



PREVAILING GAP IN PASSENGERS' EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION TOWARDS SOUTHERN RAILWAY SERVICES (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SALEM ZONE)

Dr. N. Sakthivel* A. Dhamayanthi**

*Associate Professor, Gobi Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Gobichettipalayam.

**Research Scholar, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.

Abstract

Indian railway has become a part and parcel of the country's socio-economic life, impacting not only its culture and socio economic activities but also largely influencing Indian art, history and literature besides unifying the people. This study aims to analyse the southern railway passengers experiences and satisfaction towards on-board and off-the board services. The study found that there exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards both on-boards and off-board services offered by Southern Railways. The railway passengers are observed to be dissatisfied with the railway staff courtesy, availability of chairs for resting, availability of food courts/stalls, and porters' availability in southern railway platforms. Similarly, the passengers have faced inconveniences with related to the hygiene and cleanliness of compartments, hygiene and cleanliness of toilets, security of luggage, notices on safety measures and behaviour of pantry staff. The study suggest that the cleanliness and hygiene in the plat and inside the train can be achieved by educating the passengers about how to maintain the platforms and trains to be clean and neat, not to litter waste, not to dirt the stations of trains by spitting, urinating. Not to damage the chairs and seat covers either inside the train or in platforms and similarly, not waste water. Similarly, the railway authorities can encourage the passenger to book the tickets through the e-ticking procedures or through mobile phone, in order to manager passenger crowd in the ticking counters. Southern Railways must effectively investigate and track the trends periodically to improve service quality like: ensuring the punctuality of trains, safety of passengers, clear announcement of either train arrival or departure, regulating porters charges and ensure that all basic amenities are available inside the trains and at the platforms without any differences either in the passenger class of travel or according to the station location i.e., either big or small / urban or rural locations. Moreover, the railway staff should be trained to behave politely and patiently with the passengers of various sections of society.

Keywords: Indian Railways, Southern Railways, On-Board Services, Off-Board Services, Passengers Experiences and Passengers Satisfaction.

Introduction

The public transport, being primary mode of transport remains as a powerful yardstick to measure the overall development of a nation. For one and a half century, the Indian Railways has been the principal mode of transport in India. Indian Railways (IR) has been the prime mover of the nation and has the distinction of being the largest railway system in Asia and the second largest railway system in the World under single management. It is fourth largest railway network in the world comprising 119,630 kilometres (74,330 mi) of total track and 92,081 km (57,216 mi) of running track over a route of 66,687 km (41,437 mi) with 7,216 stations at the end of 2015-16. In 2015-16, Indian Railways carried 8.107 billion passengers, more than 22 million passengers a day and 1.101 billion tons of freight. Indian railway has become a part and parcel of the country's socio-economic life, impacting not only its culture and socio economic activities but also largely influencing Indian art, history and literature besides unifying the people. The Indians have developed an abiding liking with the railways. Indian railway services are categorised freight services and passengers' services. Passenger services can be segmented into long distance, inter-city and suburban transport. They can also be clubbed under two heads: value and premium, depending on the quality of services provided.

Statement of Problem

In marketing, customer satisfaction is considered as the state of mind, a cumulative construct that is a function of service expectations and performance perceptions in a given period of time. In the context of railway transportation, passenger satisfaction is created by comparing pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences. The quality of services offered at the railway stations and inside the coach has a positive impact on the overall perception of passengers about the overall train journey, and provision of adequate and quality services help in making a passenger's stay satisfied. Considering the passenger base of Indian Railways and the considerable portion of travel time spent by passengers on platforms, it is important that amenities available at platforms match passenger expectations to ensure their satisfaction and make their experience pleasurable. Realising this fact policy makers in the Railway Board as well as the Field Officers in the Zones and Divisions are taking continuous efforts to improve and enhance the services offered both at platforms and inside the railway coaches. But, the ground level scenario at major stations in the country differs in terms of scope as well as its perceived usefulness by the railway Passengers. Based on the introspective discussion and fact driven, this study aims to focus on the passengers' experiences and satisfaction towards Southern Railway Services, with special references to Salem Railway division.



Objective

This study aims to analyse the southern railway passengers' experiences and satisfaction towards on-board and off-the board services.

Hypotheses

H₀: There exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards off-board services offered by Southern Railways.
H₀: There exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards on-board services offered by Southern Railways.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of the study consists of two stages explorative and descriptive in nature. Filed survey form part of descriptive study, which is a fact finding investigation with adequate interpretation. The study is focused on the passengers experience and satisfaction towards Southern Railways. Southern Railway has six divisions such as Chennai, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Salem, Palakkad and Thiruvananthapuram. It covers the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and small portions of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. More than 50 crores of passengers travel on the network every year. This zone of the Indian Railways differs from the other zones in India in that its revenue is derived from passengers and not from freight.

Current study is aimed to conduct among the passenger who travels in train through the Salem Railway Zone. In total 264 trains' passes through the Salem Zone. Out of 264 trains' that passes through Salem zone, 15 per cent of Trains are expected to select as sample i.e., 40 trains that originate from Kerala and passes through Tamil Nadu and end at North India or North East destinations like Delhi, Guwahati etc. A sample of 30 respondents from each train was chosen as samples that in total summed to 1200 respondents. At the end of data collection it was observed that nearly twelve questionnaires contained incomplete information, these twelve questionnaires were deducted from actual samples, this study was confined to 1188 sample subjects.

Results and Discussion

In today's competitive business environment railway passengers prefer and demand the better quality of services to be provided by the Indian railways in various zones. Generally, passengers compare the nature of services rendered by the railways in term of their experiences and nature of satisfaction derived with references to various services offered by the railways both inside the platform and inside the train. This empirical study conducted among 1188 passengers found that 50.42 per cent of the sample populations are female and 49.58 per cent of the respondents are male. It has been observed that majority i.e., 70.20 per cent of the surveyed passengers are aged between 20-30 years and 14.98 per cent of the respondents fall under the age group of 30-40 years. Further, the study confirmed that 23.15 per cent of the railway passengers are post graduates and 21.04 per cent of the sample populations have pursued professional degree. The study indicated that 33.84 per cent of the respondents earn between `5000-`10000 per month and 32.15 per cent of the sample subjects monthly income ranges between `10001-`15000. The study included 35.10 per cent of respondents from urban areas and 34.18 per cent of the passengers from rural areas of Salem zone and rest from the semi-urban areas.

Out of 1188 respondents surveyed, 63.13 per cent of respondents have said that they travel frequently on trains for business or other reasons and it was observed that 29.73 per cent of the respondents travel regularly i.e., daily on trains for official purposes. On the contrary, it was observed that 41.41 per cent of passengers travel on trains during vocation time to spend their holidays in tourist spots. The study indicated that 36.53 per cent of the respondents usually have short distance travel which does not exceed than 200 km, whereas, 19.61 per cent of respondents prefer to have long distance travels that range over 401 km or more. The study observed that 42.34 per cent of respondents prefer to travel in second class compartments. it was ironic to observe that 42.51 per cent of passengers buy tickets directly from the railway stations still now, even after the vast development of e-ticking services, mobile booking services etc. The study found that time schedule of trains, frequency of train availability and speed as considered as primary factor that motivate the passengers to avail Southern Railway services.

Table 1: Passengers' Level of Experience towards the off Board/Platform Services Offered by Railways

Variable	Sum	Mean	Rank
Counter Services			
Number of counters available	5169	4.35	1
Information display about the trains (schedules, departure & other details)	5088	4.28	2
Staff availability at the counters	4857	4.09	4
Staff courtesy	4706	3.96	5
Digital equipment available for information	4886	4.11	3



Waiting Room Facilities			
Space availability	4875	4.10	2
Hygiene & Cleanliness	4754	4.00	3
Temperature & Humid Maintenance conditions inside the room	4954	4.17	1
Availability of chairs for resting	4640	3.91	5
Rest rooms (Sufficiency of toilets/washrooms)	4734	3.98	4
Public Addressing System			
Clarity of announcements	5114	4.30	1
Accuracy of announcements	4896	4.12	2
Frequency of announcements	4802	4.04	5
Reservation chart display	4863	4.09	4
Information on train arrival & departure	4894	4.12	2
Platform Services			
Public help service counters	4909	4.13	1
Stationary stalls	4821	4.06	2
Availability of food courts/stalls	4672	3.93	4
Porters availability	4680	3.94	3
Ventilation, seats, stairs availability	4534	3.82	5
Other Services			
Cloak room facilities	5175	4.36	1
Bank ATMs facilities	5029	4.23	2
Parking Services	4835	4.07	4
Taxies, Public conveyances, Medical facilities etc.,	4973	4.19	3
Grievances /Redresses	4749	4.00	5

Source: Primary Data

From the detailed data discussion, it has been observed that the passengers feel very convenient with the plat services like: availability of appropriate ticket booking counters, temperature and humid maintenance conditions of waiting rooms, announcements facilities available at the platforms, public help service counters and cloak room facilities offered by the Southern Railways. Whereas the respondents have opined that the railway services like Staff availability and courtesy of the staff are not up to the standards. Similarly, availability of chairs and rest rooms facilities of railway platforms are not adequate as per their standard of service expectation. Passengers have experienced inconvenience with regards to reservation chart display and frequency of announcements regarding the arrival and departure of trains. The sample passengers have opined that availability of food courts/stalls, ventilation, seats and stairs provide in the railway platforms is not adequate to them. The respondents have said that the parking and grievances / redressals services offered by Southern Railways are not satisfactory to them.

Table 2: Passengers' Level of Experience towards the on Board Services Offered by Railways

Variable	Sum	Mean	Rank
Basic Amenities			
Sufficiency of seats	5147	4.33	1
Lighting & Fans	4925	4.15	2
Seat Conditions	4755	4.00	4
Space for Moving Inside the train	4927	4.15	2
Luggage Storage Facilities	4649	3.91	5
Cleanliness			
Total cleanliness of the train	4697	3.95	1
Hygiene & Cleanliness of compartments	4638	3.90	2
Hygiene & Cleanliness of Toilets	4542	3.82	3
Food & water hygiene	4349	3.66	5
Cleanliness standard of pantry staff	4454	3.75	4
Security			



Security of self/Passengers	4678	3.94	3
Security of luggage	4546	3.83	5
Availability of Guards	4701	3.96	2
Notices on safety Measures	4639	3.90	4
Safety Cautions	4856	4.09	1
Staff Behaviour			
Behaviour of railway staff	4915	4.14	1
Behaviour of Porters	4818	4.06	4
Courtesy and helping tendency Ticket checkers	4886	4.11	2
Behaviour of pantry staff	4591	3.86	5
Behaviour of police guard	4846	4.08	3
Refreshment			
Refreshments affordability	4911	4.13	3
Refreshments quality	4909	4.13	3
Refreshments quantity	5032	4.24	1
Frequency of Availability	4749	4.00	5
Time-Taken For Delivery	4965	4.18	2

Source: Primary Data

The rail passengers are found to be pleased with the on-boards railway services like: adequacy of seats availability inside the train, cleanliness of train coaches, precautionary measures taken by the Southern Railways in protecting the life of the passengers like: provision of emergency exist windows, pull chains etc., courteousness of staff and pantry services i.e., quantity of food and beverages. On the contrary the passengers have faced inconvenience due to poor seat conditions, inadequate luggage storage facilities, poor cleanliness standard of pantry staff, food and water hygiene of southern railways. The respondents were worried by the notices on safety measures and security of luggage while travelling in trains. The passengers are annoyed by the behaviour of porters and pantry staff in the train and the passengers claim that the Southern Railways fail to offer the food products frequently and are supposed to wait for longer time.

To measure the level of differences exists between the passengers' level of experience and satisfaction towards the off-boards and on-board services offered by southern railways of India, following hypotheses are framed and tested.

H₀: There exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards off-board services offered by Southern Railways.

Table 3: Measures of Dispersion Passengers' Experience and Satisfaction towards Off-Board Services Offered by Southern Railways

Variables	Experience		Satisfaction		Correlation
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Counter Services					
Number of counters available	1.65	.788	2.10	.757	.172
Information display about the trains (schedules, departure & other details)	2.72	.753	2.10	.757	.171
Staff availability at the counters	1.91	.894	2.10	.757	.168
Staff courtesy	2.44	1.035	2.10	.757	.007
Digital equipment available for information	1.89	.961	2.10	.757	.014
Waiting Room Facilities					
Space availability	1.90	.950	2.10	.757	.158
Hygiene & Cleanliness	2.70	1.034	2.10	.757	.034
Temperature & Humid Maintenance conditions inside the room	1.83	.969	2.10	.757	.115
Availability of chairs for resting	2.49	.961	2.10	.757	.101
Rest rooms (Sufficiency of toilets/washrooms)	2.02	1.122	2.10	.757	.118
Public Addressing System					
Clarity of announcements	1.70	.845	2.10	.757	.218



Accuracy of announcements	1.88	.901	2.10	.757	.131
Frequency of announcements	1.96	1.023	2.10	.757	.193
Reservation chart display	2.91	1.082	2.10	.757	.156
Information on train arrival & departure	1.88	1.035	2.10	.757	.008
Platform Services					
Public help service counters	1.87	.995	2.10	.757	.234
Stationary stalls	1.94	.976	2.10	.757	.237
Availability of food courts/stalls	2.37	1.075	2.10	.757	.306
Porters availability	2.06	1.021	2.10	.757	.145
Ventilation, seats, stairs availability	2.18	1.193	2.10	.757	.201
Other Services					
Cloak room facilities	2.64	.885	2.10	.757	.109
Bank ATMs facilities	1.77	.845	2.10	.757	.099
Parking Services	1.93	1.008	2.10	.757	.139
Taxis, Public conveyances, Medical facilities etc.,	1.81	1.051	2.10	.757	.107
Grievances /Redresses	2.00	1.083	2.10	.757	.176

Level of significance: 5 per cent

From the results of the above table, it has been found that the passengers exhibit high degree of satisfaction towards the off-board/platform services offered by the Southern Railways of India. However, they are observed to have experiences inconveniences information displayed about train schedule, Hygiene and Cleanliness status of the platforms, availability of chairs for resting, Reservation chart display on the trains, availability of food courts/stalls and Cloak room facilities.

Table 4: Result of Paired Z Test Passengers' Experience and Satisfaction towards Off-Board Services Offered by Southern Railways

Experience Vs Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Z	DF	Sig
Counter Services					
Number of counters available	-.455	.995	-15.778	1187	.000
Information display about the trains (schedules, departure & other details)	-.387	.972	-13.728	1187	.000
Staff availability at the counters	-.193	1.070	-6.210	1187	.000
Staff courtesy	-.066	1.279	-1.770	1187	.077
Digital equipment available for information	-.217	1.216	-6.158	1187	.000
Waiting Room Facilities					
Space availability	-.208	1.118	-6.410	1187	.000
Hygiene & Cleanliness	-.106	1.261	-2.898	1187	.004
Temperature & Humid Maintenance conditions inside the room	-.274	1.159	-8.160	1187	.000
Availability of chairs for resting	-.010	1.162	-.300	1187	.764
Rest rooms (Sufficiency of toilets/washrooms)	-.089	1.277	-2.408	1187	.016
Public Addressing System					
Clarity of announcements	-.409	1.004	-14.040	1187	.000
Accuracy of announcements	-.226	1.099	-7.075	1187	.000
Frequency of announcements	-.146	1.150	-4.392	1187	.000
Reservation chart display	-.198	1.220	-5.589	1187	.000
Information on train arrival & departure	-.224	1.277	-6.042	1187	.000
Platform Services					
Public help service counters	-.237	1.101	-7.406	1187	.000
Stationary stalls	-.162	1.084	-5.164	1187	.000
Availability of food courts/stalls	-.037	1.110	-1.150	1187	.250
Porters availability	-.044	1.180	-1.279	1187	.201
Ventilation, seats, stairs availability	.079	1.279	2.133	1187	.033
Other Services					
Cloak room facilities	-.460	1.100	-14.423	1187	.000



Bank ATMs facilities	-.338	1.078	-10.791	1187	.000
Parking Services	-.174	1.174	-5.117	1187	.000
Taxies, Public conveyances, Medical facilities etc.,	-.290	1.228	-8.149	1187	.000
Grievances /Redresses	-.102	1.207	-2.907	1187	.004

Level of significance: 5 per cent

From the above table, it has been inferred that probability value of 'Z' is found to be significant at 5 per cent level. Therefore the hypothesis framed stands accepted and it has been concluded that there exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards off-board services offered by Southern Railways. However it is exceptional in the case of staff courtesy, availability of chairs for resting, availability of food courts/stalls, and porters availability in southern railway platforms.

H₀: There exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards on-board services offered by Southern Railways.

Table 5: Measures of Dispersion Passengers' Experience and Satisfaction towards On-Board Services Offered by Southern Railways

Variables	Experience		Satisfaction		Correlation
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Basic Amenities					
Sufficiency of seats	1.67	.807	2.15	.743	.292
Lighting & Fans	1.85	.911	2.15	.743	.461
Seat Conditions	2.00	1.006	2.15	.743	.551
Space for Moving Inside the train	1.85	1.030	2.15	.743	.557
Luggage Storage Facilities	2.09	1.099	2.15	.743	.418
Cleanliness					
Total cleanliness of the train	2.05	1.112	2.15	.743	.428
Hygiene & Cleanliness of compartments	2.10	1.067	2.15	.743	.383
Hygiene & Cleanliness of Toilets	2.18	1.192	2.15	.743	.367
Food & water hygiene	2.34	1.128	2.15	.743	.397
Cleanliness standard of pantry staff	2.25	1.185	2.15	.743	.429
Security					
Security of self/Passengers	2.06	1.096	2.15	.743	.436
Security of luggage	2.17	1.119	2.15	.743	.451
Availability of Guards	2.04	.984	2.15	.743	.460
Notices on safety Measures	2.10	1.087	2.15	.743	.430
Safety Cautions	1.91	.973	2.15	.743	.288
Staff Behaviour					
Behaviour of railway staff	1.86	.828	2.15	.743	.419
Behaviour of Porters	1.94	.903	2.15	.743	.474
Courtesy and helping tendency Ticket checkers	1.89	.824	2.15	.743	.239
Behaviour of pantry staff	2.14	.997	2.15	.743	.424
Behaviour of police guard	1.92	1.025	2.15	.743	.302
Refreshment					
Refreshments affordability	1.87	.866	2.15	.743	.487
Refreshments quality	1.87	.822	2.15	.743	.508
Refreshments quantity	1.76	.836	2.15	.743	.382
Frequency of Availability	2.00	.889	2.15	.743	.458
Time-Taken For Delivery	1.82	.902	2.15	.743	.164

Level of significance: 5 per cent

From the above table, it has been clearly observed that the rail passengers exhibit high degree of satisfaction towards the on-board services offered by the Southern railways. Except in few cases like hygiene & cleanliness of toilets, food & water hygiene and cleanliness standard of pantry staff.



Table 6: Result of Paired Z Test Passengers' Experience and Satisfaction towards on-Board Services Offered by Southern Railways

Experience Vs Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Z	DF	Sig
Basic Amenities					
Sufficiency of seats	-.482	.924	-17.999	1187	.000
Lighting & Fans	-.295	.870	-11.700	1187	.000
Seat Conditions	-.152	.861	-6.101	1187	.000
Space for Moving Inside the train	-.297	.872	-11.748	1187	.000
Luggage Storage Facilities	-.063	1.038	-2.097	1187	.036
Cleanliness					
Total cleanliness of the train	-.104	1.040	-3.431	1187	.001
Hygiene & Cleanliness of compartments	-.054	1.041	-1.784	1187	.075
Hygiene & Cleanliness of Toilets	.027	1.150	.807	1187	.420
Food & water hygiene	.189	1.077	6.062	1187	.000
Cleanliness standard of pantry staff	.101	1.096	3.177	1187	.002
Security					
Security of self/Passengers	-.088	1.022	-2.953	1187	.003
Security of luggage	.024	1.027	.791	1187	.429
Availability of Guards	-.107	.920	-4.004	1187	.000
Notices on safety Measures	-.055	1.019	-1.850	1187	.065
Safety Cautions	-.237	1.040	-7.863	1187	.000
Staff Behaviour					
Behaviour of railway staff	-.287	.850	-11.643	1187	.000
Behaviour of Porters	-.205	.855	-8.279	1187	.000
Courtesy and helping tendency Ticket checkers	-.263	.969	-9.344	1187	.000
Behaviour of pantry staff	-.014	.958	-.515	1187	.607
Behaviour of police guard	-.229	1.069	-7.384	1187	.000
Refreshment					
Refreshments affordability	-.284	.822	-11.899	1187	.000
Refreshments quality	-.282	.779	-12.475	1187	.000
Refreshments quantity	-.386	.881	-15.082	1187	.000
Frequency of Availability	-.147	.859	-5.913	1187	.000
Time-Taken For Delivery	-.329	1.071	-10.597	1187	.000

Level of significance: 5 per cent

From the above table, it has been inferred that probability value of 'Z' is found to be significant at 5 per cent level. Therefore the hypothesis framed stands accepted and it has been concluded that there exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards on-board services offered by southern railways. However it is exceptional in the case of hygiene and cleanliness of compartments, hygiene and cleanliness of toilets, security of luggage, notices on safety measures and behaviour of pantry staff.

Findings

From the study, it has been observed that there exists vast gap in passengers' experience and satisfaction towards both on-boards and off-board services offered by Southern Railways. The railway passengers are observed to be dissatisfied with the railway staff courtesy, availability of chairs for resting, availability of food courts/stalls, and porters' availability in southern railway platforms. Similarly, the passengers have faced inconveniences with related to the hygiene and cleanliness of compartments, hygiene and cleanliness of toilets, security of luggage, notices on safety measures and behaviour of pantry staff.

The cleanliness and hygiene in the plat and inside the train can be achieved by educating the passengers about how to maintain the platforms and trains to be clean and neat, not to litter waste, not to dirt the stations of trains by splitting, urinating. Not to damage the chairs and seat covers either inside the train or in platforms and similarly, not waste water. Similarly, the railway authorities can encourage the passenger to book the tickets through the e-ticking procedures or through mobile phone, in order to manager passenger crowd in the ticking counters. Southern Railways must effectively investigate and track the trends periodically to improve service quality like: ensuring the punctuality of trains, safety of passengers, clear



announcement of either train arrival or departure, regulating porters charges and ensure that all basic amenities are available inside the trains and at the platforms without any differences either in the passenger class of travel or according to the station location i.e., either big or small / urban or rural locations. Moreover, the railway staff should be trained to behave politely and patiently with the passengers of various sections of society.

Conclusion

Customer satisfaction has gained huge importance in today's competitive environment. The study concludes by stating that 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 retain its reputation and long-term fame. Moreover, the railways can increase its revenue by enticing more number of passengers, along with provision of satisfied services.

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