



RAILWAY PASSENGERS' SATISFACTION: A STUDY IN SALEM DIVISION OF SOUTHERN RAILWAY

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Abstract: *Transport is an important infrastructure in the economy of India. It assumes a greater role in developing countries since all the sectors of the development are closely dependent upon the existence of suitable transportation network. India's transport industry has been organised with a mixed pattern of public and private sector ownership. The evident economic growth in India over the last two decades has increased demand for all transport services, particularly land transport through road and rail. The development of railways is one of the landmarks in the progress of human civilisation. Indian Railways, a historical legacy, is a vital force in Indian economy. India is a country with the largest railway network in Asia. Railways is the most convenient mode of transport for large scale goods movement as well as for long distance travel. Indian Railways has envisaged provision of various automated facilities oriented towards interfacing and guiding passengers to comfortably board trains and for providing enquiry facilities at stations. Provision of ticketing machines, water vending machines, platform shelters at stations, pay and use toilets, provision of improved cost effective lighting, good retiring rooms with modern furniture, coach indication boards, signage, security and enquiry counters are also provided to fulfill the needs of the railway passengers. The Indian Railways can perform well only when the passengers are satisfied with the services they obtain.*

Keywords: *Passengers, Railways, Satisfaction, Services and Transport.*

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INTRODUCTION

Indian service sector has witnessed a major boom and is one of the major contributors to both employment and national income in recent times. The weightage of service sector is an indication that in near future, India's GDP growth will be influenced considerably by the service sector. Future of the services and their role within the economy looks likely to continue to gain in strength. The marketers in the new millennium will continue to view service

marketing as a critically important area for their survival in the market even though various factors contribute to the growth or constraints on the future of the service economy. The activities under the purview of the service sector are quite diverse. The infrastructures including trading, transportation and communication, financial, real estate and business services, community, social and personal services come within the gambit of the service industry.

Transport, thus is an important infrastructure in the economy of India. It assumes a greater role in developing countries since all the sectors of the development are closely dependent upon the existence of suitable transportation network. The whole structure of industry and commerce rests on the well laid foundation of transportation. Thus, an effective transport system is a pre-requisite for economic development of a country. The evident economic growth in India over the last two decades has increased demand for all transport services, particularly land transport through road and rail. The development of railways is one of the landmarks in the progress of human civilisation.

Indian Railways owned a total route length of 64,000 kilometers, 2,16,717 wagons, 39,263 coaches, 7,739 locomotives and runs about a total of 12,000 passenger trains and 7,000 freight trains daily. It carries nearly 23 million passengers every day and transports over 2.65 million tonnes of freight daily. The Head Quarters of the Indian Railways is in New Delhi. Indian Railways is controlled by the Government of India through the Ministry of Railways. At present, there are 17 zones and 68 divisions in the Indian Railways. Indian Railways has identified model stations for the provision of upgraded passenger amenities. Some of the stations have been identified for provision of certain 'touch and feel items' to transform them into modern stations in order to bring about visible improvements at stations.



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India is one of the largest countries in terms of its geographical size which requires efficient means for long-distance transportation. The public transport, being primary mode of transport remains as a powerful yardstick to measure the overall development of a nation. Among the various modes of transport, railways is one of the biggest modes of passenger transport in the world.

The railway passenger services face long term competitive threats from airlines, luxury buses, personalised transport and improved public transport. Low cost airlines are giving stiff competition to upper class segments of the railway passenger service. Though there are competitions from various modes of transport, the railways has its own unique features and provides more services to the passengers. In order to compete with other modes of transport, it is inevitable for railways to accelerate the growth of passengers' origination. This can be done by providing more quality services to them. Further, the opinion of the passengers towards the services provided by the Indian Railways will be quite different as they vary in socio-economic characteristics. It is essential for the Railway Authorities to know about the opinion of the passengers regarding the services offered to them in order to make future policies and provisions.

Based upon the opinion of the passengers, their satisfaction level is decided. The Indian Railways can perform well only when the passengers are satisfied with the services they obtain.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To measure the level of satisfaction of the passengers about the services offered by the Indian Railways.
2. To determine the extent of relationship between the level of awareness of the passengers and their level of satisfaction about the services offered by the Indian Railways.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

On the basis of the framed objectives, the researcher's theoretical knowledge, discussion and deliberations with experts and from other research studies, the following null hypothesis has been framed. This hypothesis is subjected to appropriate statistical tests to enlighten the objective of the study.



H₀₁: There is no significant association between various independent variables (Gender, Age, Educational status, Marital status, Size of the family, Occupational status, Annual income, Annual expenditure, Frequency of train travel, Purpose of travel, Class of travel, Mode of buying ticket and Mode of ticket reservation) of the sample passengers and their satisfaction level.

The statistical significance of this hypothesis has been tested with the help of Chi-square test, 'F'test and 'Z'test at 5% level of significance.

SAMPLING DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is an empirical research based on survey method. The present study is confined to Salem Division of Southern Railway zone. In the selected Salem Railway Division, there are four railway junctions viz., Coimbatore, Salem, Erode and Karur. All these junctions have been selected for the study. It is decided to consider 10% of the passengers from the total passengers originating per day at each of the four Junctions of Salem Division. By using Simple Random Sampling technique, the passengers have been selected from all the Junctions of the Salem Division. On the basis of the records provided by the Public Relations Officer of Salem Division, it is found that approximately 9,300 passengers originate every day from all these four Junctions. Out of them, it is decided to collect data from 10% of the passengers from each Junction. It is considered to be adequate and representative.

The sample passengers are mobile population and they remain busy and hectic in reaching their platforms, finding their respective compartments, listening to the announcements and in enquiry. Hence, out of the target of 930 sample passengers, it is possible to collect the data only from 660 passengers. Of them, owing to non-response, inconsistency and other reasons, 160 Interview Schedules have been excluded. Thus, the total sample passengers is 500. This 500 consists of 293 from Coimbatore Junction, 76 from Erode Junction, 50 from Karur Junction and 81 from Salem Junction.

COLLECTION OF DATA

In the present study, both primary and secondary data are used. The present study is largely based on the primary data. Required primary data have been collected in the course of interview with the railway passengers through survey method with a pre-tested, well structured and non-disguised Interview Schedule. The required secondary data for the present study have been collected through Annual Reports of Ministry of Railways, White



Paper on the Indian Railways published by Railway Ministry, Reports of Comptroller and Audit General of India, various issues of RBI Annual Bulletins, data from Central Statistical Organisation, Indian Railways Year Book of various years, records from Public Relations Officer of Salem Division, various journals, periodicals and through web sites.

PERIOD OF THE STUDY

The required primary data have been collected through a survey made on railway passengers from January 2012 to June 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Customers' Satisfaction about Railway Services

In the competitive scenario, transport plays a vital role in catering to the needs of the people. Among the various modes of transport, the railways holds the credit of providing more advantages to the passengers. The ultimate success of railways depends upon the satisfaction of the passengers. It becomes inevitable to obtain the patronage from its passengers to raise its image in the Indian economy. The level of satisfaction of the railway passengers largely depends on the extent to which needs and expectations are being fulfilled. It is necessary for the railways to assess the level of satisfaction of its passengers in order to build its name and fame. Moreover, the railways by providing satisfied services can increase its revenue by attracting more number of passengers. By considering these aspects, this is a modest attempt to measure the level of satisfaction of the passengers about the railway services offered by the Indian Railways.

QUANTIFICATION OF DATA TO MEASURE THE SATISFACTION LEVEL

A list of 40 statements relating to the existing railway services has been constructed. By applying item analysis technique, 5 statements have been excluded and finally 35 statements are included for the final study. Rensis Likert's summated 5-point scaling technique ranging from highly satisfied to highly dissatisfied has been used. If a passenger is highly satisfied with the statement, a scale value of 5 is assigned, scale value of 4 is assigned if his response is satisfied, 3 if it is undecided, 2 if dissatisfied and 1 if the passenger is highly dissatisfied. The total score for each passenger from all the 35 statements are calculated using the above scoring procedure.

To identify the awareness level of the passengers about the services offered by the Indian Railways, 25 statements are included and Rensis Likert's summated 5-point scaling



technique ranging from very well aware to unaware have been used. If a passenger is very well aware with the statement, a scale value of 5 is assigned, scale value of 4 is assigned if his response is well aware, 3 if it is aware, 2 if aware to some extent and 1 if the passenger is unaware. The total score for each passenger from all the 25 statements are calculated by using the above scoring procedure.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE PASSENGERS BY SATISFACTION AND AWARENESS SCORE

The scores of the 500 passengers are calculated. An individual satisfaction score is the mere summation of the scores secured from all the 35 statements. The score of the passengers range from 35 to 175. The average score is 105. Based on the average score, it is decided to group the sample passengers into two categories viz., Dissatisfied (whose score is less than 105) and Satisfied (whose score is in between 105 and 175). Details of the findings by satisfaction level are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of the Passengers by Satisfaction Level

Satisfaction Level	No. of Passengers	Total Score	Mean Score	S.D
Dissatisfied	419(83.8)	36015	85.95	12.62
Satisfied	81(16.2)	8905	109.94	6.39
Total	500(100.0)	44920	89.84	14.77

Figures in parentheses are percentage.

Table 1 reveals that 83.8% of the sample passengers are dissatisfied with the services offered by the Indian Railways. The mean score of the sample passengers is 89.84 and standard deviation is 14.77.

The awareness score of the passengers range from 25 to 125. The average score is 75. Based on the average score, it is decided to group the sample passengers into two categories viz., Low level (whose score is less than 75) and High level (whose score is in between 75 and 125).

On the basis of above quantification procedure, the sample passengers have been classified into low level and high level. Details of the findings by awareness level are shown in Table 2.



Table 2. Classification of the Passengers by Awareness Level

Awareness Level	No. of Passengers	Total Score	Mean Score	S.D
Low level	382 (76.4)	23102	60.48	9.73
High level	118 (23.6)	9828	83.29	8.04
Total	500 (100.0)	32930	65.86	13.47

Figures in parentheses are percentage.

Table 2 reveals that 76.4 % of the sample passengers are having low level of awareness about the services offered by the Indian Railways. The mean score of the sample passengers is 65.86 and standard deviation is 13.47.

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

It is expected that the independent variables of the sample respondents would influence the level of satisfaction of the passengers about the services offered by the Indian Railways. The calculated values of chi-square, 'F' test and 'Z' test are given in Table 3 along with the results.

Table 3. Association between Independent Variables and Level of Satisfaction

Factors	Degrees of freedom	χ^2	F-value	Z-value
Gender	1	0.005**	-	1.125**
Age	2	4.328**	2.674**	-
Educational Status	3	15.593*	0.802**	-
Marital Status	1	0.001**	-	0.669**
Size of the Family	2	3.768**	2.245**	-
Occupational Status	4	3.182**	2.707*	-
Annual Income	2	3.365**	1.880**	-
Annual Expenditure	2	10.020*	2.781**	-
Frequency of Travel	5	29.444*	1.939**	-
Purpose of Travel	8	40.216*	1.208**	-
Class of Travel	8	30.816*	0.769**	-
Mode of Buying Ticket	1	0.016**	-	0.879**
Mode of Ticket Reservation	2	1.019**	0.007**	-

* Significant

** Insignificant



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AWARENESS AND SATISFACTION FACTORS: CORRELATION ANALYSIS

In the present study, it is found that 76.4% of the passengers have low level of awareness about the services offered by the Indian Railways. Against this background, it is decided to examine the relationship between the awareness attributes on service quality and satisfaction factors with the help of Correlation Analysis. The extent of relationship between the awareness factors (communication and retiring services, reservation knowledge, catering services, utility services, ticketing and fares, special services and miscellaneous services) and satisfaction factors (platform services and on-board train services) has been examined. The details of the findings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Awareness and Satisfaction: Correlation Analysis

Awareness Factors	Satisfaction Factors	
	Platform Services	On-board Services
Communication and retiring services	0.339**	0.307**
Reservation knowledge	0.104*	0.088*
Catering	0.259**	0.235**
Utility services	0.329**	0.232**
Ticketing and fares	0.215**	0.170**
Special services	0.226**	0.205**
Miscellaneous services	0.165**	0.185**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Table 4 shows that the awareness factors are significantly correlated with the satisfaction factors. However, the degree of correlation varies between 0.10 and 0.40 for most of the pairs of the variables. The highest correlation is found to be 0.339 between the communication and retiring services and platform services. It is also found that all the variables are positively correlated. It can be concluded that the awareness of the passengers about the railway services have appreciable relation with the level of satisfaction of the passengers.



SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings of the present study, the following suggestions have been made to improve the services of the Indian Railways.

- It is found that 83.8% of the passengers are dissatisfied with the services offered by the Indian Railways. The Ministry of Railways has to initiate various measures to improve the services by properly scrutinizing the grievances of the passengers regularly. The Railways has to know the needs and expectations of the passengers with the help of effective functioning of Grievance Redressal Cell at each station. In this regard, it is further suggested that contents available in the Complaint and Suggestion Box at all the stations should be reviewed periodically in the presence of Grievance Redressal Body, members of the Consumer Protection Council, public and other social organisations. By doing so, the passengers' genuine complaints can be resolved. The Ministry of Railways must take necessary steps to increase the number of compartments during festive seasons. By doing so, it will enable the passengers to utilise the services offered by the Indian Railways. Further, steps must be taken to ensure cleanliness both at the station and on-board the train to maximise the satisfaction level of the passengers.
- It is also found that the awareness level of the passengers about the services offered by the Indian Railways has a significant relationship with their level of satisfaction. Hence, it is important to improve their awareness level. In this regard, it is suggested that the Ministry of Railways should take all possible steps to propagate the various services provided to the passengers by keeping adequate index boards and bulletin boards in all possible places like rest room, at the entrance, ticket counter, passengers' lounge and platform. It may enable the passengers to know about the facilities provided by the Indian Railways. It is also suggested that announcements could be made quite often regarding the services provided by the Indian Railways. By doing so, the level of awareness of the passengers about the services can be improved to the fullest extent.

It is well known that offering better services is vital for the growth of the Indian Railways. Still, Indian Railways has to offer services to enhance the level of satisfaction of the passengers. On the basis of the findings of the present study, some constructive and viable



suggestions have been made. If the suggestive measurements have been considered earnestly by the Indian Railways and the Policy Makers, it is hope that the Indian Railways will shine and bring grandeur to our country in the near future.

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