

International Journal of Scientific Research and Reviews

Passengers' Perception of Railways (A Study in Salem Division of Southern Railway Zone)

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ABSTRACT:

Service quality may be defined as customer (passenger) perception of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations. This study is an empirical investigation that seeks to find passengers' perceptions of railways in Salem division of Southern Railway Zone. Factors considered are arrangement of medical facilities on the train, safety of passenger's belongings, accessibility to station, travelling charges, parking facility, facilities for disabled, cleanliness of the station, cleanliness of the train, adequacy of retiring rooms and tatkal scheme. Respondents have been taken by applying stratified random sampling method, percentage analysis and average score analysis are used. The study purpose is to analyze the passengers' perception towards the performance of services by Indian railways. Total of 500 used to test the hypotheses. Findings of the study reveal that the passengers have good perception on services offered by Indian railways.

KEYWORDS: Passengers, Perception and Railways

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INTRODUCTION

Transportation is the movement of people and goods with vehicles, which is, fast, convenient, easy, economical, and environmentally friendly. The transport system greatly affects the pattern of life and economic development.¹ Indian Railway is the third largest rail network in the world, with its more than 150 year old history, Indian Railway is a state-owned public utility of the Government of India under the Ministry of Railways. As a national common carrier transporting passenger and goods over its vast network, Indian Railways has always played a key role in India's social and economic development.² It is a cheap and affordable means of transportation for millions of passengers. Freight trains carry nearly 1.2 million tonnes of originating goods and 7,500 passenger trains carry nearly 12 million passengers every day. Freight and passenger traffic carried by the Indian Railways has recorded an impressive growth ever since Independence.³

The Indian Railways had made its first journey way back on April 16, 1853 from Mumbai to Thane covering a distance of about 20 km only. Since then railways has been marching forward across the country to fulfill the needs of the people.⁴

The provision of passenger amenities is one of the important objectives of the Indian Railways both as business ethic and social obligation. Indian Railways lost its market share in Freight and Passenger segment due to lack of customer responsiveness and poor public perception.⁵

This paper is an attempt to find the passengers' perception on various services provided by Indian railways in Salem Division of Southern Railway.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Fellessen., Margareta conducted a transnational comparison of customers' public transport perceived service satisfaction in eight cities (Stockholm, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Geneva, Helsinki, Vienna, Berlin, Manchester and Oslo) in Europe. The result showed four general factors: system such as traffic supply, reliability and information; bus and bus stop design that makes customer comfortable and enjoy the

travel experience; staff skill, knowledge and attitude toward customer; and safety not only both in the bus and bus stop but also safe from traffic accident. Furthermore, it was concluded that differences in public transport technology and infrastructure may cause differences in individual item loadings.⁶

Research was conducted by Laith Alrubaiee, Feras Alkaa'ida to study healthcare quality of patient perception, satisfaction, and patient trust. It also aims to test the sociodemographic variables in

determining healthcare quality. SERVQUAL model was used to measure and the results indicate its reliability. The study indicates that Sociodemographic variables play a vital role in determining patient perception of healthcare quality, satisfaction, and trust. On the other hand the study indicates better quality in private hospitals compared to public hospitals.⁷

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Indian railways need to substantially improve the quality of service, customer focus and service profile to meet the challenges of more intense competition in the transport market. In this view, the Indian railways are expected to provide services to meet customer requirements.

Based on the above issues, it is pertinent to focus the study on passengers' perception of railways with the following query:

- What is the perception of the passengers on services offered by railways in Salem Division of Southern Railway?

OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the passengers' perception on services offered by railways.
2. To offer suggestions to improve the conditions of service offered by railways.

SAMPLING DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The present study is an empirical research based on survey method. The study is confined to all the four junctions of Salem Division of Southern Railway namely – Salem, Coimbatore, Erode, Karur. The study is based on primary data collected through structured questionnaire from 500 passengers in Salem Division of Southern Railway. The respondents for the study were drawn by means of Stratified random sampling method. SPSS package were used for analysis. In order to find out the influence of various factors relating to the sample respondents on perception of railways percentage analysis and chi-square analysis have been used to discover any variances about passengers' perception among the sample respondents.

DATA COLLECTION

Primary and secondary data are used in the present study. The required primary data are collected using pre-tested and well structured questionnaire. The required secondary data are collected through

Annual Reports of Ministry of railways, White paper on Indian railways published by Railway Ministry, various journals and websites.

ANALYSIS

In order to achieve the objectives of the study an analysis is made to understand the passengers' perception on services provided by railways. The statistical tools used are percentage analysis and average score analysis. The socio economic profiles of the respondents are shown in the following tables:

Percentage Analysis:

Gender: The table 1 describes the gender wise classification of the respondents selected for the study. The gender is classified as male and female.

Table 1- Gender Wise Classification

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	222	44.4
Female	278	55.6
Total	500	100

It is found from table 1 that 278(55.6%) of the respondents are females and 222(44.4%) are males. It is concluded that the majority (55.6%) of the respondents selected for the study are females.

Age: Table 2 describes the age wise classification of the respondents selected for the study. The age is classified as less than 20 years, 20-30 years, 30-40 years and 40 years and above.

Table 2- Age wise classification

Age(years)	Number of respondents	percentage
Less than 20	71	14.2
20- 30	141	28.2
30- 40	248	49.6
40 and above	40	8.0
Total	500	100

It is evident from table 2 that 248(49.6%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 30-40 years, 141(28.2%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-30 years, 71(14.2%) of the

respondents belong to the age group of less than 20 years and 40(8%) of the respondents belong to the age group of above 40 years.

It is concluded that the majority (49.6%) of the respondents selected for the study belong to the age group of 30-40 years.

Educational qualification:

Table 3 describes the educational qualification wise classification of the respondents selected for the study. The educational qualification is classified as no formal education, school level, college level and others.

Table 3- Educational qualification wise classification

Educational qualification	Number of respondents	Percentage
No formal education	14	2.8
School level	115	23.0
College level	329	65.8
Others (experience and self interest)	42	8.4
Total	500	100

It is evident from table 3 that 329(65.8%) of the respondents' educational qualification is at college level, 115(23.0%) of the respondents' educational qualification is at school level, 42(8.4%) of the respondents' education is by experience and self interest and 14(2.8%) of the respondents had no formal education.

It is concluded that the majority (65.8%) of the respondents selected for the study are qualified at the college level.

Perception of railways:

Table 4 describes the perception of railways wise classification of the respondents selected for the study. The perception of railways is classified as arrangement of medical facilities on the train, safety of passenger's belongings, accessibility to station, travelling charges, parking facility, facilities for disabled, cleanliness of the station, cleanliness of the train, adequacy of retiring rooms and tatkal scheme.

Table 4- passengers' perception of railways wise classification

Factors	Very Good	Good	Moderate	Bad	Very Bad
Arrangement of medical facilities on the train	40 (8.0)	260 (52.0)	138 (27.6)	62 (12.4)	-
Safety of passenger's belongings	41 (8.2)	324 (64.8)	116 (23.2)	15 (3.0)	4 (.8)
Accessibility to station	85 (17.0)	337 (67.4)	68 (13.6)	10 (2.0)	-
Travelling charges	71 (14.2)	289 (57.8)	140 (28.0)	-	-
Parking facility	43 (8.6)	291 (58.2)	132 (26.4)	34 (6.8)	-
Facilities for disabled(wheel chairs, ramp, toilets, etc)	81 (16.2)	231 (46.2)	119 (23.8)	59 (11.8)	10 (2.0)
Cleanliness of the station	92 (18.4)	95 (19.0)	230 (46.0)	64 (12.8)	19 (3.8)
Cleanliness of the train	51 (10.2)	179 (35.8)	189 (37.8)	57 (11.4)	24 (4.8)
Adequacy of retiring rooms	79 (15.8)	223 (44.6)	149 (29.8)	49 (9.8)	-
Tatkal scheme	181 (36.2)	189 (37.8)	103 (20.6)	27 (5.4)	-

Note: The figures in the brackets are in percentages

It is found from the table 4 that among the total respondents 181(36.2%), 92(18.4%), 85(17.0%) of the respondents respectively have given a very good perception on tatkal scheme, cleanliness of the station and accessibility to station respectively.

It is concluded that a maximum of 36.2% of the respondents have given a very good perception on tatkal scheme.

Average Score Analysis:

Personal factors and perception of the Railways

The table 5 describes the results of average score analysis in terms of personal factors, average scores based on the respondents' perception of various factors of the railways.

Table5-Average Score- Personal factors and passengers' perception

Perception of the Railways / Personal factors		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gender	Male	3.54	3.87	3.92	3.88	3.71	3.64	3.27	3.27	3.65	3.99
	Female	3.57	3.68	4.05	3.85	3.67	3.62	3.42	3.42	3.68	4.09
Age (years)	Less than 20 years	3.65	3.70	3.86	3.49	3.39	3.03	3.17	3.11	3.18	3.46
	20-30	3.30	3.50	4.09	3.85	3.67	3.58	2.95	2.97	3.48	4.03
	30-40	3.64	3.88	4.00	3.99	3.78	3.78	3.67	3.65	3.91	4.26
	40 and above	3.80	4.10	3.88	3.75	3.68	3.93	3.18	3.30	3.68	3.83
Educational qualification	No formal education	3.57	3.57	3.64	3.29	3.21	2.86	3.57	3.93	3.21	3.29
	School level	3.32	3.73	3.91	3.72	3.49	3.54	2.74	2.81	3.73	4.01
	College level	3.64	3.78	4.05	3.98	3.78	3.69	3.55	3.47	3.73	4.15
	Others (experience and self interest)	3.57	3.79	3.88	3.48	3.64	3.64	3.40	3.74	3.12	3.64
Occupational status	Agriculture	3.82	3.82	4.00	3.41	3.53	3.53	3.09	3.38	3.53	3.56
	Business/ Professional	3.48	3.87	4.08	4.02	3.80	3.85	3.53	3.57	4.01	4.35
	Employed	3.50	3.63	3.98	3.95	3.63	3.48	3.10	3.15	3.54	3.97
	Others (home maker, student, retired employee)	3.72	3.84	3.85	3.55	3.65	3.56	3.62	3.34	3.32	3.81
Family monthly income in (RS)	Below 10,000	4.19	3.43	4.00	3.19	3.43	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.14
	10,000-20,000	3.56	3.60	3.77	4.00	3.80	3.68	3.51	3.17	3.54	3.79
	20,000-30,000	3.78	4.05	4.14	3.90	3.84	3.79	3.56	3.61	3.89	4.17
	30,000 and above	3.14	3.54	3.97	3.79	3.40	3.42	2.95	3.15	3.51	4.21
Nature of family	Joint	3.64	3.85	3.98	3.79	3.68	3.68	3.39	3.46	3.69	4.01
	Nuclear	3.43	3.65	4.01	3.98	3.70	3.56	3.29	3.19	3.63	4.10
Size of the family	1	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.50	4.00	4.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00
	2	3.44	3.78	3.97	3.94	3.81	3.71	3.70	3.48	3.52	4.02
	3	3.33	3.36	3.96	3.76	3.55	3.21	3.16	3.07	3.39	4.04
	4 and above	3.64	3.90	4.01	3.90	3.70	3.75	3.37	3.47	3.81	4.09
Number of dependents in the family	1	3.33	3.60	3.88	3.75	3.57	3.37	3.25	3.10	3.46	4.09
	2 and above	3.72	3.89	4.08	3.94	3.77	3.82	3.43	3.53	3.81	4.02

Note:

1. Arrangement of medical facilities on the train
2. Safety of passenger's belongings
3. Accessibility to station
4. Travelling charges
5. Parking facility
6. Facilities for disabled
7. Cleanliness of the station
8. Cleanliness of the train
9. Adequacy of retiring rooms
10. Tatkal scheme

It is found from table 5 that the respondents irrespective of their personal classification have very good perception towards tatkal scheme, accessibility to station and so on relating to various factors of the railways.

It is concluded that the majority of the respondents have very good perception on tatkal scheme when compared to other factors relating to the railways.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The majority (55.6%) of the respondents selected for the study are females
2. The majority (49.6%) of the respondents selected for the study belong to the age group of 30-40 years.
3. That the majority (65.8%) of the respondents selected for the study are qualified at the college level.
4. A maximum of 36.2% of the respondents have given a very good perception on tatkal scheme.
5. The majority of the respondents have very good perception on tatkal scheme when compared to other factors relating to the railways.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

- It is suggested that the Ministry of Railways can provide better medical facilities to the passengers.

- Safety of passengers' belongings is highly required, hence better protection can be provided by the Ministry of Railways
- Majority of the passengers have a very bad perception on the cleanliness of the train which can be maintained considering the hygiene factors by the Ministry of Railways

The contribution of this study is the identification of passenger's perception on the services provided by railways. Factors considered are arrangement of medical facilities on the train, safety of passenger's belongings, accessibility to station, travelling charges, parking facility, facilities for disabled, cleanliness of the station, cleanliness of the train, adequacy of retiring rooms and tatkal scheme. Tatkal scheme and accessibility to station are perceived as very good by the passengers. The effect of the present study shows that the performance of Indian railways is not up to the mark. With the aim of making Indian railways more efficient, few suggestions have been offered. If all the suggestions are considered by the Indian railway Policy Makers, it is hope that the Indian Railways will excel in the near future.

Appendix:

'PASSENGERS' PERCEPTION OF RAILWAYS

(A STUDY IN SALEM DIVISION OF SOUTHERN RAILWAY ZONE)

Structured Questionnaire

I. Personal details

1.1 Name:

1.2 Gender

Male

Female

1.3 Age(years)

Less than 20

20- 30

30-40

40 and above

1.4 Educational qualification

- No formal education
- School level
- College level
- Others (specify)

II. Travel details

2.1 How often do you travel by train?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Half-yearly
- Yearly
- Occasionally

2.2 With whom do you travel?

- Single
- Family without kids
- Family with kids
- With friends and relatives
- With business partners

2.3 Mention your purpose of travel?

- Official/Business
- Education
- Personal
- Tour / pilgrimage
- Vacation
- Sports
- Others (specify)

III. Passenger's perception of Railways

State your opinion about the Railways on basis of the factors given below

S.No	Factors	Very good	good	Moderate	Bad	Very bad
1	Arrangement of medical facilities on the train					
2	Safety of passenger's belongings					
3	Accessibility to station					
4	Travelling charges					
5	Parking facility					
6	Facilities for disabled(wheel chairs, ramp, toilets, etc)					
7	Cleanliness of the station					
8	Cleanliness of the train					
9	Adequacy of retiring rooms					
10	Tatkal scheme					

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