

They play an incredible role in improving the public transport system in Kerala: A study based on the satisfaction level of KSRTC passengers

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Abstract

As a State run transport company KSRTC is running at loss now-a-days. But it is moving forward by providing many innovative services to the general public. Cut throat competition from private transport companies, KSRTC is striving hard to make profit. Passengers are the brand ambassadors of the transport company. The satisfaction of the passengers in the present services and facilities provided by KSRTC help the corporation to improve the present dilemma. The present study is to find out the satisfaction of passengers in the services provided by KSRTC and put forward suggestions for improvement.

Keywords: Public transport system, Benefits, Passengers, Satisfaction

Introduction

The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation began its journey as the Travancore State Transport Department constituted by the Travancore King H. H. Sree Padmanabhadasa Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma, with the intent of reorganizing the transportation service of the state in 1937. The Travancore Transport Department grew with nationalization of key interstate routes such as Thiruvananthapuram to Kanyakumari and Palakkad to Coimbatore. The first fleet consisted of 60 comet chassis fitted with Perkins diesel engines, imported from England. The bodies of the buses were built by the staff of the TSTD under the supervision of the Superintendent. Thus the Transport Department began with a staff of about a hundred graduates appointed as inspectors and conductors.

Now the corporation has 1 chief office, 28 depots, 45 sub depots, 19 operating centers, 28 station masters officers, 5 workshops and 3 staff training centers. The corporation has 6383 schedules and 6241 buses including 190 JNNURAM A/C, 412 Jnnuram non A/c 13 Garuda (VOLVO), 50 Super deluxe, 51 super express, 375 Super-Fast, 1136 Fast Passenger, 3791 Ordinary, 3 mini, 1 vestibule, 2 Double Decker, 208 City Fast and 9 City buses. The corporation launched the new online Reservation portal in 2014. As per records in 2015, the average earnings per km (EPKM) works out to round about Rs 34.89 and the average earnings per bus (EPB) works out to Rs 11518.

Research problem

Millions of people in Kerala are part of the public transport system. KSRTC has been serving the general public of Kerala for more than seven decades. Passengers are the backbone of any transport system. From their opinion it is easily to trace out the problems and benefits of a public transport system. The study of passengers' satisfaction will help the KSRTC to rectify the errors in the present system followed by them. This will make more people to prefer KSRTC. In such a situation, following problems need solution:- What are the benefits provided by the corporation? Whether they are satisfied or not in the services? Whether

passengers prefer KSRTC than private transport system or not?

Objectives of the study

- The primary objective of the study is to analyse the satisfaction of passengers on the services provided by KSRTC.
- To explore whether the benefits provided by KSRTC reach the passengers.

Hypothesis of the study

H0: there is no relationship between the fare and satisfaction of passengers

Significance of the study

Mobility of the people are essential for economic development. Kerala State Transport Corporation is created with the objective to ensure an effective and efficient transport system thereby supporting the social and economic development of the country. Though serving millions of people in Kerala, the corporation fails to generate adequate financial resources. Therefore there is a need to understand the key areas of weaknesses and improve the efficiency. This can be possible through this study.

Research methodology

This study is descriptive in nature used both primary and secondary data. The passengers have been interviewed to get necessary information. Purposive sampling method is used to choose the passengers. 160 passengers are selected by using the formula. Major depot and sub depots in Kozhikode districts have been visited to understand the actual working environment. The secondary data included in the study includes published information from magazines, other journals, newspapers and websites. Various mathematical and statistical tools are used for data analysis.

Review of literature

Edvardson (1998) pointed out in his study that customers’ satisfaction depends on the usage of the information that the business can dig out from its customers.

Disney (1998) described that the friendliness of the personnel especially bus driver behavior in relation to service frequency has an impact on customers’ satisfaction.

Andreassen (1999) claimed that customers’ satisfaction in public transportation depends upon three things: ticket price, price level, finally, the layout of the platform or the station, especially for buses.

Cavana, Corbet. (2007) explained that reliability and convenience are those factors which are considered to be important in customers’ satisfaction. Specifically, these increase customer satisfaction.

Beira, Cabral (2007) pointed out that reliability, travel time and comfort are considered to have a great impact on customer satisfaction in relation with the type of the trip. For instance, those who utilize buses for professional reasons consider time as the most important dimension and particularly in buses. An interesting result is that the price of the ticket does not affect customer satisfaction directly.

Anderson *et al.* (2007) describes that which affects customers’ satisfaction is the operation failures of the services. An operation failure, such as a possible delay of a transportation means, creates bias to customers, resulting to unsatisfied customers. Also, they pointed out that, customers have the trend to blame the service provider for everything that happens; even of the service failure is affected by external or internal factors.

Bielen and Demoulin (2007) explained that customer satisfaction is being determined by dimension waiting time, in which three determinants are included, perceived waiting time, satisfaction which is related with information in occasion of delays and finally with satisfaction which is related with the waiting environment. As long as the above three determinants function well, customers will stay satisfied. Also, waiting time is considered to be crucial as it plays an intermediate role between satisfaction and loyalty link.

Dziekhan and Kottenhoff (2007) described that at-stop, real time information displays affect customer satisfaction by influencing several dimensions. Specifically, perceived waiting time is being reduced as customers with real time information overrate their waiting time 9-13 and compared to 24-30 and without taking account of real time information.

Furthermore, it has positive psychological affect and particularly, it decreases uncertainty and stress as customers know the actual department time, it increases the feeling of security of customers especially at night and it finally increases the easiness of use as customers want to economize efforts when they make a trip.

Thompson, Schofield (2007) pointed out customer satisfaction with destination. In particular, ease of use of public transportation is the most significant factor which affects directly customers’ satisfaction in relation to the destination. Time and safety are not considered as being crucial for customer satisfaction in the relation to the destination.

Gopal, Cline (2007) explained that the importance of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) in public transportation as they consider emotions to be the key factor for customers buying decisions and CRM is a tool which can help management to evaluate actions and behavior about its customers, and also provide better services, if management faces as the core of CRM tool, the key element which increases satisfaction and that is emotions. On the other hand, it is mentioned that transportation companies are fail to face CRM as a tool for serving better their customers as they affront CRM as a means of gathering data and information.

Data analysis and Interpretation

The following are the benefits or services provided by the KSRTC to its passengers:-

- Wifi services
- On line reservation
- Variety of buses
- Additional bus services during festival seasons
- Concessional rates to those who deserve
- Rural area services
- Outside Kerala services
- Short and long distance buses
- Other services and facilities like waiting rooms, pick and drop services etc.

The following Table No.1 shows that the results from analyzing the primary data on the variables. Three point scale is used for analyzing the passenger’s opinion about the services provided by the corporation.

Table 1: Satisfaction level of KSRTC passengers

Variables	No. of respondents			Percentage of respondents		
	Satisfied	No opinion	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	No opinion	Dissatisfied
Bus fare	105	33	12	70	22	8
Travel comfort	75	25	50	50	16.67	33.33
Concessional rates	95	18	37	63	12	25
Additional bus services during festival seasons	51	60	39	34	40	26
Timeliness	114	15	21	76	10	14
Number of services in rural areas	129	15	6	86	10	4
Services outside Kerala	45	30	75	30	20	50
Employees behaviour towards passengers	130	15	5	86.67	10	3.33
Other facilities and services	68	15	67	45.33	10	44.67

Source: Primary data

Results of Hypothesis

$R=0.13$, which means there is a very minimum correlation between these two variables. Thus it is clear that bus fare and satisfaction of the passengers are not directly related.

Major findings of the study

The following are the findings of the present study:-

1. Rural people enjoy the benefits by the services provided by KSRTC.
2. It is necessary to improve services in the rural areas.
3. A lot of improvements are required in the services to outside Kerala.
4. There is a favourable change in the behavior of the employees towards the passengers.
5. Passengers expect further improvements in the present facilities and services.

Suggestions

- Improve the services to outside Kerala
- Include more facilities to improve travel comfort in long distance trips
- More innovative services like online reservation, spot the bus, wifi etc.
- Improve quality of the bus by providing right maintenance.

Conclusion

Passengers are backbone of any transport industry. Without their support no single transport industry can survive. A satisfied passenger is the brand ambassador of the transport company. KSRTC is still running on losses. The Government expects to make good of these losses by a revival package that is put forward by the transport department.

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