

## **Service Quality Specification Gap in Public Transport Service: A Case Study of Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Uttar Pradesh Road transport system is essentially bus oriented. Both public & private operators are playing important role in providing transport services to such large population of Uttar Pradesh. However, the Herculean task of providing cheap & safe journey lies with Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation. Over the years Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation has been battling with numerous issues ranging from mounting losses to outdated technology which ultimately impacting its service quality to passengers. There are seven major gaps in the service quality concept. This research tries to investigate service quality specification gap (Management perceptions versus service specifications) given by Parasuraman, Zeithmal & Berry in their Service Quality Gap model. Service quality specification gap is internal to the service provider hence require internal Measurement.*

*The case study method has been employed to ascertain service quality specification gap by incorporating insights from the interviews of those who are important stakeholders (Regional Managers, Service Managers, Asst. Regional Managers, SSi, Foreman, Conductors, Drivers) in service delivery process of Upsrtc. The research results show significant perception mismatches between Higher Management, Regional Heads, Frontline Managers & Lower staff. Our findings provide that Higher Management & Employees were failed to identify service quality attributes that were important for Customers.*

**Keywords:** Gap analysis, Service quality, Employee perceptions, Manager perceptions, UPSRTC.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Transport in India consists of transport by land, water, and air. Public transport remains the primary mode of transport for most Indian citizens, and India's public transport systems are among the most heavily used in the world. With a population 1.25 billion there is great pressure on Railways, Roadways, & Limited water ways to provide safe, efficient and cost-effective transport to such huge population (Source: World Bank). In last 20 years govt has taken various steps to ease pressure on existing public transport by building Metro trains, Mono rail, Water ways, Extension of railway network & building new city transport system in the form JNURM. Despite ongoing improvements in the transport sector, several aspects of transportation are still riddled with problems due to outdated infrastructure and lack of investment in less economically active parts of the country. The demand for transport infrastructure and services has been rising by around 10% a year (Source: World Bank). Buses are an important means of public transport in India. Due to this social significance, bus transport is predominantly owned and operated by public agencies, and most state governments operate bus services through a State Road Transport Corporation. (C.Gopalkrishnan *et al.*)(1995). These corporations have proven extremely useful in connecting villages and towns across the country. However, the share of buses is negligible in most Indian cities as compared to personalized vehicles, and two-wheelers and cars account for more than 80 percent of the vehicle population in most large cities (Singh, 2005). Many Indian states government have their

own fleet of buses which are run under their State Transport Department. Uttar Pradesh govt has its own Public Transport system known as Uttar Pradesh state road transport corporation. Being a biggest public transport system in Uttar Pradesh it become imperative for UPSRTC to provide cheap, safe, efficient & comfortable service quality to its passenger. However, the Existing passengers are highly dissatisfied with almost all the critical attributes of service quality from UPSRTC. This means, being public transport facility provider, needs to take strategic decisions of implementing improved quality in the services it is offering to public. ( Manoj kumar et al.) 2016

## CONCEPTS OF SERVICE QUALITY:

Service quality has gained a significant attention and focus from academicians, practitioners & Researchers during the past few decades. Many scholars (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992;) have studied the concept, design and measurement of service quality.

### Definitions of Service Quality:

1. "A perceived judgment, resulting from an evaluation process where customers compare their expectation with the service they have received" (Gronroos, 1984).
2. Service quality is defined as "the difference between expectations and performance of the service" (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985)

### Model of Service Quality Gaps:

There are seven major gaps in the service quality concept, which are shown in Figure 1. The model is an extension of Parasuraman *et al.* (1985). According to the following explanation (ASI Quality Systems, 1992; Curry, 1999; Luk and Layton, 2002), the three important gaps, which are more associated with the external customers, are Gap1, Gap5 and Gap6; since they have a direct relationship with customers.

**Gap1: Customers' expectations versus management perceptions:** As a outcome of the deficiency of Marketing research orientation, insufficient upward communication and too many layers of Management.

**Gap2: Management perceptions versus service specifications:** as a outcome of insufficient Assurance to service quality, a perception of unfeasibility, inadequate task standardization and an absence of goal setting.

**Gap3: Service specifications versus service delivery:** as a outcome of role vagueness and conflict, Poor employee-job fit and poor technology-job fit, unsuitable supervisory control systems, absence of perceived control and absence of teamwork.

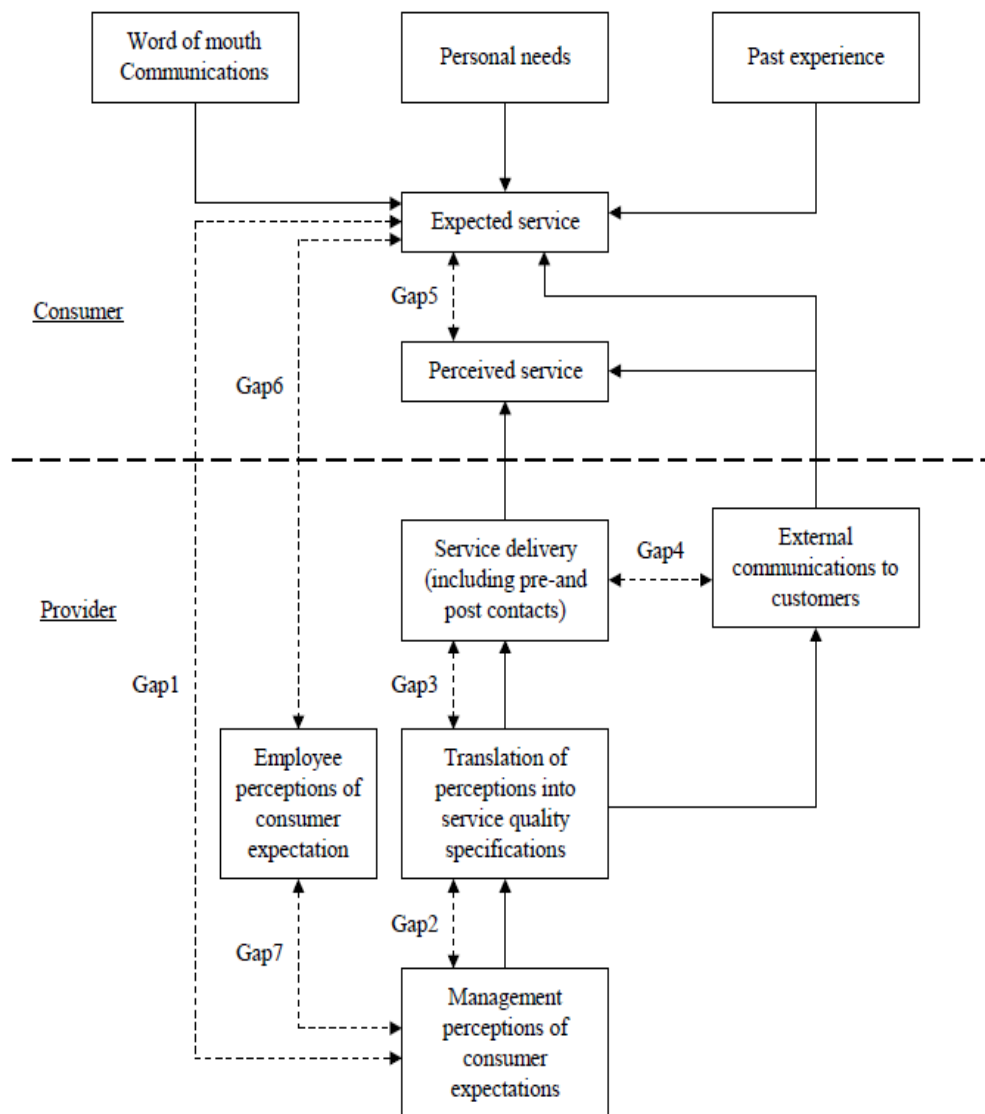
**Gap4: Service delivery versus external communication:** as a outcome of insufficient Horizontal communications and tendency to over-promise.

**Gap5: The discrepancy between customer expectations and their perceptions of the service delivered:** as a outcome of the influences employed from the customer side and the deficits (gaps) on the part of the service provider. In this case, customer expectations are inclined by the extent of individual needs, word of mouth recommendation and previous service experiences.

**Gap6: The discrepancy between customer expectations and employees' perceptions:** as a outcome of the variances in the understanding of customer expectations by front-line service providers.

## ABOUT UPSRTC:

Upsrtc is a public transport corporation presenting offering transport services in the state of Uttar Pradesh and other adjacent states in North India. With a fleet of over 12194 buses it operates over 4.1 million kilometers catering to the needs of over 1.8 million people. Provision of good, efficient, coordinated, comfortable and cost-effective services to passengers, is the motto. For efficient functioning the corporation has been divided into 20 areas. Every vicinity has a local workshop wherein main repair and upkeep paintings as well as assembly reconditioning work is performed. Every location has been further divided into operational Units known as depots. The entire wide variety of depots within the corporation is hundred and fifteen, inclusive of car-segment. Every depot has a depot workshop attached to it to offer supportive Maintenance centers. (source : [upsrtc.com](http://upsrtc.com))



**Figure 1. Model of service quality gaps** (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Curry, 1999; Luk and Layton, 2002)

**Gap7: The discrepancy between employee's perceptions and management perceptions:** as a outcome of the variances in the understanding of customer expectations among managers and service providers.

#### **Organization Structure:**

The Corporation is a self-governing body and its general superintendence, direction and administration of affairs and business is bestowed on a Board of Directors. The supervision of UPSRTC is done by the Board of Directors through its Managing Director who is the Executive Head. The Board is supervised by the Chairman and comprises of at least 5 or at most 17 Directors, out of whom one-third are from the Central government and two-thirds from the state government. The selection of the Directors is done by state government. The corporation has 60 class I officers, 207 class II officers, 20451 class III (including over 12738 conductors & drivers). (Source : upsrtc.com )

#### **LIMITED LITERATURE REVIEW:**

**Manoj kumar, Vikas Anand & Anup Srivastava (2016):** This study measures the level of customer satisfaction with the quality of services offered by Uttar Pradesh State Public Transport Corporation (UPSRTC), Uttar Pradesh State in India. The study was conducted on over 2,000 passengers in the course of June 2015 and October 2015. The various dimensions that are considered include safety, behavior, facilities, response to quarries, comfort, cost, availability etc. The study results reveal that the passengers highly dissatisfied from attributes.

**Isaac K. Baidoo (2015):** This study employs a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE) and Random Utility Theory

(RUT) to measure service quality in public transport. This method with the binary Probit in STATA lets in the identification of the choice options defining the experiment by way of capturing the selections of a consumer pattern , by using the records accrued from an experimental survey on gender.

**Shreya Das, Debapratim Pandit. (2013):** This paper analyses the concept of LOS, describes the importance of user perception in valuation of provider service and identifies the need to create LOS thresholds for bus transit from consumer belief for growing countries.

**Shreya Das, Debapratim Pandit. (2015):** This paper establishes a method using the idea of ‘user satisfaction levels’ and their ‘zone of tolerance’, along with total utility and marginal utility for service providers, to deliver a range of service levels for individual transit service features in the city of Kolkata.

**M.C. Vijayakanth et. al. (2014):** The purpose of this study is to obtain a improved understanding of the level to which service quality is delivered in Public services and private service by front-line employees (FLE) and customer perceptions of service quality in public Transport (Volvo Buses). The paper explores how closely customer expectations of service and FLE perceptions of customer expectations match. The paper also inspects how well FLE (front line Executives) have recognize the Expectation of the customers’ and how well its internal procedures support the delivery of top quality services.

**Chow-Chua, C. & Komaran, R. (2002):** This study adopts a simple methodology for Understanding service quality that takes into Account of what customers expect to receive and what the service provider can offer.

**Gowan, M., Seymour, J., Ibarreche, S. & Lackey, C. (2001):** This paper attempts to describe that Service delivery is more difficult in the public sector because it is not purely a matter of meeting articulated needs, but of outcome of unspoken needs, setting priorities, assigning limited resources and publicly justifying and accountable for what has been done.

**D. Paul Dhinakaran (2014):** This study is aims to measure the numerous difficulties and recommend ways to reduce complications and to deliver high quality service , in addition to recognizing the level of passengers’ perception towards service quality in Tamilnadu state transport corporation (Kumbakonam) limited, Kumbakonam

#### SERVICE DELIVERY & DECISION-MAKING HIERARCHY IN UPSRTC:

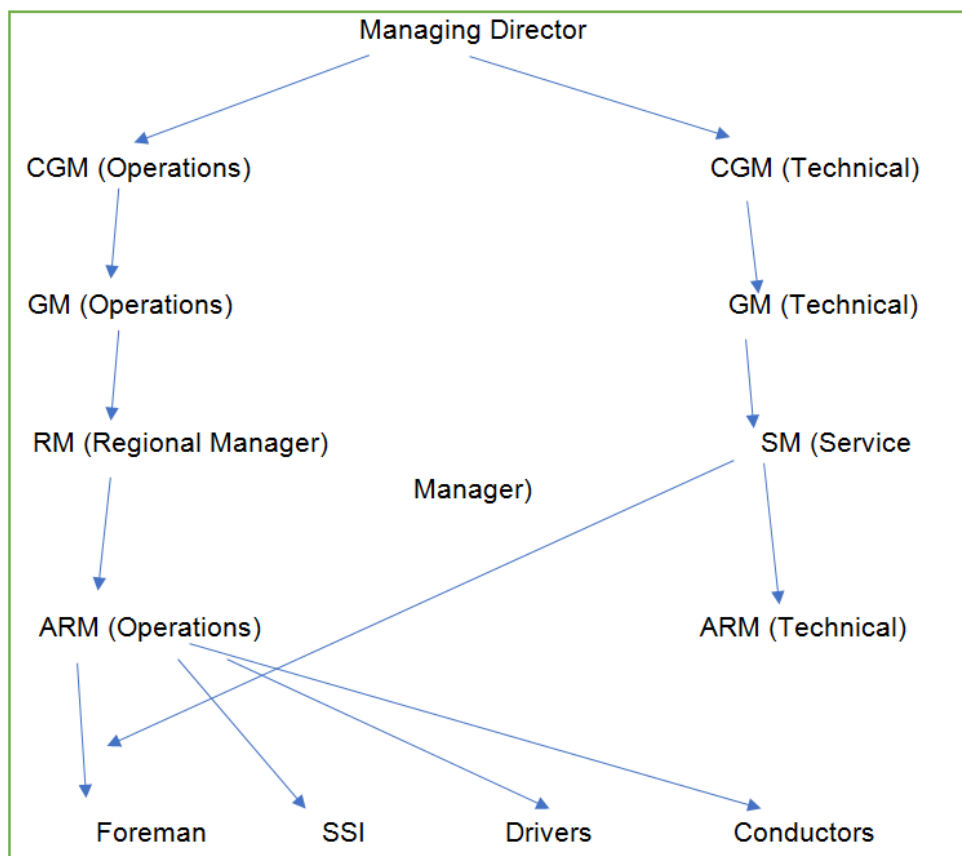


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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

**Research Gap:** After completing literature review on service quality, it has become evident that service quality has been extensively researched in many aspects worldwide with various approaches. Some of the areas of service quality have been extensively researched, while some are still in the exploratory stage.

Very few studies have tried to understand Service Quality Specification Gap that represents the difference in how management understand their customers' expectations to be and sets service standards or operating procedures to meet these expectations,

In addition, Parasuraman et al. (1985) explains not only misapprehending your customer's expectations can lead to incorrect decisions but also a variety of additional factors which undesirably affect the capability to meet customer expectations, namely, deficiency on resources; i.e. such as staff, where having a dearth of staff can lead to undesirable circumstances such as long queues, market conditions or management indifference among what customers want and expect from a service.

Grönroos (1990) states that the quality specification gap is a outcome of inadequate planning and or procedures, lack of goal setting in the organization and lacking support for planning by top management. This can be seen in a way as a dearth of the essential resources to reach customer expectations.

This Area act as a potential research gap for the study. From the above literature review it has been clear that no previous study has been done on this research gap in Indian context. Therefore, there is need to undertake such type of study.

**Research Questions:** According to literature review there are four variables that are responsible for service quality specification gap, therefore this study needs to answer the following research issues:

1. Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?
2. Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?
3. Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?
4. Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?

Research is conducted by using diverse methods, procedures and guidelines. Though, the most suitable method of conducting a research is qualitative and quantitative approach.

Qualitative Approach examines, understands and gathers data by reviewing people's behavior, the way they act and response (Creswell, 1994). It is considered as an inductive method in which interviews and case study methods are used to collect and analyze data. The qualitative research method is non-statistical and it is used to recognize the motivations and explanations in a qualitative way (Creswell, 1994).

To achieve the aim of this study qualitative research method was used. The qualitative methods used in this Research paper were literature review and interviews. The key purpose of interviews was to understand the perception of important stakeholders (Regional Managers, Service Managers, Asst. Regional Managers, SSI, Foreman, Conductors, Drivers) in service delivery process of UPSRTC that are responsible for service quality specification gap.

**Data Collection:** Interview method is used as a source of collecting the primary data whereas secondary data is collected through the literature review.

**Primary Source :** Interview is commonly used method of investigation in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Seaman, 1999). Interview can be done in three methods; structured, unstructured and semi-structured.

Total Nineteen interviews (19) were conducted Including: -

1. Regional Managers:1
2. Service Managers:1
3. Asst. Regional Managers :4
4. SSI : 2
5. Foreman :1
6. Conductors:5
7. Drivers:5

Unstructured method was used for collection of the subjective data. Unstructured interviewing is recommended when the researcher has developed enough of an understanding of a setting and his or her topic of interest to have a clear agenda for the discussion with the informant, but still remains open to having his or her understanding of the area of inquiry open to revision by respondents. (Cohen: 2006)

**Data Presentation & Analysis :** To process the data Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) was used. QDA is a range of procedures and processes applied on data that is collected into some form of understanding, interpretation or explanation of people (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 and Merriam, 2002).

## **RESULTS & FINDINGS:**

The results and findings that are discussed hereon after are based on interviews of Regional Managers, Service Managers, Asst. Regional Managers, SSI, Foreman, Conductors, Drivers.

### **Drivers:**

#### **Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?**

- 99% Drivers are Contractual.
- Paid very low compensation per km (1.36 paise per km).
- Inhuman working conditions.
- Poor HR policies.
- No policy on Illegal Buses plying on roads (Daggamar).

#### **Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Diesel average should be greater than 5kmpl irrespective of bus age.
- There should be no cut in tires from sideways while driving.
- Driver has to compensate if anything is lost /stolen from bus during journey.
- VTS are defective & shows wrong speed & location.
- ETM machines don't have battery backup for entire journey.

#### **Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Frequent changes of routes.
- Frequent changes of buses.
- Maintenance of buses depends on foreman's relationship with drivers.
- Poor training facilities.

#### **Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?**

It is difficult to be achieved as majority of the passengers are from rural background who want services at Subsidized price, pick & drop points wherever the passenger wants.

### **Conductors:**

#### **Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?**

- 99% Conductors are Contractual.
- Paid very low compensation per km (1.36 paise per km).
- Inhuman working conditions.
- Poor HR policies.
- No policy on Illegal Buses plying on roads (Daggamar).

#### **Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Load factor targets are impractical & contrary to service quality.
- Poor maintenance of buses.
- Poor seating facilities in buses and at bus stand.
- Most of the buses did not have first aid box, tool kit & fire extinguisher.
- Ambiguous policies relating to bill redemption of conductors if the bus is repaired during journey.

#### **Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Frequent changes of routes.
- Frequent changes of buses.
- Frequent delay in bag wise.
- VTS are defective & shows wrong speed & location.
- ETM machines don't have battery backup for entire journey.

#### **Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?**

Everyday conductors have encounters with different types of passengers from different demographic background, conductors have to face abusive language from passengers & managers, with this constant struggle it will be difficult to expect from conductor to deliver service quality to passengers.

### **Foreman:**

#### **Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Poor availability of spare parts.

- Poor Inventory Management.

#### **Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Buses fleet are in classified on the basis of km run, almost 60 % buses are above 10 lac km, it is impractical to expect good diesel average, body conditions & noiseless journey.
- With constant Pressure for out shedding of buses, sometimes important maintenance tasks are delayed.

#### **Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Depot workshop in UPSRTC are managed by either in house or on contract from outside parties, both of them are not having skilled labor to provide adequate maintenance of buses.
- No skilled labor for Inventory Management.
- Very few depots have fully functional inventory management.

#### **Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?**

Passengers prefer to get seats in new fleet of buses, however with majority of buses in higher km bracket, it will be difficult to meet customer expectation's.

#### **SSi:-**

##### **Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?**

- No synchronization between timetable of headquarter & depot.
- Buses are generally late from workshop.
- Some Routes are having more buses, while some routes are having very few buses.

#### **Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Bus stands did not able to meet hygiene standards because, cleaning contract are given on low bids.
- Large no Bus stands are not having CCTV cameras, if they have they are not maintained due to lack of funds.

#### **Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Drivers & conductors who have become disabled are given duties on bus stand for parking of buses & other duties.

#### **Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?**

- Passengers expects good hygiene conditions, display boards, on time buses & less crowded buses which are difficult to achieve in current scenario.

#### **Asst. Regional Managers:**

##### **Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?**

- No holidays for ARM.
- Scapegoat for any problem that arise in depot.
- Internal promotion of Regular drivers / conductors for clerical & other post creates chaos.
- No internal training programs on service quality.
- 99% Conductors/ drivers are Contractual. That lead to mass absenteeism.
- Paid very low compensation per km (1.36 paise per km) that lead to corruption in form off without ticket passengers.
- Inhuman working conditions for drivers / conductors.
- Poor HR policies, induction training & promotion.
- No policy on Illegal Buses plying on roads (Daggamar). ARM is expected to stop illegal buses without having any enforcement & authority.
- No financial autonomy in the hands of ARM.
- Large number of union that hampers day to day work.

#### **Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Monthly Load factor targets and diesel average are given without considering operational variables.

#### **Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?**

- No uniformity in principles.
- No protocols followed.
- Task policies are Ambiguous.

#### **Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?**

- ARM is responsible for both depot as well as bus stand which play prime role in service quality that can achieve customer expectations, however his hands are tied by combination of complex variables which are

interrelated. He is overburdened by so much of work that he hardly has any time left for meeting service quality to customer expectations.

#### **Service Managers:**

##### **Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Low availability of spare parts.
- Limited amount of funds for maintenance

##### **Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Bus body should not be in ruptured condition.
- Every bus should have proper brakes / tires for safety of passengers.
- Lengthy process of Auction of old buses.

##### **Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Non-availability of skilled staff.
- Bus washing facilities are either not installed or not working efficiently.

##### **Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?**

- Upsrtc operate around 11000(aprox) buses daily, which operate in different terrain & demographic conditions catering to such large population, it is almost impossible to provide new/ good condition buses to passengers.

#### **REGIONAL MANAGERS:**

##### **Management Commitment to service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Recruitment of new driver & conductors are in the hand of headquarters, with few driver & conductors on regular basis, large majority are contractual which lead absenteeism.
- Unions at various level creates chaos in day to day working.
- Management make policies under political pressure which are hard to implement on ground level.
- Managing Director is the Executive Head of UPSRTC, State govt appoints IAS officer as MD, however with frequent changing of MD, IAS officer have hardly any time to make some value addition to organization.

##### **Setting of Goals Relating To service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Limited funds are provided for enhancement of service quality.
- Lengthy process for getting allocation of funds.

##### **Task Standardization for improvement of service quality in UPSRTC?**

- Every work at different responsibilities at depot or bus stand is given to regular driver or conductor who are promoted at regular intervals, they all are ill-equipped to provide service quality.

##### **Perception of feasibility for meeting Customer Expectations in UPSRTC?**

- New bus stands are being built on PPP model to provide service quality to passengers, as well as new AC & Scania Buses are inducted in every depot to provide more comfortable journey to passenger. However, it is true that UPSRTC has to work on every variable, especially Human Resource to improve service quality.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The research findings indicate UPSRTC is a very big organization facing numerous problems at different hierarchy level. Higher management have to understand different issues related to Human Resource, Illegal buses, ageing fleet, Maintenance, Autonomy & political pressure at regional & depot level which is hampering service quality at a ground level. With no other alternative for road transport, people are using UPSRTC services even if they highly dissatisfied with the present services. Management has to understand that it is not enough that people reach their destination cheap & Safely, but it also involves certain other factors which are of prime Importance for how passengers reach their destination like comfort, convenience Hygiene, speed during journey. Managers at Regional & operational level Cannot achieve customer satisfaction without adequate resources in decision making for improving service quality.

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