

Passengers' Perceptions Towards Air-Conditioned Buses in Nepal

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ABSTRACT : *In order to promote social and environmental causes, bus services are extremely important. In order to raise productivity, promote economic growth, and improve access to markets and services, transportation infrastructure and services should be expanded. This includes the creation of air-conditioned buses. The objective of the study is to understand how passengers feel about traveling in air-conditioned buses in Nepal. The descriptive type of research methodology was used to conduct the study. Reliability, responsibility, empathy, tangibility, and assurance are the five aspects used to evaluate a company's performance in providing services. Majority of respondents were dissatisfied with bus crew's ability to provide accurate bus arrival times and answer questions. 83.33 % of respondents replied that chairs of buses are comfortable to sit on. Regarding safe traveling and trustworthiness many of the respondents are satisfied with the bus staff.*

Keywords: Perception-respondents-AC bus-passenger-service.

1. Introduction

Any person's expectations are based on their level of knowledge and are generally referred to as "the anticipated outcome of a probabilistic event" (Reber, 1985). The primary form of public transportation in emerging nations is bus-based, road-based transportation. In order to promote social and environmental causes, bus services are extremely important. For many in urban poverty, it is the sole accessible form of transportation (Armstrong-Wright et al. 1987). In Nepal, buses are a common mode of transportation. For both short- and long-distance travel, it is the most popular mode of transportation. Buses connect the major cities and towns around the nation and give people access to remote and rural locations that might not have other transportation options. For the majority of people, they are also a pretty inexpensive option. In recent years, air-conditioned buses have become more prevalent in Nepal, especially in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Butwal, and other important cities. These buses, which are operated by private businesses, are often more reliable and comfortable than regular public buses. However, they are also more expensive and might not be available to everyone in the community.

The transportation and storage industry, which comprises the movement of products and people by land, air, and train, contributed roughly 4.2% of Nepal's GDP in 2018, according to a report released by the Nepal Rastra Bank in 2019. Over the previous ten years, this industry has grown on average at a 6.5% annual pace (NRB, 2019). It is important to remember that Nepal's transportation industry plays a significant role in the country's economic growth and is intricately connected to other industries including trade, tourism, and agriculture. In order to raise productivity, promote economic growth, and improve access to markets and services,

transportation infrastructure and services should be expanded. This includes the creation of air-conditioned buses. In especially during the hot and muggy months, air-conditioned buses make traveling more comfortable. Passengers can benefit from air conditioning by staying cool and avoiding heat-related ailments. Buses with air conditioning are typically more dependable than older models. They are less susceptible to breakdowns and are less impacted by traffic jams. Buses with air conditioning frequently have greater safety equipment, like seat belts and bigger windows for better sight, which can help lower the chance of accidents. By offering more dependable and comfortable transportation for tourists, air-conditioned buses can aid in the promotion of tourism in Nepal. More individuals may choose to use public transportation in Nepal instead of driving their own cars if there are air-conditioned buses available.

Systems with air conditioning are more expensive to build and maintain than those without. This can result in increased expenses for the bus company, which might then be passed on to the customer in the form of higher fares. Systems with air conditioning use more energy than systems without air conditioning, which could result in increased fuel expenses for the bus company. Buses and other vehicles that employ air conditioning systems may produce more greenhouse gas emissions, which could have a detrimental effect on the environment. There might only be a small number of air-conditioned buses in Nepal, which might prevent certain passengers from using this mode of transportation. According to Turban et al. (2002), providing excellent customer service involves a number of actions aimed at raising the degree of customer satisfaction, which is the conviction that a good or service has lived up to the expectations of the user. A customer's overall perception of the relative superiority or inferiority of the company and its services, as well as their judgment or attitude regarding a specific service, is known as service quality (Lawrence, 2006:4). The senior and middle management level of an organization's lack of support or understanding, as well as/or a customer service policy, has resulted in a deterioration in the quality and level of customer service delivery. To satisfy clients' needs, one must deliver high-quality service. Institutions must update their antiquated operating procedures and adopt a customer-oriented mindset in order to offer higher quality services. (Naido, 2004) claims that ineffective service supply repeatedly surprises the outcomes of service provision that the government anticipates and certainly contradicts the fair expectations of all residents. Both researchers and practitioners regularly use service quality as a metric to gauge client satisfaction. It is widely acknowledged that customer happiness is influenced by the caliber of the goods or services provided (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993).

2. Objective and Methodology of the Study

The objective of the study is to understand how passengers feel about traveling in air-conditioned buses in Nepal and to identify any factors that might affect their perceptions. With the help of the study's findings, it may contribute to improving the nation's public transportation system as a whole. All types of passengers who use Butwal's bus terminal to travel short, medium, and long distances make up the study's target group. Considering the homogeneity of passenger behavior, the practicality, and the economic viability of the study, the researcher chose to interview 72 passengers by questionnaire. In order to gather information, 20 bus employees were randomly given structured questionnaires. People who take an AC bus from Butwal to Pokhara or Butwal to Kathmandu were chosen as samples. The sort of data analysis used was primarily descriptive. Using statistical tools like mean and simple frequency tables, the researcher entered data and examined the sample.

3. Analysis & Discussion

3.1.1 Consumers' Responses on Service Provision Process of the AC Bus

The way complaints are handled and how comfortable customers feel while receiving services are used to gauge the effectiveness of the service delivery process. A service provider can enhance and repair the quality of its services by having an effective policy and implementation for handling complaints. Successful service delivery is greatly influenced by the service environment. Customers were surveyed to determine how they felt about these two aspects of the service delivery process. The table below shows consumer rates for managing complaints and the friendliness of the service atmosphere.

Table: 1 Consumers' Opinion on Complain Regarding Handling and Service Environment of AC Bus Providers

Minimum (1) = Unsatisfactory Maximum (5) = Excellent

Complain Handling	Frequency	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Availability of clear policy and procedure to handle customer complain	72	1	5	1.78
Availability of awareness creation practices on complain handling procedures for customers	72	1	5	1.20
Giving timely response for customer with problems	72	1	5	2.5
Total				1.83
Conduciveness of environment				
Crowdedness of inside of buses	72	1	5	2.65
Cleanness of buses	72	1	5	2.75
Hospitality of Bus staff during the service periods	72	1	5	2.63
Availability of information on bus schedule	72	1	5	1.53
Bus staff are consistently courteous	72	1	5	2.3
Total				2.37

Source: Field Survey, January 2023

The above table showed that consumers gave the AC bus' implementation and complaint-handling practices worse ratings than the industry standard (i.e. 3). Regarding the questions of having a complaint handling procedure and prompt implementation, customers gave the AC bus provider's actions a rating of 1.83.

Similar to this, customers gave the AC bus's service environment a very poor rating for friendliness. Four categories were used to assess how conducive the service environment was, and they all received ratings below average, with the availability of bus schedule information receiving the lowest rating of (1.53) and the cleanliness of the buses receiving the highest rating of (2.75).

Consumers' Response on the Service Quality of the AC Bus

Reliability, responsibility, empathy, tangibility, and assurance are the five aspects used to evaluate a company's performance in providing services (Parasuraman et al, 1988). Customers of AC buses were asked to rate the AC bus's capacity to satisfy its customers using these five service quality dimensions.

Consumers' Responses on Reliability Dimension of Service Quality

By taking into account the safety of those involved in the service delivery process, the promptness

with which services are provided, and the availability of information regarding delayed buses in advance, customers can gauge the AC bus's dependability. When rating the AC bus's dependability, customers were asked to consider its operations. The following table displays the consumer reactions.

Table 2 Reliability Dimension of Service Quality

Reliability Service Quality	Yes		No		No answer		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Services are provided at schedule time table	20	27.78	45	62.5	7	9.72	72	100
Services are provided with safety	50	69.44	10	13.89	12	16.67	72	100
The AC bus company announces any delay of buses ahead of time.	15	20.83	52	72.22	5	6.95	72	100

Source: Field Survey, January 2023

Table 2 showed that, out of 72 respondents, 45 (62.5%) disagreed that the AC bus provided its service as per the scheduled time, 20 (27.78%) said that the AC bus provided its service as per the scheduled time, and the remaining 7 (9.72%) respondents did not provide a response. 50 people (69.44 %) responded that they feel comfortable when riding on AC buses, 10 people (13.89 %) disagreed, and 12 people (16.67 %) did not respond. In the same way, when asked whether AC Bus Firm had announced any bus delays, 52 respondents (72.22 %) answered the company had not, while 15 respondents (20.83 %) indicated it had. The remaining 5 respondents (6.95 %) did not respond.

3.1.2 Consumers' Responses on Responsiveness Dimension of Service Quality

The responsiveness aspect of service quality can be evaluated by observing how AC bus employees interact with their customers. The respondents were asked for their thoughts on the AC bus company's responsiveness dimension of service quality. The following table lists the replies from consumers.

Table 3 Responsiveness Dimension of Service Quality

Responsiveness Service Quality	Yes		No		No answer		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Bus staffs provide good services.	50	69.44	17	23.62	5	6.94	72	100
Bus staffs have willingness to help consumers.	40	55.56	20	27.77	12	16.67	72	100
Bus staff tells us exactly when buses will have arrived.	15	20.83	50	72.22	7	6.95	72	100
Bus staffs are patient to respond to consumers requests	20	27.77	36	50	16	22.23	72	100

Source: Field Survey, January 2023

Table 3 shows that, of the 72 respondents, 50 (69.44 %) are happy with the services provided by bus crew, 17 (23.62 %) are not, and 5 (6.94 %) of the respondents did not react. In terms of the bus staff's willingness to assist customers, 40 respondents (55.56 %) said they were satisfied, 20 respondents (27.77 %) said they were dissatisfied, and 12 respondents (16.67 %) did not react. However, the majority of respondents are dissatisfied with the bus crew, who struggle to provide

customers with accurate bus arrival times and to reply to their questions. Only 15 (20.83 %) and 20 (27.77 %) respondents replied that bus staff tell about the exact bus arrival time and answered their questions patiently respectively.

3.1.3 Consumers' Responses on Empathy Dimension of Service Quality

Service provider ability depends upon who tries to put himself in the position of their consumer to understand consumers' needs, and then provide what consumers desire in a convenient way. Respondents were requested to provide their opinions on the empathy dimension of the service quality of the AC bus company. Consumers' responses are presented in the following table.

Table 4 Empathy Dimension of Service Quality

Empathy Service Quality	Yes		No		No answer		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Bus staff knows the needs of their consumers.	17	23.62	50	69.44	5	6.94	72	100
Bus staff gives attention to their consumers. (for e.g. older, disabled, pregnant)	20	27.77	40	55.56	12	16.67	72	100
Bus staff are competent to communicate effectively with you.	45	62.5	20	27.77	7	9.73	72	100

Source: Field Survey, January 2023

Table 4 revealed that, out of 72 respondents, 50 (69.44 %) respondent replied that bus staff doesn't know the need of their passengers, 17 (23.62 %) respondents are satisfied with bus staff regarding identifying the need of passengers and the remaining 5 (6.94 %) of the respondent did not give any answer. Regarding the attention to their passenger, out of 72 respondents, 40 (55.56 %) respondents are not satisfied with the bus staff, 20 (27.77 %) respondents only satisfied with the bus staff and the remaining 12 (16.67 %) did not give any answer. Likewise to competent communicate effectively with passengers, 45 (62.5 %) respondents replied that they are satisfied with the bus staffs, 20 (27.77 %) respondents are not satisfied with the bus staff and 7 (9.73 %) did not give any answer.

3.1.4 Consumers' Responses on Tangible Dimension of Service Quality

To measure the consumers' responses on tangible dimension of service quality of AC bus, normally focused on equipment, physical facilities and appearance of bus staffs. Consumers' responses are presented in the following table.

Table 5 Tangible Dimension of Service Quality

Tangible Service Quality	Yes		No		No answer		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
AC buses are in good condition and free from technical failure during traveling.	45	62.5	25	34.72	2	2.78	72	100
Chairs are comfortable to sit on.	60	83.33	8	11.11	4	5.56	72	100
The floor of the bus is safe.	24	33.33	45	62.5	3	4.17	72	100
The company provided comfortable buses for passengers.	50	69.44	20	27.78	2	2.78	72	100

Source: Field Survey, January 2023

Table 5 revealed that, out of 72 respondents, 45 (62.5 %) respondent replied that buses are in good condition and free from technical failure during traveling, 25 (34.72 %) respondents are not satisfied with the bus condition and the remaining 2 (2.78 %) of the respondent did not give any answer. Many of the respondents i.e. 60 (83.33 %), respondents replied that chairs of buses are comfortable to sit on. Likewise, regarding buses provided by the company, 50 (69.44 %) respondents reported that the company provided comfortable buses for passengers. But many of the respondents i.e. 45 (62.5 %) reported that the floor of the bus is not safe.

3.1.5 Consumers' Responses on Assurance Dimension of Service Quality

To measure the consumers' responses on assurance dimension of service quality of AC bus, normally focused on perception of passenger towards buses, politeness and spoken of bus staffs. Consumers' responses are presented in the following table.

Table 6 Assurance Dimension of Service Quality

Assurance Service Quality	Yes		No		No answer		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Passengers feel safe traveling with the bus staff.	50	69.44	20	27.78	2	2.78	72	100
Bus staffs are polite.	8	11.11	60	83.33	4	5.56	72	100
Bus staff speaks with you by using appropriately addressing words.	24	33.33	45	62.5	3	4.17	72	100
Bus staffs are trustworthy.	55	76.39	15	20.83	2	2.78	72	100

Source: Field Survey, January 2023

Table 6 revealed that, out of 72 respondents, regarding safe traveling and trustworthiness many of the respondents are satisfied with the bus staff i.e. 50 (69.44 %) respondents and 55 (76.39 %) respondents respectively. But in terms of bus staff politeness and appropriate addressing words, many of the respondents are not satisfied with the bus staff i.e. 60 (83.33 %) and 45 (62.5 %) respectively.

4. Measure to improve public transportation

- ◆ There are several measures that can be taken to improve public transportation, particularly air-conditioned bus service, in Nepal:
- ◆ Increase the availability of air-conditioned buses: This can be done by encouraging private companies to invest in the purchase and operation of more air-conditioned buses and by providing financial incentives for the purchase of new buses.
- ◆ Improve the infrastructure: This includes building and maintaining good roads, constructing dedicated bus lanes, and creating efficient public transportation terminals.
- ◆ Improve regulations and policies: This includes implementing and enforcing regulations on vehicle maintenance, safety, and emissions, as well as setting policies on fare structures and routes.
- ◆ Encourage public-private partnership: Collaboration between government and private companies can help to improve the efficiency and quality of the public transportation system.
- ◆ Encourage the use of technology: Implementing technology such as GPS tracking, electronic ticketing, and real-time information systems can help to improve the efficiency and convenience of public transportation.
- ◆ Increase awareness and education: This includes launching public awareness campaigns to

educate people about the benefits of using public transportation and encouraging people to shift from personal vehicles to public transportation.

- ◆ Invest in research and data collection: Collecting data on public transportation usage and passenger satisfaction can help to inform policy decisions and identify areas for improvement.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the survey data shows that passengers are not pleased with the AC bus provider's level of customer service. The findings reveal that customers awarded the bus provider unsatisfactory marks for execution, complaint-handling procedures, and the friendliness of the service atmosphere. Many survey participants disagreed that the AC bus performed its service as scheduled and expressed discomfort while traveling on the buses. The data also reveals that the AC bus business fails to inform clients of delays in a timely manner. The majority of respondents are also dissatisfied with the bus staff's responsiveness, empathy, and competency in detecting passengers' needs and effectively interacting with them. These results demonstrate the necessity for the AC bus supplier to raise the level of service quality in order to satisfy customers' needs.

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