

Customer Satisfaction & Service Quality in Passenger Transport: A Case Study of Jalgaon

Dr. Sunil Karve*, Prof. Priyadarshan Patil**

The economic development of any country largely depends on the transport activities. Among the various modes of transport available, the road based transport is widely accepted because of its peculiar advantages. In India, both the State Road Transport Undertakings (SRTUs) and private operators provide public road transport services. Customer satisfaction is considered to be the most important factor whether it is meant for a product or a service. In case of failure to satisfy customers, company will be replaced by others and when industries offering various services, have to be more vigilant because there is a special attitude that plays an important role attracting and retaining the customers. Service quality can help service providers not only in improving their competitive positioning in the market but can also be used as a valuable tool for enhancing customer satisfaction. This research has proposed to investigate the effects of customer's service quality and customer satisfaction. Trust and customer satisfaction are significantly and positively related to customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction has found to be an important factor in passenger transport. Keeping this in view, the researchers intended to highlight that how service quality

Introduction

Passenger Road Transportation plays a pivotal role in India in bringing about greater mobility both within and between rural and urban areas. Over the last few years, companies have gradually shifted focus on service quality and customer satisfaction. This strategy is very profitable for both companies and customers. At the same time, if the service provider is a private player, it has to compete with the state transport corporations and other private players. To attract and keep the users with transporter is a continuous challenge for private players. An improvement in service quality can attract further users. Delivering superior service quality appears to be a prerequisite for success, if not survival, of such business. The competition between the private and nationalized services is expected to improve the efficiency and generally work in favour of the passengers. It is expected that the passengers get better service, lower fares, and higher reliability because of the competition.

Review of Literature

Service Quality

(Grönroos, 2001; Parsuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) Traditionally, service quality has been conceptualized as the difference between customer expectations regarding a service to be received and perceptions of the service being received. (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990) In some earlier studies, service quality has been referred as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations. (Zeithaml, Berry, &

Parsuraman, 1990). It is also conceptualized as the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority or superiority of the services.

Service Quality Dimensions

Parsuraman et al. (1988) identified five dimensions of service quality (viz. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles) that link specific service characteristics to consumers' expectations.

- (a) Tangibles - physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel;
- (b) Empathy - caring, individualized attention;
- (c) Assurance - knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence;
- (d) Reliability - ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately; and
- (e) Responsiveness - willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

After a comprehensive review of service quality studies, Asubonteng, McCleary, and Swan (1996) concluded that the number of service quality dimensions varies in different industries.

Besides SERVQUAL, Sureshchandrar, Rajendran, and Anantharaman (2003) have identified five factors of service quality from the customers' perspective. Those are: a) Core service or service product, b) Human element of service

*Professor and Director, Maratha Mandir's Babasaheb Gawde Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, India .

**Assistant Professor, Maratha Mandir's Babasaheb Gawde Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, India.

delivery, c) Systematization of service delivery: non-human element, d) Tangibles of service, and e) Social responsibility. After a close inspection, it could be safely concluded that the newly defined construct of service quality by Sureshchannandar et al. (2003) has some resemblance with the definition provided by Parsuraman et al. (1988).

Customer Satisfaction

(Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Bolton & Drew, 1991) Several authors have found a positive correlation between customer satisfaction and loyalty. (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Bansal & Taylor, 1999; Cronin & Taylor, 2000) Numerous studies in the service sector have also empirically validated the link between satisfaction and behavioral intentions such as customer retention and word of mouth

Customer satisfaction is something that includes apparent assessment of all the services and products (Leem and Yoon, 2004). Garbarino, E. & Johnson, M. (1999) conducted a research including 388 passengers who use Ferry they found that not only road transport but people want all the means of transport very efficient that there time will be saved not only time but people want its appearance should also be outstanding

Kettinger, W. J. & Lee, C. C. (1994) affirmed that many companies implement some strategies to make customers satisfied but fails to maintain them because of lack of focus and lack of experience they fail to maintain service

Further studies conducted by Zineldin (2005); Zheng and Jiaqing (2007); all concluded that customers want the best service whether it would be given by private companies or public companies and by improving quality and responsiveness customers could be satisfied which would ultimately be helpful for the reputation and profit of the companies

Gummerson (1996) explored the extent of application of relationship marketing in service sector. Service users hold good image of the organization

Jain and Gupta (2004) determined the magnitude of customer defined service quality gaps. They studied on two major quality measurement scales: service quality and service performance. In terms of service quality parameters, they found that the customers gave utmost importance to expectations followed by perceptions and importance rating.

Pathak and Modi (2004) studied quality of services provided by the companies in India with respect to issues and challenges. When service quality is measured on various parameters in, all the parameters are equally given weightage by the customers. The study was conducted on customers of hospitality services, tourism services and insurance services in a metro city.

Research Methodology

Primary data was obtained from travel passengers and

customers of Bedmutha Travels. A structures questionnaire was administered on 5 point rating scale. Sample size was 250 customers.

Bus transportation in Jalgaon

Buses run by private players are allowed to operate in few districts of Maharashtra. Inter district transportation are run by private operators, connecting capital city like Mumbai and other main cities. Apart from the MSRTC, some well known private bus operators in Jalgaon include Bedmutha Travels, Prasanna travel, Shri Sairam travels, K.K.travels, Sangitam Travels

Bedmutha Travels was established in the year 1986 and operating on 11 routes (including long and short routes). The buses owned by this company are 175 (100 on long route and 75 on short route). They offer pick up drop nearer to passenger's residence, single seat reservation for lady passengers, booking return journey tickets and water bottles to passengers. They also offer full insurance to passenger in proportion with damage. Utmost cleanliness is maintained in the buses.

Prasanna travel was established in year 1996 and operating total 04 routes and none of buses are owned by them. They offer pick up drop nearer to passenger's residence, single seat reservation for lady passengers and booking return journey tickets.

Shri Sairam travels was established in the year 2009 and operating on 09 routes (including long and short routes). The buses operated by this company are 20 and 02 of them are owned by them. They offer pick up drop nearer to passenger's residence, single seat reservation for lady passengers online booking and return journey ticket. Luggage safety is controlled by numbering process. The provision of individual LCD screen, pillow and blanket for passengers.

K.K.travels was established in the year 2008 and operating on 06 routes (including long and short routes). The buses operated by this company are 34 and they own none of them. Facilities offered are same as other travel companies

Sangitam Travels was established in the year 1980 and operating on 02 routes (including long and short routes). Two buses owned by this company. Facilities offered are same as other travel companies

Objectives of the study

1. To study the impact of service quality on customers.
2. To study the level of customer satisfaction.
3. To study the relationship between the two variables i.e. Service quality (independent) and customer satisfaction (dependent).

Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significance relationship of dimensions of

service quality with customer satisfaction

H₁: There is significance relationship of dimensions of service quality with customer satisfaction

Limitation of the Study

This study is confined to Private Bus operators in Jalgaon in Maharashtra. The results of this study should not be generalised for other states/cities. Further studies can be done on a large sample and comparison across tourism corporation-owned bus services can be done between various states/cities. The study has wide implications for our state in particular. Much work can be done towards strengthening CRM practices in this regard.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Characteristics	Range	Percent
Gender	Male	83
	Female	17
Age (years)	Less than 25	27
	25-35	58
	35-45	8
	Above 45	7
Monthly income(Rs)	Less than 10,000	25
	10,000-20,000	52
	20,000-30,000	20
	Above 40,000	3
Frequency of travel	More than once in week	29
	once in week	24
	once in fortnight	9
	once in month	23
	Occasionally	15

Demographic profile of the respondents was found to be diverse with more than half (83 percent) reported as male and the remaining (17 percent) female. Around 85 percent of the respondents have their ages below 35 years. This implies that the passengers who travel by Bedmutha Travels belong to younger age group. Majority of the respondents were having a monthly income less than Rs. 20,000/- (72 percent). Twenty percent of the respondents had monthly incomes between Rs. 20,000/- and Rs. 30,000/-

It also shows the frequency of travel by the respondents. More than 50 percent of the respondents travelled at least once or more times in a week. Second majority group is the respondents who travel once a moth with 23 percent.

Dimensions of Service Quality

'Exploratory factor analysis' was used in order to indentify various factors of perception of passengers towards travel services. 'Principal component analysis' was employed for extracting factors. Orthogonal rotation with Varimax is applied. The 'latent root' criterion was used for extraction of factors. Accordingly, only factors having latent roots or Eigen values greater than one were regarded significant all the factors with latent roots less than one are considered insignificant and

disregarded.

Criteria for the Significance of Factor Loadings

In interpreting factors, a decision needs to be made regarding consideration of factor loadings, which are worthwhile. A factor loading represents the correlation between and original variable and its factor.

After a factor solution has been obtained, in which all variables have a significant loading on a factor, then some more meaning to the pattern of factor loadings is assigned. Variables with higher loadings are considered more important and have greater influence on the name and label selected to represent a factor. Greater emphasis is placed on those variables with higher loadings. These variables have been assigned a name or a label to a factor that accurately reflected the variables loading on that factor. The name or label is not derived or assigned by the factor analysis computer program, rather, it is intuitively developed by the researcher based on is appropriateness for representing the underlying dimension to a particular factor. All the factors were given individual names appropriate for variables they represented

Table 2: Dimensions of Service Quality

Variables	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Buses are maintained neatly.	0.776				
Departure timings are maintained strictly.	0.744				
Arrival timings are maintained strictly.	0.696				
Journey comfort is excellent.	0.643			0.512	
Travel time is strictly maintained.	0.626				
Cleanliness is maintained in the busses	0.539				0.513
Cancellation of tickets is very easy.		0.754			
Phone booking is available.		0.744			
There is consistency in operator service.		0.657			
Facility of booking return journey ticket available.		0.627			
Safety of luggage is very high.		0.623			
Passengers receive proper information about bus schedules from agent.		0.587			
Passengers have options of converting a booked ticket to an open ticket.		0.531			
Single separate seats are reserved for lady passengers		0.530			
Ambience in booking office is good.			0.739		
Booking agents are courteous to passengers.			0.733		
Bus operators (driver conductors) are courteous and cooperative.	0.731				
Restrooms are available at the pickup office.			0.577		
Bus fair is not revised during peak demand days.		0.718			
During emergencies, additional/alternative bus fleet is available for deployment.	0.637				
Drop off points are nearer to bus stand/railway station or passenger residence	0.501				
Pick up points are nearer to my residence.				0.718	
Goods can be transported with little extra baggage fee.		0.606			
Booking are nearer to my home/office.				0.592	
Total	3.917	3.843	2.682	2.392	2.354
Percent of variance	16.319	16.012	11.174	9.967	9.808
Cumulative percent	16.319	32.332	43.506	53.473	63.281

Table 3: Factors Analysis

Factors	Variables	Names	Loadings	Cronbachs Alpha
F1	Reliability	Buses are maintained neatly. Departure timings are maintained strictly. Arrival timings are maintained strictly. Journey comfort is excellent. Travel time is strictly maintained. Cleanliness is maintained in the busses	0.776 0.744 0.696 0.643 0.626 0.539	0.836
F2	Responsiveness	Cancellation of tickets is very easy. Phone booking is available. There is consistency in operator service. Facility of booking return journey tickets is available. Safety of luggage is very high. Passengers receive proper information about bus schedules from agent. Facility of changeover from booked ticket to an open ticket. Single separate seats are reserved for lady passengers.	0.754 0.744 0.657 0.627 0.623 0.587 0.531 0.530	0.884
F3	Ambience & assurance	Ambience in booking office is good. Booking agents are courteous to passengers. Bus operators (driver conductors) are courteous and cooperative. Restrooms are available at the pick up office.	0.739 0.733 0.731 0.577	0.787
F4	Empathy	No fair revision during peak demand periods. During emergencies, additional/ alternative bus fleet is available for deployment. Drop off points are closer to bus stand/ railway station or passenger residence.	0.718 0.637 0.501	0.762
F5	Convenience	Pick up points are nearer to passenger residence. Goods can be transported with little extra baggage fee. Booking offices are set up at central and convenient locations from localities & offices.	0.718 0.606 0.592	0.728

Table 3 gives the names of all the five factors (dimensions). 'Reliability' is the most dominant factor. Passengers of the Bedmutha Travels feel that buses are maintained neatly. Departure and arrival timings of the buses are strictly followed. Passengers also feel that the journey comfort is excellent and travel time is strictly maintained by the Bedmutha Travels.

The second important factor is the 'responsiveness' Passengers of Bedmutha Travels feel that it is very easy to cancel the booked tickets during emergencies. They feel that there is consistency in the service of the bus operator. They feel that the facility of booking return tickets is also available. When passengers travel, they can be assured of safety of their belongings as the doors of the luggage compartment are locked and opened only in presence of passengers. Passengers receive adequate information about bus schedules from agents. The passengers can also convert the booked ticket into an open ticket so that they have flexibility to travel with the same ticket on any further date. Interestingly, Bedmutha Travels also has a system of providing separate seats for lady passengers who travel single.

'Ambience and assurance' is the third significant factor. The respondents feel that the ambience in the booking office is good. Even, the booking agents were reported to be courteous to passengers. The personnel in the bus are courteous and cooperative. Restrooms were reported to be available in pickup offices as well.

'Empathy' is the fourth significant factor. Company does not charge any extra price from passengers during peak demand day such as festive seasons. Bedmutha Travels also makes alternative bus arrangement during breakdowns and emergencies and help the passengers to reach their destination safely. Passengers have the flexibility to be dropped near railway stations/bus stands so that the customers can reach their destinations easily. Buses also stop on request from passengers near to their residential areas without any hassles.

Conclusion

Bedmutha Travels is one of the prominent bus travels in Jalgaon. Service quality offered by the Bedmutha Travels is encouraging. It is to be seen that the Bedmutha Travels scores well for factors such as 'responsiveness', 'empathy', and 'reliability'. However, there is considerable scope for the company to improve in the area of 'ambience & assurance' and 'convenience'

Employees can be more polite while handling customer problems. Cooperation from the office staff as well the staff in the buses towards the customers can be very useful for the company. As far as 'convenience' concerned, apart from phone booking of tickets, Bedmutha Travels can introduce other facilities such as online ticket booking, free door delivery of tickets, increase pick-up and drop off points. Facilities such as onwards and return ticket booking, double drivers on board for safe and comfortable journey can also be provided and of

course insurance for passengers.

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