**Customer Journey and Experience in Railways Public Transport:**

**A Systematic Literature Review and Subsequent Research Agenda**

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***Abstract:***

*Customer journey has become an increasingly important concept for understanding complex customer behaviour and gaining insights into their experiences. While this term has been used in various disciplines since the 1990s and has evolved. This paper adopts a stream-based systematic review approach to identify the underlying themes of the customer journey presented in the business literature through 2024. Initial set of search keywords are “customer journey” or “consumer journey”. And then “railways” or “rails”, as additional search string. 82 relevant papers were taken from Scopus for analysis. Linking the user customer journey in public transportation is crucial today. This study aims are (1) mapping existing studies on customer journey analysis in the railway industry, including reference journal sources, study context, country of origin and year of publication of bibliographic journals (previous research), (2) compiling definition terminology regarding customer journey stated by previous researchers' thoughts, (3) identifying important variables that influence customer experience throughout their journey on the train, (4) mapping existing studies on customer journey analysis in the railway industry, based on the approaches that have been developed in, (5) classifying studies related to customer journey in railways, related to research methods that have been used in previous research, (6) provide topics and previous research results that can be used as a framework by researchers and practitioners as a reference in developing service improvement strategies in the railway industry (7) identify research gaps that can be the basis for further research related to customer journey analysis in this sector. For methodology, methodological diversity in research that includes exploration, description, experimentation, and causal analysis. The positivist paradigm dominates, but there is a balance with the interpretivist paradigm in more exploratory studies. The inductive approach is often used for exploratory studies, while deduction is more suitable for testing existing theories. So now, the relevance of the importance of the presence of public transportation is increasing day by day in the activities of modern society. The development of public transportation in developing countries is getting higher, in line with population growth through urbanization.*

***Keywords:*** *customer journey, rail journey, customer experience, travel experience, service experience, passenger experience, public transportation, railways, high speed rails*

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# Introduction

In recent years, the concept of the customer journey has gained widespread adoption among both academics and practitioners as a valuable framework for understanding customer behavior and enhancing service experiences. The customer journey typically refers to the sequence of steps that a customer undergoes while interacting with a company’s offerings, from initial awareness to post-purchase evaluation (Folstad & Kvale, 2018b). Traditionally, business models, particularly the service blueprint, have primarily focused on the company's perspective, neglecting the customer's view of the service process (Bolton, Gustafsson, McColl-Kennedy, Sirianni, & Tse, 2014). However, the customer journey approach shifts the focus to the customer, emphasizing the importance of understanding and evaluating customer experiences across various touchpoints within the service context (Mangiaracina, Brugnoli, & Perego, 2009).

Customer journey analysis is crucial in identifying key moments of truth, touchpoints, and pain points that customers experience during their journey (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). These moments play a significant role in shaping overall customer satisfaction and loyalty. Recent efforts have been made to examine the historical development and evolving terminology of the customer journey, with the body of research expanding rapidly over the past decade. A review of 82 articles published before 2024 reveals a growing body of literature that highlights the international scope, diverse contexts, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks applied to customer journey studies (Ni, Yi, Ma, & Sun, 2019; Rincon-Novoa, Rojas-Berrio, & Robayo-Pinzon, 2022). However, despite this growth, the existing literature on customer journeys remains fragmented, with inconsistencies in the application of the concept across various sectors (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, Morgan, & Teerling, 2018).

One particular area where the customer journey framework has been applied is in the context of public transportation, specifically railways, which serve as an essential element of sustainable urban transport systems. Public transport plays a critical role in reducing the reliance on private car use, mitigating traffic congestion, and lowering environmental pollution (Olivkova, 2015). For cities to reduce congestion and encourage more sustainable mobility, high-quality public transportation services are essential (Cascetta & Carteni, 2014; Tiznado-Aitken, Lucas, Muñoz, & Hurtubia, 2020). High-quality rail services offer various benefits, including faster travel times, greater capacity, and improved environmental sustainability, which are crucial in advancing sustainable urban transportation policies (Aydin et al., 2015; Lindley et al., 2010). Furthermore, the effectiveness of public transport services, such as railways, is influenced by a range of factors including network coverage, fares, schedules, and station accessibility, all of which affect the willingness of tourists and locals alike to use these services (Gendel-Guterman & Billig, 2020; Högström, Davoudi, Löfgren, & Johnson, 2016).

The aim of this systematic literature review (SLR) is to examine and synthesize existing research on customer journey analysis specifically within the context of rail transportation. By doing so, this review will identify key trends, gaps, and insights regarding the customer experience in the railway industry, contributing to a deeper understanding of how customer journey frameworks can improve service design and satisfaction within this sector.

# Theoretical Background

The concept of customer experience (CX) has garnered significant attention in service research, and its application to public transportation, especially railways, has become increasingly prominent. Understanding the customer journey within the context of rail services is essential for improving service quality and fostering customer satisfaction. Customer journey mapping in railways seeks to capture the entire travel experience, from pre-journey planning to post-journey feedback, through various touchpoints and interactions that define the overall service quality (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; De Keyser et al., 2020). This understanding allows transportation providers to enhance the design and delivery of services, creating a seamless and more enjoyable travel experience for passengers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In railways, customer experience is deeply influenced by a variety of factors, including service design, journey characteristics, and user perceptions (Brons & Rietveld, 2009). Studies have indicated that the customer journey in public transport can be significantly improved by focusing on user-centered service design, which includes identifying and prioritizing customer demands through models such as the Kano model (Ardakani et al., 2018). This helps enhance service delivery and overall user satisfaction by considering both the functional and emotional aspects of the travel experience (Bueno et al., 2019; Tiznado-Aitken et al., 2020).

The service environment, or "servicescape," plays a crucial role in shaping customer experiences in rail travel. Elements like station accessibility, cleanliness, and the presence of helpful staff directly influence passengers' perceptions of service quality (Gendel-Guterman & Billig, 2020; Pareigis et al., 2011). For example, research by Vos et al. (2019) demonstrated that the presence of cleaning staff in stations positively affected customer experience, highlighting the importance of tangible service attributes in public transport.

Customer journey mapping in railways also requires a nuanced understanding of users' profiles and travel contexts. For instance, Grison et al. (2016) explored how user demographics and specific contextual factors (such as travel purpose or time of day) influence route choice and satisfaction levels. This insight can be vital for tailoring services to meet the diverse needs of different passenger groups.

Moreover, the interaction of passengers with technology, such as mobile apps for ticketing or real-time service updates, increasingly shapes the customer journey in modern rail services (Ni et al., 2019). Integrating digital technologies into the service design can further enhance the customer experience, making journeys more efficient, convenient, and personalized (Culen et al., 2014). In line with this, Zomerdijk and Voss (2009) emphasize the importance of service design in creating experience-centric services that cater to the emotional and functional needs of passengers.

Another critical area of research has been the understanding of service failures and recovery within the railway industry. Research by Ross et al. (2020) explored the personal and contextual factors that affect customer experience during rail service failures, offering insights into how service recovery efforts can mitigate dissatisfaction and reinforce customer loyalty.

In light of these findings, the customer journey in railways can be understood as a complex, multi-layered experience that spans various touchpoints, service environments, and customer profiles. The challenge for railway operators lies in managing these touchpoints effectively to create a consistent and high-quality experience across the entire journey. Future research can explore how emerging technologies, such as AI and IoT, can be leveraged to improve service design and personalization in the public transport sector (Kranzbühler et al., 2018).

Additionally, integrating the co-creation of value with passengers (Leino & Puumala, 2020) could lead to more customer-centered service innovations in rail travel. Understanding how passengers’ emotional and functional needs intersect across different stages of the journey is key to enhancing service delivery (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

# Methodology

# Systematic reviews on articles can be carried out in various ways, including (1) structured reviews that focus on the use of broad methods, (2) reviews with a series of theories and constructs (3) stream-based reviews by identifying research themes, (4) bibliometric reviews by analyzing citations and co-citations, (5) framework-based review using a framework that integrates current knowledge (existing), (6) hybrid-narrative review which develops a framework for the next research agenda. (7) theory-based reviews which discuss the role of specific theories, (8) meta-analysis which synthesizes results with empirical studies, (9) reviews which aim to build theories or research models.

# For this review, the method used is stream-based systematic review to produce better and more reliable review results that are able to synthesize and map all knowledge themes related to the customer journey. This approach is very in line with the customer journey concept which has various concepts in business disciplines. A PRISMA diagram has been prepared to summarize the flow of information within the scope of this review. The initial stage is the preliminary stage which involves trying to find a research protocol as a guide (guideline) which is good for facilitating transparency and objectivity of the review process. Formulate questions to review and facilitate decisions regarding criteria inclusion and exclusion criteria at each stage.

# The question asked is, from a customer journey perspective, what are the relevant business and marketing concepts published in academic journals before 2024. The initial set of search keywords written is "customer journey" or "consumer journey". Then "railways" or "rails", also written as building blocks of customer journeys or as additional search strings. A literature search with these keywords was carried out explicitly and implicitly discussing all articles regarding the customer journey. Thus, this selected terminology can find as many selected terms as possible (Schibrowsky, Peltier, & Nill, 2007).

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# Empirical Findings/Result

# The customer journey can be seen as one type of customer journey – that is, the customer's perspective on the entire journey, consisting of episodes (events that occur as part of a series) and touch points (moments of interaction) (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, van Hagen and Bron, 2014). Touch points guide us in understanding potential points of influence in the customer journey; in other words, touch points help us distinguish between points that can be influenced (such as available travel modes and road maintenance) and points that cannot be influenced (such as weather or topography) (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Several studies (e.g., Becker and Jaakkola, 2020, Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, Verhoef et al., 2009) have viewed customer experience as a multidimensional construct that focuses on customers' cognitive, physical, sensory, social, and emotional experiences.

# Emotional experiences are shaped by emotions, which are usually short-term feelings that arise because of something and are expressed (sometimes very little) as behavior (Frijda, 1993). Emotional experiences can be captured along two dimensions: pleasure-displeasure and degree of arousal ( Mehrabian and Russell, 1973 , Russell et al., 1981 ). The pleasure-displeasure dimension can be considered the experience of positive and negative emotions. The division between positive and negative emotions is based on the individual's perception of emotions, with positive emotions being pleasant and pleasurable and negative emotions being unpleasant and unpleasant sensations (MacLean, 1980). Various categorizations of positive and negative emotions can be seen in Laros and Steenkamp (2005). In consumer studies, emotions are often divided into eight basic emotions, of which four are positive (compassion, satisfaction, happiness, and pride) and the other four are negative (anger, fear, sadness, and guilt) (Brebner, 2003; Laros and Steenkamp, ​​2005). These basic emotions are classified into various sub-emotions (Laros and Steenkamp, ​​2005).

# Level of arousal can be understood as a dimension of subjective state that ranges from sleep to excitement and indicates how stimulated a person is by the environment. In general, too little or too much stimulation gives rise to discomfort (Gilboa and Rafaeli, 2003), individuals differ in their tendency to seek arousal (Mehrabian and Russell, 1973), and in different situations, they also tend to prefer different levels of stimulation (Apter, 2007). The difficulties in studying emotions empirically have been widely acknowledged. Emotions are a sensitive and personal matter; individuals may feel and express their emotions in different ways, and they may report the emotions they feel with self-censorship ( Dasborough et al., 2008 ). This makes it difficult to create measuring instruments that are standardized and can be applied universally. Furthermore, emotional experiences can be considered more difficult to study, as they continuously develop and take shape over the entire customer journey and are influenced by situational factors (Godovykh and Tasci, 2020). Furthermore, the nonlinearity of experience and the difficulty of identifying optimal levels of experience make it increasingly difficult to use, for example, standard survey designs in measuring customer emotional experiences (Palmer, 2010). The emotional experience of traveling is the result of various interrelated factors, such as mode of transportation (e.g., Liu et al., 2021, Singleton, 2019), time spent traveling (e.g., Choi et al., 2013, Nie and Sousa- Poza, 2018), density and travel time (e.g., Tirachini et al., 2013, Wener et al., 2003) and time pressure (e.g., Lucas and Heady, 2002, Lyons and Chatterjee, 2008). Because individuals view the environment holistically, the total configuration of environmental dimensions, rather than single elements, shapes their emotional experiences ( Bitner, 1992 , Lemon and Verhoef, 2016 ). Thus, to understand individuals' emotional experiences of travel, their experiences need to be taken into consideration (van Hagen and Bro, 2014).

# Past research has shown that people tend to evaluate their overall experiences over time based on their experiences during the strongest emotional moments (peak or critical incidents) and at the end ( Friman, 2004 , Kahneman, 2011 , Kahneman et al., 1993 ). Therefore, it has been claimed that instead of maximizing positive emotions throughout the customer journey, it may also be more effective to temporarily allow some negative emotions to surface so that contrasting positive emotions will be experienced with greater intensity (van Hagen and Bro, 2014).

# The table below includes variables used by a number of studies to explore aspects of customer experience in various contexts. Following is the table:

# Table 1. Variable Used in Articles.

| Authords | Year | Variable |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Lemon and Verhoef | 2016 | A customer-centric focus, Customer experience management |
| Towers and Towers | 2020 | Existing touch point categories |
| Tiznado-Aitken et al. | 2020 | Walking time Walking distance to Walking speed Crowding  multiplier parameter, In-vehicle travel time |
| Ross et al. | 2020 | Personal and contextual (task) factor |
| Delgado Jalon et al. | 2019 | Environmental dimensions, internal responses, behavior, moderator holistic environment |
| Ardakani | 2019 | proper selection of personnel, upgrade facilities of rail and the exact timing of train schedules |
| Soto | 2017 | capacity, transfers, and even different types of behavioral models for the passengers. |
| Hogstrom et al. | 2016 | service requirements, relevance and preference |
| Grison et al. | 2016 | Critical factor and motivation |
| Witts and Jacobs et al. | 2013 | Prototype and Reference Objects, communication quality |

# Focus on Customer Experience

# Lemon and Verhoef (2016) emphasize the importance of a customer-centric approach and customer experience management (customer-centric focus and customer experience management). This shows that customer experience is not just about service but also about strategies to create deeper engagement with customers.

# Towers and Towers (2020) focus on existing touch point categories, highlighting elements that can be optimized in customer interactions to increase satisfaction.

# Customer Behavior and Context Analysis

# Tiznado-Aitken et al. (2020) introduced variables related to the physical and psychological aspects of travel, such as walking time, walking speed, crowding, and travel time in vehicles. This approach shows a direct relationship between travel conditions and user experience.

# Ross et al. (2020) highlights personal and contextual factors that moderate customer experience. This study shows that customer experience is highly dependent on individual needs and situations.

# Environmental Influences and Service Design

# Delgado Jalon et al. (2019) focus on environmental dimensions, internal responses, behavior, and moderators of the holistic environment (environmental dimensions, internal responses, behavior, moderators of the holistic environment). This research highlights that the physical and emotional environment can significantly influence the customer experience.

# Ardakani (2019) emphasized the importance of selecting personnel, improving facilities and correct train schedules. It reflects a practical approach to improving services based on operational elements.

# Soto (2017) explored capacity, transfers, and behavioral models, suggesting a focus on more effective service design for transportation needs.

# Customer Needs and Driving Factors

# Hogström et al. (2016) identified service requirements, relevance, and customer preferences. This study underscores the importance of meeting customer needs to ensure service competitiveness.

# Grison et al. (2016) studied the critical factors and motivations that influence customer decisions. This emphasizes how psychological aspects, such as motivation, can drive user experience.

# Prototype and Communication Quality

# Witts and Jacobs et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of prototypes, reference objects, and communication quality. This research shows that clear, quality information is a critical component of the customer experience, especially in planning and executing trips.

# So, the variables used in this research reflect a multidimensional approach to customer experience, including operational, environmental, behavioral and communication aspects. The focus varies, from strategic management of the customer experience to managing the practical elements that influence user satisfaction. This research highlights the importance of integrating macro strategies (such as a holistic approach) with micro elements (such as personal factors and specific services) to create optimal customer experiences. The table outlines two studies with a focus on user experience in the railway industry, highlighting the research objectives and the results obtained. Both studies demonstrate a strong focus on understanding and measuring user experience in the rail industry, with different approaches. Study Ross provides in-depth insight into elements of the passenger experience that can be measured to improve service, while research by Wirtz and Jacobs et al. highlights the importance of technology and application attributes in influencing user experience. The results of these two studies are relevant for the industry to improve services and create better user experiences. The following is a detailed elaboration:

# Table 2. Result Generated in Articles

| Topic | Purpose | Result | Authors |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Dimensions that influence passenger experience in rail industry | The goals of this research topic are to determine, clarify, examine, and quantify the aspects, elements, and/or trends of the service process that influence how passengers react to stimuli and/or how the experience is evaluated. | The findings (1) identify some similar factors to those used in previous research and uncover some new factors for both person and context, (2) provide an understanding of what they mean in terms of the passenger experience and (3) indicate how the factors might need to be measured if they are to be used by the rail industry | Ross |
| Factors that affect user experience in rail industry | The study aims to determine that the users first experience with the application is influenced by established communicative patterns, means, and services and which attributes of the application seem to be relevant for the user | Topic-related attributes of the novel application are compared with attributes of representatives from networks of alternative topic-related communicative formats and media. | Wirtz an Jacobs et al. |

# Discussion

This systematic review on customer journeys in railway public transport identifies three primary areas of focus. First, it clarifies the central themes within the customer journey literature, emphasizing the need for a holistic view of the customer experience, from pre-journey planning to post-journey evaluations. The review highlights the role of multiple touchpoints and the influence of service design, user profiles, and contextual factors on passenger satisfaction and loyalty (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Grison et al., 2016). Specifically, it draws attention to how the experiences of various passenger segments, including regular commuters, tourists, and individuals with disabilities, vary, which influences their overall journey satisfaction (Crosier & Handford, 2012; Högström et al., 2016). Additionally, it underscores the importance of integrating digital technologies, sustainability, and accessibility into the customer journey framework, as these factors increasingly shape the modern transportation landscape (Ni et al., 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Second, the review offers valuable recommendations for future research directions. It suggests further investigation into the role of digital interfaces, real-time data, and personalized services in enhancing the customer journey experience (Ni et al., 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Moreover, it calls for exploring how service failures are managed, particularly in rail services, and how these failures influence customer satisfaction and recovery strategies (Ross et al., 2020). There is also a need for expanding research into the sustainability and accessibility aspects of public transport, especially in the context of integrating eco-friendly and inclusive practices into service design (Knupfer et al., 2018). The review acknowledges its limitations, particularly the restricted scope defined by the customer journey terminology, which narrowed the focus and excluded studies addressing broader customer response perspectives. As the literature grows and evolves, future studies should revisit and expand on these themes to encompass other modes of public transport, like buses and trams, and assess how these systems interact to shape the overall customer experience (Soto et al., 2017). This review lays the foundation for future studies to refine and expand the customer journey framework, contributing to a deeper understanding of passenger experiences and service improvements in public transportation systems.

# Conclusions

The literature review provides an opportunity to revisit the approaches used in previous studies and explore various contexts from different perspectives regarding customer journey analysis in the railway transportation sector. Previous studies have elaborated on topics that enrich insights and broaden understanding of the terminology and concepts related to the customer journey.

While significant contributions have been identified regarding customer journeys—particularly related to user experiences in utilizing various modes of transportation, the concept and design of comfortable and efficient public transportation for society, decision-making regarding mode selection, and the evaluation of experiences and perceptions associated with user expectations—there remains substantial potential for further exploration of the positive aspects of public transportation, especially railways. Despite these advancements, many areas still offer promising opportunities for future research.

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