on the costs associated with attracting new customers, company growth, and future revenues. Raphel and Raphel (1995) indicated that the cost of creating new customers is nine times more than the cost of maintaining an existing customer. The same authors also highlighted that increasing the existing customers’ loyalty by 5% would lead to an 85% profit improvement.

Although Theme Number 9 highlights that 30% of the customers discussed notable managers’ efforts in the way they were handling, resolving, and preventing their complaints from happening again as positive managers’ reactions, 35% of the customers talked about negative managers’ reactions as bad experiences they came across, which also can be considered as poor customer service. C10 described the manager as a good listener but with no further improvement actions. C14 expressed his feeling by saying that he did not get the care and attention he should have as a customer, when he complained to the service manager about an unresolved problem to his car. Such an action is supported Boyet and Conn’s (1991) research results when they indicated that 20% of customers leave due to the lack of personal attention. This finding also supported Shammot’s (2011) study on examining the impact of service quality provided by
Peugeot Company in Jordan on customer satisfaction, which highlighted employees’ presentation as a core factor in improving customer satisfaction.

Customers who switch to another brand will also use negative word of mouth to talk about their unpleasant experiences with others, which was indicated in Theme Number 8, with 43% of the managers agreeing. M2 mentioned that negative word of mouth prevents new customers from doing business with them. M1 shared his thoughts regarding how negative word of mouth effects is business by saying that unhappy customers will keep talking about their bad experiences to the people around them, which, in the end, will affect their company’s reputation.

Not far from that thought, and what was indicated in Theme Number 9, 35% of the customers expressed and confirmed the managers’ point of view regarding their willingness to start talking with others about the bad service experiences they had. C1 stated that he would talk with others, especially people who were looking to buy a similar car to the one he had, about the poor service he experienced. C12 talked about sharing experiences with his family members on a continuous basis. C19 talked about the discussions he usually had with his family members comparing their cars’ service quality in order to identify the best service provider. C4 said that most of his family members consult him about cars before they buy. Both findings go in line with Wu (2013) where he stated that customers only communicate positively and promote the business image through word of mouth if they are satisfied with the level of the service quality, otherwise their communications will lean toward being negative.

Theme Number 9, customers’ evaluation of the managers’ understanding of their various needs, shows that 30% of the customers strongly believe that managers would prevent or ignore solving their problems if it was cost oriented. Gowan et al. (2001) indicated that managers are more interested in meeting the organization goals and objectives with reasonable cost, while
customers strive to have their needs met regardless of the cost. The collected customer data regarding this matter shows that some of the customers were considering their relationships with their companies as business relationship, which means they struggled to get their problems fixed, and their companies had to pay additional costs for doing so. C18 expressed his feeling by saying that the company knew that they needed to improve their appointment system, because it is wasting most of their customers’ time, but they cannot think about it because it might be costly. C7 said, “If the solution will make them pay money, they will simply ignore it and will not do anything about it.” C6 discussed the matter further by saying his company would simply ignore the customer request that makes them pay extra money. Even if the request is to change a defected part under warranty, they react negatively by delaying the approval process, thinking that the customer will forget about it or would fed up with following the case. The researcher believes the existence of these differences between both perceptions will create barriers to achieving the desired service quality and customer satisfaction level.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Senter and Flynn (2010) stated that relying only on vehicles sales could prevent greater profit opportunity, which could be generated from starting after-sale service activities such as maintenance and parts sale. Saccani et al. (2007) and Wise and Baumgartner (1999) estimated that revenues that can be generated from investing in such activities could reach up to three times more than the initial car purchase. Therefore, future researchers should consider the following recommendations. First, to help managers continually plan to for better customer service, future researchers should seriously work to identify service quality attributes that have the most impact on customer satisfaction. Second, and as this research finding shows, a large portion of customers are in short-term relationships with their companies, which means they have specific
intentions to switch to another brand as soon as their cars’ warranty period expires. Moreover, the Ministry of Economy in the UAE announced that vehicles would not be affected, regardless of where their vehicle was serviced, which means vehicle owners are no longer forced to have their periodic inspections performed at their car dealerships’ workshops where they purchased their car, in order to keep their warranty valid. Thus, future researchers should thoroughly investigate the critical areas that will ensure attracting new customers and retaining existing ones, regardless of the conditions of the warranties. Third, future researchers should include a wider view of the CRM system used by most of the service managers in collecting information related to their customers’ preferences. The information related to the CRM system should reach into areas such as specific methods for system use to collect customers’ needs, how the system prioritizes those needs, and in-depth details regarding if the customer needs a follow-up procedure. Fourth, service advisors should be also included in the research to provide a wider range of information related to the underlining factors that contribute the most in creating a gap between managers and customers’ perceptions of after-sale service quality.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were four limitations in this research. First, the researcher was not able to incorporate a large sample of data due to time constraints. The researcher believes that a greater sampling size would help in gathering a vast amount of information that contains a larger number of factors that significantly contribute to how service managers and customers perceive after-sale service quality. Second, the researcher faced issues while collecting the data through interviewing service managers. The first issue was that some of the service managers completely refused to participate in an interview. The second issue was that some of the service managers kept in rescheduling the interview dates and times more than three times, making it more
challenging for the researcher to collect data in a timely manner. The third issue was that some of the service managers did not cooperate with the researcher during the interview sessions by providing in-depth details for some of the questions because of their constricted schedules. The fourth issue was that some of the interview sessions were disrupted by phone calls that the managers had to answer, external noises, and by managers pausing the interview in certain circumstances, such as leaving the office in order to interact to solve a customer problem at the front desk. The previously mentioned situations made the managers lose focus when answering the questions. The third limitation was that the researcher had similar issues while interviewing the customers. The first issue was that some of the answers were general with no in-depth information considering the customers’ limited time in the workshops. The second issue was that some of the interviews were stopped for the customer to answer phone calls or when the service advisor called the customer to be serviced, which made the customers lose attention while answering the questions. The third issue was that some of the customers did not provide the needed level of honesty with their answers, assuming they were the answers the researcher wanted to record. Fourth, the majority of the service managers’ interviews were conducted in the Arabic language, according to the managers’ requests, which made the researcher consume more time in translating the data into English, and it also created a struggle for the researcher in finding the proper alternative words from Arabic to English for some of the terms.
References


Evans, J., & Lindsay, W. *The management and control of quality*. Cincinnati, OH: Thomson Learning.


Appendix I

Standard Protocol for Conducting Qualitative Research Interview

- Any type of distinction or noise will be limited as much as possible such as loud noises or disturbance. Therefore, managers might feel more comfortable to conduct the interview in their offices where they have a better control on the surrounding environment. Physical customers’ interviews will be conducted in a quiet corner in their service centers seated areas. Customers on phone interviews will be conducted on their convenient time which they will decide on.

- Interviewer will introduce himself and the purpose of the interview will be clearly explained

- The interviewer will highlight how long the interview will take

- The interviewer will ask for permission for using a recording device from the interview

- The format of the interview will be explained prior to the start. Question will be asked by the interviewer, enough time will be given to the interview to answer while interviewer is recording hand notes.

- Interviewer will clearly highlight all the ethical consideration issues such as the interviews rights to not declare their names or positions, their rights to have a copy from the study results, and their ability to implement the result if they desire.
Appendix II

Interview Questions for Service Managers

1. What are the common needs of customers in the after-sale service quality?

2. How do you identify such needs?

3. What role do customers have in choosing those needs?

4. What are the most common factors that prevent meeting customers’ needs?

5. From your experience as service manager, what are the most common factors customers complain about?

6. How these factors are negatively affecting their level of satisfaction?

7. How do you measure your customers’ satisfaction level?

8. Do you think by having a unified perception of service quality by the managers and their customer will help in improving their level of satisfaction? Can you explain why or why not?
Appendix III

Interview Questions for Customers

1. What are your expectations of the after-sale services provided?

2. What are the things that you have been unhappy with in your post service experience?

3. Do you usually provide these complaints to the company? Why or why not?

4. How does the management treat your complaints or feedback?

5. How do you evaluate the management understanding of your service needs?

6. As a customer what could affect your level of satisfaction positively and negatively?