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## SERVICE QUALITY: GAP IN AIR TRANSPORTATION

**Abstract:** *This study aims to obtain a better understanding of the extent to which service quality is delivered within the airline's industry drawing from the passengers' adequate level, desired or expectations levels of service to service performance. A survey of 200 Omani passengers was collect and a test of the common bias method is conducted and demonstrated evenly distributed bias among the study variables. All the 22 items were analysed for its dimensionality using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) resulted in a just identified model of service quality dimensions. The results from a paired-sample test indicate that the scores of the individual dimensions of service quality vary significantly according to before and after the service among the Omani passengers. It is interesting to note that there were large effects, with a substantial difference in the tangible and reliability scores, while there were moderate effects of empathy, assurance, and responsiveness scores obtained on the levels of service. However, this study is delimited to the result of only two cities in a country. An assessment of continuous performance using a larger sample should be conducted for future study.*

**Keywords** *continuous improvement, service quality, SERVQUAL, common bias method, levels of service*

### 1. Introduction

This study identifies accurately any service gaps in the air transportation sector, through assessing and comparing the expectations and perceptions of the air passengers. Particularly, an understanding of this gaps is essential for determining passenger satisfaction and eventually retention. This study is important because air passengers' involvement in the decision-making process create competitiveness of firms in the airline industry are getting more complex, and Oman Air is of no exception. Air transportation is one of the major contributors to Oman's economy and is

striving to better serve its passengers at the highest level of satisfaction. Building passenger satisfaction starts with an understanding of the passengers' expectations for service quality, which is lacking and alarming (<http://consumerboard.org/company/oman-air-complaints>). To achieve this, understanding the quality of service dimensions that influence customer satisfaction is paramount importance. Moreover, the outcome of this study will shed some lights to airline service providers, particularly to Oman Air, which considers customer satisfaction as its number one priority.

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Indeed, service quality has become a marketing priority since many decades ago and it is generally seen as a tool for creating a competitive advantage that can help airline service providers to deal with their new environment (Kassim & Bojei, 2002). Thus, the more we know about passengers' expectations, the better we can satisfy their needs and wants and create value for them. As far as we know, all these issues have not been examined in developing countries such as Oman, despite its fast growth rates and more economic importance. Hence, the objective of this study is to fill or narrow this gap by exploring the impact of levels of service on service quality dimensions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Service Quality

The meanings of quality in services, in particular, remain elusive until to date because services are often characterized by unique characteristics and they are hard for customers to virtualize and are not easily understood (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2017; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016). These unique characteristics have resulted in making marketing activities are more difficult and challenging for a service provider to understand how service quality is expectation and perceived by its customers. Indeed, the elements of the traditional marketing mix have been adjusted to include the physical environment, people and process in meeting these unique characteristics of a service product.

In assessing the service quality, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) suggested 22 items describing five quality of service dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—as a result of few modifications. They claimed that these service quality dimensions (known as SERVQUAL) are structurally true across service industries. However, the empirical

evidence for widespread use of these dimensions is not generic (Butler, 1996; Carman, 1990; Garland, Tweed & Davis, 1999). They then suggested that service quality judgments result from consumer evaluations of performance of various service dimensions against desired or expectations (E) from each dimension. Cronin and Taylor (1992; 1994), however, argued that this conceptualization of SERVQUAL is mainly based on a satisfaction paradigm rather than an attitude model and thus, flawed. According to them the customer expectation does not play very important role measuring service quality and thus, service performance (SERVPERF) alone can be used to evaluate service quality. Their view, however, contradict with Kaczynski (2008, p. 254) saying that an understanding of customer expectations, preferences, and desired benefits is “the starting point for all marketing efforts.” Despite these differences, SERVQUAL is now regarded as the most widely applied scale used in research on service quality (Erdil & Yildiz, 2011; Phiri & Mcwabe, 2013)

### 2.2 Expectations

Customer expectations are unique, individual constructs which prior to a service influence customers' evaluation of service performance and customer satisfaction (Bitner 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Parasuraman, 1988; Stayman, Alden & Smith, 1992; Tse & Wilton, 1988). Expectations can be defined as global and componential perspectives (Yi, 1990). From a global perspective, expectations are viewed as pre-consumption beliefs about the overall performance of the product or service created by previous experience, organizational claims, product information or word of mouth.

In contrast, the other perspective of expectations deals with a process internal to the customer, that is, it is componential

(Oliver 1981; Yi 1990). In other words, expectations consist of an estimate of the likelihood of an event plus an evaluation of the goodness or badness of the event (Churchill & Surprenant 1982; Oliver 1980; Tse & Wilton 1988). Olson & Dover (1979) defined expectations as beliefs about a product or service's attributes or performances at some time in the future. In brief, expectations are variously defined and thus are open to multiple interpretations. Thus, it is safe to say that there is no consensus in the literature about the conceptual definition of expectation's construct (Spreng, MacKenzie & Olshavsky, 1996).

In turn, there are several other factors that may be considered by customers to arrive at their expectations. Many researchers believe that expectations are strongly influenced by the memory of experiences (for example, Vavra 1997), knowledge (for example, Clow, Kurtz, Ozment & Ong 1997; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985, 1988), demographics (for example, Bryant & Cha, 1996; Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994; Webb 1998; Webster, 1989; Vavra, 1997) and culture (Donthu & Yoo, 1998). Consider these in turn. Experiences involve the role of memory in forming expectancies and are rather complex as a result of a variety of cognitive processes (Folkes, 1994; Peter & Olson, 1996). However, recalling favorable or unfavourable events from memory are subjected to a number of biases (Herr, 1989) that will influence the formation of customer's perceptions of future events, such as the biases of recency (Herr, 1989), distinctiveness (Gardner, 1983; Herr, 1989) and elaboration (Kiseliuis & Sternthal, 1986). Knowledge stimulates information search by making new information easier to evaluate (Punj & Staelin 1983; Johnson & Russo, 1984). However, there are situations where there exists a negative relationship between the level of experience and the amount of external information search (Hoch & Ha, 1986), for example, experienced

customers may have prior knowledge about the service and consequently feel that they do not need further information. Moreover, the experiential nature of services makes word-of-mouth communication more reliable and trustworthy (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1993) even for low-cost services (Clow et al., 1997). For example, satisfaction with previous service experience will lead to positive word-of-mouth communications about the firm and to repeat purchases (Bitner 1990; Bitner, Booms & Tetreault 1990; LaBarbera & Mazursky, 1983; Woodside, Frey & Daly, 1989; Kassim & Abdullah, 2010; Mwiya, Bwalya, Siachinji, Sikombe, Chanda, & Chawala, 2017).

The demographic characteristics are found to affect expectations in both service quality and customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction works of literature (Assouad & Overby, 2016). It has been used as one of the segmentation bases in marketing because it provides useful insights to a service provider (Gaschler, Schwager, Umbacha, Frensch, and Schubert, 2014; Kassim, 2006). Previous research has shown that demographic variables are related to service quality expectations (Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994; Kassim, 2006; Webster, 1989)

Finally, the impact of culture in moulding expectations can be seen in Hofstede's dimensions of power distance, femininity/masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and individualism/collectivism (Donthu & Yoo 1998; Hofstede 1991; Obeidat, Shannak, Masa'deh, & Al-Jarrah, 2012). Consider the cultural dimension of individualism (like Westerners). According to Donthu and Yoo (1998) that individualistic societies tend to have a high quality of overall service expectations, that is having less empathy for others, and little tolerance for poor service. Unlike Omanis or collectivist cultures tends to relate the self to its history of kinships by emphasizing groups and society rather than individuals. They try to avoid uncertainty by making decisions collectively for the community.

High uncertainty customers have high expectations of both process and outcome. Thus, culture plays a very important role in the formation of expectations that help to improve customer satisfaction (Assouad & Overby, 2016).

### 2.3 Role of expectations is questioned

Despite the discussion above, several scholars have questioned the appropriateness of operationalizing expectations in formulating levels of satisfaction (for example, Assouad & Overby, 2016; Boulding et al., 1993). Customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction can only occur if they are related to certain aspects of a product or service about which the customer has an opinion before consumption. This approach suggests that everyone must have prior expectations about a service experience. However, those prior expectations may not be established clearly enough to serve as a basis for a comparison with an experience (Yuskel & Rimmington, 1998). For example, McGill and Iacobucci (1992), demonstrated the differences between pre-consumption and post-consumption standards. Consumers that are not familiar with a service will not include the service experiences in their initial pre-service delivery expectations because those experiences would have been difficult for them to envision prior to consumption. Moreover, a customer may modify his or her expectations during the service encounter and use those modified expectations as the standard of comparison (Danaher & Mattsson, 1994). Indeed, some studies have found expectations did not explain the satisfaction process at all (for example, Spreng & Olshavsky, 1993).

Many empirical studies have produced conflicting findings regarding the roles of expectations. These suggest that expectations may operate under different conditions, such as, product categories (Churchill &

Surprenant, 1982) and customer groups (Halstead & Droge, 1991). Moreover, expectations are passive, unstable, ambiguously formed, or even unformed due to a lack of knowledge or experience (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Halstead, Hartman & Schmidt, 1994; Yuskel & Rimmington, 1998).

Indeed, expectations in service quality literature are similarly conceptualized in a variety of ways, including the desired level of service, or the level of service that customers hope to receive, and an adequate level of service which customers will tolerate or accept (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2009). Thus, the research tends to answer the following question: *is there a significant change in passengers' service quality scores at adequate, desired or expected and performance levels of service?*

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Participant and Procedures

A convenience sample consisting of 200 Oman Air passengers in Muscat and Nizwa is used in this study because of the time constraint. The self-administered online surveys via the Survey Monkey website were distributed to the respondents via emails during the period of one month in March 2018. This population was chosen because the authors of this research had access to the respondents, making it easy for them to collect the data. Demographically, the majority (79.0 percent) of the respondents were male Omani nationals (51.5 percent) who were aged between 25 and 44 years (79.5 percent), with income levels between OMR500 and OMR1500 (53.0 percent) (OMR1 = US\$2.6).

## 3.2 Measures

We adapted the measures similar to those of previous studies by Erdil and Yıldız (2011). It is divided into two sections, the first of which comprised the SERVQUAL version of 22-item measures. The last section is used to collect the demographic profiles of the respondents. We used a forced six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “very poor” to 6 = “very good” for service quality measures. The even-numbered rating scale was used instead of the midpoint scale to minimize bias since the survey was conducted in a conservative market where the respondents are considered as being polite and helpful and would thus prefer to provide more favourable answers to the questions asked (Kassim, Bogari & Zain, 2015). This study differs from the current literature in that we included the levels of service, adequate, expectation and performance.

## 3.3 Data Analysis

We used the following statistical analysis methods: (a) testing the measurement model fit (using AMOS version 24.0), (b) common bias method (CBM; using SPSS version 24.0), (c) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; using AMOS version 24.0) for testing the reliability and validity of the survey instrument, and (d) paired-samples t-test for testing any significant change in respondents level of services (using SPSS version 24.0).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Testing the measurement model fit

In this research, the exogenous constructs of adequate, desired and performances service levels consisted of five dimensions with sets of multiple indicators that ranged from 4 to 5

indicator variables each. These constructs were analyzed individually to determine their unidimensionality using AMOS version 24. This section reports a confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) (CFA) of the five-service quality dimension; tangibles responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy.

### *Measurement model for dimension of service quality: tangibles*

The tangibles initially contained four indicators each. However, three of these indicators were taken out because their indicators had poorly standardized regression weights. The just identified, three-indicator model shown in table I was appropriate. The standardized regression measurement weights for the three-indicator model were greater than 0.50 and were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). This result suggests that the indicators are good measures of tangibles and provide evidence of convergent validity. Furthermore, the internal reliability for all factors was very good with Cronbach alphas equal to 0.80, 0.78 and 0.79, indicating high internal reliability and consistency. In addition, all the average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50) obtained in table I indicating adequate discriminant validity of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)

### *Measurement model for dimension of service quality: reliability*

Next, this section presents a unidimensional model of reliability. The initial model of reliability contained five observed variables. Using the acceptance cut-off criteria noted in Hu and Bentler (1999) produced a three-indicator model of reliability. Providing evidence in support of convergent validity, all of the measurement item weights exceeded 0.50 and were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The items appeared to be reliable measures of reliability based on their internal reliability and composite reliability.

**Table 1.** Goodness of fit statistics for the CFA model of tangibles dimension of service quality

Levels of service			Adequate	Desired	Performance
Cronbach alpha			<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.79</b>
Composite reliability (CR)			<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>0.79</b>
Average variance extracted (AVE)			<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.56</b>
Standardized regression weight			Estimate	<i>p</i> value	
ADQAIRCRAFT	←	Adequate	<b>0.75</b>		
ADQUNIFORM	←	Adequate	<b>0.76</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
ADQMATERIAL	←	Adequate	<b>0.77</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
DESAIRCRAFT	←	Desired	<b>0.63</b>		
DESUNIFORM	←	Desired	<b>0.84</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
DESMATERIAL	←	Desired	<b>0.77</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
PERFAIRCRAFT	←	Performance	<b>0.74</b>		
PERFUNIFORM	←	Performance	<b>0.76</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
PERFMATERIAL	←	Performance	<b>0.74</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	

**Table 2.** Goodness-of-fit statistics for the CFA models of reliability dimension of service quality

Levels of service			Adequate	Desired	Performance
Cronbach alpha			<b>0.86</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.81</b>
Composite reliability (CR)			<b>0.86</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>0.81</b>
Average variance extracted (AVE)			<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.59</b>
Standardized regression weight			Estimate	<i>p</i> value	
ADQSINCERE	←	Adequate	<b>0.92</b>		
ADQRIGHT	←	Adequate	<b>0.79</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
ADQPROMISE	←	Adequate	<b>0.73</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
DESSINCERE	←	Desired	<b>0.71</b>		
DESRIGHT	←	Desired	<b>0.80</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
DESPROMISE	←	Desired	<b>0.72</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
PERFSINCERE	←	Performance	<b>0.89</b>		
PERFRIGHT	←	Performance	<b>0.71</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	
PERFPROMISE	←	Performance	<b>0.69</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	

*Measurement model for dimension of service quality: responsiveness*

A unidimensional model of responsiveness, the third dimension, is presented in this section. Though the initial model contained four observed variables, this model produced poor fit. Using the acceptance cut-off criteria produced appropriate three-indicator CFA models that are illustrated in this section. Providing evidence in support of convergent validity, all of the measurement item weights exceeded 0.50 and were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The items appeared to be reliable measures of customer service based on their internal

reliability (0.86, 0.80 and 0.81).

*Measurement model for dimension of service quality: assurance*

This section reports a unidimensional model of assurance. The initial model of assurance contained four observed variables but one were inappropriate using the cut-off criteria. The appropriate CFA model for assurance has three indicators. Table IV displays the standardized regression weight and reliability. The findings showed that most of the measurement items weights for the three-indicator model were greater than 0.50 and were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). This result

suggests that the indicators are good measures of assurance and provide evidence of convergent validity.

In addition, the model fitted the data well and was reinforced by the internal reliability

for all factors was very good with Cronbach alphas equal to 0.88, 0.84 and 0.86 indicating high internal reliability and consistency. The three appropriate, three-indicator models are illustrated in table IV.

**Table 3** Goodness-of-fit statistics for the CFA models of responsiveness dimension of service quality

Levels of service			Adequate	Desired	Performance
Cronbach alpha			<b>0.88</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>0.85</b>
Composite reliability (CR)			<b>0.88</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>0.86</b>
Average variance extracted (AVE)			<b>0.72</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>0.69</b>
Standardized regression weight			Estimate	<i>p</i> value	
ADQEXACT	←	Adequate	<b>0.76</b>		
ADQPROMPT	←	Adequate	<b>0.93</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
ADQWILLING	←	Adequate	<b>0.85</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
DESEXACT	←	Desired	<b>0.70</b>		
DESPROMPT	←	Desired	<b>0.85</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
DESWILLING	←	Desired	<b>0.84</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
PERFEXACT	←	Performance	<b>0.62</b>		
PERFPROMPT	←	Performance	<b>1.00</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
PERFWILLING	←	Performance	<b>0.82</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	

**Table 4.** Goodness-of-fit statistics for the CFA models of assurance dimension of service quality

Levels of service			Adequate	Desired	Performance
Cronbach alpha			<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.77</b>
Composite reliability (CR)			<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.80</b>
Average variance extracted (AVE)			<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.58</b>
Standardized regression weight			Estimate	<i>p</i> value	
ADQINSTIL	←	Adequate	<b>0.64</b>		
ADQSAFE	←	Adequate	<b>0.80</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
ADQRESPECT	←	Adequate	<b>0.83</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
DESINSTIL	←	Desired	<b>0.84</b>		
DESSAFE	←	Desired	<b>0.66</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
DESRESPECT	←	Desired	<b>0.82</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
PERFINSTIL	←	Performance	<b>0.63</b>		
PERFSAFE	←	Performance	<b>0.59</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
PERFRESPECT	←	Performance	<b>1.00</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	

**Measurement model for dimension of service quality: empathy**

Finally, this section reports a unidimensional model of empathy. The initial model of

empathy contained five observed variables but two were inappropriate using the criteria noted above. The appropriate CFA model for empathy has three indicators. Table V displays the standardized regression weight

and reliability. The findings showed that most of the measurement items weights for the three-indicator model were greater than 0.50 and were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). This result suggests that the indicators are good measures of empathy and provide evidence of convergent validity and adequate discriminant validity of the constructs (see Table V).

**4.2 Common Bias Method**

Next, since majority of the respondents were Omanis, a test of equal specific bias in the dataset using Harman's Single Factor Test. The result shows that this dataset did not suffer from the common bias issue because the total variance explained by the single factor is 37.4 percent which is less than 50 percent.

**Table 5** Goodness-of-fit statistics for the CFA models of empathy dimension of service quality

Levels of service			Adequate	Desired	Performance
Cronbach alpha			<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.77</b>
Composite reliability (CR)			<b>0.82</b>	<b>0.87</b>	<b>0.82</b>
Average variance extracted (AVE)			<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.58</b>
Standardized regression weight			Estimate	<i>p</i> value	
ADQINDIV	←	Adequate	<b>0.77</b>		
ADQHOURS	←	Adequate	<b>0.76</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
ADQPERSONAL	←	Adequate	<b>0.78</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
DESINDIV	←	Desired	<b>0.91</b>		
DESHOURS	←	Desired	<b>0.73</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
DESPERSONAL	←	Desired	<b>0.86</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
PERFINDIV	←	Performance	<b>0.78</b>		
PERFHOURS	←	Performance	<b>0.76</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	
PERFPERSONAL	←	Performance	<b>0.77</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	

**4.3 Confirmatory factor analysis**

In depth analysis using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is conducted to examine the constructs' dimensionality (see also Tables I to V) in AMOS 24 software. The initial CFA model for all service quality dimensions were not acceptable, and to obtain an acceptable fit, one item each from the tangibility, responsiveness and assurance

dimensions were deleted, while two items each from the reliability and empathy (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) because the factor loading is less than 0.50. Table II provides the measurement scales of each of the five dimensions of perceived service quality. The sample correlations, and square root of AVE are shown in table VI.

**Table 6** Correlations, and square root of AVE

Variable	CR	AVE	Adequate level	Desired level	Performance level
Adequate level	0.88	0.60	<b>0.78</b>	.071***	0.77***
Desired level	0.89	0.62		<b>0.79</b>	0.77**
Performance level	0.86	0.55			<b>0.74</b>

### Paired-samples t-test

Paired-samples t-test is used to test or answer the research question whether there

is a significant change in passengers' levels of service. The results are shown in Table VII. The analysis results are discussed next.

**Table 7** Paired-samples t-test results

Dimension	Levels of service			A-C			B-C		
	(A)	(B)	(C)	Diff*	95% CI		Diff*	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
Tangibles	3.38	3.41	3.12	0.26 [0.20]	0.19	0.33	0.29 [0.18]	0.20	0.38
Reliability	3.37	3.31	3.11	0.25 [0.16]	0.17	0.34	0.20 [0.10]	0.12	0.28
Responsive	3.36	3.37	3.16	0.21 [0.10]	0.12	0.29	0.21 [0.10]	0.12	0.30
Assurance	3.28	3.23	2.99	0.29 [0.16]	0.20	0.38	0.25 [0.13]	0.16	0.33
Empathy	3.39	3.41	3.23	0.16 [0.10]	0.09	0.23	0.18 [0.11]	0.11	0.25

### Discussion of results

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the levels of service on passengers' scores on the service quality dimensions. There were statistically significant decrease in the service quality dimensions at adequate level and desired level to performance level. The means decrease in the service quality dimension at adequate level of service to performance level of service were ranging from 0.16 to 0.29 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.09 to 0.38. Given the eta values ranging from 0.10 to 0.20 we can conclude that there were a large effect (Cohen 1988, pp. 284-7), with substantial difference in the quality of service dimensions scores obtained before and after the service.

Similarly, at the desired level of service to performance level of service, there were statistically significant decrease in the service quality dimensions (0.18 to 0.29). The eta squared statistic indicated a large effect size. Thus, the results indicated in Table VII answer the research question that is there is a significant change on the service quality dimensions at adequate level, and desired level to the performance level or

services. The limitations and implications of these results are discussed next.

### Discussion, implication, and future research

This study investigates and identifies the pertinent service quality dimensions influencing at three levels of service. The changes were significant at adequate to performance levels of service and at expectation to performance levels of service. According to Pallant (2010) the differences on the scores of service quality dimensions between the levels of service could not happen by chance. In fact the effect size provides an indication of the magnitude of the differences on the scores of service quality dimensions between the levels of service. Thus, an in depth analysis was conducted to test the effect size of the changes (Pallant, 2010). It is interesting to note that the scores of the individual dimensions of service quality vary significantly according to the levels of service. Another interesting finding of this study is that the eta squared statistic at adequate level of service indicated large effect size for tangible (0.20), reliability

(0.16) and assurance (0.16), while responsiveness and empathy quality dimensions have a moderate effect to performance level of service. Next, given the eta squared value of 0.18 we can conclude that there was a large effect in the tangible scores obtained at the desired level to performance level of service. Meanwhile, assurance (0.13), empathy (0.11), reliability (0.10) and responsiveness (0.10) do effect moderately before and after the service. Thus, the findings suggest that the five service quality dimensions play crucial roles in building passenger satisfaction.

Our findings have generated some insights for marketing managers or practitioners. The findings suggest that Omani passengers are less tolerable and have higher expectations when it comes to service quality. Obviously, Oman Air needs to continuously improve its passengers' service levels (adequate and desired), in its effort to attract new passengers. These essential actions may be the result of the knowledge or information about the effect of individual dimensions of service quality on the levels of service. Another interesting finding of this study is the significant large effect of tangibles on levels of service. Thus, companies such as Oman Air can increase passenger satisfaction

directly by improving the tangibility dimension of their service. Thus, airline managers need to foster satisfaction by improving their passengers' airline experiences. The findings also suggest that passengers of diverse cultural background might react differently to factors affecting level of services. Thus, improvement of service quality is a contributing factor to service differentiation and competitiveness in the airline industry. Therefore, to better serve the customers, it is recommended that Oman Air develop and implement market-oriented service strategies to identify their customer needs and expectations.

As in any studies, there are certain limitations that should be understood when interpreting the results and deriving the implications. First, the convenience sampling used was not random and the sample size was small. Thus, it is useful to replicate this study using a larger sample. Second, the measurement scale used, which comprised only forced six-Likert scale, represents another study limitation. Finally, given the nature of the sample, caution must be exercised in the generalizability of the results.

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