Abstract

Service organizations are continually confronting challenges to remain competitive and successful, which compels them to regularly reevaluate their strategies to improve services. Customer satisfaction, from the service quality perspective, has emerged as a new modus operandi for assessing customers’ perceptions and/or expectations of services in order to reorient and regulate existing services. Services are becoming increasingly ubiquitous and this growth is accompanied by increased business interest in measuring and managing service quality. This interest is also reflected in a large number of academic studies. Despite this there is very little consensus about the dimensions and antecedents of Railway Passenger Service Quality (RPSQ). There are two possible reasons for this: first the phenomenon of railway passenger service quality is changing as affordability is increasing among customers. Second, the theoretical approach and the assumptions on which the public transport service quality is usually founded, is flawed in the Indian context.

The research issues are: 1) What is the structure of Railway Passenger Service Quality? 2) What are the antecedents of the Railway Passenger Service Quality? 3) What are the most appropriate modelling and measurement methods for measuring Railway Passenger Service Quality quantitatively? 4) What is the relationship between Railway Passenger Service Quality and passenger satisfaction and behaviour loyalty of passengers?

It was found that leading models and instruments tend to be based on exploratory factor analysis and have not been informed by advances in measurement theory, particularly covariance-based structural equation models. The diverse nature of requirements of stakeholders makes it extremely difficult to decide upon what constitutes quality in Railway passenger services. Hence, identification of common minimum quality items suitable for all passengers will help design the system and thereby improve passenger satisfaction. To address this issue, recent advances in measurement theory to dataset were applied and compared two different modelling methods namely exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. Based on psychometric scale development approaches, this research conceptualized, constructed, refined, and tested a multi-item scale ‘RAILQUAL’, that examined key factors influencing railway passenger service quality. Through qualitative and quantitative studies in three phases a 18 item six dimensions ‘RAILQUAL’ model was developed, which is a measuring instrument for service quality and passenger satisfaction in Indian Railways. The resultant dimensions showed good psychometric properties based on findings from various reliability and validity tests as well. Nine hypotheses were proposed in the thesis and examined using structural equation modelling. Although one hypothesis was rejected the resultant structural model showed strong relationships between the dimensions included.

The research identified that service quality is a strong contributor to behaviour loyalty. The strong pathway from service quality to behaviour loyalty was through passenger satisfaction. Both passenger satisfaction and service quality had significant effect on profitability. The research provides an empirical evaluation of relationship between identified attributes towards dimensions of service quality and also the importance of each dimension towards the overall service quality of passenger services in Indian Railways. A number of recommendations for further research were made. These included the replication of this study in all the zones of Indian Railways so that the instrument ‘RAILQUAL’ can be standardized across Indian Railway.