

## CONCEPTUALIZING TOURIST JOURNEY: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TOURIST EXPERIENCES ON IRCTC

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### ABSTRACT

The study examined tourist experiences on IRCTC by conducting qualitative content analysis of 100 online reviews which were divided into Pre-Trip, Entrance, Payment, and Post-Visit stages. The study showed both positive aspects of digital accessibility and affordability alongside negative aspects regarding ticket availability and station infrastructure alongside payment reliability and service consistency. The analysis identified essential improvement zones for digital performance alongside better customer assistance and standardized services which would strengthen overall passenger satisfaction.

The study examined IRCTC as well as Tourist Journey and Railway Tourism through Online Booking and Qualitative Research to evaluate Customer Experience and Service Quality and Ticket Availability and Qualitative Tourism Research with Digital Payments and Travel Satisfaction and Tourism Experience in Indian Tourism. The research stated that how IRCTC excels at digital accessibility and affordable service but points out ticket availability issues along with station infrastructure problems and payment reliability concerns and service consistency problems. The satisfaction of passengers can be improved by implementing digital improvements and enhanced customer support with standardized services to address current gaps. Future investigations must combine quantitative research methods with international railway tourism frameworks to establish strategic service development plans.

**Keywords:** *Tourist journey, IRCTC, railway tourism, qualitative analysis, customer experience, digital payments, service quality, online booking, passenger satisfaction, Indian Railways.*

### INTRODUCTION

Indian Railways operates its subsidiary organization Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) to manage online ticketing and catering and tourism services throughout India. The massive transportation network of Indian Railways requires IRCTC to serve as a vital digital interface which provides smooth travel solutions to its millions of daily passengers. IRCTC delivers essential services that include online bookings as well as e-catering options and tourism packages while managing luxury train operations to guide the entire tourist experience for both domestic and international visitors. IRCTC users encounter diverse travel experiences across its wide network because their experiences depend on how easily they book trips and obtain tickets and the conditions of train stations and onboard amenities and how they feel after their journeys (Banerjee, 2010).

The tourist journey through IRCTC requires examination of various points of interaction which determine customer satisfaction levels. The IRCTC service path consists of four stages that tourists encounter: pre-trip ticket booking together with availability and customer expectations; entrance phase regarding station facilities and check-in processes and service accessibility; payment stage about online transactions and refund policies and value for money; and post-visit overall satisfaction and future travel intent and recommendation evaluation.

A qualitative research analysis investigates the tourist experience on IRCTC through a review-based examination of online customer feedback. The research groups customer feedback according to essential themes to discover important satisfaction factors that will guide service enhancement strategies. The research establishes an improvement method for Indian railway tourism services which maximizes efficiency along with comfort features and enhances customer interaction (Mukherjee and Sachdev, 2004).

Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) experiences transformed customer interactions because of growing railway service digitalization throughout India. Research on railway service delivery and customer satisfaction together with public-private partnerships (PPP) effectiveness to enhance service quality exists in multiple studies. Banerjee



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(2010) investigated railway tourism public-private partnerships through research which revealed implementation inefficiency and poor services and lacklustre customer satisfaction as major hurdles.

Baksi and Parida (2008) conducted research about how perceived automated service quality affects customer satisfaction in online travel services. Bansal et al. (2008) studied e-ticketing adoption in India and discovered essential differences between male and female usage behaviour. Security issues together with system usability and system reliability proved essential factors which influenced customer preferences for IRCTC's e-ticketing system. The research by Kumar (2007) explored how PPP functions within Indian Railways by outlining the advantages that arise from public-private partnerships between government entities and private organizations. Mukherjee and Sachdeva (2004) conducted research on land transport service trade while offering an international view of railway deregulation. The research showed that railway systems which operate without regulation like the European Union produce better operational results and service quality. Pandey (2008) applied his research to develop a quality assurance model which revealed inconsistent and unreliable services at IRCTC.

## **AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **AIM**

This study aims to analyse tourist experiences on IRCTC, identifying key factors affecting satisfaction and areas for improvement across different journey stages.

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To examine the pre-trip booking and travel experience on IRCTC, including ticketing, station facilities, and onboard services.
2. To provide recommendations for enhancing IRCTC's services based on identified tourist experiences and challenges.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How do travellers perceive the pre-trip booking and travel experience on IRCTC, including ticketing, station facilities, and onboard services?
2. What recommendations can be made to enhance IRCTC's services based on identified tourist experiences and challenges?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research adopts a secondary qualitative method that examines IRCTC tourist experiences through online reviews as secondary interview data. The approach of this research mirrors the TripAdvisor study because it conducts content analysis to extract useful information from public user-generated feedback.

A web-crawling script gathers 200 recent reviews from IRCTC online platforms and travel forums as the initial stage of the process. Review screening identifies 100 user feedback reports which provide complete user experience coverage for analysis.

The research selection focuses on 100 participants through the review of 100 entries found on IRCTC's official website and travel forums and customer review sites. The research scope includes India because IRCTC serves passengers throughout the nation who use railway transportation for tourism purposes and business requirements and general travel purposes. The research design covers all areas of India while including evaluations from luxury trains and express trains and sleeper cars and AC and premium coaches. The analysis of user reviews from a wide geographical range of customers enables the study to obtain a complete understanding of railway network experiences throughout India. Qualitative content analysis segments user reviews into four stages of the tourist journey beginning with Pre-Trip booking experience and expectations followed by Entrance station facilities and boarding process and Payment transaction ease and value assessment and Post-Visit customer satisfaction and future travel intentions. The analysis of themes will reveal shared traveler issues as well as service strengths and weaknesses to create a systematic understanding of IRCTC customer perspectives.

The usage of secondary interviews is valid because this approach delivers genuine and natural user feedback free from interviewer effects while obtaining extensive participant insights. Online reviews deliver genuine opinions without interviewer influence which makes them a great source for qualitative research work. IRCTC users who booked train tickets

or tourism packages represent the target participants from India. Data acquisition for public reviews happens without needing any direct recruitment because the information exists in publicly accessible review materials.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The examination of 100 reviews from IRCTC website shows how users experience the tourist journey through four distinct phases: Pre-Trip, Entrance, Payment, and Post-Visit.

Users find the IRCTC online booking system satisfactory during the Pre-Trip stage because they can easily access it and use various payment methods through the mobile application. Technical difficulties continue to affect customer experience because users frequently report site failures together with sluggish performance and inadequate support systems. The challenge of obtaining available tickets continues to be a significant problem particularly during Tatkal bookings and busy routes because numerous users experience problems securing confirmed reservations and end up feeling frustrated. Several travelers have encountered problems with incorrect seat selection and booking problems which negatively influenced their travel experience.

Users face multiple issues within the Entrance stage which consists of station experiences because they encounter long queues at ticket counters and ineffective verification processes and insufficient station facilities. The majority of rail travelers have voiced concerns about unclean facilities and deteriorated washrooms together with insufficient seating options in waiting areas and excessive passenger density at stations. Security measures receive conflicting responses as some passengers value the presence of CCTV cameras and security staff yet others face problems with inadequate crowd control and theft occurrences.

Passengers express different opinions about their payment success rates combined with processing methods and refund procedures during the Payment stage. Users experience frustration because digital payments are generally accepted but they face delayed refunds along with transaction failures and unclear refund policies from IRCTC. Several travelers expect higher ticket prices to guarantee enhanced service quality by offering better seating comfort and improved dining options and onboard assistance.

Users continue to use IRCTC during their repeat travels because the platform provides affordable rates and extensive railway routes and lacks alternative options. The negative feedback from customers centers around slow support from customer service representatives and unclean onboard environments as well as unreliable food quality. The ongoing complaints of economy-class passengers continue to include unacceptable overcrowding conditions and malfunctioning air conditioning units along with insufficient access to drinking water.

The research indicates that IRCTC excels through its convenient services and digital accessibility together with its cost-effective solutions for Indian railways. Digital platform stability and station infrastructure and transaction efficiency together with service consistency across all travel el

## **DISCUSSION**

The study reveals positive aspects together with service weaknesses of IRCTC compared to worldwide railway tourism practices. The main benefits of digital accessibility and affordable pricing exist alongside major issues related to website performance and station facilities alongside service consistency problems. The booking system stability and customer service responsiveness and infrastructure quality at IRCTC lag behind EuroRail and Japan's Shinkansen system which provide highly optimized digital ticketing and passenger experience.

The service quality provided to different travel classes shows an obvious lack of consistency. Travelers who use Vande Bharat or Rajdhani Express services express better satisfaction while those in lower-class compartments encounter mixed hygiene standards along with cramped conditions and inadequate maintenance. The service quality in railway networks of developed nations remains uniform throughout all classes which produces a consistent experience for passengers across different ticket types.

The major shortcoming exists in the management and infrastructure of railway stations. Passengers complain about extended waiting times and security problems and insufficient waiting facilities at railway stations that do not serve metro areas. The extensive Indian railway network experiences inconsistent traveler experiences because of absent uniform facility management practices and outdated station infrastructure.

Thirdly the refund policies and digital transactions processes require further improvement. IRCTC has enhanced online payment methods but travel tensions rise from delayed refunds and payment system breakdowns which diminishes user confidence in the platform. IRCTC can achieve global railway tourism standards by improving its IT infrastructure and delivering consistent services and better customer engagement methods.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research investigated IRCTC tourism experiences through an analysis of 100 online reviews which covered four travel steps from Pre-Trip to Entrance and Payment to Post-Visit. The study confirms that IRCTC excels in providing accessible and affordable services yet its customers encounter issues with ticket distribution and website reliability along with poor station conditions and inconsistent service quality. Rajdhani Express and Vande Bharat yield favorable feedback but lower-class coach passengers encounter irregular service quality and hygiene concerns and insufficient support. The user experience decreases significantly because of payment issues and slow refund processes as well as station management problems.

The user experience at IRCTC will improve when the digital platform receives optimized updates to minimize system failures and enhance speed performance while simplifying ticketing for Tatkal services. The implementation of AI-powered chatbots combined with real-time customer support measures will help address user concerns effectively. The improvement of station infrastructure together with the maintenance of clean waiting areas while standardizing service quality in all travel classes represents vital requirements. Digital payment security needs improvement alongside the implementation of automated refund systems to boost transaction reliability.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research adds value to railway tourism scholarship by using a systematic methodology to study digital service delivery in India's railway system. The feedback categorization system covers essential journey stages which generates a complete user understanding of IRCTC while expanding research about digital platforms in tourism. Research findings confirm earlier works about e-ticketing service quality gaps along with station infrastructure but they present fresh insights about service disparities between economy and premium train classes.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research offers specific recommendations that IRCTC together with policymakers should use to enhance railway tourism services throughout India. A better travel experience can be achieved through improved digital infrastructure combined with enhanced customer support systems and standardized onboard services. By incorporating advanced payment systems together with real-time support platforms customer trust levels and engagement rates will improve. The guidelines from this study match international industry standards which provide IRCTC with strategic methods to boost efficiency while guaranteeing reliable service delivery and better customer satisfaction.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The research analysis depends on online reviews yet these assessments tend to present highly favourable or unfavourable opinions instead of representing a fair assessment. The research methodology examines qualitative data while omitting quantitative user data as part of its approach. Future investigations should use a combination of surveys and interviews as research methods to confirm the study's results. Research should expand to evaluate IRCTC services against international railway operators to find effective service enhancement methods.

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