

Passengers Perception of Service Providers at Railway Platforms in India: A Comparative Analysis



Mohit Kumar Ojha, Himani Upreti, Rupa Khanna Malhotra, Oshin Parasar

Abstract: *The study is an attempt to measure satisfaction level of passengers for different platform-based amenities and service providers at railway platforms in India. The study is conducted at Allahabad Junction Railway Station, one of the busiest station in North Central Railway (NCR) Zone of Indian Railways. Study tried to compare the performance of service providers based on whether private vendor and railway operated ones. For the purpose a total of 23 amenities in five categories have been selected for the study. Diagnostic research adopting observation and survey method using questionnaire technique was used. Mean and standard deviation has been calculated to measure the level of performance of various service providers while gap analysis is used to compare their relative performance. Overall it is concluded that Book stalls, drinking water and other facilities like reservation display boards and so on provide maximum satisfaction, while, personal hygiene has least satisfaction level. Satisfaction level is high for services provided private operators as compared to those provided by Indian Railways.*

Key Words: *Platform-Based Amenities, Satisfaction Level, Indian Railway, Allahabad Junction, Gap Analysis*

I. INTRODUCTION

Service has attained huge importance in today's economy and is justified by the emergence of the term 'economy of services' (Urban, 2010). Service organizations have to understand the expectations of its customers and fulfill those expectations by providing quality services (Parasuraman, Zethaml and Berry, 1988). Satisfaction can be expressed as matching of customer's service expectation and actual service delivery. It can be referred to as the result of individual service transaction and complete service encounter (Johnston, 1995). As per Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 100, quality of service reflects the passenger's perception of transit performance; Givoni and Rietveld (2007) opine that quality of stations has a positive impact on the overall perception of passengers for rail journey. Indian Railways has a country wide network and is a major service provider of the country and to combat the onslaught from air and road transport, railway is mulling multiple innovations.

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In this regard, it is pertinent to measure the quality of service deliver at railway platforms of Indian Railways. In this direction, present study is an attempt to assess the level of service delivery and performance of different service providers at one of the busiest railway station in India, namely, Allahabad Junction in the North Central Railway (NCR) Zone of Indian Railways.

II. THEATRICAL BACKGROUND

Several studies have been done in national and international context covering various aspects of railways considering the generic dimensions of service quality like refreshment, security, ambiance, information provision, behavioural aspects, and so on; a few studies have also studied services at railway platforms.

TCRP Report 100 (2000) identifies eight categories to measure service quality namely availability of transit service, service monitoring, community, travel time, safety and security, maintenance and construction, economy and capacity. Doi et al. (2003) have studied Metro Rail Transit 3 (MRT3) stations of Metro Manila, Philippines to identify the cause of low ridership from the point of view of accessibility and intermodality. Geetika and Nandan (2010) identified 16 factors to measure passenger satisfaction. They found out that quality of refreshments and behavior of staff, were most important for customer satisfaction at railway platforms. A report by The Gallup Organization (2011) identified dimensions of ease of buying tickets, provision of information about train schedules/platform and personal security as major factors for satisfaction, and lack facilities for car parking, quality of facilities and services and cleanliness/good maintenance of station facilities were major dissatisfaction. Gupta and Datta (2012) have considered attributes of accessibility, extent of waiting, information availability, passenger amenities, security and travel related facilities. As shown by the results extent of waiting, security and travel related facilities are the attributes with which passengers were most dissatisfied.

Vishnuvarthani & Selvaraj (2012) in their study of Salem Division of Southern Railway, India concluded that majority of sample passengers were unaware or have low level of awareness about the services provided by railways and at the same time around 83.8 per cent of the sample passengers were dissatisfied with the services provided at the railway platforms. Result also shows that there is a positive correlation between the awareness factors and satisfaction factors.



Further, they concluded that individual expenditure, class of travel & mode of ticket reservation are positively associated with the level of awareness of passengers. Vishnuvarthani & Selvaraj (2013) assert that assessing the awareness level is of immense importance because until and unless passengers know about the utilities they will not use them. So, it is vital to inform the passengers about various amenities available at railway platforms. Hanna& Kaufmann (2014) have concluded in their study on High-Speed Rail (HSR) Stations in United States that location of station within the city, the size of the station, accessibility & intermodality and appearance & serviceability of stations are the major factors that has to be considered before construction of a railway station. Geetika et al. (2016) in a study of Allahabad Junction Railways station had concluded that station premises were lacking in terms of quality of services offered to passengers while they found that food and beverages and cleanliness were the factors significantly affecting passengers’ overall satisfaction. Further in a study on Kanpur Central Railway station, Ghosh et al. (2017) have reported that cleanliness and hygiene level was at its lowest and passengers were extremely dissatisfied with the quality of urinals, drinking water facility and quality of eatables offered at stations.

However, most of the studies relate to the services as such and not the service providers. This study aims to measure the satisfaction level of customers with respect to various services providers at Allahabad Jn. railway station. The present study considers individual service providers in the categories of food and beverages, book stalls, personal hygiene and water facilities, internet and telecommunication facilities, basic amenities for passengers. In all 23 different amenities have been included in the study and the satisfaction level is measured for each of these amenities. Study aims to measure satisfaction level of passengers for different amenities and service providers available at platforms of Allahabad Junction. Study also tried to assess the difference between satisfaction level of passengers for facilities provided by private vendors and those provided directly by railway. The study focuses on the specific service providers and satisfaction level for each of these service providers under respective categories is measured.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Observation method is applied to draw an exhaustive list of amenities. For the sake of simplification and comparison, 23 amenities had been divided under five broad categories. The questionnaire has been drafted in four parts on selected amenities on the basis of their accessibility to the passenger. The questions relate to biographical profile of passenger, awareness-usage status sought via dichotomous questions in the form of ‘Yes’ and ‘No’, satisfaction level of respondents for selected amenities by different service providers (5 – Point Likert type scale has been used, where 1 represent highly dissatisfied and 5 represent highly satisfied) and finally open ended questions were asked to seek suggestions from respondents to improve the platform and to make their transit stay at stations more comfortable and pleasurable.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The observation process shows that basic amenities like water points, foot over bridge, platform display, reservation display etc. are present on each platforms and are well functioning, but the more specific facilities like restaurants, ATMs, escalators medical facility, waiting hall, Sulabh Sauchalaya, enquiry counters etc. are concentrated on platform 1. It was also found that Platform Enquiry Machine was not functioning on any of the platforms except on platform 1 though it was available on every platform (Annexure 1).

The amenities selected have been classified on the basis of service provider i.e. private vendor and directly by railway and it can be seen that 13 services are being provided by private vendors. The facilities provided by private vendors comprise of food and beverages, book stalls, personal hygiene. Basis facilities like drinking water, platform display, enquiry counters, and so on are provided directly by railway.

V. SATISFACTION LEVEL OF PASSENGERS:

To analyze the satisfaction level of passengers, mean and standard deviation has been calculated for each individual amenity (on the basis of service provider) and composite mean value is also calculated for each of the five categories selected for the study. For calculating the mean value and SD, only affirmative responses are considered. Non-user responses have not been considered (Refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Satisfaction Level of Passengers

Amenities	Frequency		Mean Value	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing*		
Food and Beverages				
IRCTC Food Plaza	94	118	3.49	0.92
NCR (Vibhagiya Khan Paan Seva)	131	81	2.60	0.88
NCR Catering (Khan Paan Seva)	194	18	3.36	0.77
Jan Aahar (South Indian Food)	54	158	2.82	0.93
Indian Railway Khan Paan Seva	71	141	2.87	0.94



NCR Milk Stall	142	70	4.06	0.84
Book Stall				
A. H. Wheeler	105	107	4.13	0.78
Sarvodaya Sahitya	43	169	4.23	0.75
Shikshit Berozgar Mudran and Prakashan Sehkari Ltd.	8	204	2.75	0.7
Ram Krishan –Vivekanand Vedanta Sahitya	32	180	4.16	0.98
Personal Hygiene				
Urinal (Free)	194	18	1.5	0.82
Urinal (Pay and Use)	187	25	1.96	0.97
Sulabh Sauchalaya	154	58	2.49	0.99
Communication and Banking Facilities				
PCO/STD/ISD/Internet	49	163	3.04	0.76
ATMs	149	63	3.55	0.86
Drinking Water and Other Facilities				
Water Point	206	6	3.51	1.08
Waiting Hall (Seating Chairs)	199	13	3.75	0.76
May I Help You	102	110	3.07	0.89
Platform Display	195	17	4.28	0.744
Platform Enquiry Machine	117	95	2.03	1.23
Reservation Display Board	177	35	4.29	0.87
Escalator	163	49	2.87	0.89
Cloak Room	52	160	3.42	0.91
* *These respondents never used the particular services hence did not give their opinion on it				

As evident from Table 1, it is inferred that in **food and beverages** satisfaction level of passengers is highest for NCR Milk Stall with mean value of 4.06, which suggests that passengers are more than moderately satisfied with the service quality of Milk Stall. The lowest mean value is of NCR Vibhagiya Khan Paan Seva having mean value around 2.6. Maximum deviation is recorded for Indian Railway Khan Paan Seva while minimum deviation is for NCR Catering. Overall Satisfaction level of NCR catering is maximum as the standard deviation is minimum while maintaining a healthy satisfaction level of 3.35.

In the category of **book stall** Sarvodaya Sahitya has maximum satisfaction level with mean value of 4.23, which shows that passengers are very much satisfied with its services, while minimum satisfaction level is of SBMPSL with mean value is just 2.75. Maximum deviation is recorded in Ram Krishan-Vivekanand Vedanta Sahitya with std. deviation of 0.99 while lowest deviation is for SBMPSL which is mainly because very few respondents have rated their satisfaction level for SBMPSL. Overall, Sarvodaya Sahitya delivers maximum satisfaction to the passengers.

In case of **personal hygiene**, none of the item managed to attain a satisfaction level of 2.5. Highest mean value is of Sulabh Sauchalaya (2.49) and lowest is of Free Urinal (1.5). Deviation is also very high for each of the items; overall Sulabh Sauchalaya seems to provide maximum satisfaction to passengers, although usage level is very low.

Talking about **communication and banking facilities**, we can clearly identify that ATMs have maximum satisfaction level with mean value of 3.55 but its deviation is on a higher side. STD/PCO booth recorded low deviation as compared

to ATMs because only 49 respondents have rated their satisfaction level against it.

Finally, in case of **drinking water and other facilities**, Reservation Display Board has highest satisfaction level (4.29) followed by Platform Display (4.28). Deviation is maximum for Platform Enquiry Machine (1.23) followed by Water Point (1.08). Overall it can be said that in this category platform display provides maximum satisfaction for passengers as it has high mean value for satisfaction level and low standard deviation.

VI. GAP ANALYSIS

To conduct gap analysis, mean score of importance scale (for overall groups of amenities only) and satisfaction scale has been computed for each individual amenity (on the basis of service provider). While calculating mean score, non-user responses have not been considered. Overall the satisfaction level from all the utilities combined together as shown in Table 2 is 3.20 as against average level of importance placed at 4.39, thereby, registering a gap of 1.19 points. Considering individual amenities, urinal facility and platform enquiry machine have registered highest gap in terms of passengers' perception of importance of those amenities as against their respective satisfaction out of it. It shows that level of cleanliness and hygiene are sub-standard at Allahabad Junction Railways Station as gap in importance and satisfaction score for water point is also on a higher side registering 1.19 points.

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All service providers in food and beverage category except milk stall (0.47 points) have registered gap score above 1, while three of them, namely; NCR (Vibhagiya Khan Paan Seva),

Jan Aahar, and Indian Railways Khan Paan Seva have registered gap score above 1.5. Only one amenity, namely, Reservation Display Board has reported negative gap score of -0.02 and hence which shows highest satisfaction level of 4.29 out of 5 and hence out-perform the importance score.

Another utility that closely matched the performance standard is platform display registering mean satisfaction

score of 4.28S against importance score of 4.32 and hence having a gap of just 0.04 points.

Other amenities registering gap score of above one are, Shikshit Berozgar Mudran and Prakashan Sehkari Ltd., May I Help You (enquiry counters), Escalators and ATMs. Overall it can be said that performance of amenities under food and beverage categories and personal hygiene categories are below par which can be attributed to the fact that there prevail unhealthy environment and improper maintenance of these amenities.

Table 2: Gap Score for Individual Amenities

Sr. No.	Utilities	Mean Score (Importance Scale)	Mean Sore (Satisfaction Scale)	Gap Score
1	IRCTC Food Plaza	4.53	3.49	1.04
2	NCR (Vibhagiya Khan Paan Seva)	4.53	2.6	1.93
3	NCR Catering (Khan Paan Seva)	4.53	3.36	1.17
4	Jan Aahar	4.53	2.82	1.71
5	Indian Railway Khan Paan Seva	4.53	2.87	1.66
6	NCR Milk Stall	4.53	4.06	0.47
7	A. H. Wheeler	4.51	4.13	0.38
8	Sarvodaya Sahitya	4.51	4.23	0.28
9	Shikshit Berozgar Mudran & Prakashan Sehkari Ltd.	4.51	2.75	1.76
10	Ram Krishan-Vivekanand Vedanta Sahitya	4.51	4.16	0.35
11	Water Point	4.67	3.51	1.16
12	Urinal (Free)	4.07	1.5	2.57
13	Urinal (Pay & Use)	4.07	1.96	2.11
14	Sulabh Sauchalaya	4.07	2.49	1.58
15	Waiting Hall (Seating Chairs)	4.41	3.75	0.66
16	May I Help You	4.27	3.07	1.2
17	Platform Display	4.32	4.28	0.04
18	Platform Enquiry Machine	4.41	2.03	2.38
19	Reservation Display Board	4.27	4.29	-0.02
20	Escalator	4.69	2.87	1.82
21	Cloak Room	4.37	3.42	0.95
22	PCO/STD/ISD/Internet	3.39	3.04	0.35
23	ATMs	4.79	3.55	1.24
Overall Satisfaction Level		4.39	3.2	1.19

VII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

In this study, only food & beverages category has been qualified for drawing a comparison between private vendors and railway operators as on Allahabad Junction it is the only category where both Indian Railways as well as private players operate and hence compete with each other. There are six different service providers in food and beverage category at Allahabad junction, three each from private players and Indian Railways. Private operated ones are: IRCTC Food Plaza operated by Neelam Restaurant, NCR Catering (Khan Paan Seva) operated by private vendors selected by Indian Railways via tenders and NCR Milk Stalls operated by Parag and Amul. Service providers belonging to Indian Railways are: NCR Vibhagiya Khan Paan Seva operated by zonal railways, Jan Aahar and Indian

Railways Khan Paan Seva both operated directly by Indian Railways. Table 3 shows that passengers have placed high importance for this category of amenity as the mean importance level placed by passengers is 4.53.

Comparison has been made for different service providers as against importance placed by passengers. It is evident from Table 3 that none of the service provider has been able to meet the level of importance placed by passengers; performance of private vendors is still somewhat satisfactory as all three have been able to register mean satisfaction level in excess of 3 which signifies passengers are satisfied with the performance and service delivery of those vendors.

Outlets operated by Indian Railways have fallen behind as all three providers have mean satisfaction level less than 3 which clearly highlights abysmal performance of Indian Railways operated food stalls. Considering individually, passengers have rated NCR Milk Stall as best performing food and beverage outlet registering

mean satisfaction score of 4.06 which is very close to the importance level placed by passengers for food and beverages. Worst satisfaction level has been recorded for NCR Vibhagiya Khan Paan Seva hence we can infer that passengers are not satisfied with the performance and service delivery of food stalls operated by zonal railways.

Table 3: Performance Comparison of Amenities Provided by Indian Railways and Private vendors

Operated by	Utilities	Importance Level (Mean)	Satisfaction Level (Mean)
Indian Railways	Jan Aahar (South Indian Food)	4.53	2.82
	NCR (Vibhagiya Khan Paan Seva)		2.60
	Indian Railway Khan Paan Seva		2.87
Private Vendors	IRCTC Food Plaza		3.49
	NCR Catering (Khan Paan Seva)		3.36
	NCR Milk Stall		4.06

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude it can be said that the study throws important information regarding state of affairs at railway station as the study is conducted at a major junction of NCR Zone of Indian Railways. The findings show that people are willing to pay for services provided quality is assured. Quality of eatables has emerged as a major issue. Further, the biggest challenge before railway is to create hygienic environment as the findings reveal least satisfaction level for cleanliness. They also have to work to make people aware of the facilities available at railway stations by proper maintenance and positioning. Railway has to put its effort forward to change the scenario of railway platforms and make it more like metro rail platforms. The ray of hope is that a large number of passengers were by and large satisfied with large number of amenities. As the outcome of this study, it is recommended that cleanliness and hygiene of railway platforms need to be improved and it should be ensured that every aspect of railway platforms concourse area, water points, rail tracks, waiting lounges, seating area and washrooms should be clean and hygiene. Further it is recommended to provide ample security for passengers and their luggage and for that proper security mechanism has to be in place with the likes of metal detector, scanning machine, restricted entry and so on. There should be proper arrangement of seating for passengers so that they can relax and spend their stay with more comfort and ease. For that, there must be provision of retiring rooms, waiting rooms and proper seating facility on every platform. Further to look after the needs of 'divyang' and old aged people, Upward and downward Escalators should be provided on every platform to facilitate platform inter-change. There should be provision of proper medical facility including dispensary, medical store and ambulance and railway authorities should ensure proper its functioning. Additionally, it is recommended that enquiry counter, television display for train running status, and so on should be available on every platform, while entertainment facility like TV and indoor games and recreation facility should be provided so that passengers can enjoy while waiting for their trains at platforms.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION, RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

The study may prove to be of immense use for administration and policy makers as it considers specific services for measuring service quality and performance of service providers. The results of the study provide a clear framework for improving service delivery at railway stations. The study identified various dimensions which provide high satisfaction level to passengers and railway can use those dimensions for improving their future plan of actions. The major limitation of the study is sample size as it is conducted at one station. A bigger picture could emerge if it was conducted on number of stations. However, this limitation also presents an opportunity for further research.

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Annexure 1

Summary Table of Existing Amenities on Allahabad Junction. Railway Station*				
Amenities	Platform/ Entrance	Numbers (per platform)	Free/ Pay & Use	Current Status**
Waiting Facilities				
Waiting Hall (Seating Chairs)	PF 1	2	Free	Available (Working)
Food & Beverages				
IRCTC Food Plaza	PF 1	2	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3, 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8 and 9 & 10	0	N/A	Not Available
NCR (Vibhagiya Khan Pan Seva)	PF 1	2	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3	0	N/A	Not Available
	PF 4,5&6 and 9&10	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 7&8	2	Pay	Available (Working)
NCR Catering (Khan Pan Seva)	PF 1	0	N/A	Not Available
	PF 2&3	5	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 4,5&6, 7&8 and 9&10	3	Pay	Available (Working)
Jan Aahar (South Indian Food)	PF 1	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3, 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8 and 9 & 10	0	N/A	Not Available
Indian Railway Khan Pan Seva	PF 1	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3, 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8 and 9 & 10	0	N/A	Not Available
NCR Milk Stall	PF 1	1 (Parag)	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3 and 4,5&6	0	N/A	Not Available
	PF 7&8 and 9&10	1 (Amul)	Pay	Available (Working)
Book Stalls				
A. H. Wheeler Pvt Ltd.	PF 1	2	Pay	Available (1 Closed & 1 Working)
	PF 2&3	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 4,5&6	3	Pay	Available (2 Closed & 1 Working)
	PF 7,8	0	NA	Not Available
	PF 9,10	2	Pay	Available (Working)
Sarvodaya Sahityra	PF 1, 4,5&6 and 9&10	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3	1	Pay	Available (Closed)
	PF 7,8	0	NA	Not Available

Shikshit Berozgar Mudran & Prakashan Sehkari Ltd.	PF 1, 2&3, 4,5&6 and 9&10	0	NA	Not Available
	PF 7,8	2	Pay	Available (Closed)
Ram Krishn-VivekaN/And Vedanta Sahitya	PF 1	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3, 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8 and 9 & 10	0	N/A	Not Available
Personal Hygiene				
Urinal (Free)	Entrance (City Side), PF 2&3, 4,5&6, 7&8, 9&10 and Entrance (Civil lines side)	1	Free	Available (Working)
	PF 1	0	N/A	Not Available
Urinal (Pay & Use)	Entrance (City Side), PF 2&3 and 9&10	0	N/A	Not Available
	PF 1, 4,5&6 and 7&8	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	Entrance (Civil Lines Side)	1	Pay	Available (Working)
Sulabh Sauchalaya	Entrance (City Side)	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 1, 2&3, 4,5&6, 7&8, 9&10 and Entrance (Civil lines side)	0	N/A	Not Available
Medical Facility				
First aid Room	PF 1 and 4,5&6	1	Pay	Available (Closed)
	PF 2,3 and 9&10	0	NA	Not Available
	PF 7,8	1	Pay	Available (Working)
Drinking Water				
Water Point	PF 1	9	Free	All Available (Working)
	PF 2&3	10		All Available (Working)
	PF 4,5 & 6	14		Available (1 Not Working)
	PF 7&8	18		All Available (Working)
	PF 9&10	11		Available (2 Not Working)
Communication				
PCO/STD/ISD (Internet/Fax)	PF 1	1	Pay	Available (Working)
	PF 2,3 and 9&10	0	N/A	Not Available
	PF 4,5&6	1	Pay	Available (Not working)
	PF 7&8	1	Pay	Available (Closed)
ATM's				
ATMs	Entrance (City Side)	4	Free	Available (Working)
	PF 1 and Entrance (Civil lines side)	1	Free	Available (Working)
	PF 2,3, 4,5&6, 7&8 and 9&10	0	N/A	Not Available
Services				
May I Help You (Enquiry)	PF 1	2	Free	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3, 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8 and 9 & 10	0	N/A	Not Available
PF Display	All Platforms	-	Free	Available (Working)

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PF Enquiry Machine	All Platforms	-	Free	Available (Not Working Except PF 1)
Reservation Display Board	All Platforms	-	Free	Available (Working)
Escalator	PF 1 and Entrance (Civil lines side)	1	Free	Available (Working)
	PF 2&3, 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8 and 9 & 10	0	N/A	Not Available
Ramp Bridge	PF 1, 2&3, 4,5&6	1	Free	Available (Working)
	PF 7,8 and 9&10	0	NA	Not Available
Lighting	All Platforms including both entrance	-	Free	Available (Working-Except on PF 4,5&6 Near Pay & Use Urinal and Extreme Corners of All Platforms)

Note:

* The observation of railway station has been done on different days and at different time of a day for a week.

** Categorization under "Available" is as follows:

Working: The facility is properly functional and was open at the time of observation.

Closed: The facility is properly functional but was closed at the time of observation.

Not Working: The facility is not functional at all.