

Passenger experience with quality-enhanced bus service: the Tyne and Wear 'Superoute' services

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This paper investigates the role that enhanced service quality introduced into a deregulated market has in improving the experience of bus travel by a sample of passengers in the Tyne and Wear area of England. A generalised ordered choice (GOC) model that accounts for preference heterogeneity through random parameters, as well as heteroscedasticity in unobserved variance, and random parameterisation of thresholds, is implemented to identify sources of influence on the overall experience of bus travel in the presence and absence of the quality-enhanced treatment of service. The GOC model is contrasted with a standard ordered logit model, and the marginal effects associated with the preferred GOC model are derived for each influencing attribute, taking into account the various ways in which each influence contributes to the utility associated with each level of bus experience. The paper supports a view that the introduction of quality improvements, via a Quality Bus Partnership, does contribute non-marginally to an increase in a positive bus experience, and signals a way forward through cooperative intervention, to grow patronage. Knowing which attributes successfully deliver a more positive experience (and those that do not) means that resources are effectively targeted at the aspect of service provision which will increase patronage and therefore revenues, satisfying the objectives of both the bus operator and the local authority partner.

Keywords: Bus passenger attitudes, Customer experience, Heterogeneous thresholds, Ordered choice, Quality bus partnerships, Quality improvement, Random parameters.

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