



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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## EVALUATION OF PASSENGER SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY IN INDIAN RAILWAYS - A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY USING RAILQUAL

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### ABSTRACT

Indian Railway Passenger Services today faces consumer challenges, competition from Super Luxury Bus Services and Low cost Air Lines and with these challenges a related and equally important issue has emerged – Service quality and evaluating the service encounter. Using Railway Passenger Services as the primary study setting, We explore the concept of Rail Transportation Services quality and its evaluation from both the Passenger and Railway perspectives. Standard scale of SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman et al has been used with modified attributes to suit the Railway passenger Services used to conduct the survey. The findings provide special empirical insights on the gaps in the services provided by Railways. The five dimensions used to measure Service Quality are Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. This Study gives useful insights to boost customer satisfaction towards Railways customer Satisfaction Measurement.

### KEYWORDS

Passenger satisfaction, Railway service quality, Railqual.

### INTRODUCTION

Quality changes the nature of business competition and, perhaps more than any other factor, it dictated how companies make products or deliver services. In the global economy quality is just the entry ticket. It is recognized that high quality service is essential for organizations that want to be successful in their business (Parasuraman et al 1988; Rust and Oliver, 1994). The organization has to battle many competitors who have attained it. The next step is figuring out how to differentiate you. This differentiating and improving is possible only through service quality measurement. In general research on service quality address two types of problems which are Instrument for measuring service quality and evaluation of service quality in separate framework of study indicating that it is highly desirable to incorporate both problems in a comprehensive manner. While there are a number of studies on rail passenger service quality (eg. Disney, 1988, 1999; Hann and Drea 1998; Drea and Hanna 2000; Tripp and Drea 2002), there is very little published literature that reports the use of SERVQUAL in the assessment of railway passenger service quality.

To understand service quality there are an array of factors or determinants. A number of researchers have provided lists of quality determinants, but the best known determinants emanate from Parasuraman and colleagues from USA, who found five dimensions of service quality namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy and used these as the basis for their service quality measurement instrument, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1990). The result was the development of SERVQUAL instrument based on the gap model. The central idea in this model is that service quality is a function of the difference scores or gaps between expectations and perceptions. An important advantage of the SERVQUAL instrument is that it has been proven valid and reliable across a large range of service contexts. However, while the SERVQUAL instrument has been widely used, it has been subjected certain criticisms as well. It has been suggested that for some services the SERVQUAL instrument needs considerable adaptation (Dabholkar et al., 1996) and that items used to measure service quality should reflect the specific service setting under investigation, and that it is necessary in this regard to modify some of the items and add or delete items as required (Carman, 1990).

Satisfaction is defined as a customer's perception of a single service experience, whereas quality is the accumulation of the satisfaction for many customers over many service experiences. Such past evaluative experiences perhaps lead overtime to a more general attitude. Moreover, Services is equal to the perception of a Single Service as received and measured against the expected service received. The difference in the degree, direction and discrepancy between the perceptions and expectations of a Customer results in a level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. (Hill, 1992:44)

Satisfaction and Service quality are often treated together as functions of a customer's perceptions and expectations. The simplest model is the two concept equation defined as  $Q = P - E$ . When perceptions (P) are equal to expectation (E), Service Quality (Q) is satisfactory. If expectation are higher than actual perceptions, a customer's rating become negative (Cattle, 1990, pp-22-23)

Passenger Satisfaction in the field of Public Transportation is related to the Perceived discrepancy between actual ideal levels of service. Therefore both perceptions and expectations of service are being measured on the other hand the measurement and understanding of passenger satisfaction with services incorporates both customer provider issues (Oliver, 1997), Parasuraman et al 1985, Rust and Oliver 1997)

In the hand book of measuring customer satisfaction and service quality (Transportation Research Board, 1999), Five gaps have been identified, Consumer expectation – management perception gap, Management perception – Service quality specification gap, Service Quality Specification – Service delivery gap, Service delivery – External communication gap and Expected Service – Perceived Gap, which also indicate the sequence of quality management from monitoring to remedial actions and finally assessment.

Service Quality has been described as a form of attitude, related but not equivalent to satisfaction which results from comparison of expectations with performance (Parasuraman et al 1988). Service Quality involves a comparison of expectations with performance. It is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations on a consistent basis. Service quality has been conceptualized as a function of consumer expectations towards the service situation and process, and of the output quality they perceived themselves to have received.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

### NEED TO CHANGE FOR INDIAN RAILWAYS

The organizational justification for this study comes from the compelling need to change for the Indian Railways made time and again (Sondhi n.d.). It needs to change in order to survive. In this case, the old systems remain untouched and they continue to generate the same behaviors. However, we believe that it is possible to bring about a change in such a manner and in such areas of Indian Railways which is acceptable to different stakeholders and therefore implementable. In the context of Indian Railways, action choices emanating from changes in such factors as ownership and structure have the risk of antagonizing the three important stake holders - the government, the railway personnel and even the customers – who would like to see the Indian Railways more as a not-for-profit organization. Thus it can make them withdraw from or oppose the proposed change. However a change in such factors as system, culture, leadership and industrial relations are not necessarily threatening to them and a beginning can be made to initiate change in these areas. Thus the intent of this research is to use Service Quality route as the over-arching method for bringing about change in the Indian Railways.

### LOSS OF MARKET SHARE IN PASSENGER BUSINESS

IR provides the most energy efficient and economical mode of transportation in India. In spite of this, IR lost its market share in Freight and Passenger segment due to lack of customer responsiveness and poor public perception Passenger service constitutes 60% of the transport output but contribute only 32% of the revenue. 60% of the suburban passenger traffic adds only 10% to the passenger earnings. The upper class travelers - though comprise only 1% of the originating passengers - account for around 20% of passenger revenues. The ratio of average passenger fares per passenger kilometer (pkm) to average freight tariffs per net ton (ntkm) is very low in IR compared with other countries. The ratio of 0.3 for India compares with 1.2 in China, 2.2 in Japan, 0.7 in Thailand and 0.5 in Bangladesh. In passenger segment IR share is 68% in the year 1951 to roads 32% where as it is a mere 13% share in a total of 87% for Roadways now. As of now, many academicians and practitioners have undertaken various works on other areas of management on Indian Railways but very limited work has been done in Service operations management. This study will examine the service quality measurement in various services of IR.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

A study of the application of the SERVQUAL scale with modified attributes to suit the Railway services to assess Customers perceptions of the Service Quality offered by Indian Railways is appropriate as there is a general feeling in the minds of Rail Travelers that the quality is not up to the mark . Hence this study aims to identify the areas where attention needs to be given by the Indian Railway authorities in order to increase the satisfaction of its customers.

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

A descriptive research design was used to gain an insight into consumer's perception about the services offered by Indian Railways with respect to five dimensions of SERVQUAL scale.

### SOURCE OF DATA AND SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Primary data were collected for the research. An undisguised structured questionnaire, SERVQUAL , by Parasuraman et al with modified attributes to suit Railway Services was used for the research. The respondents were asked to provide belief rating for services offered by Indian Railways, using seven-point rating scale ranging from 1(low) to 7(high)

### THE SAMPLE

The sample size used was 100. The respondents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling at Secunderabad city .The sampling units are passengers of Indian Railways with Rail Travel exposure.

## RESULTS

The standard scale of SERVQUAL was administered to 100 respondents. Primary data was analyzed using mean average. Gap analysis was done by calculating the average mean for individual statements and dimensions namely: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness (Table 1 ) and Figures 1-7)

TABLE 1: MEAN SCORES OF 26 STATEMENTS

Attributes	Expectations (E)	Perceptions (P)	Gaps (E)-(P)	% of Satisfaction
Clarity of Information given in timetables	6.2	5.4	0.9	86.2
Clarity of Information given at stations	6.2	5.8	0.4	93.1
Cleanliness at stations	6.5	4.2	2.4	63.8
Modern appearance station	5.2	3.5	1.7	67.4
Cleanliness in train	5.4	4.0	1.5	73.1
Overall appearance - train	5.3	4.3	1.0	81.5
A neat professional appearance of staff	6.3	4.8	1.5	76.0
Willingness to help	6.7	2.2	4.5	32.6
Prompt service	6.3	3.8	2.5	60.9
Availability of staff in handling your requests	5.9	2.9	3.0	49.4
Maintaining the frequency of trains as scheduled	5.5	3.2	2.3	58.2
Providing on time train services	6.7	4.4	2.4	64.9
Dependability in handling your service problems	6.0	3.8	2.2	63.1
Performing services right at first time	5.7	2.9	2.8	50.5
Dealing with you in caring fashion	5.8	2.9	3.0	49.0
Understanding your needs when you make inquiries	4.9	3.8	1.1	77.5
Having your best interest at heart	6.9	4.1	2.8	59.7
Courtesy of staff on train	6.2	4.4	1.8	71.5
Being informed if there are delays	6.8	3.5	3.3	51.6
Personal safety at station	6.6	3.9	2.7	58.7
Personal safety on train	7.0	4.7	2.3	67.0
Staff at ticket office	5.8	3.9	2.0	66.2
Having knowledge to answer your questions	5.2	4.0	1.3	75.8
On train information about delays	5.6	4.8	0.7	86.9

TABLE 2: MEAN SCORES OF FIVE DIMENSIONS

Dimensions	Expectations (E)	Perceptions (P)	Gaps (E)-(P)	% of Satisfaction
Tangibility	5.9	4.6	1.3	77.5
Reliability	6.0	3.6	2.4	59.4
Responsiveness	6.3	3.0	3.3	47.3
Assurance	6.2	4.2	2.0	67.5
Empathy	5.8	3.6	2.2	61.6
Overall Results	6.0	4.1	2.0	67.6

FIGURE 1 - PERCENTAGE OF SATISFACTIONS

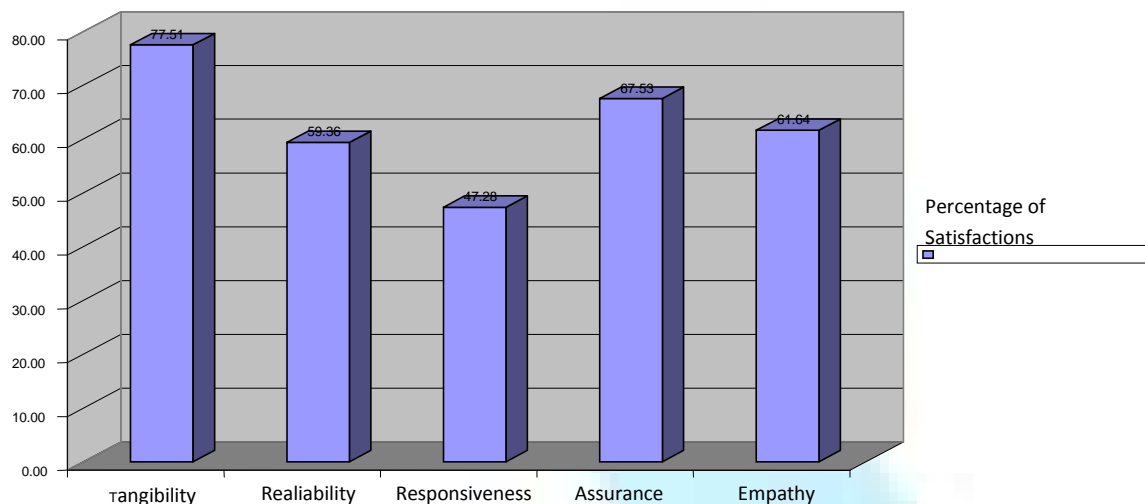


FIGURE 2: GAPS IN FIVE DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

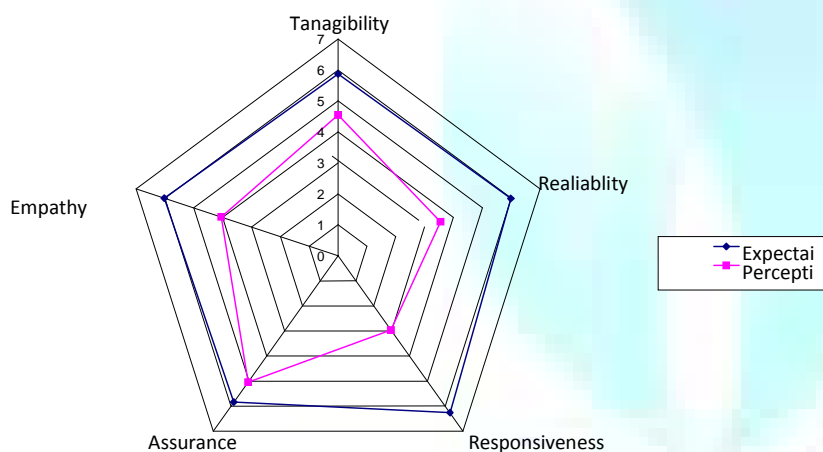


FIGURE 3: GAPS IN TANGIBILITY

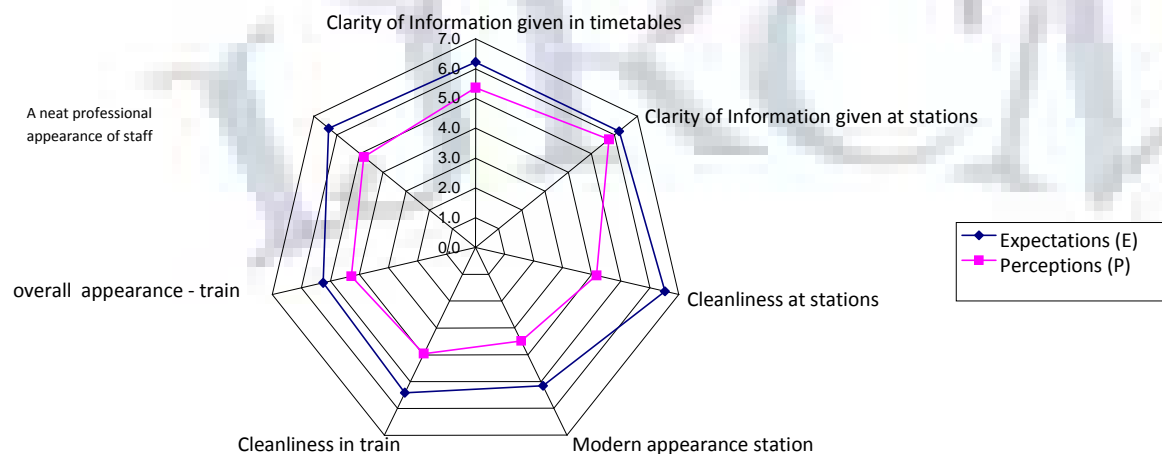




FIGURE 4: GAPS IN RELIABILITY

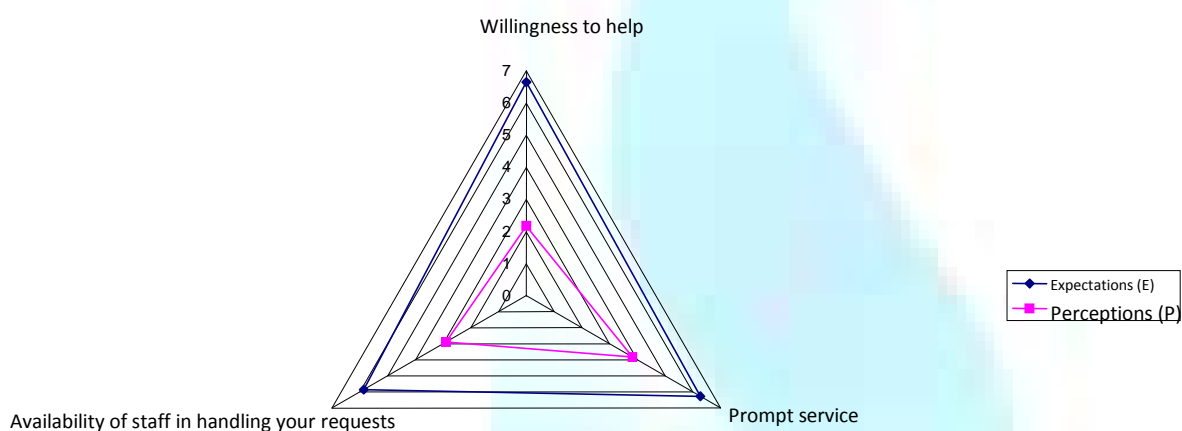
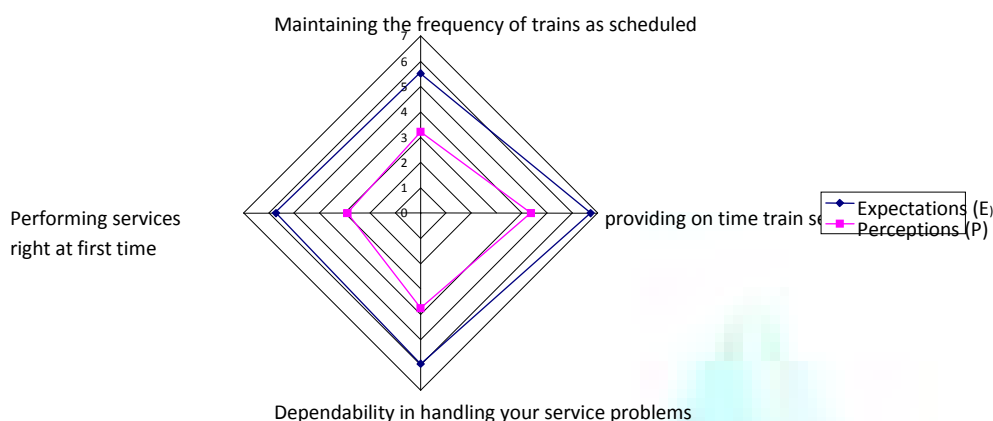
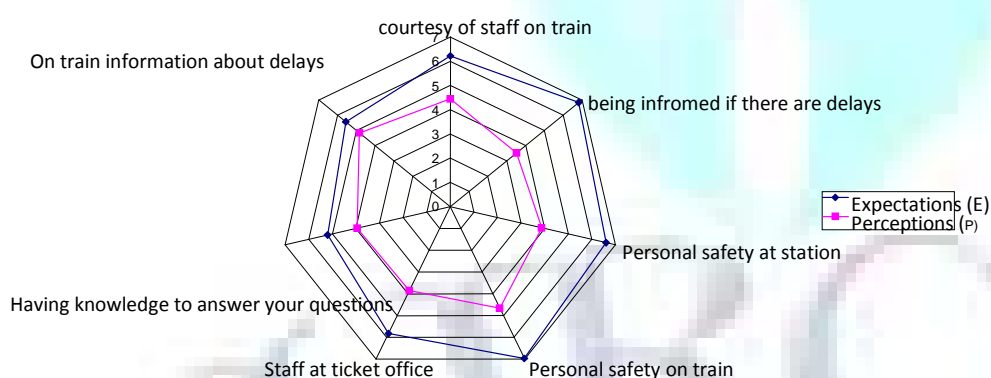


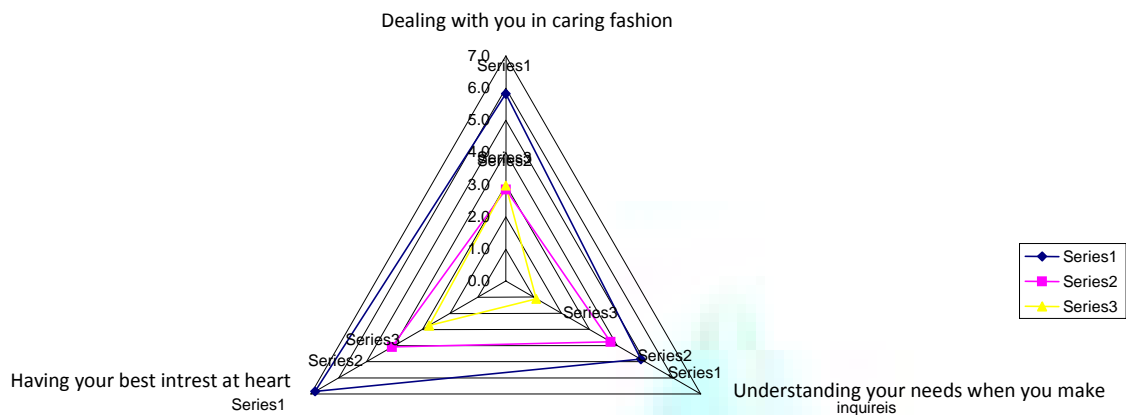
FIGURE 6: GAPS IN ASSURANCE



### DISCUSSION ON RESULTS

Quality is critical success factor in Service industries. The research measuring service quality has focused primarily on how to meet or exceed the external customer's expectations and views service quality as a measure of how the delivered service level matches consumer's expectations. These perspectives can also be applied to the employees of the firm and in this case, other major gaps can be closed in service quality gaps model

FIGURE 7 - EMPATHY



On the basis of mean score calculated for individual dimensions, It is found that tangibility dimension of Railways Passenger Service has less gap. Then its Assurance as second and empathy as third in the list where as reliability has more gap and the gap is more in case of responsiveness. Overall the gap in reliability and responsiveness are more in service quality in Indian Railways which need to be taken care.

The satisfaction level is as follows. The overall satisfaction is 67.6 % which means its 2/3rd of the satisfaction level and Railways needs to improve further by 1/3rd of their service quality aspects to get cent percent satisfied organization. If we look at individual dimensions the Responsiveness dimension is only at 47.3% level followed by Reliability which is only at 59.4 %. The Railways have to improve in these two dimensions so that their overall satisfaction level reaches a minimum of 90% satisfaction level.

If we look at individual attributes clarity of information given at stations and timetables have got 93.1% and 86.2% respectively. Where as it's the willingness to help got only at 32.6 % and availability of staff in handling requests got only 49.4 %.

## CONCLUSION

Improving the quality of service is one of the ways to improve the competitiveness of Railway Passenger Business. In all the trains and stations the above questionnaire can be used for collecting the feedback from passengers. The results point towards the need for South Central Railway to formulate management policies such as training of staff so as Staff has to be more responsive to customers needs. Bureaucracy in SCR has to be reduced or eliminated as it's a government department with less dynamism. Hence the human touch is more required as we can see in Airlines services which we are missing in Indian Railway Passenger Services. If this aspect is improved there will be definitely improvement in the satisfaction levels of the Passengers.

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