A RESEARCH STUDY OF PASSENGER SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICES QUALITY OF THE SOUTHERN RAILWAYS

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ABSTRACT

One of the contributing variables for Southern Railways' service excellence is customer happiness. Indian Railways are a convenient and reasonably priced form of transportation as compared to other modes. Passengers rely heavily on rail as a form of transportation for a variety of reasons, but the railroads' strengths in terms of safety, convenience, and cost-effective service are particularly noteworthy. The research was empirical, and it involved polling travellers. 16 variables and 3 facility factors were taken into account while analysing passenger satisfaction. The investigation revealed that the amenities now offered by the railways in trains are not at all satisfied by the passengers. In order to ascertain the degree of passenger satisfaction, the study examined the facility aspects, including the amenities offered by South Indian Railways and their variables.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With 162 years of experience operating rail transport networks, Indian Railways is one of the biggest and oldest in the world. The most convenient and cost-effective means of transportation is provided by Indian Railways. Additionally, rail travel is the favoured means of transportation for passengers. People moved from one location to another as a result of population increase, urbanisation, employment opportunities, and other factors. In the current competitive market environment, there is competition in every sector. To satisfy the passengers, service providers in those places must be equipped with the greatest marketing techniques. The researcher provides further information to Railways to help it improve and provide better service for its passengers by realising and taking into account the service variables based on the preferences of the study's participants.

Indian Railways is a statutory company owned by the Indian government's

Ministry of Railways, which oversees the whole nation's rail system. India currently has the fourth-largest railway network in the world, after China, the United States, and Russia. It is the second-largest railway network in Asia. India, on the other hand, tops the global rankings for passengers paid per mile. The most feasible and cost-effective method of long-distance and suburban passenger transportation is by rail. Railways aid in both the supply of raw materials and other supplies to industrial locations as well as the conveyance of finished items to markets. Much of the expansion of agriculture is owed to railroads. Only the railway has allowed agriculture to become commercialised. Farmer income today comes from exporting their produce to distant locations and even the worldwide market. Railways make it easier to move commodities quickly over great distances, such as perishable foods, agricultural machinery, and other things. The transportation industry has a big impact on the growth and development of the country. Without a reliable transit network, a nation cannot progress. Transport is essential to the expansion of the economy. All modes of transportation, including air, land, and roadways, have experienced tremendous infrastructural growth since deregulation. As we already know, transport is a critical component of marketing. Despite the fact that there are many various modes of transportation, railroads are crucial because of their cost, security, and safety. Railroads connect all districts in the modern era. Long distance travel is possible mostly because of the railroads. People preferred railroads to airlines due of their affordability and accessibility.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The researchers Rajeev Kumar 'Ranjan, Nitin Thapar, ShoaibAlam Siddiqui, and Arun Kant Painoli (2020) look at measures to improve, like prompt train management and highly responsive staff training on railway issues. To provide travellers a sense of security while travelling, safety procedures must be improved. In other words, the missing railway connect is necessary for the passenger services offered by Northern Railway. The researchers found that the most important factors affecting passenger satisfaction were the cleanliness of the lavatory, the condition of the train's passenger windows, the cleanliness of the train's interior and the effectiveness of the fan and air conditioning system within the train.

2019's Mahima Johnson The Ministry of Railways should take a number of steps, the research suggests, to more thoroughly examine customer complaints and improve services. Certain processes should be carried out in order to increase the quantity of unbooked boxes during busy times. Trains must run on schedule, especially during daylight hours, and construction activity must not interfere with train timing. The speakers need to be properly mounted on the platforms. Cleanliness should be maintained in the restrooms at the railroad station and the railroad station. More efforts should be made to ensure cleanliness in train stations and on board cars in order to increase customer satisfaction. The crowded station now has more ticket vending machines, which is beneficial to customers.

According to Makesh and Mathankumar's (2018) research, the railway offers a wide range of services to its customers in the Madurai Zone. These include the E-Working System, Net Booking, Unreserved Ticket System, Passenger Reservation System Internet Inquiry, and Tourism Services. The Railways should construct passenger facilities on underutilised and underused land in order to boost overall revenues. Despite the great technological breakthroughs achieved by the trains, not everyone can easily access them. The railways should make the necessary preparations in this regard.

Rajashekhar and Deviprasad (2010) The study looks into the factors that affect the quality of service provided to railway passengers, including reservations and tickets, facilities on the platforms, in-train services, employee relations, punctuality, safety, and security. This study provided a model of the various aspects of the quality of service provided to railway passengers.

Hermen Indicators of service quality that are both clients and suppliers of cleaning, catering, and security services are revealed by Jan Van Ree's (2009) study. The significant results and pertinent recommendations for professionals and academics interested in service quality, as well as a number of beneficial repercussions for customer organisations, particularly supplier organisations, with regard to raising consumer perceptions of service quality.

(2012) Garima Malik The study identifies the elements that make up Indian Metro Railways' service quality. The conclusion shows that, among the different aspects examined, annoyance caused by construction has had a negative impact on customers' overall satisfaction with Delhi Metro.

(1994, Hauser, Simester, and Wernerfelt) Customer satisfaction is used to predict potential future sales. Customers that are dissatisfied with the services they have received are unlikely to develop long-term connections with the service provider (Lin & Wu, 2011). Dr.KalpanaDabe (2012) reviewed the amenities offered to passengers in this survey, from the ability to book tickets to the pleasure of riding in trains. The poll determined whether or not the amenities offered in trains were maintained effectively and efficiently. It pinpoints the areas that require the most improvement so that passenger pleasure can be maximised. Additionally, it evaluates the total travel experience and perception of passengers on Indian Railways.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Southern Railways must take into account a number of elements that are suitable for passengers when providing its services to customers.

- ❖ In light of this, the researcher asks the question: Do the amenities offered by Indian Railways affect passengers' satisfaction with Southern Railways' service quality?

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To analyse the facility factors and customer satisfaction with Southern Railways' service quality.
- ✓ To advise appropriate actions based on the study's findings.

5. METHODOLOGY

100 passengers on Southern Railway trains were interviewed using a carefully planned interview schedule to get the primary data. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to examine the data. The researcher employed multiple correlation, regression, the Mann-Whitney test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The issues that train passengers in the Tirunelveli District encounter are examined in this study. Therefore, it has been hypothesised in this study that there is no discernible difference between Mean Rank of Gender, Marital Status, and Educational Qualification with respect to Factors Problems Experienced by the Passengers.

TABLE.1 - SERVICE QUALITY ATTRIBUTES

S.No	Factors	Statements
1	**Amenities**	Platform features
2		Providing catering
3		Staff conduct
4		ticket reservation and cancellation procedures
5		Availability of the Railways
6		Arrival and departure information service
7		Health care facilities
8		The comfort level of the waiting area
9		Accessibility to Parking
10	**Health And Hygiene**	less contaminated journey
11		Security and safety

12		hygienic conditions in train restrooms
13		train restrooms
14	**Essential Needs**	Basic amenities include a fan, light, and drinking water.
15		Existence of seats
16		Seating arrangements and cleanliness

One of the most important factors in determining the quality of goods or services, and consequently the performance of the Indian Railway, is customer satisfaction and retention. Customers' desire to use products or services of a substantially higher quality or to receive superior quality services has developed as a result of the growing significance of quality in our lives. This part looks into the passengers' satisfaction with reservation and ticketing, amenities on the railway platforms, in-train service, employee service, punctuality, safety and security, etc. We created a satisfaction model with 3 elements and 16 attributes based on psychometric scale development methodologies to gauge customer satisfaction with Indian Railway Passenger Services. Additionally, 4 traits are classified as health and hygiene, 3 attributes as essential needs, and the other 9 attributes are classified as amenities. The model was assessed using both confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis.

Table.2 – Model fit Indices

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of SamplingAdequacy.		.758
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx.Chi-Square	12796.505
	df	120
	Sig.	<0.001

First, 16 items are used in an exploratory factor analysis to group the variables. Principal component analysis (PCA) from SPSS was used to analyze the 16 items on the satisfaction measure. The adequacy of the data for factor analysis was evaluated prior to doing PCA. The correlation matrix could be examined to find several coefficients of 0.3 and higher. The Barlett's Test of Sphericity obtained statistical significance, confirming the factorability of the correlation matrix, while the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.768, exceeding the suggested value of 0.6. Varimax rotation was done to assist in the interpretation of these two components.

Table.3 – Factor loading

Factor	**Variables**	**Factor loading**	**Eigen value**	**% of variation explained**
Amenities	Platform features	0.520	4.585	28.251
	Providing catering	0.610		
	Staff conduct	0.378		
	ticket reservation and cancellation procedures	0.550		
	Availability of the Railways	0.650		
	Arrival and departure information service	0.545		

	Health care facilities	0.683		
	The comfort level of the waiting area	0.753		
Health and Hygienic	Accessibility to Parking	0.753	3.279	50.036
	less contaminated journey	0.753		
	Security and safety	0.725		
	hygienic conditions in train restrooms	0.776		
	train restrooms	0.814		
Essential facilities	Basic amenities include a fan, light, and drinking water.	0.903	1.809	61.248
	Existence of seats	0.795		
	Seating arrangements and cleanliness	0.950		

The model's factor structure was then confirmed, and the dominating component was identified, using confirmatory factor analysis. In this instance, it is discovered that the default model is a saturated model that meets all fit indices. The regression coefficient of the fitted model is shown in Table 4 .

Table.4 – The Regression Coefficients

DependentVariable	IndependentVariable	RegressionCoefficient
	Amenities	0.399
ServiceQuality	Healthand Hygienic	0.769
	Essentialfacilities	0.745

We can see from Table 1 that the most important and necessary facilities for health and hygienic conditions. The satisfaction will rise by 1.7 percent if we boost these two factors by one percent. Below is a representation of the satisfaction regression model on the service quality model. Service quality is determined by how satisfied customers are with 0.399 amenities, 0.769 sanitary conditions, and 0.745 basic amenities.

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6. SUGGESTIONS

- Customers don't seem to understand how e-ticketing works. The railway administration is urged to make the required preparations to create and advertise online ticket reservation and cancellation procedures.
- Trains and platforms can be kept clean and orderly, increasing service quality both inside the train and on the platforms, by promoting patrons' education and social awareness on certain civic behavior.
- The railroad's administration will prevent unauthorized individuals from entering the station. The railroads ought to pay more attention to the safety of women and kids. The security of luggage is one of the problems with rail travel.

7. CONCLUSION

Research into service In an effort to understand customer satisfaction with service quality, Southern Railways has tried to analyses the aspects that affect its qualities. In this study, the researcher offers numerous service-related factors that the Southern Railways could take into

account in the future in order to please passengers. Given the dubious quality of services, Railways work to enhance key areas and provide customers with quality services. The most significant kind of public transit in India is provided by Southern Railways. India's growth and development have benefited greatly from the railways. This is the most popular and economical long-distance transportation system in the nation. The empirical study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of what influences passengers' satisfaction with the quality and level of service offered by Southern Railways. The railroads work to enhance their core competencies and provide their customers with high-quality services. To compete with other modes of transport, it is crucial to meet passenger needs and satisfaction. Some recommendations have been made using the findings of this study. It is hoped that the Southern Railways will soon sparkle and shine magnificently for our nation if the proposed measurements have been taken into consideration. This effort on the part of the railroads will undoubtedly keep the public using its services in the future.

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