Bangladesh Railway Ticketing Service: An Analytical Study based on User Perspective

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Abstract

Bangladesh railway is a state-owned organization which transports passengers and goods all over the country. Passengers can avail tickets either from ticket counter or online. Though it launched e-ticketing a long time ago, Bangladesh railway is still struggling to provide satisfactory services to the passengers. This study aims to reveal the factors associated with disrupting the quality of service and make an analytical assessment of the state of ticketing service from the user perspective. This study is a qualitative explorative approach developed on the textual analysis of interview data. Considering the great flexibility of the nature of open-ended interview data code hierarchy model, word frequency and perception mapping has been applied to analyze the data. The findings of the aggregated data shows that ticketing services provided from counters or stations is affected with mismanagement and mere corruption. On the other hand, e-ticketing service failed to change the quality-of-service delivery due to complex procedural nature. Finally, findings of the perception map shows that all these factors generate a negative perception among the passengers towards Bangladesh Railway which is alarming for future endeavor.

Keywords: *Railway, E-ticketing, Passengers' Perspective, Service.*

Background of the Study

Railway is one of the most traditional inland modes of transportation used globally. From the inception it became more comfortable, safe and speedy means of transportation due to technological development. Bangladesh railway is a state-owned transportation entity that mainly transports passenger and goods from one corner of the country to others. Bangladesh railway is operated under a separate ministry named Ministry of Railway. Bangladesh railway is divided into two geographical zones east and west zone for better management. Two zones cover a total length of 3000 km route (approx.) (Ministry of Railway Website). Besides it has international operation with India which carry passenger from both countries.

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Bangladesh railway sell tickets to passenger both manually and electronically. Passengers may avail tickets for their desired destination from any nearby railway station ticket counters or they may buy tickets from online using e-ticketing apps (rail sheba) or website of Bangladesh railway. This study explores the state of ticketing service delivery of Bangladesh railway and understand the passenger's attitude towards railway ticket management based on real life experience.

Current Scenario of Bangladesh Railway

Bangladesh railway started operating with potential damaged infrastructure due to liberation war in Bangladesh immediately after independence (Ministry of Railway website). Bangladesh railway had an inherited infrastructure from British period. Bangladesh railway's rail route consist of three different gauges as meter gauge, broad gauge and a mix of meter gauge and broad gauge with 3000 km route and 482 stations (Master Plan of Bangladesh Railway,2019). Though number of stations and passengers increased over the last ten years but length of rail route and net income of Bangladesh railway did not grow much (Bangladesh Statistics, 2020). Though there is a plenty of demands among passengers, still Bangladesh railway is carrying loss over the years. Passengers have lots of issues with the ticketing service of Bangladesh railway which is one of the prime means of revenue generator. Railway ticket fare hike happened three times within last ten years. The intention was to improve services and reduce railway's loss. But still passenger service is not up to the mark and passenger indicated there are issues of irregularities and corruption in ticket management.

Table 1. Railway service expansion

Year	Number of Stations	Number of Passengers	Net Loss (million tk)	Fare Hike (%)	Station Increase (%)	Passenger Increase (%)	Loss (%)
2010-11	443	6,35,36,000	7747.49	50			49.92
2017-18	482	9,00,57,000	14318.68	7.23	8.80	41	49.06

Source: Bangladesh Statistical Year Book, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2020

Though Bangladesh railway carries considerable amount of total passenger of the country, it is yet to provide satisfactory service to the passengers and goes through a regular loss. Poor infrastructure, irregularities and difficulties in ticketing making mark of dissatisfaction among the passengers. To keep pace with the digitalization of the service delivery like many other countries Bangladesh Railway took an initiative to introduce e-ticketing in 2012 which enables passengers to purchase tickets from online and mobile app. These initiatives were taken to create better service and positive attitude towards Bangladesh railway (Ferdous et al., 2021).

Research Strategy: Public Service Delivery and Attitudes of the Citizens

Public service delivery over the world has been changing rapidly and attained a new paradigm. The new paradigm of public service delivery is not a single phenomenon rather a complex knot of phenomena which possess a different managerial basis (Gurtoo et al., 2015). Improving any process need continuous assessment and rigorous actions. Since Bangladesh railway started its operation, it has been struggling to provide quality services. Over the last ten years it failed to expand route length and earn operating cost although Bangladesh railway has been the highest allocation receiver as a single sector in seventh five-year plan 2016-2020 (Bangladesh Statistics 2020). From 2012 Bangladesh railway made some major changes in ticketing services. Bangladesh railway introduced online e-ticketing system on that year and continue their manual ticket selling from the ticket counters of different stations (Ferdous et al., 2021). For technological support Bangladesh railway had a contract with a private organization named CNS limited. CNS is a global software development company that provides technological solution and services. CNS delivered the first computerized seat reservation system and e-ticketing software to Bangladesh railway (CNSBD). There is no doubt that all these initiatives were taken to improve the current state of Bangladesh railway ticketing service and taking a step towards the service automation following the global trend of e-governance. But improving a process needs sequential actions. This process includes five interrelated stages- define, measure, analyze, improve and control. Any process improvement drive needs a rigorous assessment of the situation and problem statement. It is mandatory to follow up the process continuously to confronting the evolving problems and this part is considered the most difficult part of the process improvement methodology (Harvey, 2006). So the sudden changes in the ticketing system were like a bolt from the blue for the passengers of Bangladesh railway. Along with this experience of ticketing, other associated factors later shaped the attitudes and perspectives towards service delivery of Bangladesh railway. Quality of the service creates level of satisfaction among the consumers. Sometimes service receiver's satisfaction become the baseline of the key performance indicator for the service providers (Grigoroudis and Williams, 2010). It is natural to grow a perception based on user experience regarding the ticketing services provided by Bangladesh Railway. Sometimes A large number of consumers avoid expressing their feedbacks as they are not sure whether any corrective measure will be taken to improve the service or not. But service receiver's feedback may help to understand their expectations, need and desires (Grigoroudis and Williams, 2010). Improving a service delivery is not a sudden incident rather an endless process. To keep continuing the improvement of the process it is important to find the loopholes and consider service receiver's perspective about the service. For this study 17 respondents were chosen purposefully from the user of Bangladesh railway because it has granted to understand the experience of user's and actual reality of the ticketing service of Bangladesh railway. Sample were drawn based on two criteria that they use the railway services regularly (at least twice in a week) and went through the process of e-ticketing. To understand the real situation 10 of the respondents were selected from 'Barhatta railway station' (a railway station from rural area in Bangladesh) and 7 of the respondents were selected from 'Mymensingh railway station' (a railway station from urban center in Bangladesh). Respondents were selected from both urban and rural areas so that dynamics of challenges regarding e-ticketing could be better understand. In qualitative study sample are

drawn for theoretical insights, reveal distinctive aspects of people or social settings. In this study non-probability purposive sampling technique was used as this technique is for special explorative cases. This type of sampling technique is used for understanding particular type of cases for in-depth investigations rather than generalizations (Neuman, 2012). Qualitative study often works with small sample of people or phenomena nested in particular contexts. As samples are more purposive than random. In contrast to quantitative approaches samples in qualitative study may be small to explore a particular phenomenon (Gray, 2004). Sample size for this study was determined to understand the context rather than generalization. After preliminary selection of the respondents an interview schedule was prepared. Based on theoretical understanding and experiences some specific open-ended questions were developed related to ticketing service of the Bangladesh railway. However, the interview process was kept flexible and during data collection note taking was done to establish higher reliability and authenticity of the data (Neuman, 2012). In this qualitative study data collection and data analysis were done simultaneously. While analyzing the interview data, these were translated from Bengali to English using 'edited transcription' approach. Some grammatical corrections were done without changing the meaning and essence of the idea. After transcription the following steps are adopted to analyze the data using qualitative data analysis software Nvivo. Firstly, key words and topics were identified from each interview and explore the emerging themes and categories and lastly tried to understand the whole context and draw a holistic view of situation based on the linkage among categories (Neuman, 2012). Rigorous analysis is done based on the interview data and identified significant similarities in interpretation based on the reaction of the respondents.

Table 2. Generated codes from interview data for analysis

Name of the Codes	Number of References
Consciousness about e-ticketing	14
Problems with counter	17
Perception towards online ticketing	17
Perceptions towards Bangladesh Railway	24
Expectations	27
Payment methods	15
Mode of buying tickets	16

Source: Author 2021 (Generated in Nvivo)

Perception Analysis: Ticketing Service of Bangladesh Railway

This particular study tried to cluster the experiences of the passengers of Bangladesh railway who avail tickets and travel by train. Based on their experiences on buying tickets through online and from ticket counters situated in railway stations, it tried to identify the issues related with ticket counters and factors that hindering e-ticketing services also. A comprehensive analysis is done using code hierarchy and word frequency to understand the overall situation of ticketing service of Bangladesh railway. Codes are generated from the in-

depth interview analysis from respondents. From the code hierarchy it is found that some of the codes were stressed over others indicating their weight in the study.
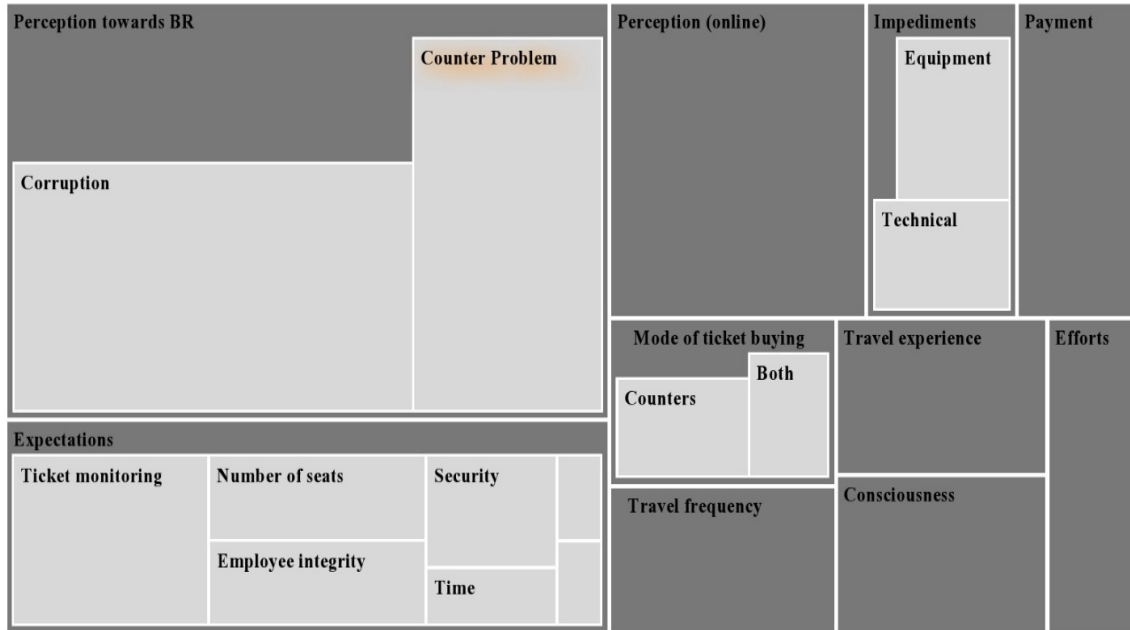

Figure 1. Code Hierarchy Generated Based on Interview Data (Using Nvivo)
Source: Author 2021

The code hierarchy model shows that this study progresses based on five deciding factors containing integral elements. Respondents emphasized on over all services of railway ticketing which contains problems associated with manual ticketing from counters and corruption related to them. They shared their opinion regarding e-ticketing also and factors that hindering them to access e-ticketing service and their expectations to Bangladesh railway. During this study some thought-provoking cases were detected regarding mismanagement. Respondents of this study are found to avail tickets from both railway station ticket counters and online as well. Even some of the respondents buy tickets only from the counters but interestingly no one is found who only avail tickets from online. This indicates that e-ticketing may not convenient to all. Though data indicates people are more accustomed with buying tickets from counter but the experience is not worthy at all. One of the respondents (respondent 02) shared his experience by saying "I had different experiences in case of buying tickets from railway station. The main problem of buying tickets from station is, waiting in a long queue for hours. Sometimes later crowd start jostling. Although having sufficient tickets, so often officials operating counter do not provide tickets intentionally as they could sell them to 'blackers'." A larger portion of the interviews of respondents was about various forms of corruption and mismanagement in the ticketing service that is delivered from the ticket counters. This is also indicated in the code hierarchy model. Respondents pointed issues that has become a part and parcel of ticketing service but no monitoring or corrective measure was taken. But in the modern paradigm of public service delivery process citizen led governance is one of the distinct features which is to ensure the accountability and encourages openness (Gurtoo 2015). However, it is a matter of great

concern, respondents pointed that an intentional artificial crisis of tickets are made by the station officials so that demand goes high. Then they sell tickets over actual price from the counters or they sell them to the 'blackers' (who sell tickets illegally over actual price). According to respondents station master and other officials remain absent in the station. There is no way to know the number of daily allocated tickets in the station and number of sold tickets. So passengers always remain in the darkness whether they will be able to buy tickets or not. While interviewing an interesting case was found from a respondent (respondent 05). The respondent shared an incident happened with him along with his friends.

"I never failed to buy tickets in my home town but faced an unfortunate incident in Mymensingh Railway Stations. It was 22th February 2020. We had an intention to travel from Mymensingh to Netrokona Barhatta. We went to counter in Mymensingh railway station to buy five tickets for us of Mohanganj Express. We asked five tickets with seat of that date but they provided me tickets of 28th February. I was in a hurry so that I did not notice the date on tickets. After getting into train I found it. Then I found that four or five more passenger have same issue. I went to counter again and request them to change the tickets. They got angry at me and did not change it. After two days I went their again to change my tickets. Then they offered me one third refund of actual price of the tickets. I had no option. After that I bribed 650 tk to ticket checker of the train and travelled illegally in a cabin. It seems they sell wrong tickets intentionally to the passengers. Then refund one third of the actual price and then resell this with high price to brokers to make more profits."

Besides this, respondents shared about a new form of corruption. Sometimes they sell standing tickets even if seats are available. Some officials have behavioral problem towards less educated or senior citizens. Some of the respondents (respondent 04) said that tickets can be found to the 'Blakers' even if it is not available to counters. Sometimes passengers take help from local political leaders to avail tickets. So it seems ticketing service from counter is like a black box where transparency is missing. On the other hand, respondents have mixed opinions about online ticketing. Even if they are not accustomed with e-tickets, they have a positive attitude towards online ticketing. Respondent 03 said, "I prefer online ticketing system more than offline or manual one. Because I think online ticketing is more convenient." Cumulative mismanagement and corruptions in manual ticketing, unnecessary hassles are reasons behind to grow positive attitudes towards e-ticketing. Respondents identified that online ticketing is hassles free, less time consuming and transparent. But against all these convenience potential threats were identified from the data which hindering the extensive use of e-ticketing services. There is a saying that one size does not fit to all. Mindless adoption of any practices is like taking medication that was prescribed for others. It means that people are different and they need a customized action in case of introducing any new approaches (Harvey 2006). E-ticketing in Bangladesh was introduced in 2012 without considering the demographic features and economic condition of the people (Bangladesh Railway master plan 2019). Bangladesh railway did not take any initiative to make e-ticketing popular among people and did not disseminate the process through electronic or print media for the people's concern. As a result, two potential risks were grown. E-ticketing

process remain complex and like a maze to the general people who are illiterate or less educated and inability to buy smart phone or any electronic device is also impeding popularizing e-ticketing system among the poor or lower middle class. More over payment method and internet speed has become issues. According to Ookla speed test index 2021 Bangladesh ranked 133 among 138 countries for mobile internet speeds (www.speedtest.net). Internet availability issue also need to be addressed. A word frequency test query was run on the interviews of respondents with Nvivo to analyze the points they emphasized during the study.

Figure 2. Word Cloud Based on Interview Data (Using Nvivo)
Source: Author 2021

Interestingly the word cloud showed the same effect which code hierarchy denoted earlier of this study. Figure 2 - illustrates some of the words which bear a great significance and frequency during the interview. It is obvious that words like online ticketing, station, convenient, service, ticket price got emphasized during the interview. People expect a convenient service and for that online or e-ticketing could be a solution if the procedure could be made easy. People are concern about the mismanagement of manual ticketing services delivered from stations. So based on the experience a mixed perception is developed among the passengers over the years. Respondents pointed that e-ticketing is convenient but there are issues related to procedure and access. On the other hand, ticketing service from the counters laden with mismanagement and different types of corruptions. The following figure shows the holistic view of the state of ticketing services of Bangladesh railway based on user perspective.

In these circumstances, solutions for the betterment of ticketing services were composed from the interviews which was suggested as the form of expectations by the respondents. Code hierarchy model (figure 1) illustrates the indicators of resolving the issue. A large portion of suggestions stressed over the figure in the label of expectations. Respondents emphasized to increase the total number of seats and employee integrity.

Respondent 01 said, "Number of compartments should be increased. Authority should not allow passengers without tickets. If they provide standing tickets that number should be fixed so that other passengers do not feel bothered." Employee integrity is a great concern. Officials of Bangladesh railway should be more responsible and they need to monitor that tickets are not sold over actual price. Government should make more publicity to encourage people to buy tickets from online. And the process should be developed in easier way so that everyone can buy e-tickets if they wish (respondent 03). Respondents also emphasized to monitor the allocation and sell the number of tickets. Every station should have a display showing this information. This will bring a transparency in the overall process.
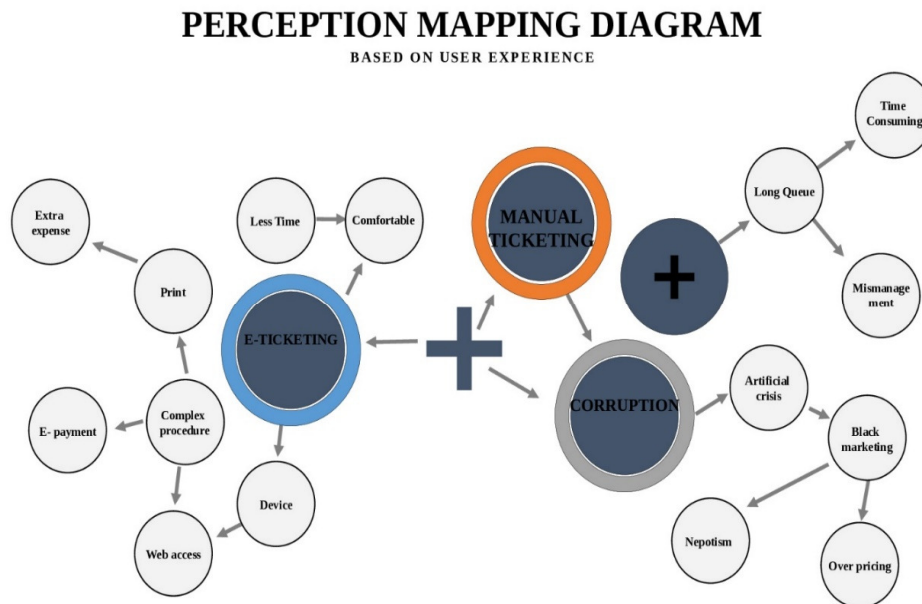
PERCEPTION MAPPING DIAGRAM
BASED ON USER EXPERIENCE

Figure 3. User Perception Mapping Diagram (Using Info graph)
Source: Author 2021

Conclusion

This paper has admitted that ticketing service of Bangladesh Railway need to go under major reforms as there are many loopholes were identified in the service from the study. Being the most demandable state-owned transportation Bangladesh railway can provide better ticketing service to its passengers only by taking smart measures and counting the user perspective about the service. Public service delivery possesses a specific feature which is different from others. It is now expected that public organizations will emphasize on achieving social objectives along with monetary objectives and take them as guiding principles to conduct the regular operations (Lane 2008). In order to understand the state of the ticketing service of Bangladesh railway and perception of the users this study will be a guidance. From the user experience it tried to explain the current scenario and understand the problem and prospects of online ticketing as well. Thus, this paper creates a scope of further

study to assess how the ticketing service could be more user friendly and design a process of stable service provision.

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