

Why Pakistan Railways Has Failed To Perform: A Special Focus On Passenger Perspective

Abstract

It is the definite truth that an extensive railway infrastructure exists in Pakistan but it is not in working condition and with every passing day, situation is deteriorating. This paper primarily endeavors to present an option perspective on what is normally considered good and done with Pakistan Railways. This study was conducted in four railway stations of the provincial capitals of Pakistan i.e., Karachi, Lahore, Quetta and Peshawar. The field based, exploratory type of study uses quantitative method of research and weighted from data collection. The study emphasized exposed a lack of training on part of the Railway personnel and recommended that appropriate steps be taken to ameliorate said deficiency.

KEY WORDS: Railways, Mass Transportation, Pakistan, Socio-economic development, Perception, IMF, WB

Introduction

In terms of interpretation, Public Transportation is a term that refers to a mode of transportation service that the general public may utilize so as to move from one place to another against a certain fee. Other names for the public transportation are mass transportation as well as mass transit because it is usually used by a score of people for travelling to various locales and regions. There are actually two main types of public transport system despite there being an overwhelmingly large number of entries in said category.

The Government and appropriate authorities are responsible for operating the common forms of transport and the latter is available for access by all members of the community provided that they are willing to pay the requisite sum for transition in location. Buses, street cars, subways, trains and so forth are

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included in the common carrier system. The public transport system covers the whole city area and affords people the chance to travel to any location by employing its many modes for transportation.

On the other hand, there are contract carriers that are managed by private owners and are loaned to customers for passage to a particular location. These include rental cars, taxis as well as hired buses. The one advantage that contract carriers possess over the more traditional public transport system is there greater scope in accessibility, meaning that these carriers can go where other public iterations of transportation are unable to access.

1.1: Importance of Transportation

Modes of transportation are one of the most integral and irrefutable of components that a society entails. They are rapid and essential conduits for transition and mobilization within various localities and areas for the denizens. In short, these means of transportation are an intimate portion of any society. They exhibit a proximate nexus with life style, location and range of activities as well as the goods that are available for consumption. Due to stellar progressions in the field for transportation, it has become possible for the society to buoy itself on a supplementing scale and has brought about changes in the manners in which societies are organized.

Transportation plays numerous vital and undeniable roles within a society. Firstly, it plays an Economic role. Economics, as we are aware, involves the production, diffusion and consecutive consumption of different services and goods. Transportation resources are necessary for the movement and transition of these goods and services from one point to another within a society. This movement evinces both corporeal and incorporeal aspect. For instance, in addition to displacement of medicines, transports also allow for movement of skills and knowledge as well through movement of doctors and technicians from one geographical location to another.

From a Social perspective, Transportation acts as the leading and foremost of indicative heralds that define and denote the identity of an urban settlement. Sure other factors like water, food and other facilities play critical roles as well, but it is the sources of transportation that are readily and profoundly reminiscent of the pattern, size and formation of urban centers. For instance, rural areas are dictated and determined by the modes of transportation that they contain. While an urban settlement is recognized as being so by the excellent and effectual conduits of transportation that is present within its context.

From a Political point of view, Transportation is necessary to transmission of characteristics of equivocal protection, improvement of common culture and benefits of an economic nature that numerous political units in a society contain and are liable for. For example, military movement inside a country or society is met with fruition through any specific transportation method. Also natural material for construction of important structures such as roads, buildings and so on is also completed so by transportation means.

When we talk about Rail transport, we are basically refereeing to a means of transport that is dependent upon rail tracks. Rail transport comprises of wheeled vehicles that run on rail tracks and conversationally speaking, rail transport is usually called train transport. Contrary to generic or regular vehicles that run on roads and set paths, rail transport runs on rail tracks and is guided in their direction as well. Usually, a railway track constitutes steel rails, fitted on ties or sleepers if you will, and ballast. The rolling stock is mostly fitted onto it and is held in place by metal wheels. It is these wheels that move and provide the whole system with its characteristic speed and movement. This mode of transport is widely used to transfer commodities, goods and passengers to various locations and destinations.

Railway transport is extremely resilient and is able to endure great degrees of cargo as well as passengers usage on a daily basis. It is efficient and economical from an energy usage based perspective as well. It is also the cheaper and more frugal option for those who can't afford the more expensive and costly means of transportation, like air travel for instance.

The oldest and most archaic instance of Railway travel can be traced back to the 6th century BC. There, Periander, one of the Seven Sages of Greece, was the one who was originally attributed with the invention of Rail travel. Subsequently, following the industrial revolution in Britain, the steam Locomotive was invented and as a result, the rail transport system advanced rapidly. This was in the 18th and 19th century. With railways came a huge surge of positivity in various nuances like shipping, freight, passengers travel and so much more. Railways became the mode of transport favored by all due to the economy and efficiency that it entailed. The transition from canals to railways made possible the concept of "national markets" where prices differed very little from one city to another. Studies have displayed that the creation and advancement of the railway in Europe was one of the most significant technological inventions of the late 19th century in pertinence to the United States, absent which, GDP would have been below 7.0% in 1890.

It was in the year of 1880s that trains powered by electricity were developed. This was also the year when the first rapid transit and tramway systems came into being. Many countries that utilized non electric trains with steam locomotives had their latter substituted with diesel powered locomotives during the 1940s. The whole process was more or less completed by the year of 2000. Japan was the most prominent in the electric train system department and introduced electrified high speed railway systems in the year of 1960. Other countries followed as well in wake of Japan's innovative marvel in the rail system.

Significance of Railways

The importance of railways in urban economics and society development

Unlike other industries that grew and instilled advancement within their framework with the advent of time, Railways were responsible for the transition of technology on an ascending scale on a rapid level. For one, it induced proximity between towns, in the excursion sense, and brought towns closer thereby bolstering commerce and tourism.

Railway is the single most excellent example of modernism in transportation. The cause for such a claim is evident by the fact that no other mode of transportation has been able to influence the world on a level so profound and facilitative in pertinence to evolution of transportation aside from railways.

Railway stands for modernity more than any other social institution or industry. There are no competitors to railways in the race of technological advancements as it has been the singular most influential institution that has affected the world on a gigantic scale. Just visualize a world prior to the origination of railways. The distances in themselves were tremendous impediments that rendered movement from one locale to another virtually insurmountable. After the dawn of railways, these distances experienced shrinking and also brought about diversity in terms of culture, politics and other echelons of the world.

Railways as Agents of Economic Revolution

Railway tracks were built to run on tracks and that is it. These tracks usually required decimation of obstacles that would hinder the movement of trains, whether they be natural or manmade. Those that adapted the railway revolution typically prospered as opposed to the ones who were abrasive towards the whole notion. The latter and the towns to which they were affiliated suffered the brunt of their decision in earnest as they were either left behind, thereby becoming stagnant, obscure and backward, or were left behind in the rapidly evolving world.

Railway stations eventually evolved into immensely intriguing attractions around which many businesses prospered. Many towns were also initiated around such stations. With the arrival of railways, there also came newer opportunities pertaining to employment, business ventures and other capital earning conduits. Railway stations, with their awesome size, splendor and unique ministrations were a fascinating and exciting site for people and that tantalized many into enhancing the significance that they pertained. Porters, station vendors, railway employees are just some examples from the myriad of opportunities that railways department has spawned for the populace.

Railways are a much more monetarily facilitative and cheaper alternative to other modes of transport. With Fuel and gas prices on a perpetual ascension, many now opt for railways as their mode of choice for transportation.

Railways indubitably play a most vital role in society. The fact that with the passage of each day newer and more advanced forms of railways like metros and monorails are manifesting lays further credence to this claim. Many regard them as agents of decongestion and cleaning of cities. Railways can also be regarded as vessels where diverse inhabitants from different contours of society mingle each day .e.g. every day thousands of travel by train in Mumbai daily. Each passenger has his own set of friends with whom he or she mingles and exchanges thoughts, opinions and views. The odds of meeting exotic and new

people that inadvertently modify one's socialization in some manner are also very elevated when it comes to trains.¹

Pakistan Railways, an Introduction:

Pakistan Railways, also written as PR, was formerly known as the Pakistan Western Railway and its reporting mark was PWR. This was between the years of 1947 and 1974. Pakistan Railways is the national state-owned railway company of Pakistan. It was originally founded in the year of 1886 and its main headquarters were enacted in Lahore. All across the territory of Pakistan, Pakistan Railways encompasses about 4800 miles, 7791 in kilometers, of track. The said track extends from the region of Torkahm to the metropolis of Karachi.

The original notion for a rail network came to light in the year of 1847. It was a decision ensued as a ramification of Karachi becoming a vital sea port subsequent to the fall of Sindh to the British Empire in the year of 1843. The Commissioner of Sindh at that time, Sir Henry Edward Frere, solicited permission from Lord Dalhousie to initiate a survey for a Railway line and seaport in Karachi during the year of 1858. It was established that a railway line running from Karachi to kotri would be constructed and from there, a steamboat service, designated as Indus Flotilla, would link Kotri to Multan. From there, another railway line would be laid that would connect to Lahore and regions beyond its territory.

It was on the 13th of May in the year of 1861 that the first railway line between Karachi and Kotri was opened to the general public. The railway line in question constituted about a length of 169 kilometers, or 105 miles. Subsequently, a railway line measuring about 209 miles, or 336 kilometers, was constructed between Multan and Lahore. It was opened for general public access on the 24th of April in the year of 1876. Three Bridges over the rivers Chenab, Ravi and Jhelum and a railway line linking Lahore to Jhelum were constructed in the year of 1876. Onward, a Railway line running from Lodhran to PanoAkil, measuring about 334 kilometers, was inaugurated in the month of July, during the year of 1878.

About four companies were operating in the region that would later be known as Pakistan during the year of 1885. They were Scinde, or Sindh, Railways, Punjab Railways, Delhi Railways and the Indus Flotilla Company. Later on, or in the year of 1885 to be precise, these companies were purchased by the Secretary of state and in 1886, were consolidated into the North Western State Railway. Sometime later, the name was again changed, this time to the NWR, or the North Western Railway to be precise.

It was in the year of 1857 that the Chairman of Scinde, Punjab and Delhi Railways, William Andrew, recommended that the railway line running through the Bolan Pass would be instrumental in counteracting any atrocity or military offense by Russia. It was during the second Afghan War between Britain and Afghanistan, that raged from 1878-1880, a need was felt to construct a railway line

that ran up to Quetta. This was because it was perceived that such a construction would allow easier access, for British forces, to the frontier. Therefore, on the directives of the Vice royal council, construction on the aforementioned railway line was instigated in the year of 1879. After a period of four years, construction was completed on the railway line running from Ruk to Sibi and measured up to about 215 km. It was open for business in the month of January, during the year of 1880. After enormous trepidations and hurdles, the tough terrain beyond Sibi was also fitted with a railway line in the month of March of 1887. The line measured about 320 kilometers and eventually reached the city of Quetta.

The Kotri Sukkur Railway line was laid on the 27th of October in the year of 1878. It was constructed on west bank of Indus River and the Lansdowne Bridge over the river Indus that connected Rohri to Sukkur was also inaugurated and opened for business on the 25th of March in the year of 1889. The construction of this bridge was vital in linking Karachi to the city of Peshawar by railways.

It was by the year of 1898 that the network of railways began to expand. A line was recommended which would run from Karachi to Peshawar and minutely followed the trail taken by Alexander the great when he was marching on to the Arabian Sea through the Hindu Kush Region. It was during the earlier stages of the 20th century that railway lines running from Peshawar to Rawalpindi and from the latter to Lahore were constructed.

It was in 1947 that Pakistan came into being. As a result, Pakistan inherited about 2122, 5048 in miles, of railways route. 6880 kilometers, or 4280 miles, from this route were 1,676 mm (5 ft. 6 in), 506 kilometers (314 mi) were 1,000 mm (3 ft. 3 3/8 in), and 736 kilometers (457 mi) were 2 ft. 6 in narrow gauge.

During the years of 1950-55, the Mashriq-Maghreb Express, bearing the number 5214, was launched. It would operate between the regions of Taftan, situated in West Pakistan, to Chittagong, which was located in East Pakistan.

State of Pakistan Railways

Pakistan Railways is undoubtedly one of the most prominent, if not the most productive, department of the state. Each year, Pakistan Railways transits 65 million passengers to their destinations through 228 trains (inclusive of passengers, mail and express). In fact, total revenue includes about 50% of passenger traffic annually. On a daily basis, Pakistan railways are responsible for carrying approximately 178,000 passengers. The railways are also an integral cog in the whole freight mechanism. The latter is responsible for transporting petroleum, lubricants, raw material, building commodities and so forth across the country. 39% revenue annually is generated from transport of petroleum and lubricants, 19% from wheat and the remainder 42% is garnered from domestic traffic.

Corruption in the Midst of Pakistan Railways

Pakistan railways has been the topic of many a series of investigations, initiated by the National Accountability Bureau (Pakistan's anti-corruption organization). These investigations were launched subsequent to allegations of corruption within the ranks of railways and its various prongs of machinations. Of all branches, it was the railway maintenance and repairs, upgrading and purchase of locomotives, and accounts department were the most intensely affected by corruption. More than 220 Million Pakistani rupees were usurped from the Railways accounts department in form of unauthorized payments, and disposal of scraps. Besides that, consignments of cargo were also stolen from freight trains. Ever since 2012, when first these concerns came to note, NAB has been investigating into the cesspool of corruption that is Pakistan Railways management to no avail.

In March 2012 Pakistan Railways' previous General Manager was captured by the NAB on charges of abuse of power and asserted association in the misappropriation of Rs600 million, identifying with the offer of scrap at a beneath business sector esteem rate.[10] In 2002 a report was incorporated by some remote financial specialists about the advantages of Pakistan Railways, which were evaluated at USD 8 billion; however this figure was not affirmed by legislature of Pakistan. As indicated by government sources it is worth more than this evaluation.

Previous Railways Minister Ghulam Ahmad Bilour was likewise included in debasement and he has been named in a multi-billion rupee scrap outrage, which is presently being researched by Nab. He was additionally charged to have distributed track eating autos to companions and gathering laborers without delicate.

For many amongst us, the very idea of Railway stations as well as rail journeys is comprised of the raw material from which dreams are fabricated. These rail journeys in their self are excellent and nostalgic adventures that resound with a traveler for as long as he lives. An individual gets to meet prospective companions and friends for life in many a number of these excursions and also affords the chance to interact with one's society and region unlike any other 5. Therefore it is integral to scrutinize as what ailments currently malign our railways and what effect they impart upon the perspective of the passengers travelling aboard these locomotives.

Statement of the Problem/Justification:

Railways are essentially one of the most eminent and irrefutably vital of public transportation channels and because of such, the maintenance and streamlined functioning of the said department takes precedence over all others. In addition to being a mode of transportation for literally scores of passengers on a daily basis, railways also makes for a prime channel for transit of cargo and other such heavy equipment throughout the country. These facts certainly can be perceived as adequate testament to the pivotal significance entailed by railways. That is why it is unfortunate that Pakistan railways have now fallen into a

condition evocative of sentiments pertaining to squalor, embezzlement and sheer inefficiency. The passengers who frequent the railways mode of transportation harbor certain perceptions regarding the former's performance. In order to understand the causes of inefficiencies on part of Pakistan railways, and to collate the perceptions that originate as a ramification, on part of the passengers, this study can prove to be highly instrumental.

Objectives of Study

- To discover the main obstacles confronted by Pakistan Railway in conveying its efficient execution
- To know the causes behind manifestation of these inefficiencies
- To assess the passenger's perception regarding Pakistan Railways.
- To gain an idea about the satisfaction level entailed by social denizens in conjunction to Pakistan Railways.

Methodology

Keeping in view the hybrid nature of data involved in the present research, questionnaire is used to collect data. The advantage of questionnaire is that it is comparatively flexible and can be used to elicit hard and soft data. The questionnaire was given to 200 respondents and their responses are then carefully examined. As the purpose of the study is to gain insight into the perception of passengers regarding performance of Pakistan railways, the type deemed appropriate for the study was exploratory. This was augmented by inculcation of the quantitative method research for optimal and clarity based collection of data. The study was basically included passengers of Pakistan Railways as respondents and their candidacy was decided through simple random sampling. The sampling method utilized here was Geographical Cluster Sampling and 50 respondents from Lahore Station, 50 from Peshawar, 50 from Karachi and 50 from Quetta were chosen as the subjects for data collection.

Limitations of study

The researcher was unable to access a more diverse population regarding choice in respondents as it was highly improbable. Convenience played a huge factor in deciding upon respondents as it would have been problematic to do so otherwise. The respondents were chosen from the ones present at the Railways station and the train in which the researcher travelled a limitation indeed, but one that was not profoundly damaging or consequential upon the research's outcome.

Results and Discussion

The questionnaire contained 20 questions covering the areas from causes of malfunctioning of railways to the satisfaction level of the passengers.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents believed that the sole cause of malaise in railways was corruption. 68% people think corruption is responsible for the deterioration of railways. Among the other causes of malfunctioning of

railways include overstaffing, political interference, lack of resources, and inefficiency. The following table presents these findings in visual form.

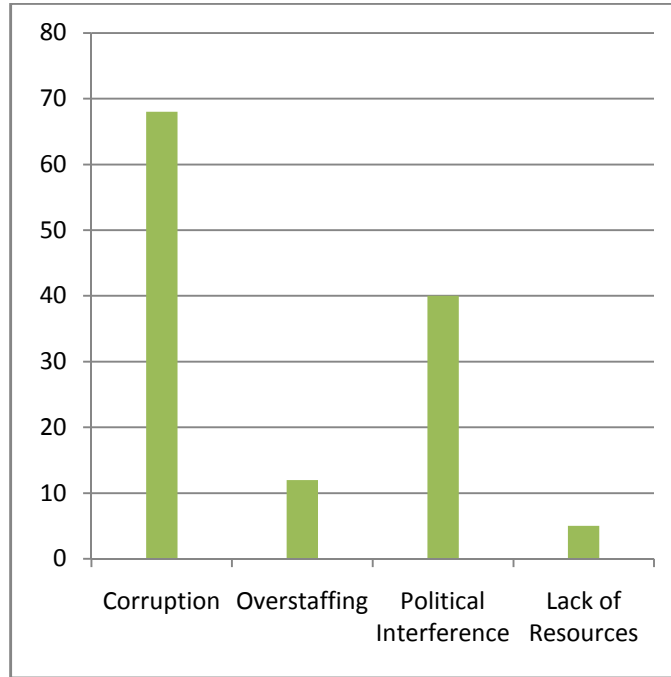


Table: 1.0

Level of Training in PR employees

It is a fact that the Pakistan Railways is one of the biggest employers in Pakistan. The said department is responsible for providing employment to thousands across Pakistan. Through this study, the researcher came to the knowledge that even though railways utilize a large chunk of human resource in various sectors like Ticketing, Police and security personnel, Ticket Checker, Station Staff, Signaling, etc. yet it does not have any efficient mechanism for the training of its employees. This deficiency causes an enormous loss in terms of men and material wastage. The public perception about the level of railway personnel is dismal. 70% of the respondents professed discontentment in pertinence with the training level of railway employees. The remaining 30% were of the opinion that if it is functioning with this workforce, it is okay.

The Reason for Dissatisfaction with PR

The present sense of dissatisfaction with PR is not because of its inherent ills as it was a popular source of passenger and freight communication in the early years of Pakistan. The current lack of dissatisfaction is a result of gradual process that began in 70s and continued in subsequent years. Our questionnaire was

designed to probe the reasons for current attitude of dissatisfaction. The findings are presented in the following diagram:

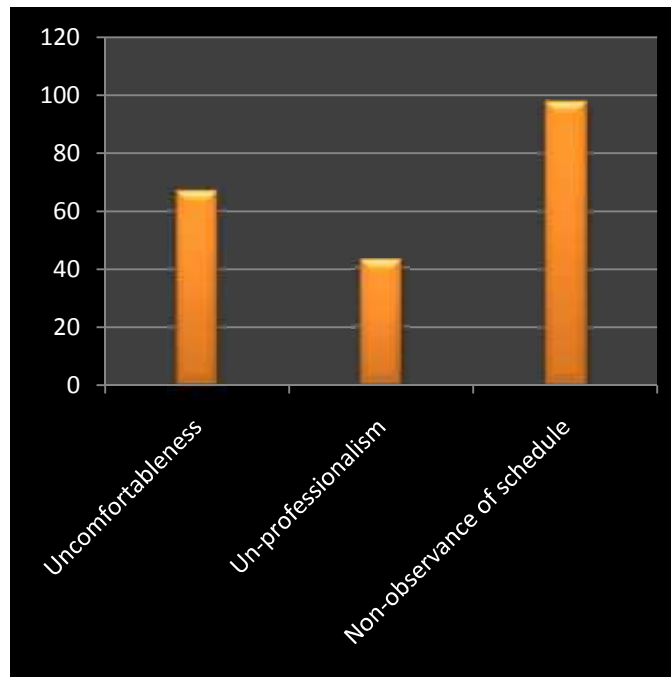


Table: 1.2

As is apparent from the aforementioned graph, the main causes for this dissatisfaction amongst the passengers stems from flaws like an unprofessional behavior of the PR employees, often exemplified through their acerbic and taunting remarks towards passengers. Also, passengers were of the perspective that the PR seating and accommodative arrangements were severely lacking in comfort and ease, thereby making the journey an ordeal marked by discomfort and irritation. Also, the passengers were deeply disapproving and dismayed by the non-observance displayed by PR in terms of schedule adherence. However, some respondents were of the view that the schedule of PR has improved considerably since the term of the former Minister for Railways, Mr. Ghulam Ahmad Bilour.

Another facet of the story

The above discussion should not lead one to assume that the whole scenario in PR is bleak. There are some aspects that can be appreciated and people acknowledged them. This is the reason that still PR is fetching passengers. The positives include frugality, safety and accessibility of trains. A large number of respondents said that the reason for preferring the railways for transportation is that it is economically advantageous. Moreover, trains are less prone to accidents and it becomes a great attraction in a country like Pakistan where road accidents are common. In addition to this, some respondents cited the reason of enhanced

accessibility provided by railways. The graphical presentation of the data is in Table 1.3

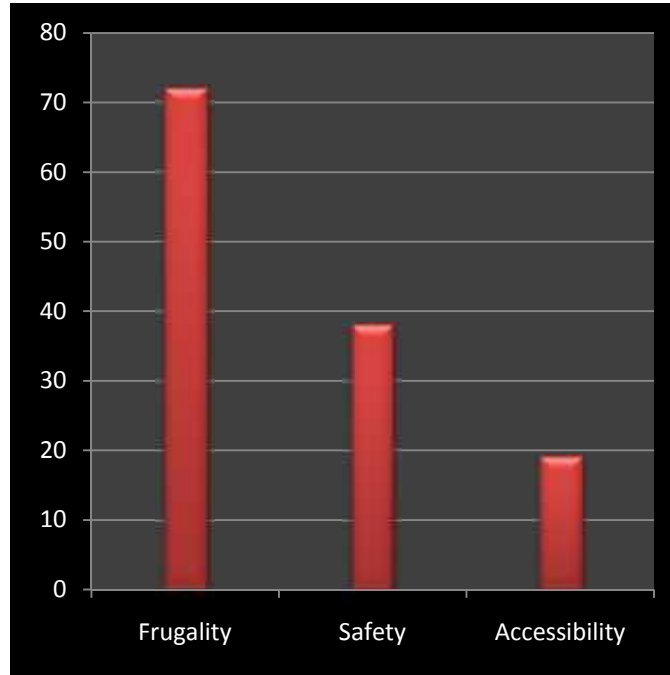


Table 1.3

Conclusion

From this study, it can therefore be extrapolated that Pakistan Railways are in state of disarray which in turn has spoiled the perceptions of Passengers for the worst. It can be concluded that Pakistan Railways, foremost requires much enhancement and accentuation in the training department. While many personnel are serving in various departments of PR, they still lack the requisite knowledge and skills that are necessary for apt and satisfactory dispensing of their services. The infrastructure and technology employed by PR is antiquated and obsolete in contrast to the present technological auxiliaries being utilized in contemporary departments of other nations. These shortcomings form an integral portion of the whole body culpable for PR’s adverse image in the eyes of society. Another aspect of PR that can be extrapolated from this study is that the Pakistan Railway employees are lacking in attributes of professionalism and courtesy to an alarming degree. Most of those passengers were disapproving of the acerbic and cold treatment that they received from personnel of Pakistan Railways such as Ticket checkers, police personnel or coolies. This has led to the conclusion that the Pakistan Railways are lacking in what would be designated as adequately appropriate professionalism. This shortage needs to be mitigated so as to ensure that the department concerned may rise above the insinuations and disparagement

intercepted by it from irate consumers and relative critics. Another facet of the story that was revealed through this study is that the Pakistan Railways suffers, and has done so perennially, from problems of unpunctuality in pertinence to its trains arrivals and departures. This is one nuance that has contributed copiously to the negative and apprehensive stance that many now harbor towards Pakistan Railways. However, some respondents' reactions to this query were quite conducive for the present regime as they praised the modicum of positivity inducted by them in the daily machinations of Pakistan Railways. They were of the view that ever since the changing of the management, Pakistan Railways was conducting its matters with improved efficacy and a more punctual and improved schedule for arrivals and departures of trains. Still, comments endorsing punctuality were stifled and surpassed in frequency by those contrary to aforementioned attribute. That is why it can be concluded that Pakistan Railways is grievously lacking in punctuality and observance of time when it comes to arrival and departure of trains, a source of much irritation and inconvenience on part of the passengers of PR. However, not all conclusions are pessimistic or dark. From the research, it can be concluded that Pakistan Railways excels at certain features and aspects in comparison to other modes of public transportation. Majority of the respondents were of the view that Pakistan Railways was the most frugal and economic way of travel for them. Those respondents who frequently utilized Railways as a means for daily transportation were of the view that taking the train was the least expensive and financially low impact way of travel for them. In addition to being frugal and easy on the pocket, journeying in Pakistan Railways, according to Respondents, affords safety unlike any other mode of transportation. It was also found that people consider PR trains to be the most accessible form of transportation, in terms of fare and travel capacity. It can therefore be concluded that while Pakistan Railways may be rife with problems pertaining to infrastructure and functioning, there are still traces of silver lining within a bleak backdrop.

Recommendations

1. The management responsible for Pakistan Railways must ensure the formulation of a proper and effectual training system for its personnel so as to better incorporate within them the qualities of professionalism, efficiency and enhancement in acumen pertaining to their services .
2. The Upgrading of technology and infrastructure within PR is highly recommended as the archaic means of service delivery grievously hamper smooth operation initiation and as a consequence encumber passengers to greatly disconcerting degrees.
3. It has become somewhat of a perception amongst passengers and general populace alike that Pakistan Railways is overrun by the flaw that is tardiness and unpunctuality. Administration needs to make certain that all necessary steps are taken to improve the arrival and departure schedule of the trains.

4. Conditions of hygiene on PR stations are less than satisfactory. Efforts need to be extended towards mitigation of squalor in stations so as to allay passengers discomfort and irritation.
5. Likewise, the conditions for hygiene and seating within the trains need to be vastly improved as well. Many passengers regarded the apparent deficiency in these aspects with disdain and dissatisfaction.

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