



Impact of Service Quality on Customer's Satisfaction in the Airline Industry (A case study of PIA, Oman Airline and Air-Arabia)

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ABSTRACT- Objective: The research study aimed to investigate the prevailing competitive environment in the airline industry. By comparing the compare service quality of three different airlines (PIA, Oman Airline, and Air Arabia) using the SERVPERF model. Background: Observing the competitive landmark of the airline industry, the airlines concentrate on the need to analyze the customers' demands and provide services according to their demands. Method: A total of 150 customers were selected randomly to collect the data through self-administered questionnaire. The statistical reliability and validity of each questionnaire were tested through Cronbach's Alpha and factor analysis with positive responses. The research applied ANOVA, correlation, and regression to predict the results. Results: The results declared that PIA shows significant means for empathy while insignificant for tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. Oman Airline showed a significant mean for assurance dimension of service quality while insignificant for tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy. While for Air Arabia the results declared a significant mean for tangibility, assurance, and insignificant mean for responsiveness, reliability, and empathy. Conclusion: The detailed analysis has proved that service quality in the form of tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy is the most important contributor to the satisfaction of customers of the Airline Industry.

Keywords: Service Quality, Competition, Reliability, Tangibility, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The commercial aviation sector, in the last three decades, has become an important catalyst, in the economic growth and development of nations. The aviation industry assists 2.7 trillion US Dollars and 3.6% in the total gross domestic product (GDP). Aviation transportation facilitates close to 4 billion passengers annually and 62 million tons of freight to domestic and international destinations and has assumed a significant role in the faster and convenient movement of passengers and goods in national economies. Besides, it is providing immense employment opportunities and enabling about 29 million people to earn their bread and butter from commercial aviation. The growing importance of aviation, in the economies of various countries, has resulted in creating a highly competitive environment. This, in turn, requires that the airlines provide high-class amenities to their passengers' resultant increase in their profits. The quality of facilities has always been important for the existence and competitiveness of airlines (Chen, 2008). The service quality results in the long-term increase in passenger satisfaction and in turn client's trustworthiness, which is the antecedent of cost savings, increased market share, and improved profitability. The travelers are not satisfied with provided service quality and are not expected to have a long-run relationship with the respective airline (Lin & Wu, 2011). Standards of service quality influence a company's comparativeness and help to retain customer support and market shares (Park, Roberston & Wul, 2004; Morash & Ozment, 1994). Therefore, customer loyalty is always regarded as important for any organization (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000; Rauyruen & Miller, 2007). Client loyalty has been the rational interactive answer of travelers pleased with the provision of superior value. (Oliver, 1999; Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Lee, Lee, & Feick, 2001)

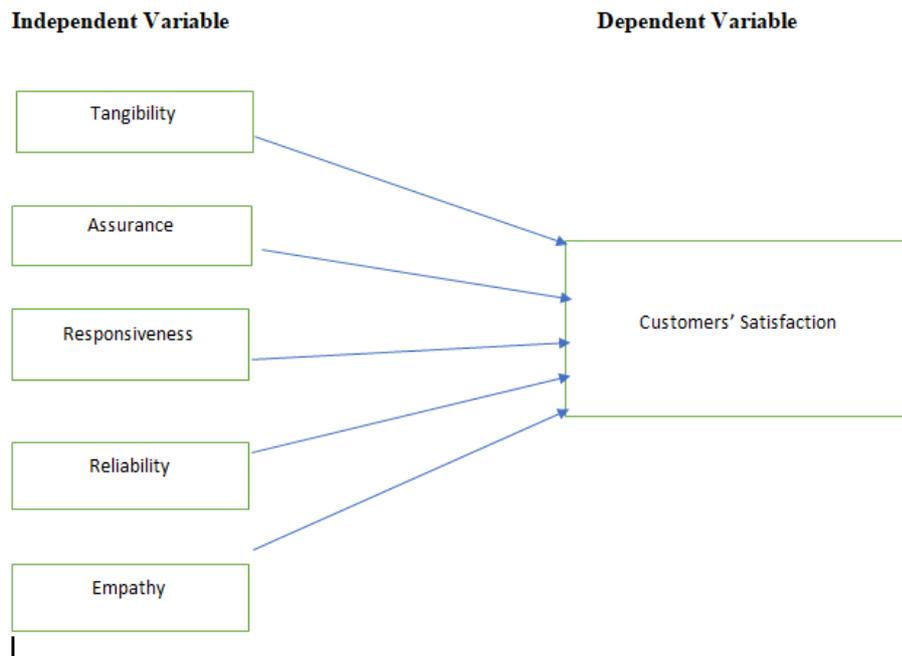
Holding customers and evolving relationships with new customers are one of the key business strategies. Business growth depends on frequent visits of a customer for any business and the most effective way to increase customer's visits is to provide the service quality that meets and customer's expectations. Similarly, in the airline industry, it is needed to keep its service quality up to the mark to attract and retain customers in the existing competitive surroundings.

There is a lot of recognition in the researched writings that service quality has proven significant in the attainment and maintenance of market share and return on investment goals for an organization. (Anderson & Zeithaml 1984; Philips, Change & Buzzel, 1983). The substantial part of the overall responsibility for the improvement of service quality rests upon the employees detailed to contact and deliver to the passengers. Church and Stum (1990) call such customer service employees “corporate ambassadors” Which is most important to make travelers’ loyalty and organizational image. So, therefore, the association between customer and service provider is considered an important aspect of satisfaction and quality because services are normally treated with large social components (Crosby & Stephens 1987; Brown & Swartz 1989; & Crosby 1991).

Keeping in view, the relationship between an airline and its passengers, the prevailing standards of service delivery needs to be overhauled for the satisfaction of the customer. The analysis would help in identifying grey areas contributing negatively towards customers’ satisfaction and charting appropriate responses to ensure customer satisfaction. To attain this goal, the focus on service quality in PIA, Air Arabia, and Oman Airline should, not be on its delivery only, rather the service should be delivered in a manner that generates and manages customer’s traveling records with the airlines as a brand. The service quality of PIA, Air Arabia, and Oman Airline must not be confined to more providing traveling facilities. Passengers should be made to feel like a special guest rather than an ordinary traveler. The people should experience something special the moment they get to the Airline while going through the checking countries boarding the Aircraft, the way food is served, its quality and taste during flights, entertainments, the texture of massage seats. All the facilities must maximize the delight of the passengers.

In case PIA manages to revamp its service provision to the complete satisfaction of customers, there is a fair possibility for the national airline to achieve a strategic competitive position in the industry. Similarly, if Air Arabia successfully provided its service quality to satisfy the customers it would help them to attract and retain a larger number of passengers than any other airline, moreover if customers’ are satisfied with the services of Oman Airline they would be able to get the competitive advantage over other high-cost airlines in the same territory.

Theoretical framework



Hypotheses

- H0. Tangibility has no significant effect on the customers’ satisfaction
- H1. Tangibility has a significant effect on the customers’ satisfaction.

- H0. Reliability has no significant effect on customers' satisfaction
- H2: Reliability has a significant effect on the customers' satisfaction.
- H0. Assurance has no significant effect on customers' satisfaction
- H3. Assurance has a significant effect on the customers' satisfaction.
- H0. Responsiveness has no significant effect on customers' satisfaction
- H4: Responsiveness has a significant effect on the customers' satisfaction.
- H0. Empathy has no significant effect on customers' satisfaction.
- H5: Empathy has a significant effect on the customers' satisfaction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Services in the Airline Industry

The best example of the above assertion is the emergence of less expensive Airlines which pay the way for the mushroom growth of many new Airlines which alter the existing strategies of already established Airlines business. There is another feature called "heterogeneity" which tells us that there is always a contrast between two seemingly similar businesses because different personalities having divergent mindsets are involved in their establishment (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). This all hinges on the people who offered the services and those who avail them (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). Hence keeping the behavior of employees unchanged and retaining the quality of services is an uphill task (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). In the case of Airline, customers have to interact with a handful of people hence the conceived notion regarding the standard of service is directly related to the expertise of the latter to fulfill expectations of the former (Alotaibi, 2015).

Another difference between goods and services is the inevitable dependency on service production and consumption. Consumption and production of service mostly go hand in hand, therefore, customers are part and parcel of these processes (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Resultantly quality is ensured only when there is proper coordination among service providers and customers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). The involvement of customers is a must to have enhanced service quality (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Another significant aspect is "perishability" which means that services are something that cannot be saved nor stored, resold, or restored. Due to this factor, it is incumbent upon the service providers to foresee the potential demands and devise their strategy to meet them. In addition to that, they must have contingency plans to make for damage control in case of any disruption in the plan. This is also essential to secure the interest of the customer.

2.2 Service Quality

The standard of service or product is recognized as a "*driving force for improved competitiveness, customer satisfaction, and profitability*" (Edvardsson, 1992). Service standard has got too much importance due to its effect on customers' satisfaction (Leonard & Sasser, 1982; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Chang & Chen, 1998; Gummesson, 1998; Silvestro & Cross, 2000; Newman, 2001; Suresh Chander et al., 2002; Guru, 2003). Organizations give service quality a priority while designing a marketing strategy to achieve a competitive position (Levitt, 1981; Parasuraman et al., 1985).

The perception of end-users regarding the high quality of products is usually admitted as an essential instrument to retain people's confidence in any brand (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009). A better service standard is an essential prerequisite for the establishment and flourishing of any business unit. Because it has a bearing on shaping customer's purchasing behavior. It also influences the overall performance of any organization (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

Service quality was defined by different authors in their way

- "Customers define what the company's quality standards shall be". (Parasuraman et al. 1985)
- "Quality is about all the things which consist to satisfy needs and wants". (Edwards, 1968)

- The level and degree of the product which satisfies the consumer wants and it is the degree regarding the specific product conforms to the design or specification”. (Gilmore, 1974)
- “Service quality reflects about a measure which states that how well the service delivered can match the expectations of the customers”. (Lewis and Booms 1983).



Figure: Service Quality and satisfaction

Source: Lai, Griffin, and Babin (2009)

The definitions mentioned above clearly indicate the association between service standards and customer satisfaction.

2.3 SERVPERF Scale

Cronin and Taylor (1992) studied the SERVQUAL scale and redeveloped the questions explaining service quality (Jain & Gupta, 2004). They gave a developed version of SERVQUAL claiming that it didn't define the performance part of the service standard (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). They emphasized the fact that usually, customers don't have expectations until they experience the service quality, and hence they don't expect anything from the firm in advance (Gurbuz et. al., 2008). Cronin and Taylor (1994) Established the SERVEPERF scale, which was based on performance lately backed by most of the scholars (Burch et al., 1995; Oliver, 1993). Hence the SERVPERF model is used in measuring the service standard in almost every firm giving services to the customers (Yilmaz, 2011).

These can be conditional from the research work performed by Cronin and Taylor (1994); Burch et al. (1995).

a. Cronin and Taylor (1994) said that in 1992 they had this study to develop the SERVPERF scale that emerged from SERVQUAL and has defined service quality significantly.

b. Cronin and Taylor (1994) used five points Likert scale to assess service standards in regression analysis the same as SERVQUAL.

c. Cronin and Taylor (1994) explored the SERVPERF scale can be defined to measure reliability and reliability the same as SERVQUAL. Although criticism on Servperf, they practiced it in four basic service sectors (e.g., banking, insect control, dry-cleaning, and fast-food). They claimed that SERVPERF is a developed model for calculating only the performance rather than studying the gap between expected and real performance (Jain & Gupta, 2004 (Yilmaz, 2011). Cronin and Taylor (1992) defined five dimensions of service quality for analyzing the performance specifications.

2.4. Connecting the SERVPERF model of Service quality with the Airline industry

The study of previous studies recognized that the service quality of an airline has many qualities grouped in various stages of the service delivery process, such as pre-flight, in-flight, and post-flight stage, etc. Each service quality is one of the dimensions of airline quality. Each service quality attributes belong to one of

the service quality dimensions which are the mainstay of the model. However, few alterations in the dimensions can be made to suit the environment of research as was done and tested by Gilbert and Wong (2003). A theoretical framework of airline service quality that emerged from this review is conceptualized as below:

Tangibility: Up to date equipment, visually appealing facilities, well-dressed employees, latest facilities.

Reliability: Respond within the time frame, reassuring when a problem arises, punctuality, and dependable, correct record.

Assurance: Safety (in-flight), politeness (reservation, pre, during, and post-flight), employees have support to do their job, employees are trustworthy.

Responsiveness: Efficient service, well in time, and quick information to the customer, employees willing to help in response to the request.

Empathy: Individual attention to customers, the anticipation of customer needs, convenient timings of flights, the best interest of the customer in employees' minds.

2.5. Customers' Satisfaction

Review and need of Customer satisfaction of the literature in the earlier segment have defined, that service standard achieves client's satisfaction by service distribution of an entities' employees. Therefore, service quality is achieved when there is a harmonious and fruitful relationship between service providers and clients.

Hence the relationship between the customers and employees is a significant benchmark to assess quality and satisfaction (Brown & Swartz 1989, Crosby 1991, Crosby & Stephens 1987, Solomon et al. 1985, Swartz & Brown 1991). Front line employees must understand customers' wants and being the company's ambassadors to construct customer satisfaction. Since in the services sector, the behavior of those who are offering services is the result of whatever the customer consumes, therefore, entities must utilize all their capabilities to nourish and intensify inter satisfaction. The element is key in framing the purchasing interest of customers It is a behavior that stems from the experience of the customers (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Kotler and Armstrong (1996) define customer satisfaction as "*a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product or service's perceived performance concerning his or her expectation*" (Kotler, 2003). Hence satisfaction of a customer is intimately linked with his desires and expectations. Sometimes a person experience services which are above the level of his expectations. This difference is called real customer satisfaction. Numerous factors influence a person's satisfaction like imagined service quality, client's perception, mindsets, emotions, interaction in society, and others (Rust and Oliver, 1994). Personal skills of its front line employees.

Various yardsticks are used to assess satisfaction. (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) calculated service satisfaction on single commodity sale that is the end-users' overall feelings towards the organization service. In this study, we define customer satisfaction as a claim (Crosby & Stephens (1987), (Oliver & Swan 1989, Bitner & Hubbert 1995) claim service satisfaction takes place at different levels, such as satisfaction with the contact person, satisfied with the core services experienced and satisfaction with the company overall.

2.6. Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Cronin and Taylor (1992) discovered experimental help for the possibility that apparent assistance quality prompted fulfillment and contended that administration quality is a forerunner of buyer fulfillment (Cronin, Brady, and Hult, 2000; Anderson, Fornell and Lehman, 1994). Consumer loyalty is regularly observed as a multidimensional build along with similar measurements that comprise administration quality (Sureshchandar, Rajendran, and Anantharaman, 2002).

Despite solid connections between administration quality and consumer loyalty, the two developments are in truth not the same as the client's perspective (Baker, 2013). Brady and Cronin (2001) attempt to explain the determination and nature of the administration quality and fulfillment development and discovered exact help for the conceptualization that administration quality was a precursor of the superordinate fulfillment build. In the avionics business, Huang (2009) states that administration quality influences consumer loyalty and that consumer loyalty influences client conduct, including repurchase

aim and verbal. Correspondingly, Yunus, Jamil, and Rashid (2013) contend that the nature of administration conveyance via carriers significantly affects consumer loyalty, which thusly, altogether influences client dedication. These discoveries confirm Retnaningsih (2013) accommodation. Moreover, Chou, Liu, Hung, Yih, and Han (2011) assess carrier administration quality in a Taiwanese aircraft and found that dependability and affirmation are the principal significant measurements, responsiveness is the second, sympathy the third pursued by physical assets and flight design. Different elements of aircraft administrations incorporate security, client objection taking care of, the kindness of group, on-time takeoff and appearance, solace and tidiness of seats, adaptability, cordiality, and genuineness (Hynes and Dredge, 1998). Furthermore, Wang, Shu, Lin, and Tseng (2011) inspect nine assessment criteria of service quality in the carrier organizations and found that travelers are more worried about solace, inside adornment, and the administrations of aircraft organizations.

III. METHODOLOGY

For the current study of examining the service feature of the airline business and their customers' satisfaction positivism (quantitative approach) is used because positivism helps relies on reliability uses of research instruments (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006). For the current research, positivism is applied.

The population N for the research in hand is all the customers traveling through PIA, Oman Airline, and Air Arabia to study the service quality and customers' satisfaction. Customers from different airlines are selected randomly through a random sampling technique. The number decided was 150 customers 50 from each airline (Nunnally, 1967; Schreiber et. al., 2006) ten elements for every parameter to be estimated is unacceptable value. Then the conceptual framework was operationalized using 5 point scale starting from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data was collected through close-ended questionnaires and statistical analysis was performed by ANOVA and regression.

IV. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

A sample of 150 respondents was equally divided among the three airlines. 50 respondents for PIA, 50 for Oman Airline, and 50 for Air Arabia. For descriptive Statistics application, the gender-wise distribution is analyzed at first.

Table 4.1: Gender wise distribution of respondents

Airline		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
PIA	Female	18	36.0	36.0	36.0
	Male	32	64.0	64.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	
Oman Airline	Female	20	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Male	30	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	
Air Arabia	Female	26	52.0	52.0	52.0
	Male	24	48.0	48.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The overhead table demonstrates the number and percentage of male and female respondents in the three airlines. The result shows that the percentage of males was more than female for PIA, similarly, for Oman Airline the result shows high percentages of males than females, while for Air Arabia the response percentage of females is more than males.

4.2. Age-wise Distribution of respondents

After analyzing the gender distribution, age-wise distribution is considered for further details

Table 4.2:

Airline			f	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
PIA	Valid	less than 25	9	18.0	18.0	18.0
		25-35	14	28.0	28.0	46.0
		35-45	21	42.0	42.0	88.0
		more than 45	6	12.0	12.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
Oman Airline	Valid	less than 25	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
		25-35	12	24.0	24.0	38.0
		35-45	19	38.0	38.0	76.0
		more than 45	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
Air Arabia	Valid	less than 25	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
		25-35	22	44.0	44.0	54.0
		35-45	12	24.0	24.0	78.0
		more than 45	11	22.0	22.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	

4.3. Quality Dimension

Table 4.3:

Dimension	PIA	Air Arabia	Oman Airline
Tangibility			
Q1	4.76	4.80	4.84
Q2	3.28	3.36	3.20
Q3	3.84	4.34	4.08
Reliability			
Q4	3.24	2.94	3.80
Q5	4.46	4.18	4.44
Q6	4.28	3.98	4.22
Responsiveness			
Q7	4.68	4.30	4.54
Q8	4.62	4.20	4.58
Q9	3.08	2.20	3.12
Assurance			
Q10	2.58	2.94	3.48
Q11	3.70	3.24	3.98
Q12	4.14	3.86	4.48
Empathy			
Q13	4.18	4.28	4.62
Q14	4.16	3.52	4.34
Q15	4.08	3.46	4.12

The above table indicates the average score of each item of the Service Quality dimension for Pakistan Airline, Air Arabia and Oman Airline. For tangibility average score of Oman Airline was upper than other Airlines for question 1 for the second and third question average score of Air Arabia was upper than the rest. For reliability mean score of Oman Airline was higher than the rest of the Airlines and the second and third question mean score of PIA was greater than the other companies for responsiveness. The mean score of the first and second questions was higher in PIA and the third question mean the score was higher in Oman airline. For assurance, all three mean scores of Oman Airlines were higher than others. For empathy, all three mean scores for Oman airlines were higher than the rest of the airlines.

4.4. ANOVA

ANOVA ^a							
Airline	Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PIA	1	Regression	31.061	5	6.212	13.772	.000 ^b
		Residual	19.847	44	.451		
		Total	50.908	49			
Oman Airline	1	Regression	34.469	5	6.894	18.122	.000 ^c
		Residual	16.738	44	.380		
		Total	51.207	49			
Air Arabia	1	Regression	18.072	5	3.614	7.838	.000 ^b
		Residual	20.290	44	.461		
		Total	38.362	49			

a. Dependent Variable: satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), empathy, Tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness

The above table describes that whether model is statistically significant and the results clearly indicated that models for all airline were statistically significant having p-value of 0.00

2.7. Regression Coefficients

Airline	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
PIA	(Constant)	.318	.121		2.621	.012		
	Tangibility	.123	.162	.115	.756	.454	.384	2.607
	reliability	.058	.122	.062	.476	.637	.522	1.916
	responsiveness	.286	.225	.251	1.274	.209	.228	4.380
	assurance	.281	.181	.271	1.553	.128	.290	3.445
	empathy	.554	.129	.474	4.309	.000	.731	1.368
Oman Airline	(Constant)	-.031	.099		-.312	.757		
	Tangibility	-.148	.154	-.141	-.963	.341	.344	2.905
	reliability	.127	.191	.121	.665	.509	.223	4.478
	responsiveness	.094	.191	.098	.492	.625	.188	5.319
	assurance	.459	.156	.446	2.945	.005	.323	3.094
	empathy	.173	.173	.142	.998	.324	.367	2.723
Air Arabia	(Constant)	-.099	.114		-.868	.390		
	Tangibility	-.363	.113	-.435	-3.215	.002	.657	1.523
	reliability	-.102	.180	-.097	-.564	.575	.411	2.433
	responsiveness	.062	.205	.059	.303	.763	.320	3.128
	assurance	.456	.167	.464	2.735	.004	.417	2.399
	empathy	.006	.121	.008	.048	.962	.481	2.078

a. Dependent Variable: satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), empathy, assurance, Tangibility, reliability, responsiveness

The above table shows comparisons of the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in the three airlines under consideration derived models are

PIA

Customer Satisfaction = $0.318 + 0.554 \text{ empathy}$

Oman Airline

Customer Satisfaction = $-0.031 + 2.945 \text{ Assurance}$

Air Arabia

Customer Satisfaction = $-0.099 - 3.215 \text{ tangibility} + 0.456 \text{ Assurance}$

For PIA the results indicate that empathy has a statistically significant positive effect on customer satisfaction with a p-value of 0.000. While for Oman Airline the results indicate that assurance has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction with a p-value of 0.005 and for Air Arabia the results portray that tangibility has a statistically significant negative impact on customer satisfaction and assurance has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction with p-value 0.002 and 0.048 respectively. Variance inflation factor (VIF) which is used to detect strong multicollinearity shows that there is no strong multicollinearity among explanatory variables.

V. DISCUSSION

A comprehensive review of existing research work highlighted that there is a dire need to identify the role of service quality of Airline Industry that is almost unaddressed by previous researchers and to compare different airlines in terms of service quality to know what gaps are left indifferent airlines for the achievement of customers' satisfaction and indirectly to maximize profit. Most of the studies conducted previously were limited to one airline or have used different models (Khan & Fasih, 2014, Kaura, et al., 2012). The research in hand focused on national i.e. PIA as well as international airlines i.e. Oman Airline and Air Arabia in terms of service quality using the SERVPERF model. With concern to the inspiration that service quality possesses on the satisfaction of the airline customers, the results declared that SERVPERF dimensions possess a positive relationship with the satisfaction of customers in the airline industry. Satisfaction is the main invented by the employees, due to the reason that they are the major part of the productions or service provisions. Prices, airline responses, airplane environment and equipment, the image of the airline in terms of satisfaction, the policy of luggage and baggage, are the other matter that causes customers satisfaction at first. When customers pay more money they want the services according to the price which they paid, and if they don't get the right services they get unsatisfied (Naik et al., 2010; Wisniewski, 2001; Curry & Herbert, 1988; and Zeithaml, 1988). Service quality is also evaluated by the appearance of the aircraft and their condition if the airplanes are in good conditions customer feels more satisfied and vice versa because they have to stay in that environment during the whole flight. The customer gets attracted to the airlines by the image of the airline in general, which sometimes increases the expectations of the customers. Receiving the customers by the cabin crew is also one of the drivers for satisfying customers. The on-time flight service, the on-time landing and the response to problems are also the value-added to service quality. The findings of this research confirm the results of the researches conducted previously (Hossain, 2012; Juwaheer, 2004).

VI. CONCLUSION

Observing the competitive landmark of the airline industry, the airlines concentrate on the need to analyze the customers' demands and provide services according to their demands so that they would be able to attract, retain and maintain their passengers in long run. To address the concern mentioned above, the current study is conducted to identify the impact of service quality provided by International Airlines (PIA, Oman Airline, and Air Arabia. The detailed analysis has proved that service quality in the form of tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy is the most important contributor to the satisfaction of customers of the Airline Industry. The comparison of 3 international Airlines highlighted that all 5 factors of service quality, empathy for PIA, assurance for Oman Airline and Tangibility+assurance for Air Arabia has a positive significant effect on their customer's satisfaction. Altogether, the study offers a significant contribution to the body of knowledge regarding service quality

and customers' satisfaction with PIA, Oman Airline, and Air Arabia. As well, this study is quite significant for Policymakers to improve services accordingly.

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