

MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY IN MADURAI DIVISION OF SOUTHERN RAILWAY ZONE

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ABSTRACT

For several years, the Indian Railway (IR) keeps its passenger fare low and cross subsidises the loss making passenger traffic with profit earning freight traffic. Under the modern consumerism, passengers of rail transport are craving for quality service from the IR. The Railway Board has to ponder over the features of service quality of IR where for mass movement of men and materials, rail transport is highly suitable; but this must be accompanied by quality train service with safety and convenience in travel. Considering the above aspects, the present study titled “measuring service quality in Madurai division of Southern Railway Zone” has assumed greater significance than ever before.

KEYWORDS: Indian railway, Southern Railway, service Quality, passenger expectation, Madurai division.

INTRODUCTION

¹In a year, 700 crore passengers travel in Indian railway; while 1.3 crore passengers travel in IR daily, 1.2 crore of them travel in the unreserved Coaches. Southern railway (SR) a key zone of Indian railway was formed in April, 1951. Head quartered in Chennai, it has the following six railway divisions – Chennai Tiruchirapalli, Madurai, Palghat, Salem and Trivandrum. ²Madurai railway division was formed in 1856; it spans over 1,356 kms making it the largest division of SR. At present, the Madurai division covers 11 districts of Tamilnadu and one in Kerala. ³SR operates daily 1313 trains where more than 50 core passengers travel in a year.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of earlier studies reveals that previous studies focused on measuring service quality of Indian Railways in terms of Parasuraman’s SERVQUAL model based on five dimensions ⁴Hemant Sharma and Sonali Yadav (2013), Rajeswari and Santa kumari (2014) and Singh and Vikas Kumar(2015); and ⁵certain others were concerned about growth and development of IR – Arpita Mukherjee and Ruchika Sachdeva(2004). The present researcher’s review of literature has brought to limelight that earlier studies were not concentrated on passengers’ problems in online ticket booking, issue of women passengers’ safety in travel, benefit of holding

season ticket and the like. Importantly, feasible solutions are lacking in raising the revenue of IR/SR so that it could improve the service quality of IR/SR. The present study fills this gap.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Concerning the service quality, IR is severely hampered by the funds crunch. To illustrate, as stated earlier, a large part of revenue of IR is obtained from freight traffic, and passenger fare is cross subsidized with profit earning freight traffic. To worsen the situation the IR is losing freight traffic to road transportation.

A sordid state of affairs is the operating ratio of IR has consistently been higher than 90%; ⁶while it was 91.3% in 2014-15, it was 90.5% in 2015-16, 96.5% in 2016-17, 96% in 2017-18 and 92.08% in 2018-19.

The foregoing discussion pinpoints lack of funds of IR/SR. The Ministry of Indian Railway has to balance carefully both these aspects, namely augmenting its financial resources and enhancing the service quality in rail transport. Amid this back ground, the following research questions arise.

1. What are the passengers’ perceived and expected level of service quality features in Madurai division of Southern railway?