

Study on the Effectiveness and use of touch screen at the Coimbatore railway station

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Introduction

Many standard marketing practices like mass media advertising, sales promotion, sales calls were a part of the old economy. With the increasing change in the markets scenerio, these strategies are witnessing a rapid change where time and place convenience is given utmost importance.

One such form of promotional activity where the consumer direct channels are used to reach out and deliver goods and services to customers without using marketing middlemen is the DIRECT MARKETING.

Direct marketing is defined as "Communications where data are used systematically to achieve quantifiable marketing objectives and where direct contact is invited or made between a company and its customers." One form of direct marketing is the kiosk marketing.

What is a Kiosk

A kiosk is an electronic tough screen which provide information to customers regarding products and services of a company. These are

set up in a very small area around four square feet of space, in a location that is convenient for the customers and enable them to obtain relevant information about the company even without visiting the company. Also they are operated 24 hours a day and seven days a week without any supervision.

Indian Railways - An Insight

India is a land of diverse culture and Indian Railways play a key role in not only meeting the transport needs of the country, but also in binding together dispersed areas and promoting national integration. Truly, Indian Railways have emerged as the sinews of the Indian economy and have reached out to bring together the great Indian family.

Railways traverse through the length and breadth of the country covering 63,140 route kms as on 31.3.2002, comprising broad gauge (45,099 kms), meter gauge (14,776 kms) and narrow gauge (3,265 kms). As the principal constituent of the nation's transport system, Indian Railways own a fleet of 2,16,717 wagons (units), 39,236 coaches and 7,739 number of locomotives and manage to run 14,444 trains daily, including about

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8,702 passenger trains. They carry more than a million tonne of freight traffic and about 14 million passengers covering 6,856 number of stations daily.

Indian Railways have been the prime movers to the nation and have the distinction of being one of the largest railway systems in the world under a single management. Railways being the more energy efficient mode of transport are ideally suited for movement of bulk commodities and for long distance travel. As compared to road transport, the railways have a number of intrinsic advantages. Railways are five to six times more energy efficient, four times more efficient in land use and significantly superior from the standpoints or environment impact and safety. Indian Railways, therefore, rightly occupy pride of place in the growth and development of the nation.

Railways have to perform the dual role of commercial organization and vehicle for fulfillment of social obligations. In national emergency, railways have been in the forefront in rushing relief material to disaster stricken regions. For meeting its social obligations, railways are required to make investments that are un-remunerative and also have to provide subsidized services. Unlike many foreign railways, which receive government subsidies for public service obligations, Indian Railways are not specifically compensated for these operations.

The Indian Railway system is managed through zones and operating divisions. There are also six production units engaged in

manufacturing rolling stock, wheels and axles and other ancillary components to meet Railways' requirements.

In pursuance of the decisions taken earlier, Government has now decided to operationalise seven new zones and eight new divisions. The North Western Railway at Jaipur and East Central Railway at Hajipur have been made functional with effect from 1st October 2002. Remaining five zones viz., East Coast Railway at Bhubhaneshwar, North Central Railway at Allahabad, South East Central Railway at Bilaspur, South Western Railway at Hubli and West Central Railway at Jabalpur and eight new divisions at Agra, Ahmedabad, Guntur, Nanded, Pune, Ranchi, Rangiya and Raipur shall be operational with effect from 1st April.

Research, Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO) is the sole research and development wing of Indian Railways, functioning as the technical adviser and consultant to the Ministry, Zonal Railways and Production Units.

Need for the study

The Indian Railways boasts of the largest railway network of the world with over 11 million passengers traveling everyday on over 62,000 routes. Hence, it is no surprise that the queues at the reservation counters are unending and the enquiry counters overflowing. There are certain kiosks to distribute tickets, coupons etc. Indian Railways is planning to install multi-lingual kiosks at railway stations to distribute the platform

tickets. These kiosks can be operated with a touch screen and will provide comprehensive information about train and city related enquiries. These are targeted at the commuters who have to stand in long queues for information and railway passes. Kiosks have been installed at Chennai, Bangalore, Calcutta, Pune and Secunderabad to be followed soon by Mumbai and other cities by leading touch screen solutions providing companies.

The present study has been taken about the effectiveness of one such touch screen installed at the Coimbatore railway station and what the commuters opine about the touch screen.

Objective of the study

To know the usage of the touch screen amongst the public

To know the satisfaction of the public regarding the information provided

To know the opinion of the public about the touch screen and suggest the possible areas of improvement

Scope of the study

Study can be extended to the other stations and junctions and compare with that of Coimbatore station.

Study can be taken on the other forms of online marketing by the Indian Railways like Internet and their effectiveness

Methodology adopted for the study

Research Design

The study adopted was descriptive in nature.

Research approach

Survey was taken by personal face to face interview method.

Sampling design

For the purpose of the study, 50 respondents were chosen in the city of Coimbatore, which consisted of the travelers i.e. common public from different age groups and occupations like Auditors, Advocates housewives bank employees etc. Convenience sampling method was used for the purpose of the study.

Data collection

The primary data was collected using a structured, undisguised questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both open ended and closed ended questions. The secondary data was collected by the websites on the Indian Railways and books on Marketing Management.

Analysis of the data

Likert's summated scale has been used as a scaling technique.

The data has been analysed using percentages and test of hypotheses have been used for the purpose of analysis.

Hypotheses

Ho : Null hypothesis : $\mu = 80\%$ of the sample felt that the information provided in the touch screen , though good, needs further improvement

H1: alternate hypothesis : $\mu < 80\%$ of the sample do not feel that the touch screen needs any further improvement

I.o.s. : 5%

Test statistic: z test

Limitations of the study

The study was confined to Coimbatore and it may not reflect the opinion of the commuters of the nation.

The study involves very few commuters; hence the replies need not be generalized.

The study ignores the lack of knowledge of the commuter in using the touch screen.

The other online media enquiries like online Railway Reservation has not been considered for the purpose of the study.

Analysis and Interpretation of data

Q5 : Do you know that there is touch screen facility in Coimbatore Railway station?

Q6 : How often do you travel in train

Q7 : Comment on the following services of the touch screen

services	very good	good	average	poor	very poor
Language understandable	6	27	12	1	4
Data, information provided	3	19	18	4	6
speed	8	25	10	2	13
user friendly	5	15	12	11	7

Q9 Which language do you prefer for the touch screen?

Q10 What do you think about the "spot your train" option of the touch screen?

Q11 What do you think about the PNR status option in the touch screen?

Q13 What do you think about the "train fares" option in the touch screen?

Q15 What do you think about the "facilities" option in the touch screen?

Table 1: Likerts summated scale has been used for Q7

Points given are 2,1,0,-1,-2 for very good, good, average, poor, very poor respectively

services	very good	good	average	poor	very poor
Language understandable	12	27	0	-1	-2
Data, information provided	6	19	0	-4	-12
speed	16	25	0	-2	-13
user friendly	10	15	0	-11	-1

From the table $\bar{x} = 18$

$s = \sqrt{\sum x^2 / n - (\sum x)^2 / n^2} = 11.77 / \sqrt{50} = 1.56$ the standard deviation of the mean
 $\mu_0 = 40$ the hypothesized mean

Applying z test : $z = (\bar{x} - \mu_0) / (s / \sqrt{n}) = (18 - 40) / 1.56 = -22 / 1.56 = -14.7$

The table value for two tail test of normal distribution at 5% level of significance is -1.96 to 1.96.

Since the calculated value is less than the table value, reject H_0 . Therefore it is concluded that 80% of the sample do not feel that the touch screen needs any further improvement.

Findings of the study

- All the respondents are aware of the touch screen in Coimbatore
- Of the sample, 30% of the them travel daily, 30% travel monthly once, 20 % of the people travel occasionally; ,15% travel weekly once and 20% travel occasionally.
- Most of the respondents felt that the touch screen is user friendly.
- Two fifth of the respondents felt that ENGLISH can be used as a medium,

- followed by preference for TAMIL and HINDI with 30% and 25% respectively
- 80% of the sample said that the information about the train status, PNR status provided by the touch screen is accurate
- 80% of the sample felt that the “spot your train” option is accurate
- Almost all the respondents 90% felt that the train fares are available for pre-reservation
- Around 75% of the respondents are dissatisfied with the “facilities” option provided in the touch screen

Suggestions given by the respondents

- Most of the respondents felt that apart from the usual reservation counters, the touch screens can be provided at the bus stands and other common places

- More number of touch screens should be provided near to the bus stands and other public places
- Some respondents felt that an awareness should be created by keeping an indication board/sign to be placed in front of the entrance and the counters
- Demonstrations should be given in Railway stations, to help the not so computer savvy commuters
- The spot your train option can be accurate
- In many enquiries , the arrival time and the departure time are the same which is ironical, care must be taken to report the exact time
- The complaint should be taken care of and rectified immediately
- Train fare details should be given for all the classes – fares for the unreserved are not given
- Proper maintenance should be carried out
- Details regarding the connecting train schedules at other stations to be included in touch screen
- In the “facilities” option, the addresses of the Hotels run by the State Government – Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation in various tourist locations can be given
- Railway touch screens may be connected with bank ATMs
- More number of touch screens say two or three can installed in the counter to avoid the thronging passengers
- The system used is outdated; sometimes the keyboard gets stuck ; these machines can be replaced with new ones
- Just as in the other cities, the monthly season tickets can be issued by the kiosks since they form the vast majority of the travelers
- Pictorial representations wherever possible can be included
- City guide map to be included ; this will help the foreign tourists to have hands on information
- Contact number(s) of the concerned authorities can be included for further reference

Conclusion

While it is an undeniable fact that the Indian Railways caters to the entire Indian population, certain discrepancies and inconveniences do creep because managing such a huge network of operations proves to be a Herculean task. Especially during the issuing of tickets during the season time like summer, the crowd goes uncontrollable. While the Railway Reservation system takes care of the waiting time and the serpentine queues by providing a token system and if necessary the seating arrangements , these kind of information screens come as a boon not only to the travelers but also to the clerks issuing tickets. With the increasing computer literacy and

Suggestions from the researcher

- More POP displays can be given to encourage the use of the touch screen

the pressing need for automated information, it is no doubt that these would be used to the fullest extent, provided the machines do not fail frequently. For a city like Coimbatore, this kind of facility is to be enhanced and see to it that these facilities are utilized by one and all.

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