IMPLICATIONS OF ONLINE RAILWAY TICKET BOOKING

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Abstract
An online booking engine is an application which helps the travel and tourism industry support reservation through the Internet. It helps consumers to book flights, hotels, holiday packages, insurance and other services online. This is a much needed application for the aviation industry as it has become one of the fastest growing channels. Our Indian Railways has emerged as a front-runner in providing quality travel services to India's population of more than a million. They have not hesitated in offering state-of-the-art services to customers such as online checking, booking and reservation facilities. The online railway booking portal of Indian Railways offers comfortable travel options and the journey begins from the click of a mouse at our home.

INTRODUCTION
The Indian Railways is Asia's largest and the world's second largest rail network that has adopted e-Governance in right earnest to reap the benefit of IT explosion. Indian Railways entrusted IRCTC with the task of conceptualizing, developing and implementing the software. The issues of flexibility, scalability and provision of totally self-help arrangement (as different from the assisted process at the Reservation Counters) had to be permitted to the internet users. Further a variety of online payment mechanisms (like Credit Cards, Internet Banking, Cash Cards, etc.) were to be integrated with for convenience of millions of users. IRCTC has also developed and published Web services to enable access to the basic internet service using other media like phones. All this and more has been done by IRCTC since its inception. The entire Internet ticketing concept was conceived, formulated and implemented by IRCTC within a record time span of less than 9 months**. [1]**

ONLINE RAILWAY TICKET BOOKING
Indian Railway takes us to otherwise unexplored sites and rail conveyance can cover a lot more countries than any other mode of transportation available. We will be glad and proud to know that Indian railways is the world's busiest and largest railway network and covers 63,140 route kilometres covering all the directions of the country.

It is continuously working to offer best possible services not only to the Indian passengers but also to the visitors who come to explore our country.

The Indian Railways were divided under categories to smooth the progress of management and functionality and even though the booking system for Indian railways is centrally computerized, managing such a huge network can be challenging and hence the Indian Railways decided to introduce online railway ticket booking to make booking of railway tickets easier and more convenient. The special benefits of using the online Indian railway tickets facility is that passengers can reserve their tickets from the comfort of their home or office without having to stand in long queues at railway stations or having to take the trouble to go to a travel agent. A railway ticket can be done up to 90 days before our desired date of departure, but it is advised to plan our journey way ahead as the availability of tickets can be difficult, especially during vacation and wedding season. An online railway can be made right till the final reservation chart is made that is six hours before the train leaves the station. So just get ready to indulge into the comforts of Indian railways as it is the cheapest and safest mode of transport in India as it will take you to even those places where other transport cannot reach. [2]

MAIN ONLINE FUNCTIONS
It includes reservations (fee computing and ticketing), cancellations (computation of clearage/cancellation fees and refunds) modifications like postponing, preponing, modification journey, supervisory operations, enquiries, chart preparations and verification of data.[3]   Indian Railways provides two types of online railway tickets that is I-ticket and E-Ticket.

INTERNET TICKETING
Internet ticketing operations of IRCTC were launched on 3rd August 2002 in collaboration with CRIS, the Centre for Railway Information Systems. Tickets for Rail journeys in India can be booked including Tatkal tickets on the Internet on the web site www.irctc.co.in; by any user after registering at the site (Registration is free). Payments for tickets are made by use

of Master/Visa/Diners Club/American Express Credit Cards, Citibank Debit Cards and also through Direct Debits to the users' bank accounts; this is available to users who have their accounts in the 27 banks having Internet Banking facility like ICICI, HDFC, Citibank, IDBI, Bank of Punjab, UTI Bank, State Bank of India, Centurion Bank, Punjab National Bank, ABN Amro, Corporation Bank, Federal Bank, Union Bank of India, Oriental Bank of Commerce, Syndicate Bank, Indian Bank etc. and others which are being integrated shortly. There is also a cash card payment options from ITZ Cash Cards, I -cashcard and Done Cash Cards. I-Tickets get delivered to the users' homes/offices or any other address of their choice in over 220 cities of India within 48/72 hours. Web-Based Rail Reservation (Internet Ticketing) 175.

The service charges per I-ticket are very nominal, i.e., Rs 40 per ticket (Not per head) for Sleeper Class Tickets and Rs. 60 per ticket (Not per head) for AC Class/First Class Tickets. From daily average sales of about 112 tickets in August 2002, the site today books more than 40,000 tickets daily. Though handling only a very small percentage of the tickets booked by the Indian Railways Passenger Reservation System, which book about 7 lakhs tickets daily, this website has today over 35 million registered users. Besides delivery of the tickets, IRCTC also makes several value additions such as 24-hour helpline to assist customers, on line answering of email round the clock, facilities for time table enquiries on train timings and other particulars, email alerts to Customers regarding the status of confirmation of their accommodations and an Online Consignment Tracking System to know the status of delivery of their tickets at any time.

The I-ticket can be cancelled at any Computerized Reservation Counter across the country by submitting cancellation requisition along with the ticket. No cash is paid to the Customer at the time of cancellation. The amount is credited back to the Credit Card Account/Bank Account of the User. Other facilities like change of name, change of boarding point, etc., are also available only across counters Reservation timings are from 05.00 hrs to 23.30 hrs from Monday to Sunday. Customers should ensure that, depending on the place of delivery required by them, they allow a minimum of 2/3 clear days (excluding the date of journey and date of booking) before the date of journey to ensure hassle free delivery of the ticket.

E-TICKETING
On 12 August 2005 we have launched the e-Ticketing services. This scheme was initially introduced in only two Shahabad's. Now from 01-01-06 onwards, it covered all Rajdhani, Shatabdi, Jan Shatabdi and Super-fast trains and on 24-02-2006, e-ticketing services were launched to all trains.

An **electronic Ticket** (commonly abbreviated as **e-ticket**) is a digital ticket. The term is most commonly associated with airline issued tickets. Electronic ticketing for urban or rail public transport is usually referred to as travel card or transit pass. It is also used in ticketing in the entertainment industry. An electronic ticket system is a more efficient method of ticket entry, processing and marketing for companies in the railways, flight and other transport industry. **[4].**

The user need not have to have a physical ticket with him; he can take print out the Electronic Reservation Slip (ERS) in the specified Performa and travel. While travelling, the user has to carry the ERS along with the relevant Government issued Photo Identity Card, which together constitute the travel authority. To avail this service, the user can log on to www.irctc.co.in and book his ticket on the Internet just like any normal booking, and selecting 'e-Ticket' in the Plan My Travel page. The user has to give the photo identity card details of any one of the passengers, while booking the ticket. On confirmation of his booking, the user can take a print of the Electronic Reservation Slip (ERS) and can perform the journey with the ERS and the photo identity card. At present only confirmed/RAC tickets can be booked through e-Reservation, while WL tickets can also be booked in the normal Internet Tickets.

DOCUMENT/I-CARD REQUIRED TO BOOK E-TICKET
The user is not required to give any input of the photo identity card details of any of the passengers while booking the ticket. However he shall have to carry and show one of following identity card of any of the passengers in original while travelling. The following photo identity cards are considered valid.
- Passport.
- Voter photo identity card issued by Election Commission of India.
- Driving Licence issued by RTO.
- Pan Card issued by Income Tax Department.
- Photo Identity card having serial number issued by Central / State Government.
- Student Identity Card with photograph issued by recognized School/College for their students.

- Nationalized Bank Passbook with photographs.
- Credit Cards issued by Banks with laminated photograph.
- Photo identity cards having serial number issued by public sector Undertakings of State/Central Government, District Administrations, Municipal bodies and Panchayat Administrations.
- Unique Identification Card "Aadhaar". **[5]**

Payments for e-Tickets can be made by Credit Cards (Master/Visa), Direct Debit or Cash Card IRCTC levies a service charge of Rs.15/- (Second/Sleeper) and Rs.20/- (Higher Class) for the first passenger and an additional Rs.5/- for every subsequent passenger up to a maximum of Rs.25/- (Second/Sleeper) and Rs.40/- (Higher Class) Cancellation of e-Ticket is permitted on the website (www.irctc.co.in) up to chart preparation. No cancellation is possible at Counters. Part/Complete cancellation is possible online, but if the passenger whose ID is recorded originally wants to cancel his journey alone, the entire ticket for the group has to be cancelled and fresh booking is to be done. In case person fails to carry ERS during the journey a penalty of Rs. 50/- is imposed. However, if a person fails to carry Photo Identity Card, then he is treated as without ticket.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN E-TICKET AND I-TICKET
Wondering what the difference is between the **e-ticket** and **I-ticket** options available at the IRCTC website? Indian Railways has emerged as a front-runner in providing quality travel services to India's population of more than a million. They have not hesitated in offering state-of-the-art services to customers such as online checking, booking and reservation facilities. The online railway booking portal of Indian Railways offers comfortable travel options and the journey begins from the click of a mouse at our home.

I-TICKET
For those who are short of time and travel frequently, **I-tickets** have come as a boon. We can book i-ticket through the internet ticket-booking facility available at the IRCTC website. IRCTC has developed a user-friendly website where one can register and check the availability of tickets. The process of booking I-ticket has been kept simple to help people from all walks of life utilize this facility.

- The ticket is delivered at our doorsteps and we need a copy of a voter's ID card, passport or ration card to validate the address once the ticket reaches our address.
- The i-ticket needs to be booked three to four days prior to the travel date.
- The railway charges a minimal service amount and one can pay online through credit and debit cards.
- In case we wish to cancel the ticket, it cannot be done online and we need to visit the reservation counter.
- We can book an I-ticket from the IRCTC website.

E-TICKET
The popularity of an **e-ticket** can be gauged from the fact that it accounts for 98 percent of online rail reservations today. The primary reason behind this raging popularity of the e-ticket is its user-friendly approach. Working professionals who are constantly on the move benefit tremendously from this facility. They can book the ticket while travelling and only need a valid identification document to authenticate their identity during the journey.

- The ticket is delivered to us in the form of an email that we have to print. The railway authorities also SMS our ticket. We simply need to show either the SMS or a printout of the email to the TT. We are also required to carry identification proof such as voter's ID card, passport or ration card.
- E-ticket can be booked any time prior to the preparation of departure chart of the train and tatkal service of the Indian Railways comes within the preview of this service.
- No extra charges apply.
- In case we wish to cancel the ticket for any reason, the same can be done prior to preparation of the departure chart of the train. The cancellation can be done online and the amount is credited back to our account. The refunding process is extremely fast if the booking has been done through the online reservation portal of the Indian Railways.[6]

MOBILE TICKETING

Mobile ticketing is the process whereby customers can order, pay for, obtain and validate tickets from any location and at any time using mobile phones or other mobile handsets. Mobile tickets reduce the production and distribution costs connected with traditional paper-based ticketing channels and increase customer convenience by providing new and simple ways to purchase tickets. Mobile ticketing is a prime example of horizontal telecommunication convergence.

Mobile ticketing is a method by which law enforcement agencies use in-car computers to create traffic citations in the field, then print a hard copy for the offender. The advantages of mobile ticketing include reduced paperwork time, reduced chance of tickets being made void by human error and immediate accessibility of citation information by other departments.[7]

IMPORTANTS OF ONLINE RESERVATION SYSTEM OF INDIAN RAILWAYS

The Indian railways are considered to be having the largest network of rails and having the busiest rail network in all over the world. Even today there is a continuous growth in the network of the railways. The online rail ticket booking has gained very high popularity in the people due to many reasons. Here are some of the benefits listed of the online rail ticket booking.

1. We can get with the help of online ticket booking is that we can get our ticket from any part of our country. All we need for booking our tickets is a computer having an internet connection. We can book our tickets at the comfort of our office and home.

2. We do not have to stand in the long lines for booking your ticket. Online booking is that this process is completely hassling free. The online reservation system of railways offers us the facility that we can book our seats from morning 8 am to late night 11 pm. This is sufficient time for the people to book their tickets on the internet.

3. The online ticket booking can also compare the different prices, their travel duration and their availability. Here the benefit which we can get is that we can select the train which goes through the shortest route to our destination with least fair.

4. We can also check the availability of the seats in a particular train. If we find that the ticket is not available for the particular train then we can also search the tickets in the other trains of that specific route. And we can do this all by sitting in front of our computer. For online railway ticket there is a website €rainenquiry.com€ where we can get all the updated information about the desired train.

5. 4. It is only a single platform, which provides e - ticketing services as well as   I - ticketing services. Before, launching of IRCTC system reservations were done over the counters but now it is very simple to reserve the ticket by which we can save our time as well as energy.

ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEMS

1. Stress-free, hustle free booking of tickets
2. Easy payment options
3. Various additional schemes to avail on this booking.
4. We can have various options while choosing our tickets.
5. It helps to speed up cash flow.
6. No need to lose out on potential business.
7. Be open 24/7 for bookings - very good support for customers.
8. It helps to grow our business.
9. It reduces the amount of time we spend scheduling and playing phone tag with clients.
10. Automatic analytics help us analyze what works and what doesn't.

LIMITATIONS OF ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEMS

If passenger not a fan of technology, online booking might not be for us.

1. Sometimes software glitch can cause to buy same ticket twice. And then   to contact Customer care and stress our self for reversal.
2. Unfortunate network loss while paying in online make confusion whether paid or not yet.... so need to contact again Customer care.
3. Internet access is must for online booking.
4. Sometimes there is a trouble to collecting those printed passes while online booking.
5. System that doesn't have great customer support, relying on the system may be difficult.

CONCLUSION
Our Indian railway services websites providing sufficient privacy and security. Overall, online booking helps foster better client relationships and helps us provide better customer service. But make sure we look at all our options and make an informed decision. It has proved to be boon not only for passengers but also for Railway functioning since it generates all the reports for optimisation and decision making. It is an online real time passenger reservation system.

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