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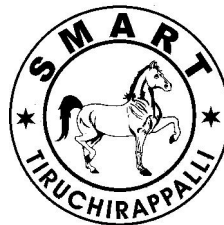
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CONSUMER IMAGE OF INDIAN RAILWAYS – AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The Indian Railways has been expanding its activities every day to provide safe and convenient traveling facilities to the people. Of late, the Indian Railways is facing criticisms at every corner regarding its functional aspects such as: accidents, derailing, cancellation of trains, theft and robbery, overcrowding and the like. On one hand, the Indian Railways is being appreciated by the people for its effective transportation system and on the other hand, it is criticised on various functional aspects. This study has been undertaken to record the perception of the passengers about the functioning of the Indian Railways and the quality of its track record.

Introduction

Indian Railways is the largest rail network in Asia and the world's second largest under one management. The Indian Railways (IR) is the state-owned railway company of India having complete monopoly over the country's rail transport. It is one of the largest and busiest rail networks in the world, transporting over five billion passengers and over 350 million tonnes of freight annually. The IR is also the world's largest commercial or utility employer, having more than 1.6 million regular employees on its payroll. The railways traverses through the length and breadth of the country covering a total length of 63,140 km (39,200 miles). The IR owns a total of 216,717 wagons, 39,236 coaches and 7,739 locomotives and runs a total of 14,444 trains daily, including about 8,702 passenger trains. As per the Union Budget 2005, the Indian Railways has earned Rs. 46,635 crores which is Rs. 1,838 crores, higher than the budget estimates. Freight earnings increased from Rs. 28,745 cr. in the previous year to Rs. 30,450 cr.

The Indian Railways has been functioning in the context of several constraints such as heavy capital investments, complicated organizational structure and the like. In spite of the constraints, the Indian Railways has been expanding its activities every day to provide safe and convenient traveling facilities to the people.

Of late, the Indian Railways is facing criticisms at every corner regarding its functional aspects such as: accidents, derailing, cancellation of trains, theft and robbery, overcrowding and the like. On one hand, the Indian Railways is being appreciated by the people for its effective transportation system and on the other hand, it is criticized on various functional aspects. Therefore to understand and highlight the feelings of the passengers about the functional aspects of the Indian Railways, this study has been undertaken.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study

- Ø To study the general image of the Indian Railways
- Ø To study the specific image of the Indian Railways relating to the services before travel, services during the travel and services after the travel.

Methodology

As it is an empirical study to highlight the feelings of the passengers of the Indian Railways about its image, it largely depends upon the primary data, apart from the basic information about the railways. As such, a survey was undertaken through an Interview Schedule with those who have travelled through express trains. The survey was conducted on

the floor of the Madurai Railway Station. 200 passengers were interviewed for ten days during May 2005.

Mode of Analysis

As stated earlier, the study focuses its attention on general and specific image of the Indian Railways. The general image of the Indian Railways can be studied by considering the following :

- i. Performance of the Indian Railways
- ii. Satisfaction of the consumers
- iii. Attitude towards the Indian Railways with respect to certain aspects
- iv. General attitude towards the Indian Railways
- v. General opinion about the services of the Indian Railways
- vi. General opinion about the constraints under which the Indian Railways operate

The general performance of the Indian Railways has been studied with the help of a simple five point ordinal scale which ranges from “very good” to “very bad” indicating the values from +2 to -2. The level of satisfaction has been measured with the help of the ordinal scale of thermometer type. The respondents were asked to indicate on the scale which ranges from 0% to 150% with 100% as expected level of service. Thus, their expectations have been compared with the level of services provided by the Indian Railways. To analyse the general attitude of the consumers towards the Indian Railways, 11 statements (Vide 1.1) have been identified and have been measured with the help of a simple seven point ordinal scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Partly Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Partly Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The values are assigned from +3 to -3. The total maximum score for each statement would range from +600 (200 respondents * 3) to -600 (200 respondents * -3). For measuring the image on various

general attributes such as safe, comfortable, modern etc., Semantic Differential Scale has been applied. Each scale consists of two opposing adjectives such as safe and dangerous, comfortable and uncomfortable and the like.

The specific image of the Indian Railways involves elements of services such as response to personal enquiry, booking services, water facilities, quality of food and the like. It has been measured on a five point scale ranging from Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor and Very Poor. The values are assigned from 5 to 1 where 5 referred to “Very Good”, 4 to “good”, 3 to “Fair”, 2 to “Poor” and 1 to “Very Poor”. The possible range of score for each statement by all the respondents would be from 200 to 1000. The respondents were required to mark their response for each statement. With the scores given by the respondents, an attempt was made to measure the consumer expectations for various functional aspects of the IR and consumer perceptions of what they actually received. In short, it is an analysis to compare the consumer expectations and consumer perceptions. The consumer expectation is calculated by averaging the values assigned to each scale. It comes to 3 $((5+4+3+2+1)/5)$. The actual mean (consumer perception) for each statement is arrived at by dividing the total score by 200 (ie the total number of respondents). For example: When a particular statement secures a total score of 648, it is divided by 200. The weighted average will come to 3.2 (648/200). If the actual mean (weighted average) is greater than the expected mean, it means that the service delivery is satisfactory and vice versa.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study in respect of general and specific image are summarized as follows:

- i) Regarding general performance of the Indian Railways, out of 200 respondents, 166 (83%) have expressed a positive

attitude, 34 (17%) remained neutral and none has recorded a negative attitude.

- ii) As regards the level of satisfaction, 160 (80%) have stated the level of satisfaction as 'Below 100%', while 40 (20%) have given the level as 'Above 100%'. As such, the Indian Railways offers more than what is expected of it by the passengers.
- iii) Considering the attitude of the respondents towards the Indian Railways, intensities of favourability and unfavourability and their respective ranks on the selected statements are given as follows:

The foregoing analysis is self explanatory. The first four statements have secured more than 50% of the positive feelings of the respondents. At the same time, negative statements such as too expensive and personal influence have been placed last in their ranking.

- iv) The following table shows the opinion of the respondents about the general image of the Indian Railways:

With regard to the factor 'Safety', out of 200 respondents, 194 (97%) have expressed positive feeling that it is safe to travel by train, while 192 (96%) have got positive opinion about comfortability of journey. 180 (90%) have stated that it is economical to travel. 156 (78%) are of the opinion that there is courteous service by the employees. 180 (90%) have expressed that the Indian Railways has been functioning efficiently. The above profile is presented in the form of a chart:

- v) The following table shows the attitude of the respondents towards the Indian Railways in the context of the constraints it functions:

It is to be noted that 200 respondents have expressed their positive feeling that the Indian Railways can do better though they function in the clutches of constraints and also they have sympathy towards the Indian Railways. 172

(86%) have stated that the Indian Railways is doing a good job.

- vi) The following discussion highlights the opinion of the respondents about the specific aspects of the Indian Railways:

It is noticed from the above table that no one has had very poor image for the factors considered except for cleanliness of carriage and availability of reading materials at the train. The services such as response to telephone enquiry, response to personal enquiry, water facility at the station, availability of reading materials at the platform, cleanliness of platform, quality of food and snacks, cleanliness of carriage and waiting room facility have secured an average mean of above 3.4 as against expected mean of 3.0. It reveals that the respondents are satisfied with the services. The services such as medical facility, availability of reading materials inside the train and quality of food & snacks at the platform have had a score below the expected level (2.7 to 2.9). These services demand the attention of the Railway authorities and the services should be provided according to the satisfaction of the passengers. Considering the overall weighted average in respect of all the services, it (3.4) is greater than the expected mean. It implies that the passengers get satisfactory services from the Indian Railways.

Conclusion

The image of any organization depends upon its personality, perceptions of the consumers and the quality of the products or services offered. As regards image, it is difficult to state in a single word as to whether the IR has positive image or negative image. It is understood from the evaluation of the consumers that there are certain aspects towards which the respondents have positive feelings and there are others towards which they have negative feelings. As a whole, the positive attitude is greater than the negative attitude. It

is stated that the negative aspects should be looked into by the Indian Railways.

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**Table - 1.1
General Opinion of the Respondents About the Indian Railways**

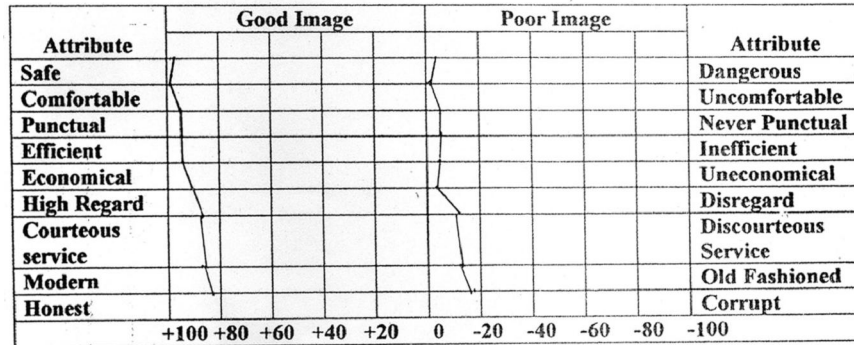
Statement	Intensity Value	Rank
Computerisation at the stations has led to better customer service	+ 471	1
It is convenient to travel by train when compared to other mode of transport	+ 442	2
I think the Indian Railways are doing a wonderful job	+ 338	3
The Indian Railways shows a great interest in its passengers	+ 310	4
The trains arrive in time	+ 263	5
The Indian Railways considers you as goods to be transported from one place to another rather than as passengers	+ 218	6
Travel by train is accident free now-a-days	+ 168	7
Everyone at Indian Railways is uncertain and vague, when information is sought	+ 165	8
When I travel by train, I feel like a VIP	+ 128	9
It is too expensive to travel by train	+ 127	10
Personal influence and contacts are necessary to have easy and comfortable journey	+ 110	11

**Table - 1.2
Opinion of the Respondents about General Image of the Indian Railways**

Attribute	Good Image			Neutral	Poor Image			I.V	Attribute
	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3		
Safe	54	81	59	0	6	0	0	+377	Dangerous
Comfortable	47	85	60	8	0	0	0	+371	Uncomfortable
Punctual	20	66	66	34	14	0	0	+244	Never Punctual
Efficient	43	86	51	0	20	0	0	+332	Inefficient
Economical	67	55	58	0	20	0	0	+349	Uneconomical
High Regard	6	106	54	8	20	0	6	+246	Disregard
Courteous service	34	95	27	6	33	5	0	+276	Discourteous service
Modern	0	80	54	40	20	6	0	+182	Old Fashioned
Honest	0	60	54	54	26	6	0	+136	Corrupt

Note : I - V refers to Intensity Value of the scores of the respondents

**Chart 1.1
Profile of Indian Railways**



**Table - 1.3
Opinion of the Respondents About Functioning of the Indian Railways in the Context of Constraints**

Statement	Intensity Value	Rank
In spite of the constraints, the IR can do much better	+ 372	1
I appreciate the limitations and fully sympathise with the IR	+ 306	2
In view of the constraints, the Indian Railways is doing a good job	+ 304	3
The constraints are of no relevance to the customers who should get good services	+ 230	4

**Table - 1.4
Opinion of the Respondents About the Specific Aspects of the Indian Railways**

Sl. No	Factor	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Expected mean	Actual mean
		5	4	3	2	1		
1	Computerised Enquiry Service	141	37	22	0	0	3.0	4.6
2	Response to Telephone Enquiry	15	59	114	12	0	3.0	3.4
3	Response to Personal Enquiry	6	160	34	0	0	3.0	3.9
4	Booking Services	133	41	20	6	0	3.0	4.5
5	Quality of announcement	53	115	26	6	0	3.0	4.0
6	Seating Arrangements at the platform	6	80	86	8	0	3.0	3.1
7	Water facilities at the station	14	74	80	32	0	3.0	3.4
8	Bathroom & toilet facilities at the station	7	54	85	54	0	3.0	3.1
9	Food & Snacks available at the platform	0	74	100	26	0	3.0	3.2
10	Quality of food & snacks at the platform	0	46	94	60	0	3.0	2.9
11	Availability of reading materials at the platform	19	75	94	12	0	3.0	3.5
12	Availability of reading materials inside the train	7	33	60	94	6	3.0	2.7
13	Cleanliness of platform	23	93	46	34	4	3.0	3.5
14	Quality of food and snacks inside the train	0	74	106	20	0	3.0	3.3
15	Medical facility	0	34	80	86	0	3.0	2.7
16	Cleanliness of carriage	15	65	86	34	0	3.0	3.3
17	Waiting room facility	24	82	66	28	0	3.0	3.5
	Overall						3.0	3.4