

Exploring Passenger Loyalty: A Perspective Through Expectancy Theory in Public Transport Usage

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Abstract

The paper discusses the application of Expectancy Theory in understanding and improving passenger loyalty in public transportation systems. Expectancy Theory, originally developed by Victor Vroom in 1964, is a psychological framework that explains how individuals' expectations influence their decision-making processes and behavior. The paper emphasizes the importance of three key components of the theory: expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to performance), instrumentality (the belief that performance will result in desired outcomes) and valence (the value placed on those outcomes). By applying Expectancy Theory to public transportation, it explores how aligning service quality with passenger expectations can enhance passenger satisfaction and loyalty. Factors such as comfort, responsiveness, facilities, safety, ticketing systems and information provision are identified as critical components of service quality that influence passenger experiences. The paper argues that public transportation providers can improve passenger loyalty by ensuring that passengers perceive a clear connection between their efforts (e.g., choosing a service) and the rewards (e.g., reliable and comfortable transportation). It concludes that a strategic approach that incorporates Expectancy Theory can lead to systematic improvements in public transportation, resulting in higher passenger satisfaction, increased loyalty, and more efficient use of resources. This approach not only benefits transportation providers but also enhances the overall passenger experience and contributes to the development of more reliable and user-friendly public transportation systems.

1. Introduction

Expectancy Theory, developed by psychologist Victor Vroom in 1964, is a psychological term for explaining what drives people in decision-making processes. At its basis, Expectancy Theory proposes that people are driven to act in various ways depending on their beliefs about the consequences of their actions and their chances of reaching certain outcomes (Talwar et al., 2021). It proposes three fundamental components: expectation, instrumentality, and valence. Expectancy is the assumption that effort will lead to performance, instrumentality is the notion that performance will result in certain outcomes, and valence is the value that people place on those results (Abrate et al., 2021; Zboja et al., 2020). According to Expectancy Theory, people have the greatest motivation when they feel that their actions will result in desired results that are valued to them.

In the advanced world of public transport, where communities' pulses beat in harmony, the pursuit of effectiveness and passenger happiness is continuous. By applying Expectancy Theory in the transportation field, a light of knowledge amidst the complexity of how people act in our ever-changing environment (Bernhard et al., 2020). Expectancy Theory, which is based on the concept that people are driven by the expectation of desired outcomes, provides a prism through which one may interpret the complexities of staff performance, passenger experience, and operational effectiveness in public transportation systems (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2021). The efficiency and efficacy of public transport systems have a significant impact on passenger experiences and satisfaction with the service. An effective public transportation system not just promotes personal mobility within towns and cities, but also increases the entire ease of use and accessibility of the public transportation system (Saif et al., 2019). By continuing to explore deeper into its implementation, it is discovered that the ability to transform the very core of public transport, cultivating a culture of excellence and empowerment that extends from frontline employees to the people they serve

At its basis, Expectancy Theory proposes a straightforward but profoundly concept of individuals is motivated by the assumption that their actions will result in significant outcomes (Lunenburg, 2011). In the context of public transport systems, this idea serves as a guiding concept in analysing and optimizing every aspect of the passenger trip. Every touchpoint, from bus timeliness to staff acquaintances, is an opportunity to either reinforce or undermine the expected assumptions that influence behaviour (Bajada, 2017). By implementing this approach, public transportation authorities may not only boost staff motivation and performance, but also foster an environment of dependability and happiness between passengers (Cyril et al., 2019). By strategically aligning incentives, training programmes, and operating norms, public transportation networks may turn into lively arteries of urban connection, imbuing every journey with the guarantee of efficiency and comfort.

Furthermore, the use of Expectancy Theory in public transport systems goes beyond individual behaviour and includes larger systemic alterations (Rezaimoghadam et al., 2022). Public transportation administrators may discover crucial areas for improvement and innovation by examining the expectation, instrumentality, and valence aspects at play. Whether it's optimising route planning to cut travel times, integrating technological solutions to increase passenger comfort, or investing in staff development courses to improve service quality, Expectancy Theory concepts serve as a compass to guide strategic decision-making (Osafo et al., 2021). Public transport systems can develop into efficient and successful alternatives by taking a comprehensive strategy that tackles both staff enthusiasm and passenger happiness, effortlessly integrating into the fabric of urban life while fostering long-term progress and growth.

2. Basic Expectancy Theory Framework

Expectancy Theory, developed by psychologist Victor Vroom in the 1960s, is a psychological framework (shown in Fig 1) that holds that people are driven to act in a specific manner as they believe their activities will result in desirable results. This theory states that individuals are driven to select the choice that maximizes their predicted satisfaction, which is governed by expectation (Lunenburg, 2011). As shown in Fig 1, the basic framework of Expectancy Theory has three important keys; expectancy, instrumentality and valence (Abdul Rehman et al., 2019). Expectancy is an individual's judgement of the likelihood that their efforts will yield the required level of performance. Instrumentality refers to the notion that obtaining a specific level of performance will result in desired results or rewards. Finally, valence refers to an individual's perceived worth or attractiveness of performance results or rewards. Understanding and controlling these characteristics allows organisations to successfully inspire individuals to expend effort, perform well, and accomplish desired goals (Osafo et al., 2021). An individual gets excited if he or she feels that (a) effort will result in satisfactory performance (expectancy), (b) performance will be valued (instrumentality), and (c) the importance of the rewards is extremely favorable (valence).

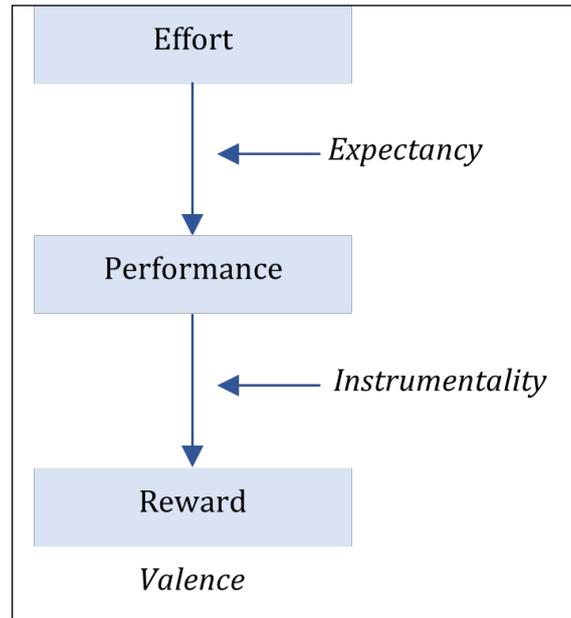


Fig. 1 Basic Expectancy Theory framework

3. Application of Expectancy Theory to Determine Passenger Loyalty

Recognizing and handling the elements that impact passengers' expectations, initiatives, and incentives is necessary when implementing Expectancy Theory to assess passenger loyalty in the public transportation business. Passengers develop expectations about the quality service they receive based on criteria such as responsiveness, comfort, and convenience (Alit Suthanaya, 2018; Chengula & Kombe, 2017; Mohd Talmizi & Tahir, 2021; Obsie et al., 2020; Pakurár et al., 2019; Štraub, 2020; Susilawati & Nilakusmawati, 2017). These expectations shape their actions, such as selecting a certain transport service or promoting it to others (Aniebiet et al., 2021). To create loyalty, public transportation companies have to guarantee that passengers see a clear link between their efforts (such as selecting a service) and the rewards (such as dependable and comfortable public transportation) (Fu et al., 2018). By synchronizing service quality with passenger expectations and facilitating consistent delivery, public transportation companies can boost passenger loyalty by strengthening the belief that their efforts will result in successful outcomes, maximizing Expectancy Theory's effectiveness in shaping passenger behavior (de Oña, 2020; Ricardianto et al., 2023). Fig 2 shows the application of Expectancy Theory in the context of passenger loyalty in public transportation service. From the figure, passenger expectation represents expectancy, service quality represents instrumentality and the end outcome which is passenger loyalty will represent valence.

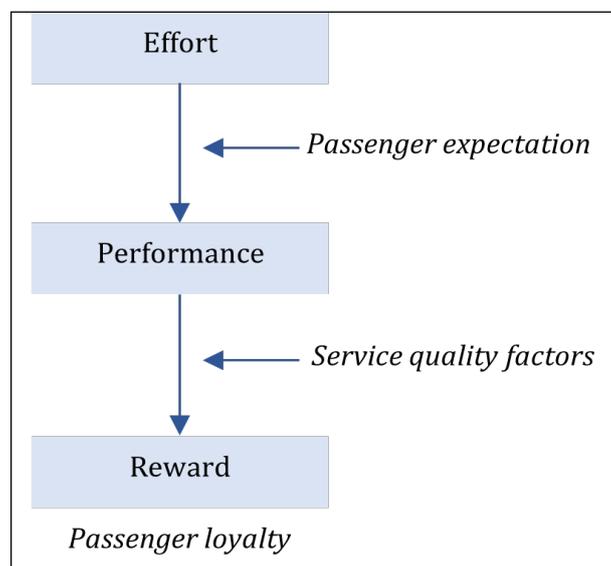


Fig. 2 Application of Expectancy Theory to determine passenger loyalty

From Fig 2, knowing the role of valence in Expectancy Theory is critical in increasing passenger loyalty. Valence is the feeling of value or beauty of the rewards that go along with a specific behaviour (Burton & Balleine, 2022). In the context of public transportation, passengers evaluate the benefits of taking advantage of a certain service, such as cost-effectiveness, safety, and punctuality (Mohd Talmizi & Tahir, 2020; Ojo et al., 2014; Pakurár et al., 2019). Public transportation providers can impact valence by providing incentives such as loyalty programmes, coupons, or unique advantages, enhancing the appeal of using their service against competitors. By constantly monitoring and changing the perceived value of rewards, public transportation businesses may increase customer loyalty by keeping the advantages balance the price of their services (Kautsiro & Awolusi, 2020). Passenger loyalty benefits transportation agencies by increasing passenger retention, passenger growth, and making better use of existing resources. From a marketing and management strategy standpoint, it is thus interesting to understand greater detail regarding the elements determining a public transport passengers' loyalty (Imaz et al., 2015). This strategic plan develops a good emotional connection with the company while also encouraging repeat usage that solidifies for the strengthening the loyalty in passenger.

Moreover, good communication is essential when implementing expectation theory to passenger loyalty in the public transportation world. Clear and honest communication regarding service offers, modifications, and changes may help passengers understand the relationship between their efforts and the expected benefits (dos Reis Silveira & Gadda, 2022). It additionally fosters confidence as well as trust in the public transportation provider, maintaining the assumption that using their services would provide beneficial results (Hoo et al., 2023). In addition, requesting input and actively listening to passengers' problems displays a dedication to addressing their wants and preferences, which can help to improve the expectancy-loyalty relationship (Pakurár et al., 2019). By encouraging open communication channels, transport businesses may better align passenger expectations with the actual service experience, resulting in a devoted client base that feels appreciated and respected (Ibrahim & Borhan, 2020).

3.1 The Role of Service Quality Factor in Determining Passenger Loyalty

The importance of service quality variables in determining passenger loyalty is critical in the transportation business (Ibrahim & Borhan, 2020). Service quality encompasses several elements, including dependability, responsiveness, certainty, empathy, and tangibles. Passengers evaluate their entire experience based on these factors, forming opinions on the competency and dependability of the transportation provider (Eboli et al., 2022). Maintaining a consistently high level of service quality not only meets but often exceeds passenger expectations, fostering trust and contentment (Khan et al., 2017). Moreover, exceptional service quality can cultivate positive emotional connections with the company, thereby increasing loyalty and advocacy among travelers. Conversely, any deficiencies in service quality can erode confidence and loyalty, prompting passengers to explore alternative options (Rane, Achari, et al., 2023). Consequently, transportation businesses must prioritize continuous service quality improvement to nurture and retain passenger loyalty in a highly competitive market.

Service quality refers to the ability to please customers in a fast and effective manner, aimed at improving business performance. In the service industry, 'quality' is considered a critical component for evaluating business growth. According to Ramya et al. (Ramya et al., 2019), service quality is strongly correlated with earnings, sales growth, and customer perceptions. Over the last few decades, service quality has had a tremendous impact on corporate productivity, price reduction, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and revenue generation (Yum & Yoo, 2023). Additionally, service quality has been a primary focus among professionals, administrators, and academic experts (Seth et al., 2005). Several factors have been identified by various researchers to determine service quality. These factors exist because the term 'service quality' alone cannot fully capture the actual meaning of how well certain services are performed. Hence, the concept relies on multiple factors (Abdul Rahim et al., 2021; Hoo et al., 2023; Oloruntobi et al., 2022; Tuan et al., 2022). However, in this paper, only factors such as comfort, responsiveness, facilities, safety, ticketing system and information provision (provided in Table 1) will be applied to evaluate users' satisfaction levels when using public transport. From the table discussed, it can be concluded that these factors can be applied to Expectancy Theory framework. The application is then shown in Fig 3.

Table 1 Service quality factors to determine passenger loyalty

Service quality factor	Explanation
Comfort	Comfort is an important factor of service quality that has a significant impact on the passenger experience in public transportation systems. It includes features such as seating arrangements, hygiene, humidity level, and general environment (Hoo et al., 2023). A pleasant ride greatly improves passengers' overall pleasure and opinion of the transportation operator. Comfortable seats, large seating space, and well-maintained interiors can improve the travel experience by lowering stress and weariness while in route. Furthermore, features like as air conditioning, appropriate air circulation, and noise cancellation help to provide a comfortable and soothing environment for passengers (Abdul Rahim et al., 2021). Public transportation systems that prioritize comfort and service quality not only attract more passengers but additionally promote loyalty and good word-of-mouth recommendations (Imaz et al., 2015), eventually improving the overall reputation and competitiveness of the transportation provider.
Responsiveness	Staff responsiveness is an important service quality factor that affects the passenger experience in public transportation. It refers to the promptness, generosity, and efficiency with which staff personnel respond to passengers' requests and queries (Ramya et al., 2019). When public transportation employees are attentive, passengers feel appreciated and provided with assistance throughout their entire journey. Quick help with boarding, ticketing systems, and handling concerns increases passengers' perception of safety and ease of use, resulting in better satisfaction ratings (Çapalı et al., 2023). Furthermore, friendly interactions and a readiness to assist customers establish a favorable environment that promotes trust and loyalty to the transportation service. Staff response not only assures smoother operations, but it also contributes to the public transportation system's general sense of reliability and passenger-centricity (Fu et al., 2018).
Facilities	Facilities play an important role in influencing the passenger experience in public transportation systems (Friman et al., 2020). This service quality element includes the infrastructure, facilities, and accessibility features available to passengers during their trip. Facilities, which vary from well-maintained stops and terminals to comfortable waiting spaces, bathrooms, and seating arrangements, have an important impact on passengers' ease of use and happiness (Md. Rohani et al., 2013; Naudé et al., 2005). Accessible facilities for disabled passengers, such as ramps, lifts and tactile pavement, provide inclusiveness and equitable access to public transit for all people. Furthermore, amenities such as ticket vending machines, information kiosks, and signage improve the efficiency and convenience of navigating within the transportation network (Dallimore & Biermann, 2018). By introducing excellent facilities, public transport providers not only improve the physical environment for passengers, but also showcase their commitment to offering a smooth and enjoyable travel experience.
Safety	Safety is crucial in public transport systems, since it is a core service quality factor that has a direct influence on passengers' well-being and confidence in the system (Simoés & Suen, 2023). Public transport providers priorities safety measures to safeguard passengers, employees, and facilities. This includes a variety of issues, including as scheduled vehicle and infrastructure maintenance routines, obedience to safety rules, and the establishment of security measures to avoid accidents, vandalism, and criminal activity (Manandhar, 2023). Additionally, appropriate signs, announcements, and safety instructions assist passengers in securely navigating stations and vehicles. By putting safety first, public transportation systems inspire trust in passengers, guaranteeing them of their safety while commuting. A safe and secure atmosphere not only gives passengers peace of mind, but it also fosters good opinions of the public transportation system, promoting loyalty and continuous use (Mojica & Ferrer, 2022). As a result, safety remains a pillar of public transportation service quality, ensuring its dependability, integrity, and status in the area (Simoés & Suen, 2023).
Ticketing system	The ticketing system is an important service quality factor that determines the passenger experience in public transportation. It includes a variety of factors such as the convenience with which tickets may be purchased, the availability of purchasing

alternatives, and the dependability of fare collecting methods (Zalar et al., 2018). A well-organized and effective ticketing system simplifies the boarding process, shortens queues, and decreases passenger wait times. Furthermore, offering a variety of payment options, including cash, contactless cards, and mobile applications, improves passenger accessibility and ease of use (Stefanescu et al., 2013). Clear fee systems, fare concessions for certain categories, and easy-to-use ticketing devices or interfaces all help to ensure ticketing efficiency and fairness. Furthermore, dependable ticketing systems provide correct fare computation and enforcement, lowering instances of fare evasion and revenue loss (Barabino et al., 2013). Optimizing the ticketing system allows public transportation operators to enhance overall service quality, increasing passenger overall satisfaction and their loyalty.

Information provision Information accuracy and supply are critical service quality factors in public transport, ensuring that passengers receive timely and trustworthy information during their travel (Romero Morales, 2022). Effective communication of timetables, routes, delays, and service disruptions allows passengers to plan their travels more effectively and make sensible choices (Ibrahim, 2021). Clear signage, announcements, and digital displays at stations and on vehicles assist passengers understand the system and keep informed of any changes or improvements (Titov et al., 2023). Furthermore, reliable and up-to-date information sent via multiple methods, including as websites, mobile applications, and customer care hotlines, improves passengers' accessibility and ease of use. To create a sense of trust among passengers, public transport providers must prioritize information distribution and accuracy, therefore reducing travel uncertainty and annoyance. By providing complete and trustworthy information, public transport system can foster the loyalty within passengers (Suryani et al., 2023).

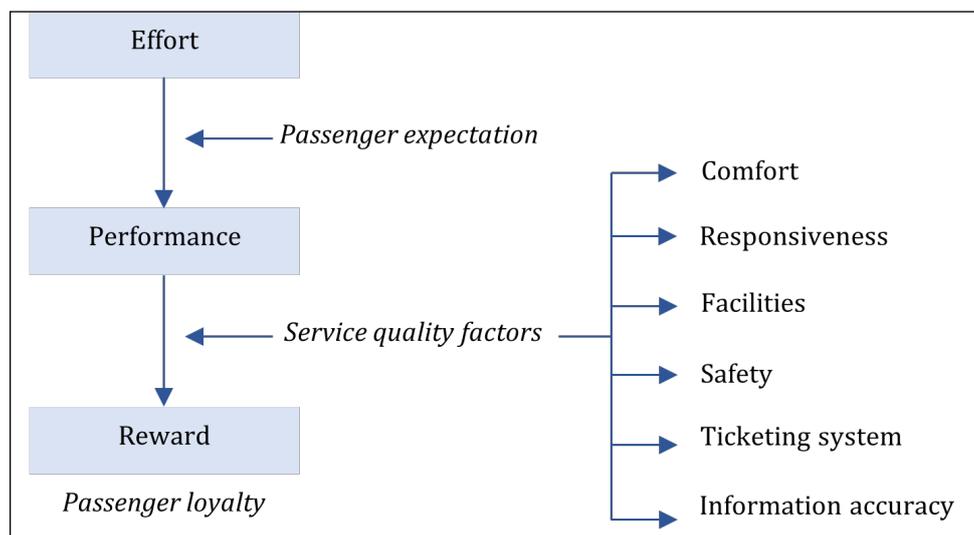


Fig. 3 Application of service quality factors to the Expectancy Theory framework

4. Discussion

When applied to public transportation, Expectancy Theory provides a solid foundation for improving operational efficiency as well as passenger happiness. The theory's key components—expectation, instrumentality, and valence—are critical aspects when analyzing and optimizing the public transportation experience. For example, assuring staff members feel their efforts will result in excellent performance (expectancy) and meaningful outcomes (instrumentality) with valued results (valence) may dramatically improve motivation and service quality. This method not only improves worker performance but also provides a more dependable and enjoyable service for passengers (Cyril et al., 2019; Ricardianto et al., 2023). By matching transport staff members motivations with passenger service expectations, public transport systems may achieve greater levels of efficiency and customer satisfaction, establishing an organizational culture of quality and responsibility (Khan et al., 2017).

Passengers reflect their expectations on a variety of service quality factors, including timeliness, comfort, and accessibility. These expectations influence passenger behaviour, including their choice of travel services and their willingness to suggest them to others (Aniebiet et al., 2021). For public transportation businesses, it is critical that

customers see a clear and constant relationship between their efforts (e.g., selecting a service) and the rewards (e.g., dependable and pleasant transportation). By matching service quality with customer expectations and guaranteeing consistent delivery, these businesses may increase client loyalty. This method strengthens the notion that passengers' efforts will result in positive consequences, hence increasing the efficacy of Expectancy Theory in shaping passenger behaviour (de Oña, 2020; Ricardianto et al., 2023).

Valence, an important aspect of Expectancy Theory, is the perceived value of the rewards associated with certain behaviours. Passengers using public transport assess the positive aspects of utilising a specific service based on cost-effectiveness, safety, and timeliness. Public transportation service providers can increase valence by providing incentives such as loyalty programmes, promotions, or exclusive privileges, making their services more enticing than competitors (Kautsiro & Awolusi, 2020). Transportation businesses may boost passenger loyalty by constantly monitoring and changing the perceived value of rewards, ensuring that the advantages outweigh the expenses. This not only improves passenger retention and growth, but it also maximises resource use. Understanding the factors that influence passenger loyalty is critical for building successful marketing and leadership approaches that foster a strong emotional connection with the business and passenger repetition (Rane, Choudhary, et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion

Applying Expectancy Theory into transportation systems presents an advantageous perspective for driving systematic changes and improving the customer experience. The theory's emphasis on motivation and outcome expectations is consistent with the aims of public transportation authority, providing avenues to improve both staff performance and passenger pleasure. By addressing the fundamental characteristics of expectation, instrumentality, and valence, public transit may become more efficient and user-friendly. Strategic efforts such as improved route planning, enhanced technical integrations, and thorough staff training programmes are critical milestones in the process. Finally, by developing a motivated staff and meeting passenger expectations, public transport systems may emerge into critical components for urban infrastructure, enabling long-term growth and increasing the quality of life for city people.

Overall, achieving the desired outcome of Expectancy Theory in public transportation demands a comprehensive strategy that takes into account service quality, passenger expectations, and effective communication. By harmonising these factors, transportation businesses may increase passenger loyalty, optimise resource utilisation, and achieve long-term success. This method not only helps the firms, but also improves the entire passenger experience, resulting in a more efficient and dependable public transit system.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The authors are responsible for the study conception, research design, data collection, data analysis, result interpretation and manuscript drafting.

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